Diploma in informal education unit 2:

Facilitating informal education and community learning
Facilitating informal education and community learning

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Facilitating informal education and community learning

About this Unit

This Unit explores some core theoretical issues and definitions of terms that are central to the whole programme. The Unit explains some of the concepts that are central to the practice we are aiming to promote.

The Unit begins our exploration of the nature of informal education and community learning. We look at:

- The distinctive qualities of informal education and community learning;
- Being an educator;
- The nature of conversation – and the central role it plays in informal education and community learning;
- Democracy, the life of the group and association;
- Reflection and learning;
- Our character and values – and their significance in informal education and community learning; and
- Evaluation – how to.
Some of the material is complex. We encourage students to use opportunities – with colleagues, students, tutors and supervisors – to talk through and test out in practice the ideas discussed here.

Mark K. Smith

NOTE: This central Unit in the programme uses a slightly different format to others. Reading specific Chapters from the set book *Informal Education* (as indicated) is an integral part of the Unit. You will find additional support materials on the informal education homepage (www.infed.org/support).
Facilitating informal education and community learning

An introduction to informal education and community learning

About this section

This section introduces the debates explored throughout the Unit and in the Chapters of the set text, *Informal Education*.

In this Introduction, we examine the differences between informal and formal education. Rather than identifying the *setting* as the key point of difference between ‘formal’ or ‘informal’, our focus is on *curriculum* or *conversation*.

We identify key elements in informal education practice, including conversation and work with groups. It closes with a discussion on the links between informal education and community learning.
Informal education: the simple – but flawed – definition

One of the most common ways of discussing informal education is simply to focus on where the work takes place and who sponsors the work. Perhaps the best known approach is to separate ‘formal’, ‘non-formal’ and ‘informal’ education (after Coombs et al. 1973). Within this approach:

- **Formal education** is linked with schools and training institutions.
- **Non-formal** education is organized activity outside formal systems, located with community groups and non-governmental organizations.
- **Informal** education is the lifelong process in which people learn from everyday experience – it covers what is left (adapted from Jeffs and Smith 1999: 118).

The simplicity of this distinction has an appeal. And it does raise some questions for policymakers (e.g. If schools and colleges have only a limited place in the learning that occurs in a society, would funding be better used elsewhere? Does the current obsession with accreditation have any merit? Should researchers explore learning in everyday life in more depth?) However, when we examine more closely how and when learning happens *in practice*, this particular division of learning doesn’t hold water.
Informal education as process

The main problem with the simple division suggested above is that, as soon as we begin to look at the characteristics of learning activities within, say, schools and families (‘formal’ and ‘informal’ in the above way of looking at things) we find a striking mix of educational and learning processes in each.

Family members teach and organize educational events as part of their everyday experience. A grandfather might show a child how to use a key to unlock a door; a mother may work with her daughter around reading – and so on. Despite being labelled as ‘informal’, these educational events in their essence may be little different to what happens in a classroom. Both grandfather and mother set out to teach particular skills.

To accommodate day-to-day reality, we must move beyond a simple focus on setting, and look to the processes and experiences involved in each. We argue for the following distinction:

- **Formal** education entails a plan of action and defined content (in schools this is provided by a curriculum; in the home it might be thought up on the spot e.g. the grandfather thinking about the different steps involved in unlocking a door and then taking the child through them, or the mother working out or following a reading plan).

- **Informal** education is shaped by **conversation and is spontaneous**. It is not tied to particular environments. (Jeffs and Smith 1990; 2005)
It is vital to recognise that whether we are labelled ‘formal’ or ‘informal’ educators we will use a mix of formal and informal education. What differentiates informal from formal educators is the different emphasis each places upon curriculum and conversation, and the range of settings in which they may work.

If we follow this focus through, it is possible to think of non-formal education as a sort of ‘halfway house’. It uses a curriculum or plan – but it is one that is negotiated between educators and learners – but more of this later.

**Reflecting on experience**

As helpers and informal educators we talk, listen and join in activities with others (children, young people and adults). Some of the time we work with a clear objective in mind - perhaps linked to some broader plan, such as working with a group so that they can take on the organizing of an activity. At other times we may ‘go with the flow’ – adding to the conversation when it seems right or picking up on an interest.

Like formal educators, our job is to encourage reflection and new understandings. However, as informal educators, we are thrown into this by the conversations we have. People tell us about different aspects of their lives, about what might be worrying or concerning them. Our response might be to invite them to say more, and to tell us about their feelings and experiences. We might also encourage them to try to make sense of things – perhaps by suggesting another way of thinking about something. Often we will support and look to
develop their confidence them to act. Exploring and enlarging experience is central to this way of working.

Thus far, we can see that when viewed as a \textit{process}, informal education:

\begin{itemize}
  \item works through, and is driven by, conversation;
  \item involves exploring and enlarging experience; and
  \item can take place in any setting.
\end{itemize}

The whole of this Unit examines these distinctions in more detail.

\begin{flushleft}
\textbf{REFLECTION POINT:} Can you think of times when your work has been led by conversation?...and are there other times when you have had a particular \textquote{curriculum} or \textquote{plan of action} in mind? What are the attractions and difficulties of the two approaches, for you?
\end{flushleft}
Conversation over curriculum – the implications

Making conversation the root and focus of our work brings with it some consequences. Three key issues are that we will need to:

- cope with the unpredictability of our work;
- recognise the importance placed on the character of the worker;
- focus a lot of our work with groups.

The unpredictability of informal education

Informal education tends to be unpredictable – we do not know where it might lead. In conversation we have to ‘catch the moment’, where we can say or do something to deepen people’s thinking or to put others in touch with their feelings (Jeffs and Smith 1999b: 209-210).

‘Going with the flow’ opens up opportunities to get into rewarding areas. There is the chance, for example, to connect with the questions, issues and feelings that are truly significant to people. ‘Catching the moment’ can quickly take conversations into the realms of feelings, experiences and relationships. In informal education we are able to be responsive to situations and experiences.
Not using a curriculum (for the most part), informal educators have to work out for themselves what might be the best response in any given situation. To do this with integrity, we have to develop, with others, some sense of what might make for human well-being. It could be argued that all educators should develop this if they are to act well. However, without the ‘prop’ of a curriculum, it is fundamental for informal educators.

We work through relationship. Unlike many of those working in formal settings, relationships with informal educators take place on a voluntary basis. People are rarely under any obligation to talk to an informal educator (Jeffs and Smith 1999: 84).

**REFLECTION POINT:** *If informal education is unpredictable, how can you plan?*

*The focus on character*

Not having a curriculum removes a ‘hiding place’ for educators. Instead of seeking to transmit information from our pre-defined curriculum, we have to engage with situations and with people. This throws our character into the spotlight. Our behaviour, attitudes and values are always being scrutinized by those we work with. If we do not ‘practice what we preach’, or are not fair, truthful or unselfish in our conduct, we will not be heard or heeded.
The need for integrity also applies to formal educators. If we are to believe Parker J. Palmer (1998: 10) good teaching cannot be reduced to technique, but flows from ‘the identity and integrity of the teacher’. It entails self-knowledge.

When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject. (ibid.: 2)

However, it is easy in many education systems with their focus on the ‘delivery’ of pre-packaged programmes, testing, and the achievement of externally-set targets and outcomes for educators to become technicians.

REFLECTION POINT: Is your character under scrutiny?...what pressure does this bring?
Informal education and group life

Informal education has a place in the process of working to enable people to ‘share in a common life’ (Dewey’s famous [1916] focus for education – explored in Section 3 of this Unit and Chapter 3 of set text Informal education). The values and behaviours needed for conversation to take place are exactly those that foster democracy and ‘fraternity’.

Pioneers of informal education, within adult education and youth work, placed a special emphasis on the cultivation of group life. In particular, they looked to encourage participation and self-government. One way of understanding this is the idea of ‘association’.

Association - joining together in companionship or to undertake some task - and the educative power of playing one's part in a group or association has been a defining feature of youth work (Doyle and Smith 1999: 44). This was, perhaps, most strongly put in the Albemarle Report (HMSO 1960). That Report famously declared that the primary aims of the youth service should be association, training and challenge (ibid.: 36 - 41 and 52 - 64).

Our concern as informal educators with group life and encouraging participation is of fundamental importance, if communities are to flourish. Joining together to undertake a task or simply to enjoy ourselves is a powerful form of education. It helps with our social development, our confidence and our ability to contribute to the community. Perhaps even more important motivation for association comes from the argument for the concept of
‘social capital’. The research provides compelling evidence that a flourishing network of groups, clubs and associations can make a community safer, healthier and happier. [See Unit 2, Section 1 for details.]

REFLECTION POINT: How is your own experience of group life?…what are the benefits and challenges of working with groups in your setting?

Informal education and community learning

In Scotland there has been a longstanding interest in community education. More recently, the term ‘community learning’ has become the key way of describing the focus for informal and community educators. A Scottish Executive paper (2003) has discussed community learning and development as ‘a way of listening and of working with people’. It continues:

We define this as informal learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities. The aim of this work is to strengthen communities by improving people's knowledge, skills and confidence, organisational ability and resources. Community learning and development makes an important contribution towards promoting lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship.
A few things need saying about this. First, it is important to distinguish between ‘education’ and ‘learning’:

- **Learning** involves developing new awareness, understanding and skills. It is something that is happening all the time and we may or may not be aware of it.

- **Education** is a conscious attempt to foster such learning.

Where these definitions get a little blurred is where people set out to learn something for themselves, for example about the behaviour of birds. They might look on the internet, read books and talk to experts. This sort of conscious, and to some degree planned, activity can be described both as ‘learning’ and as ‘self-education’.

Secondly, it is important to recognise that, at the heart of the way of viewing learning set out above is an attempt to strengthen communities. It is not primarily about the development of skills and understandings by individuals (although it inevitably involves this).

There is a strong overlap with the fostering of such community learning and our approach to informal education. We argue that enhancing group and associational life lies at the heart of what we should be doing as informal educators. However, we use the idea of informal education to explore work that is taking place in a wider range of settings than is usually the case by proponents of community learning. For example, we see informal education occurring, at times, in schools, prisons and other formal institutions.
The Scottish paper (*Working and learning together to build stronger communities*) goes on to argue that a community learning and development approach is based on a commitment to the following.

- **Empowerment** - increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence community circumstances.

- **Participation** - supporting people to take part in decision-making.

- **Inclusion**, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, recognising that some people have more restricted opportunities and influence so should be given particular attention.

- **Self-determination** - supporting the right of people to make their own choices.

- **Partnership** - recognising that many agencies can contribute to community learning and development, and should work together to make the most of the resources available and to be as effective as possible.

**REFLECTION POINT:** Could you describe what you offer as ‘community learning’?
In conclusion

Some clear themes emerge when we examine the work of informal educators and those concerned with community learning:

1. First, and foremost, informal and community educators are *educators*. Our job is to work with people so that they may explore their experiences and learn.

2. We seek to work *with* people, rather than to organize or provide *for* them.

3. While we may be involved in very different activities as informal and community educators we look to *conversation* as a central means by which people can reflect and learn.

4. We are concerned with the *whole person*. The task is not to develop a narrow area of knowledge or skill but to encourage people to value and engage with themselves and the world. This means attending to the body, mind and spirit (to use an old YMCA phrase).

5. As informal and community educators we have a central concern with working so that all may *share in a common life*. There is a stress on fostering democratic ways of working, equal opportunity and justice for all.

6. For quite a lot of the time informal educators are involved in forming and developing *groups*. Sometimes the group is just for a single event such as a trip, sometimes for something more permanent such as a tenants’ association.
References


Introduction


Facilitating informal education and community learning

1. Being an educator

About this section

In this section we want to look in more detail at the nature of learning and education. We also look at the contrast between informal and formal education. To do this we focus on Chapter 1 of the set text - *Informal Education*.

We introduce quite a lot of different ideas in the Chapter – and in this section – in order to form the basis of our arguments. Our aim is to highlight how learning fits in with other aspects of our lives - and the special qualities that educators have. In many ways it is these qualities - what informal and formal educators share - that is our main concern.

Tony Jefts and Mark K. Smith
The main ideas

Before you read Chapter 1, we review the main ideas discussed:

Learning

We are thinking all the time. A lot of thinking goes on without our being conscious of it. However, there are moments when we are jogged into awareness. This may be when we come across something that does not ‘fit’ or where there is a ‘problem’ to be solved.

Thinking involves remembering - going back over events or bringing ideas and feelings to the front of our mind. When we remember things we tend to try to make sense of them - to understand them. Having worked at them, we may well try to commit that understanding to memory. We can call that memory ‘learning’.

As workers we may look back at something that we didn’t handle so well, think about it and come to some conclusions as to what went wrong. We take the memory of those conclusions (the learning) into a new situation and, hopefully, work in a better way. In this way, we could say that learning is *thinking that carries us forward*. We have understood something that can be applied in a new situation.
Education

Education is the *conscious attempt to foster learning*. In other words, as educators we set out to encourage people to think - and to develop new understandings that can help them.

The way we do that is to act on the *environment* rather than the person. We do not – we cannot – tap into people’s brains and educate them, rather we work on *relationships* and *situations*. It is experience of these that stimulates learning.

However, education is not simply about setting out to foster learning - it also involves a commitment to certain *values*.

Informal and formal education

At this point, we suggest that we avoid making too much of the difference between informal and formal education.

**Read** Chapter 1 of Informal Education.

Then think about your answers to the questions at the end of the chapter. Below we give our thoughts.
Chapter summary

In Chapter 1 we explore:

1. The nature of learning.

2. What it means when something is described as ‘education’ (and here we focus on the intention to foster learning; attention to the environment and the sorts of values and commitments involved).

3. The differences between formal and informal education.

When we ask the question 'what is it to be an informal educator?' - the answer is that it means, first and foremost, being an educator. The chapter argues that those working in everyday social situations need to define themselves primarily by conversation. They may at times use formal settings and have a curriculum to follow, but the balance of their work names them as informal educators.
Questions and reflections

Question 1

*Education involves setting out with the intention of fostering learning. It entails influencing the environment; and is based on a commitment to certain values such as a respect for persons. Think about your work with people - are these things that you look to?*

To answer this, it may be worth reflecting on one or two specific encounters or conversations that you had recently. Looking back, to what extent did you think about the environment?

- Was it a setting that you had organized - such as a classroom, group room or social area such as a bar or café? Are there things about the way the room was set out that could be changed to increase the chance for people to engage with each other?

- If it was an environment that you had a hand in organizing - was there material around like posters or leaflets to stimulate discussion? How about the activities - did they get in the way of conversation and learning - or were they a spur to it?

- If it was a setting where you had little control - such as on the street - did you do anything to make conversation easier - for example, moving to a quiet spot? Was it necessary - or even possible?
A good way of looking more closely at the interaction is to write down what happened and what you were thinking and feeling as a ‘process recording’. [See Unit 1, Section 2 for a sample framework.] Once you have done that, review your recording and ask yourself what values were in play? Values will be expressed in the actions and words of those involved - including you as the educator.

**Question 2**

*We can separate informal from formal education using the amount of control over the environment; and the way the educational encounter is 'planned'. How much control do you have over the environments in which you work? To what extent are your work encounters with people planned?*

This question brings out the contrasts between informal and formal education. In the book we suggest that control over the environment and whether the encounter is curriculum or conversation-based are the main ways of separating the two.

Part of our interest in asking the question is to encourage you to look at the sorts of encounters you have in your work. You will probably find a mix of informal and formal. But you may find something more - that what you think is informal is really quite formal in terms of education (and vice versa).
Question 3

What mix of informal and formal education do you use? Where would you place yourself between X and Y in the diagram?

There is a link between this and the last question. One way of approaching this question is to list the different pieces of work or sessions that you are involved in. Then try to place each on the diagram. You then may begin to get an idea of the balance involved in your work.

You may experience a bit of a problem here. A session or piece of work may involve a number of different situations - some formal, some informal. Whatever, it may help to get a fix on your activities.
Question 4

Education involves facilitating and teaching. How do you feel about describing yourself as a: facilitator; and teacher?

This is a favourite of ours. Many informal educators such as youth workers, community workers and community educators are not happy about calling themselves ‘teachers’. For some, it reminds them of schooling - and that may well be something that they want to forget, or not be associated with. However, this is something that we need to come to terms with.

Part of the problem here is the way in which education is seen as schooling rather than something much wider. Teaching is not confined to schools - it goes on in everyday life, such as when a parent shows a young child how to use a fork and spoon; or a neighbour explains how to tune the engine on the car.

Some people may also be put off by the idea of facilitation. Here we might simply view it as working to build an environment in which people can engage with each other and some topic. It involves looking to process. Educators have to work both on process and on the focus of the exploration. There will be times when they need to design an environment for learning and others when they will need to give information.
Activity

Look at the work you have been doing - and the conversations you have over the next few days.

Are you actively working to build an environment in which people learn? Are there changes you can make?

What are people learning through their interactions with you?

What values do think are important in relationships with others? Are they central to the conversations you are having at the moment with the people using your agency?
Further reading

For a discussion of the nature of education as it relates to the work of informal educators see:

Facilitating informal education and community learning

2. Thinking about youth work

The meaning of the term 'youth work' is difficult to pin down. When people talk about youth work they can mean very different things. For example, they might be describing work with a group of Guides; running a youth club; making contact with different groups of young people on an estate; mentoring a young person; or facilitating a church fellowship; or tutoring on a mountain walking course. Over the years contrasting traditions of youth work have emerged and developed. To understand what youth work is, therefore, it is important to look at how different ways of thinking about, and doing, the work emerged and gradually took shape. When we do this it is possible to identify some key things that define youth work.

Mark K Smith
Early stirrings

It is difficult to say when the term 'youth work' came into widespread usage. Some historians point to the development of Sunday Schools associated with churches and chapels in last few years of the eighteenth century, and, in particular, the activities of pioneers such as Robert Raikes and Hannah More as an important forerunner of the work. Sunday Schools often used more informal ways of working and later developed a range of activities including team sports and day trips.

It is also possible to look to the emergence of ‘ragged schools’ in the first half of the nineteenth century. These schools were run by volunteers and aimed at the many children and young people who, because they were poor, could not access other forms of education. They frequently met in settings like stables, under railway arches, church halls and run-down houses. Again, they were a lot more informal than mainstream schools.

Another important landmark was the establishment of young men's associations. Indeed, it could be said that the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), set up in 1844, was the first dedicated youth organization.

These innovations largely grew from the activities of evangelical Christians. They were a response to the social and spiritual situation that the pioneers encountered. The poverty and deprivation of the Mendip Hills, for example, motivated Hannah More; the squalor and lack of hope and opportunity in the dock areas of Portsmouth animated John Pound to set up a 'ragged school'. Some schemes flowed from very conservative views, others sought radical
social change. As a result, there were some tensions and conflicts between different groupings.

A further, important, factor in the emergence of youth work was that people began to talk about 'youth'. In other words, the significance of 'youth' as a category began to be recognized. There were growing numbers of articles in newspapers, for example, about the problems facing young men and women - and the issues they presented to society. As public interest in 'youth' developed, by the 1890s psychologists such as G. Stanley Hall began to build theories of 'adolescence'. However, it was around the mid-century people began consciously 'working among youth'.

The development of youth work in Britain

One of the key moments was the establishment development of youth's institutes and clubs in the 1850s in Britain. Here the work of the Reverend Arthur Sweatman is of special note. He had been involved in setting up and running a youth's institute and had looked at the activities of a number of similar initiatives. In a paper read to the Social Science Association in Edinburgh in October 1863 he made one of the first cases for specific provision for youth (via clubs and institutes. He argued that lads and young men have 'special wants and dangers', which call for an agency such as a Youths' Institute:
Thinking about youth work

Their peculiar wants are evening recreation, companionship, an entertaining but healthy literature, useful instruction, and a strong guiding influence to lead them onward and upward socially and morally; their dangers are, the long evenings consequent upon early closing, the unrestraint they are allowed at home, the temptations of the streets and of their time of life, and a little money at the bottom of their pockets. (Sweatman 1867)

The basic form that some of these Institutes initially took was as a large room or church hall where young men could read, talk, play games, get a cup of tea or cocoa and take part in various classes and activities. What follows is an account of the Latymer Road Ragged School Youths' Institute from the RSU Quarterly Record in April 1881:

Every evening between 100 and 200 young fellows quietly interest themselves with books, draughts, carpentry tools and games of various sorts. The name of Coffee House has been dropped and that of Evening Shelter substituted. The boys, in fact, make the place a kind of club and are sadly distressed when they are unable to obtain entrance, which sometimes happens on the occasion of a public meeting. There is a weekly service on Wednesdays at 7.30pm and the boys, by their quiet demeanour, show that they appreciate the service and the kindness which prompts it.
There were evening classes twice a week, the three ‘R’s were taught to those who needed it (and wanted it), and one of the main features of the shelter were fortnightly cocoa concerts. The *Quarterly Record* reported that ‘admission is one penny, which is returned in the shape of hot cocoa and a price of a cake’.

In the 1880s and 1890s there was a growth in club provision for young people. Of particular note here was the pioneering of lads’ clubs by many Catholic and Anglican priests. There was also a parallel growth in girls’ clubs and groups. From 1880 onwards we see a number of girls clubs being established, some with hostels, some with a range of rooms and facilities. There were also other important developments in Christian work with young women, including the founding of the Anglican, Girls Friendly Society in 1875. Its purpose was to ‘unite girls and women in a fellowship of prayer, service and purity of life, for the glory of God’. By 1885 there were 821 branches in England and Wales. We can also chart the development of outreach work to young people by district visitors linked to churches and religious groups (see, for example, Maud Stanley and work around the Five Dials or the activities of Thomas Barnardo in east London).
By the late 1880s and in the 1890s, more radical forms of youth work had begun to be noticed. One of the most interesting examples here was the work of Emmeline Pethick and Mary Neal. They started a club - the Espérance - and then, disturbed by the exploitation of young women by the West End dress trade, a tailoring co-operative (the Maison Espérance - described in Pethick 1898). Their particular contribution was recognising a social and political dimension to work with young women. Emily Pethick (who later went on to become the treasurer and key organizer with the Pankhursts of the English Suffrage Union) wrote:

> The conditions, not only of the home, but of the factory or workshop had to be taken into account. It became our business to study the industrial question as it affected the girls' employments, the hours, the wages, and the conditions. And we had also to give them a conscious part to take in the battle that is being fought for the workers, and will not be won until it is loyally fought by the as well (Pethick 1898: 104).

Quite a number of the women involved in setting up girls clubs were concerned about the exploitation of young women at work, and the problems they faced in their leisure. Part of the purpose of earlier girls’ organizations such as the National Organization of Girls Clubs (founded in 1911 and now known as Youth UK) was to put pressure on the government for reforms in these areas. Most of these initiatives, for all their differences, emerged out of the work of evangelical Christians. However, there began to be a significant shift away from evangelicalism in great swathes of youth work. Workers with very different religious views had begun to come into the work. For some there was a stronger emphasis on fellowship and
Thinking about youth work

social justice. We can also see the beginnings of youth work in other faiths. Of greatest significance here is the pioneering of Jewish youth work by Lily Montagu and others through various forms of club and settlement.

**Uniformed work**

While there were shifts away from evangelical youth work, there continued to be developments. The most significant innovation began in Glasgow in the early 1880s. William Smith started to experiment with the idea of uniformed youth groups as a means of evangelism. ‘By associating Christianity with all that was most noble and manly in a boy’s sight’, he wrote, ‘we would be going a long way to disabuse his mind of the idea that there is anything effeminate or weak about Christianity’ (quoted by Springhall 1777: 22). It was out of these activities that the Boys Brigade emerged (there were around 800 units by the end of the nineteenth century). Local brigades typically involved a mix of drill and instruction plus a range of other activities including camping, music, first aid and clubrooms. Others quickly imitated Smith’s vision. In 1891 an Anglican version, the Church Lads’ Brigade, began in London and by 1893 had a membership of 8,000 boys. The Jewish Lads’ Brigade was founded in 1895 and the Catholic Lads’ Brigade in 1896. Girls’ Brigades also began to be established.
The emphasis on drill, evangelicalism and regimentation in the Boys' Brigade worried a number of commentators. Of most significance was Robert Baden-Powell who was to found Scouting. While applauding certain aspects of the work, he was deeply suspicious of formal religion and ‘hymn-singing dissenters’ and of the numbing effects on creativity of drill. Baden-Powell was concerned about the well-being of young people. It has been said that the poor physical condition of the young men attempting to join the army during the Boer War was a central factor in his championing and fashioning of Scouting. However, he was equally worried about people's mental well-being. He began to explore different schemes and educational forms and to write up his own vision. In August 1907 he conducted the famous Brownsea Island Experimental Camp - and this experience confirmed his initial views. The result was *Scouting for Boys* (first published in parts in 1908). It is difficult now to appreciate the impact of *Scouting for Boys* - it sold in thousands and resulted in the establishment of a large number of Scouting groups. Baden-Powell had planned to set up a separate movement, but events overtook him. By 1912 there were some 128,000 Scouts and nearly 5000 Scoutmasters. By 1930 there were nearly 390,000 Scouts and cubs and nearly 35,000 Scout leaders. Baden-Powell had also responded to requests to young women and had established the Guides (formally in 1910). It many respects, Scouting could claim to be the first mass youth movement in Britain. It also involved major innovations in practice. Robert Baden-Powell took various elements from other schemes and programmes and moulded them into a
form that caught many people's imagination. Today we can easily overlooked his concern with the social lives and imagination of young people, and how he was able to build on this to develop an educational form that looked to association (see below). He placed a special value on adventure; on children and young people working together - and taking responsibility (his 'patrol' building on the idea of 'natural' friendship groups and 'gangs'); on developing self-sufficiency; and on 'learning through doing' (he was deeply suspicious of curriculum forms).

Youth work, youth clubs and the youth service

Following the First World War, there were some stuttering steps toward state funding and involvement in youth work, for example the granting of powers to local education authorities to establish 'Juvenile Organizing Committees' (Board of Education Circular 86, 1921). However, it was with onset of the Second World War and In the Service of Youth (Circular 1486, 1939) (for England and Wales) that we see the beginnings of an organized service to deal with the situations arising in wartime Britain. In the interim there had been some interesting developments in church-based youth work, around old scholars clubs in schools, and in work on new housing estates (detailed in Jeffs 1979, and Smith 1988). But with the outbreak of war, and the need for more imaginative youth work, a number of interesting forms of work gathered pace including the 'open' club, and 'detached' youth work. With the ending of hostilities government enthusiasm for youth work waned, and it needed the 'discovery' of teenagers (and various moral panics surrounding their behaviour) to gain attention to the work in the late 1950s.
Following the publication of the Albemarle Report in 1960 (which looked at the situation facing young people – and the leisure opportunities open to them) there followed a bit of a golden age for youth work in England and Wales. In particular the Report heralded the heyday of the large youth club or youth centre. It famously declared that the primary aims of the youth service should be association, training and challenge (ibid.: 36 - 41 and 52 - 64).

To encourage young people to come together into groups of their own choosing is the fundamental task of the Service… (We) want to call attention to:

a) an opportunity for commitment....

b) an opportunity for counsel....

c) an opportunity for self-determination. (1960 52-54).

The Albemarle Report was the trigger for a major spending on youth centres, the expansion of training, and the development of project work (especially around detached youth work and coffee bars).

Well into the 1970s youth workers were benefiting from a 'bulge' in the numbers of young people. However, the demographic tide was running against them - the number of young people was dropping significantly. This reflected in a significant decline in the membership of youth organizations by those over the age of 11 years. But there were also further factors at
Thinking about youth work

work including the rise of the home as a centre for entertainment. With television, video, computer gaming and the like there was a variety of different possibilities for entertainment in many homes. Increased participation in education both meant that larger numbers of young people had the opportunity to meet each other) and that there were pressures on young people's time to complete course work. There was also a massive growth in alternative commercial leisure opportunities. The youth club, like the public house, declined in significance as a place where people meet and spend time.

**Transforming youth work**

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s there was continuing pressure on state funding for youth work. Social work, criminal justice, schools and further education were seen as higher priorities. In addition there was still a significant demographic factor - a drop in the numbers of young people.

One response by youth workers and youth services to was to move to alternative ways of working – in particular detached youth work, issue-based projects and, in Scotland, youth cafes. With numbers attending youth clubs and centres in decline there was a domino effect. It was hard to make the case for dedicated buildings, a struggle to generate sufficient numbers of participants for groups and special activities, and often demoralizing for workers who had nobody to talk to but themselves for much of the time. It was also increasingly difficult to find
people ready to volunteer to work in local community groups. The traditional youth club seemed doomed to extinction.

The final blow was delivered by a combination of an increasing interest in issue-based work by youth workers and a growing emphasis upon concrete outcomes by policymakers. To sustain funding for youth work there was a shift from 'open' provision toward working with groups of young people deemed to be 'at risk' in some way.

This trend was heightened by the coming to power of the Labour Government in 1997. Their emphasis on dealing with social exclusion, and their focus on services for youth rather than youth service, pointed to some big changes (see Jeffs and Smith 2001). These initially resulted in England in the establishment of the Connexions Service and the development of the role of the personal advisor. (This direction was not taken in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). However, across the UK there was an attempt to 'transform' youth work and to bring it much more tightly in line with the government objectives. In England these were laid out in Every Child Matters (HM Government 2003), Youth Matters (HM Government 2005) and Aiming High (HM Treasury 2007). The overall effect was to radically alter the shape of many jobs within youth services and those agencies tied to state funding. Many jobs still involved some youth work, but they also entailed a lot more formal work with individuals and groups. State-funded youth work increasingly became more focused on outcomes and upon gaining some sort of accreditation. There was also a large increase in the amount of paperwork that workers had to do. In Wales while youth work gained some recognition in policy debates, it still suffered from the same emphasis upon targeted work and outcomes (see Wales Youth Agency 2002; Welsh
Thinking about youth work

Assembly Government 2007). With the advent of the Scottish Assembly, there was a renewed interest in youth work (and a movement away from community-based learning and education) – but many of the same themes appeared (see Scottish Executive 2007).

The other side of the coin is that many voluntary agencies, churches and community groups continued to develop more open and informal ways of working. During the 1990s there was a large increase in the numbers of youth workers employed by churches. Indeed, by 2000 there were probably more full-time youth workers paid for by churches and religious groups than by the state (Brierley 2000). Many of these workers continued to have a lot of freedom around the way they worked – and did not have to meet the range of outcomes that limited the work of state-funded workers.

**Defining youth work**

So what implications does this history have for the way we define youth work? The first thing to say is that it is helpful to think of there being different forms of youth work rather than a single youth work with commonly agreed characteristics (Smith 1988: 51). However, it is possible to identify elements that have come together to give it a distinctive identity. Here we look at a model proposed by Jeffs and Smith (2010).
Exhibit: What is youth work?

Jeffs and Smith (2010) argue that youth work entails a focus on:

**Voluntary participation.** The voluntary principle delineates youth work from almost all other services provided for this age group (Jeffs 2001: 156). Young people have, traditionally, been able to freely enter into relationships with youth workers and to end those relationships when they want. This has fundamental implications for the ways in which workers operate and the opportunities open to them. It encourages them to think and work in rather more dialogical ways (*op. cit.*); develop programmes attractive to young people; and to go to the places where they are (see, also, Davies 2005)…

**Education and welfare.** Historically, youth work did not develop to simply ‘keep people off the streets’, offer activities, or provide amusement. Many early clubs grew out of Sunday schools and ragged schools, institutions that placed great emphasis on offering welfare and educational provision for young people (Montague 1904). The rise of the welfare state and expansion of state education during the late Nineteenth- to early and mid-Twentieth centuries eradicated the need for youth agencies to provide mainstream welfare and educational services. With developments and changes in state support mechanisms, and the identification of other needs, the pattern of welfare provision shifted – but remains a significant element of youth work. Contemporary examples of this include support groups, counselling, careers advice and information and advice services relating to areas such as sexual health and housing…
Young people. Although there have been shifts in age boundaries, youth work remains an age-specific activity. In Wales, for example, this is defined by a recent government strategy document as 11-25 years (Welsh Assembly Government 2007). While there may be problems around how we talk about and define youth - and around the sorts of expertise those working with young people can claim - there can be no doubting that many young people both view their experiences as being different to other age groups, and seek out each other's company (Savage 2007). Youth workers have traditionally responded to this - and learnt to tap into the ways of understanding the world young people occupy and the nuances of youth cultures.

Association, relationship and community. 'Building relationships' has been central both to the rhetoric and practice of much youth work. Relationships are seen as a fundamental source of learning and of happiness. The aim is to work with young people in community so that they might better relate to themselves, others and the world. Those within religious settings might well add in relationship to God. Association - joining together in companionship or to undertake some task, and the educative power of playing one's part in a group or association (Doyle and Smith 1999: 44) - has been part of working with young people from early on and was articulated in the Albemarle Report… Historically group work - the ability to enter, engage with and develop various types of social collectivities - was viewed as the central skill required of a youth worker. Youth work is fundamentally about community; about working as John Dewey (1916) put it, so that all may share in the common life. It is an activity of communities.
Being friendly, accessible and responsive while acting with integrity. Youth work has come to be characterized by a belief that workers should not only be approachable and friendly, but also that they should have faith in people and seek to live good lives. In other words, the person or character of the worker is of fundamental importance. As Basil Henriques put it (1933: 60): ‘However much self-government in the club may be emphasized, the success of the club depends upon the personality and ingenuity of the leader’. The head of the club, he continued, must ‘get to know and to understand really well every individual member. He must have it felt that he is their friend and servant’ (ibid.: 61). Or as Josephine Macalister Brew (1957: 112-113) put it, ‘young people want to know where they are and they need the friendship of those who have confidence and faith’. The settings workers help to build should be convivial, the relationships they form honest and characterized by ‘give and take’; and the programmes they are involved in, flexible (Hirsch 2005).

Other models have appeared e.g. Davies (2005) – but they essentially use similar elements. However, there are those who dispute some of the elements.

Perhaps the most significant criticism has come from John Ord (2007) and others of the focus on voluntary participation. The argument here is that increasingly workers are using ‘youth work methods’ to work with young people who are required to be with them. This is certainly true – but whether it is youth work is another matter. As Bernard Davies (2005) has
commented voluntary participation is central to what has historically been defined as youth work – and for good reason. It has a big impact on the way we have to work.

Second, there has been some criticism by writers like Ord on the focus on informal education within models of youth work such as the above. Certainly, workers within youth support services are required to do more formal work – often leading to accreditation. Youth workers have always done a certain amount of formal work. The question here is whether the amount that some are required to do radically alters the way they see themselves – and the way that young people see them. In other words, some workers are becoming more like teachers or social workers.

**Conclusion**

Just how youth work will develop in Britain and Northern Ireland over the next few years is a matter for some debate. With the coming to power of the Coalition government, the emphasis has changed. There have large-scale cutbacks on a number of programmes, and the ending of other schemes like Contactpoint (the database covering all children and young people). An Ofsted report (2010) argued that while detailed policies are currently being developed, a clear indication of its priorities was given in *The Coalition: our programme for government*. According to them, this set out the intention to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action:
We will take action to support and encourage social responsibility, volunteering and philanthropy, and make it easier for people to come together to improve their communities and help one another.

In addition, they quote a speech given in London on 9 June 2010 by Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office. This provided further pointers in relation to the function of public services. These include the need to ‘develop more focused integrated local services [that] can unlock the potential of communities and frontline workers to design and deliver a genuinely joined up approach to multiple challenges’ (Ofsted 2010).

It seems pretty clear that much targeted work will remain the focus of local authority youth support services (but may well be run by private companies and voluntary organisations). It also seems clear that a lot of open and more universal work will be seen as part of the ‘Big Society’ – and part of the work of churches, voluntary groups and community organisations. Some will be provided by private companies.

A huge challenge faces these organisations. There will be considerably less money put into such work by the State (at least in the short run) – and the situation facing young people will worsen. Many are already facing the prospect of a long period of unemployment or under-employment (if they are lucky enough to get a part-time job). In addition many will be living in families where there is less money around – and an increasing number will be facing housing problems (with cutbacks in the amount of money going into housing support and in the number of homes being built). The problem here is that many were already having major
problems. In a UNICEF report (2007) on child wellbeing, the researchers found that children and young people in the United Kingdom were close to the bottom of the league in terms of material well-being, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviour and risks and subjective well-being. Indeed, they were bottom of the league for the last three. Not only did children and young people report feeling unhappy more than in other countries, their behaviours were riskier (for example around drug taking and sexual activity) and there were also strong indicators of a range of problems in families (see also Layard and Dunn 2009).

References


Facilitating informal education and community learning

3. Trusting in conversation

About this section

Having argued that conversation lies at the heart of informal education and community learning, we need to explore what it is and what is involved in a 'good' conversation.

Part of the problem is that conversation is so much a part of everyday life that we can take it for granted. We can fail to see its importance and potential.

We are going to use *Informal Education* again (this time chapter 2) to explore the nature of conversation. On the following pages, we review some of the main themes, before we ask you to read the Chapter.

Tony Jeffs and Mark K. Smith
Conversation

In the chapter we explore the nature of conversation. It involves people co-operating; thinking about others’ experiences and feelings; and giving each other room to talk (Jeffs and Smith 2005: 29). It also entails being open what others say and trying to be as clear as we can about what we hear and say. Catherine Blyth (2008: 4) has argued that when it works, ‘conversation can come close to heaven’. She continues:

Be it sharing a laugh with a stranger, transforming a contact into a friend; that joyful moment when you click, share a joke or spark a new idea; or just let off steam with someone who knows how to listen, there are countless adventures between minds out there, waiting to happen, in each encounter, each day of our lives.

Networking is part of its value, although the word sounds chilly and strategic. Conversation is something bigger: it is the spontaneous business of making connections, whether for work, friendship or pure, fleeting pleasure.

Conversation allows us to get on with others – and, thus, to ‘get on in life, and enjoy it more’ (Blyth 2008: 5). ‘Talk’ – speaking and listening – is powerful. It helps us to think and:

- allows two or more people to engage with each other and to explore experiences and questions; and
- heals. It allows our pain and worries to be heard and enables us to feel part of something.
In other words, the simple act of talking itself can be very helpful. Putting something into words and sharing it with others allows us to name our experiences and feelings and, thus, to put them into perspective. What felt awful and overwhelming at the time can be contained by the understanding generated by conversation.

**Informal educators and conversations**

To be educators we have to have to think and act in the ways we describe in *Informal Education*. We commit ourselves to certain values and ways of being with people. We act ‘professionally’. We work – but that work largely takes place through a very open form – conversation. Two important things follow from this.

First, people have to accept us as conversational partners – and they have to allow that conversation to roam across all sorts of areas. It may sound obvious, but this is really important – we can only work with people if they let us. They have to accept us if we are to explore with them their thought, feelings and actions.

Second, engaging in conversation as an informal educator means being *alongside* other people, not trying to manipulate or act on them. Classically, it involves us listening to people telling us stories about some aspect of their lives. We respond in ways that accept them as people (even if we may not agree with their ideas, attitudes or actions) - and we look at how we can come to some sort of deeper understanding of the things they are describing.
REFLECTION POINT: In her book, The Art of Conversation, Catherine Blyth suggests five maxims or things that make for good conversations:

- Think before you speak
- Listen more than speak
- Find the incentive for talking
- Never assume you know what they mean or that they understand you
- Take turns

Reflect on what you do in conversations. How well do you measure up to these maxims or principles?...are there any you find easier or more difficult?

Read Chapter 2 of Jeffs and Smith (2005) Informal Education.
Chapter summary
In the chapter we explore:

- *Talking to others* - and the special place it has in our lives.
- *The nature of conversation* - conversation is complex, and things can often go wrong.
- *Being with* - rather than acting upon people.
- *Being open* - putting our own ideas and values on the line in conversation.
- *Going with the flow* - we are often led by conversation, rather than leading it.
- *Changing conversations* - how we move through different forms of talk.
- *Conversations and activities* - conversation is an activity and shouldn't be set against activity.

The key message is that a lot of the elements of conversation are the very qualities that we are seeking to foster as educators. These include listening to others, being open, valuing others etc. Conversation isn't just the means through which we work, involvement in it helps to make the world a better place.
Questions and reflections

At the end of Chapter 2 we give you some questions to think about. These are a bit different; they are designed to help you reflect on your abilities as a conversationalist. In that sense there are no wrong or right answers.

- Are you someone who is reasonably at ease when meeting new people?
- How do you open up conversations with the people you are working with? What do you say to people you are meeting for the first time?
- Are you open to what others are saying? Do you have a tendency to want to win arguments?
- How happy are you 'going with the flow'?
- Are you able to help people to move from one form of conversation to another, e.g. from social chit chat to more 'serious' talk?
- What are you like on 'endings'?
In conclusion

Conversation lies at the heart of our work as helpers, facilitators and educators. It is the medium we use, and the fostering of a commitment to conversation is one of the key aims that we have.

As educators we move between different forms of conversation - greetings, chats about the weather when waiting for buses, teaching people a skill, and ‘deeper’ exchanges about personal troubles and questions. Moving in and out of such conversations does not come easy.
Activity

Keep a rough note over a week of the amount of time that you spend in conversation with the people you are working with (‘clients’). Also look at how long each of the conversations lasts. Are they brief, are they long? How deep do they go?

Once you have an idea of what is happening - review your working sessions. If you don't spend much time in conversation try to make time to be around with people.
Further reading

One of the best introductions to conversation is an older book by Ronald Wardhaugh (1985). Deborah Tannen has written a number of books about women and men in conversation (1991) and the impact of conversational styles on relations with others (1992) - and these are also useful introductions to the area. Stone et. al.’s (2000) book grew out the work of the Harvard Negotiation Project – and provides a useful framework for thinking about ‘learning conversations’?


Facilitating informal education and community learning work

4. Fostering democracy and association

About this section

The section is linked to Chapter 3 of *Informal Education*. Our fundamental point in the Chapter is stated in the first paragraph:

Our aims as informal educators change. At one moment we may want to promote talk about home life. At another we may seek to make contact with a group. Yet while aims alter with situations, all educators, we argue, must share a larger purpose. This is to foster democracy.

After a summary of the main themes of the Chapter, we review the questions included at the end of the Chapter in the book.

*Tony Jeffs and Mark K. Smith*
Themes

Many people in western countries at the moment may find our opening statement – about aims changing over time and the over-riding goal of fostering democracy – a little odd for (at least) a couple of reasons:

First, at a time when the emphasis in much government policy is on having clear objectives, working to a curriculum, and gaining skills that are important economically, the idea that educational aims may need to change with situations lacks a sense of ‘certainty’. However, as we will see, forms of learning based in conversation can be very powerful – in part because they relate to what people are interested in and want.

Second, while politicians and policymakers will often talk about democracy and involvement, they are often less keen on a democratic citizenry questioning their behaviour. When it comes to real decision-making, they do not always appreciate community educators and leaders encouraging people to ask awkward questions or to argue and campaign for what they want.

We argue that fostering democracy and association is at the centre of what we do as educators and organizers. Informal educators and facilitators have a special contribution to make. Our commitment to conversation, and the fact that we work in and with groups, in which people can have some say, opens up all sorts of possibilities.
In recent years, the concept of **social capital** provides a strong case for this way of working. Researchers, such as Robert Putnam, have demonstrated that in those areas where people belong to clubs and groups, and where there are still reasonably strong relationships between neighbours people are generally happier and healthier. [See Unit 2, Section 6 for more on social capital.]

**Read** Chapter 3 of Informal Education.

Then think about your answers to the questions at the end of the chapter. Below we give our thoughts.
Chapter summary

In Chapter 3 we explore:

*Democracy* - what the term means and how it has been used. We look at direct and representative forms of democracy and at our responsibility to get involved. Our basic position is that communities can only really flourish when people engage with each other and have a real hand in deciding the way forward.

*Sharing in a common life* - for us to engage with each other we need to see the connections between us. We may be individuals, but we can only be individuals if there is society. We look to others for recognition, we need to cooperate with others to produce the food and materials we want.

*Difference* - sharing in a common life does not mean that we all have to be the same. We need to recognize and celebrate difference.

*How conversation is crucial for democracy*. The values it carries, the processes involved, and what it can achieve - understanding, commitment and action - make it central.

*Association*. One of the great strengths to our work is that we often work in and with groups that have some form of democratic structure. As educators one of our tasks is to promote and open up such groups and to work with people so that groups do work in more participative ways. We also need to be looking at how groups connect with political processes.
Questions and reflections

Question 1
Here we have placed a special emphasis on democracy - or as Dewey put it: working so that people may share in a common life. How would you describe the aims of your work?

We asked this question because having clear aims for our work is central to good practice. We need a reference point – if another person were to come up to us after a conversation and ask, ‘How does that fit with your aims in the work?’ we should be able to answer the question.

We also want you to consider a further question here. This is about how much emphasis you are placing on working for a society in which people are able to share and participate. A lot of the things we do or talk about as workers are linked to this theme. It would be interesting to look back over your last work session to see how many times you said or did something that was concerned with how people were treating each other, for example. A lot of the interventions we make are to encourage people to respect each other, or to consider others’ needs.
Question 2
Do you work in ways that encourage people to join in and to take the responsibility for organizing things? Think about this with regard to your work over the last few weeks.

How much do we organize for people rather than with them? In *Creators not Consumers* one of us (Smith 1982) explored the different styles that workers could adopt:

- **telling** - which consists of giving straightforward orders often without explanation.
- **selling** - where we have something in mind that we want people to do, such as going on a trip, and we try to persuade people that it is a good idea and that they should take part.
- **participating** - where workers and ’participants’ jointly make decisions. Both parties have some control over the final product.
- **spectating** - where we as the workers do not intervene in any way - we have no power over what the outcome might be. Participants simply get on and do things themselves.

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                telling  selling  participating  spectating
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Look at a couple examples of projects or pieces of work you have been involved in. Where do your interventions fall on the scale?
Question 3
Gaining a sense of identity involves looking at what we share with others, and how we are different. Consider the recent conversations you have had with a couple of individuals. Have you attended to both elements? Have you linked these questions of identity?

Questions about what we share and about difference have been central in the development, for example, of work with young women and girls, and of work around dis/ability and sexuality. They have also been fundamental features of educational projects that develop within different cultural communities or communities of colour – what is it we share through our culture and how does it set us apart (make us different) from others? Such questions of identity should apply to all work and are often overlooked.

A follow-up question would ask us to look at the sorts of posters we have on the walls or leaflets or materials we have around if we are working in a building or centre.

We may also consider the subjects that we try to introduce into conversations. Are we encouraging people to explore their identity with others? Are we asking them to consider their history?
Question 4
To what extent are the groups you work with 'communities in the task of educating themselves?'

In the current jargon, the question here is whether the groups we work with and within are ‘learning communities’. It addresses the way we think about groups - and the sorts of questions we should be asking as we work.

As helpers, facilitators and educators we should be helping to build ‘learning communities’. The groups we work with may have some specific purpose - such as to play football or to organize local tenants. But for them to be satisfying to their members they have to be something more.

One part of this is the social side - recognizing that people join groups to be with other people as well as play the sport or whatever.

Another aspect, we think, is that people, for the most part, don’t want to be static - they want some change, they want to grow. This is where looking at the group as a learning community comes in. As educators, it may be that we can help people to work at making the group a place where people can develop.
Question 5
What are educators to do in societies that discourage democratic ways of living?

Some of you reading this will be working in situations where working for democracy is difficult or is severely discouraged. How, then, are you to make sense of this Chapter?

One of the messages we have tried to convey is that we have to be sensitive to the constraints in a situation. It would be quite wrong, if we were to encourage democratic ways of working in settings where they are not possible. This is not to say that, as facilitators and educators, we should not be working for democracy - but it is to say that we need to have a political understanding of what is possible - and to work with people so that they, too, develop such an understanding.

To mark out a possible way forward, we can use the concept of ‘scope’. We may work in a society or situation that is authoritarian and centralized. However, within that there may be room for groups that run themselves, that have an ‘associational’ structure. It may be that we can focus on developing democratic ways of working within these groups and associations. Our hope will be that the more groups there are like this, the greater the chance that their influence will spread - that they can become ‘nurseries for democracy’.
In the words of Alexis de Tocqueville,

…the strength of free peoples resides in the local community. Local institutions are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they put it within the people's reach; they teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment and accustom them to make use of it. Without local institutions, a nation may give itself a free government; but it has not got the spirit of liberty.

Question 6
What would be the result if you applied a 'democratic audit' to the pieces of work you are involved in. For example, do they:

- enable all to share in a common life?
- encourage people to think critically?
- foster the values and attitudes of a free society?
- sustain and extend opportunities for political participation?
- contribute towards greater equality?

These are questions that you can ask of your work. They may be questions that are worth exploring through wider reflection (see below).
Activity

Using the questions posed in Question 6 (above), take a detailed look at the work of your agency - or the section of it in which you work.
Further reading

There are any number of books on democracy, and democracy and education. One starting point to thinking about 'sharing in a common life' could be books about community building. A popular example here is Scott Peck's work (1987). A good introduction to education and democracy has been written by Vic Kelly (1995). The classic treatment is John Dewey's (1916). Last, but not least, take a look if you can at Robert Putnam’s work.


Facilitating informal education and community learning work

5. Exploring reflection and learning

About this section

This section relates to Chapter 4 of *Informal Education*, where we look more closely at the process of working with others (or ourselves) to deepen learning.

By thinking more carefully about what is involved in learning, we can improve the way we work with both our own, and others’, feelings and thoughts.

Tony Jeffs and Mark K. Smith
Some themes

Chapter 4 introduces some useful and well-known ways of thinking about experience, learning and reflection.

First we examine ‘emancipating and enlarging experience’. These are John Dewey’s words. He took a special interest in experience and thought that educators should work with people to open themselves up to new and deeper experiences, and to come to a better understanding of them so that they may act in ways that bring greater happiness. ‘Experience’ is such a common and overlooked word that we need to think carefully about what we mean by it. One of the points we make is that experience involves thinking - and that this is often forgotten.

Second we turn to the nature of reflection - here we look at remembering, attending to our feelings, and building new understandings. This is a process central to our work.

Third, we explore learning from experience. Experiential learning is often associated with informal and community education. We look at the popular model put forward by David Kolb.

We also argue that, as educators, while we look to experience, we should not fall into the trap of ignoring the importance of giving information. In many respects this goes back to earlier issues about facilitation and teaching. We need both in our work.
Read Chapter 4 of Informal Education.

Then look at the questions at the end of the chapter. Below we give our reaction to the questions.
Questions and reflections

Question 1
Reflection involves: returning to experience; attending to feelings; and evaluating experience. Consider some recent conversations you have had in your work. Have all three elements been present? Have you worked so that people can attend to each?

In different conversations we may be focusing on just one or two of these. It could be that we tend to forget or overlook one element generally in our work. Or it could be that we attend to all three aspects, but don’t spend enough time with one (such as exploring feelings).

This question is not an easy one to approach. It may be helpful to talk it over with a colleague or with a supervisor or mentor. Talking through an encounter - describing what happened, looking at your feelings at the time, and now, and looking for the learning - what you are doing in thinking about the encounter is the process you are exploring in this question.
Question 2
Consider the picture of experiential learning below. Compare it with a recent piece of work with a group or an individual. How well does it fit what occurred? What seems different?

As we point out in the chapter, it is our experience that learning often doesn’t follow these neat steps. Things tend to happen all at once - our mind jumps around. But this doesn’t mean that the model is not useful. It alerts us to important aspects of educational encounters.
This, again, is something that may be worth working through with someone else. One thing that we have found helpful in this task is making a record of the work. Being able to look at the work on paper allows us to put some distance between ourselves and the work. This can help us see things more clearly.

Question 3
Often our work is such that we are only able to go so far with people. We are interrupted; we only have a short time - and so on. How do you handle this as an educator? What do you do with your feelings?

The feelings and emotions stirred up by the work can be a real problem. After some conversations we can be left with real concerns and worries. We may not see the person again, we do not know what is going on for them. Another possibility is that the conversation has brought up issues for us - perhaps about the way we work or about some event in the past. We need ways of dealing with this.

Knowing this may happen, a common temptation may be to push the person to come to a ‘conclusion’ in the conversation. We may press them for a decision or for them to say what they are going to do next. The problem is that they may not be ready for this. We are, thus,
Exploring reflection and learning

acting to deal with our own feelings, rather than looking for what may be helpful for them. There may be a case for us ‘pushing’ - but it has to be made in terms of the client’s well-being.

A better way of handling things is through talking with others - and personal reflection - perhaps through recording or keeping a journal. Just as we talked of trusting in conversation, we need to have faith in people’s abilities to work at things. Furthermore, we need to work in ways that respect and strengthen people’s abilities to make difficult choices and to take responsibility for their lives. There will always be times when we are left with feelings that we would rather not have. We have to learn to live with them….though this is easier said than done.

Question 4
Do you spend enough time reflecting on your own work?

How do we make judgements about our own work? What is ‘enough’ time spent on reflection? Different jobs will require varying depths of analysis and reflection. Perhaps the first step is to get a picture of how we spend our time. Here it may be worth keeping a brief note in your diary of the amount of time spent on different activities.
Another step may be to consider whether we are happy about our work. Are we coming away from sessions at ease with the way we worked and the direction things took?

Our guess is that most workers do not spend the time they should reflecting on their practice. This is often born of pressures to do other things - and sometimes guilt at taking time out from the ‘real work’ for this type of activity. Certainly, it is possible to go the other way - as we say in the book, time spent recording may take time away from face to face work. We have to make judgements on their value to the work.
Activity

Take time out to record a group that you are involved with. It could be one you are participating in as a member (such as a staff team) or one where you are the main worker.

Try to make some judgements about the attention paid to remembering, attending to feelings and developing understandings.

Look at your recordings and think about the group process. Were the elements there? How did they relate to each other? Can you make any judgements about outcomes (what were they)?
Further reading

One starting point for further reading are the books about adult education listed in Appendix 1. Rogers (1996) includes quite a bit of material on learning. Groupwork books such as that by Johnson and Johnson include useful exercises around experiential learning.

John Dewey’s (1933) classic exploration of thinking is still well worth looking at - if you can get hold of a copy. Boud et al (1985) includes a number of very useful chapters concerning the process.


6. Living with values

About this section

Because we are concerned with fostering learning in life as it is lived, we often have to make difficult choices. The people we are, and the values we hold, will fundamentally affect how we deal with these. The complex personal and social choices we all make are not external to our work but sit at the very heart of it. But what are those values?

In Chapter 7 of Informal Education we explore some of the values that we believe central to the work. We look at how those values have to be reflected in the way we are with people.

It isn’t just that informal educators and facilitators need to be friendly, genuine and approachable. We also have to be trying to live life well. The basis for our work lies in our ability to build, and hold onto, moral authority. By this we mean that, as informal educators, we need a clear set of values that are respected by others - and, crucially, that we practice what we preach. We also explore how we go about making difficult choices.

Tony Jeffs and Mark K. Smith
Themes

In this chapter we explore some values that we believe should be at the centre of what informal educators do within the community setting. These involve a commitment to:

- Respecting persons
- Promoting well-being
- Truth
- Democracy: and
- Fairness and equality.

We also consider the moral authority of the informal educator and organizer. Here we look to the example we must set – and the need to ‘practice what we preach’. We also reflect on how we make difficult choices – and some of the other questions that arise in our activities, such as those around confidentiality.

Read Chapter 7 of Informal Education.

Then look at the questions at the end of the chapter. Below we give our reaction to the questions.
Questions and reflections

Question 1
In what ways may we indicate disapproval towards, say, racist or sexist language without being seen as prigs or killjoys?

Each of us develops our own style and there will be no set pattern as to the way we respond to, say, racist name calling. However, five things stand out for us.

First, we need to be clear about the values we bring to the work as educators and facilitators. As we saw in Chapter 1, education requires respect for people, a commitment to fairness and equality, and a belief in democracy. We may find it hard to make choices and move forward, if we have not reflected on whether our own values match those of education.

Second, we need to be able to work out what those values mean for our behaviour. The two classic responses to racist name-calling are to condemn it or to ignore it, perhaps in the hope that it will go away. In terms of educational values, both have their difficulties. In condemning, we may attack the ‘sinner’ rather than the ‘sin’; in not responding, we may be condoning racism. This brings us back to the early themes of the chapter. How are we to act in a way that stays true to the values of education and helps us to retain moral authority?
Third, to act in situations such as this requires that we also gain knowledge. In this case we need to learn about the ways in which 'race' (or gender, sexuality, dis/ability or class) enter the lives of the young people involved. How do they see the world? What experiences have led them to the understandings they have?

Fourth, such knowledge may, in part, be gained from courses or from reading, but the major source will be reflection on our conversations with those concerned.

Last, while it is important for us to react to situations as they occur in ways that help people to think about their behaviour and its impact, it is not enough. We need to work so that people can explore such questions in less tense situations. This may take the form of introducing the subject into our conversations or running sessions - say on a residential. If we follow what has been said already, then the tone is likely to be exploratory.
Question 2
Consider your face-to-face work. Does the way you work, the way you treat yourself and others, reflect the values central to informal education? Have you retained moral authority?

Do you practice what you preach? Here it may be helpful to turn back to page 30 of Informal Education and to think about the qualities of conversation listed there. Do you think people experience you as bringing these things into your dealings with them?

Question 3
Reflect on a situation where you have had to make a difficult choice about who to work with - on what basis did you make your decision?

This may be something that you have already spent time on with your manager, mentor or supervisor. Sometimes we make choices about who to work with without really being aware of what we are doing. We may work with a group, for example, simply because they come to the centre or project - rather than as a positive choice. However, there are a lot of times when we do have to weigh things up.
For example...

A classic example here is when in youth work or in a community project we have to exclude or discourage someone from coming to a group or session. We may say that we are unable to deal with their behaviour in the context of that group. For example, we may exclude someone from a youth group because their behaviour is experienced as very threatening by younger members.

In this situation we may have put the welfare of the bulk of the group above giving time to work with the person who has challenging behaviour. Sometimes, a way round it for us to try and work with the person in another setting - perhaps one to one so that the problem can be worked at. Unfortunately, though this can't be in many cases. Either we do not have the time or the resources, for example, to work outside the centre or project sessions - or the person does not want to work on the issues.

It is worth reviewing how you took your difficult decisions - and what you took into account. It is pretty inevitable that you will feel that you did this or that wrong, or that there were other avenues or possibilities that you did not consider. But that it is the nature of the work.

We have to make decisions fairly quickly, so there will always be things that are not quite as we would want them. Furthermore, there are often no simple wrong or right ‘answers’. In the example we use in Chapter 7 – of making a choice between the musician and the person involved in petty crime – we can see that there are reasons for working with both. In this sense, making a choice involves someone losing out.
Question 4
Do you think that a code of practice would be a help or a hindrance to developing good practice?

Codes of practice do provide a reference point - something for us to use to judge situations. But they are also a source of argument - how do we interpret this statement or that, how does it apply to a particular situation we are looking at?

It may be that it is less the detail of the code of practice that is significant - the words on paper - but the fact that we talk about what they mean. A code of practice may be most useful as a tool to stimulate reflection and conversation about the right way to work; it won’t necessarily 'tell' us what to do.
Activity

Making difficult choices sometimes involves us acting as individuals, sometimes as a team. However, whether we act as a team or as an individual, we have to be able to explain and justify our actions to others such as colleagues or managers. In this sense, when making decisions we have to think about what may make for the good, and also about what others think.

A key element here will be the thinking of our colleagues. Our actions may impact on them (especially if we are part of team). Further; if we call ourselves informal educators (or youth workers or community workers or community educators) then our actions should connect with ideas held within the work about what is right.

As an activity - we would suggest that you try to raise questions about the value base of the work, and how it connects with the actions of workers, in your work team.
Further reading

Facilitating informal education and community learning

7. Evaluating community learning and development

Alan Rogers and Mark K Smith with the assistance of Sarah Lloyd-Jones

About this section

‘Evaluation’ has become an ever-present feature of practice – yet it is often badly done. One reason for this is that, for many, it is a contractual requirement - something that has to be undertaken to satisfy funders and higher tiers of management. Another reason is that evaluation, if it is to be done well, involves a lot of time and thought, together with good judgement.

In this piece we want to explore ways of thinking about evaluation that allow it to become part and parcel of the way we work. We also want to look at how we might develop ways of monitoring, reviewing and communicating that stay true to the processes and ethos of informal education and community learning and development.
What is evaluation?

If we look at the Latin origins of the word, evaluation means 'to strengthen' or to empower. In this spirit we want to focus on ways of approaching evaluation that look to strengthen the ability of workers and their agencies to address the needs of young people and local communities. At the same time we also need to attend to the needs of funders – but not at the cost of the former.

Unfortunately, much evaluation today is largely about monitoring and the measurement of things. This has been linked to the expansion of government social initiatives from the 1930s on (especially, initially, in the United States). Unfortunately, when considering youth work and community development very little that is worth anything is easily counted.

As a way of getting started, we offer the following definition:

Evaluation is the systematic exploration and judgement of working processes, experiences and outcomes. It pays special attention to aims, values, perceptions, needs and resources.

There are several things that need to be said about this.
First, evaluation entails gathering, ordering and making judgments about information in a methodical way. It is a research process.

Second, evaluation is very sophisticated. There is no simple way of making good judgements. It involves, for example, developing criteria or standards that are both meaningful and honour the work and those involved. Also, individuals and groups tend to have different perceptions and these need to be understood.

Third, evaluation is something more than monitoring. Monitoring is largely about 'watching' or keeping track. Evaluation involves making careful judgements about the worth, significance and meaning of phenomena.

Fourth, evaluation operates at a number of levels. It is used to explore and judge practice and programmes and projects.

Last, evaluation - if it is to have any meaning - must look at the people involved, the processes and any outcomes we can identify. Appreciating and getting of flavour of these involves dialogue. This makes the focus enquiry rather than measurement - although some measurement might be involved (Rowlands 1991). The enquiry, therefore, should involve negotiation and consensus over the process of evaluation, and the conclusions reached.
REFLECTION POINT: How does your own experience of evaluation match with the five key points identified here?...what are the key similarities and differences?

**What is the purpose of evaluation?**

Basically, evaluation is either about *proving* something is working or needed, or *improving* practice or a project. The first often arises out of our accountability to funders, managers and, crucially, the people are working with. The second is born of a wish to do what we do better. We look to evaluation as an aid to strengthen our practice, organization and programmes (Chelimsky 1997: 97-188).

We need to both ‘prove’ and ‘improve’ – and to find a balance between them. An over-focus on accountability will do little to improve the work we do. Similarly, neglecting accountability is a mistake ethically - and avoids an opportunity for learning and feedback.

When thinking about all this it is helpful to distinguish between programme and project evaluation, and practice evaluation.

*Programme and project evaluation* is typically concerned with making judgments about the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of pieces of work. Here evaluation is essentially a
management tool. Judgments are made in order to reward the agency or the workers, and/or to provide feedback so that future work can be improved or altered.

**Practice evaluation** is directed at the enhancement of work undertaken with particular individuals and groups, and to the development of participants (including the worker). It tends to be an integral part of the working process. In order to respond to a situation we have to make sense of what is going on, and how we can best intervene (or not intervene). Similarly, other participants may also be encouraged or take it upon themselves to make judgments about the situation. In other words, they evaluate the situation and their part in it. Such evaluation is sometimes described as *educative or pedagogical* as it seeks to foster learning. But this is only part of the process. The learning involved is oriented to future or further action.

We need to be clear about:

- What are we aiming to do and why – what difference do we want to make?
- How would we know if we were succeeding – choosing and judging indicators?

Having got clear on these, we can gather the information we need to begin to make our judgements.
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REFLECTION POINT: Do you have experience of ‘programme’ and/or ‘practice’ evaluation?...have either been helpful or problematic for you?

Evaluation as action research

Evaluation is a form of research. It entails adopting a particular frame of mind or perspective. This isn’t confined to people with long and specialist training. Such research involves as Stringer (2007: 4) has put it:

- A question or problem to be investigated.
- A process of enquiry
- Explanations that enable people to understand the nature of the problem.

Here we talk of action research as the research we are concerned with looks to the enhancement of our work.
The key part of evaluation, many would argue, is framing the questions we want to ask, and the information we want to collect such that the answers provide us with the *indicators* of change.

**The action research works through three basic phases:**

*Look* - building a picture and gathering information. When evaluating we define and describe the problem to be investigated and the context in which it is set. We also describe what all the participants (educators, group members, managers etc.) have been doing.

*Think* – interpreting and explaining. When evaluating we analyse and interpret the situation. We reflect on what participants have been doing. We look at areas of success and any deficiencies, issues or problems.

*Act* – resolving issues and problems. In evaluation we judge the worth, effectiveness, appropriateness, and outcomes of those activities. We act to formulate solutions to any problems. (Stringer 2007: 8-9; 65-88; 95-122; 125-145)
REFLECTION POINT: Can you think of the research question(s) you would like to explore about your own work of the work of the agency for which you work?

Thinking about indicators

Unfortunately, much of the talk and practice on the subject of indicators has been linked to rather crude measures of performance and the need to justify funding. We want to explore the sort of indicators that might be more fitting to the work we do.

In everyday usage an indicator points to something; it is a sign or symptom. The difficulty facing us is to work out exactly what it is that what we are seeing might be a sign of! In youth work – and any authentic education – the results of our labours may only become apparent some time later in the way that people live their lives. In addition, any changes in behaviour we see may be specific to the situation or relationship, rather than a permanent or general change. Further, it is often difficult to identify who or what was significant in bringing about change. Last, when we look at the work, as E Lesley Sewell (1966) put it, we ‘tend to see what we are looking for’. For these reasons a lot of the outcomes that are claimed in reports for work with particular groups or individuals have to be taken with a large pinch of salt.
Luckily, in trying to make sense of our work and the sorts of indicators that might be useful, there is some help at hand. We can draw upon wisdom about practice, broader research findings, and our own values.

**What might we need indicators for?**

We want to suggest five possible areas that we might want indicators for:

- *The number of people we are in contact with and working with.* In general, as informal educators helpers and animators we should expect to make and maintain a lot of *contacts.* This is so people know about us, and the opportunities and support we can offer. We can also expect to involve smaller numbers of *participants* in groups and projects, and an even smaller number as ‘clients’ in intensive work.

  The numbers we might expect - and the balance between them - will differ from project to project (Jeffs and Smith 2005: 116-121). However, through dialogue it does seem possible to come some agreement about these.

- *The nature of the opportunities we offer.* We should expect to be asked questions about the nature and range of opportunities we offer. Do people have a chance to talk freely and have fun; identify issues; expand and enlarge their experience, learn, and make change?
As workers we should also expect to work with people to build varied programmes and groups and activities with different foci. But what should the nature and range be?

- *The quality of relationships available.* Many of us talk about our work in terms of ‘building relationships’. By this we often mean that we work both *through* relationship, and *for* relationship (see Smith and Smith 2008). This has come under attack from those advocating targeted and more outcome-oriented work. However, the little sustained research that has been done confirms that it is the relationships that workers form with people and encourage them to develop with others, that really matter (see, for example, Hirsch 2005). Unfortunately identifying sensible indicators of progress is not easy.

- *How well people work together and for others.* Within informal education and community learning and development there is a valuing of working so that people may organize things for themselves, and be of service to others. The respect in which this held is also backed up by research. We know, for example, that people involved in running groups generally grow in self-confidence and develop a range of skills (Elsdon 1995). We also know that those communities where a significant number of people are involved in organizing groups and activities are healthier, have more positive experiences of education, are more active economically, and have less crime (Putnam 2000). However, what indicators should we be looking for with regard to this?
• *The concrete changes and activities generated.* Last, but certainly not least, we can look for evidence of change in the people we are helping and working with and for new neighbourhood activities and experiences offered because of the efforts of those we are working with. More indirectly, we can also look for changes in the policies of local agencies and the services they offer.

For some of these areas it is fairly easy to work out indicators. However, when it comes to things like relationships, as Lesley Sewell noted many years ago, ‘Much of it is intangible and can be felt in atmosphere and spirit. Appraisal of this inevitably depends to some extent on the beholders themselves’ (1966: 6). There are some outward signs – like the way people talk to each other. *In the end though,* youth work is fundamentally an act of faith. However, our faith can be sustained and strengthened by reflection and exploration.

**REFLECTION POINT:** *Can you identify potential indicators for progress in your own work, using the five suggestions above?*

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**The ripple effect**

As well as looking at any possible direct impact upon participants, it is also worthwhile thinking about how our work might be acting as ‘*a pebble in the pond*’. It is very difficult for a
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group or agency to evaluate in any sustained way the broader impact of their work. However, reflecting on what might be happening can help us to think in fresh ways.

Looking at the various projects within one youth and community network (linked to the Rank Foundation) it becomes clear that there are different kinds of ripple. We might look at the way in which the actions, experiences and learning of the people involved in the project feed through into changed behaviour in their families, peer groups, local neighbourhood, and schools.

In a similar way we can think about our experience as practitioners. For example, work on qualifications rippling into confidence and personal development rippling into changes in lifestyle.

Crucially, we can also consider what the concrete impact our efforts have had on the policies and services offered by other agencies.

We can also think about how our work and development creates ripples in our own organization; other agencies we may work or be in contact, with; and the field more generally (see following diagram).
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Our work + development
The agency
Other agencies
The field generally

The pebble in the pond
In conclusion
The approach to evaluation discussed here has an emphasis upon:

- Dialogue and agreement.
- Encouraging forms of evaluation that have the potential to enhance practice.
- Exploring how we might identify and talk about many of the ‘intangible’ aspects of the work.
- Communicating findings in different ways to different groups.

To further reflect on some of the implications of this we suggest you do the next activity.

**Activity**


This piece explores many of the questions raised in this section – and highlights some of the problems that occur when seeking to evaluate informal education, and community learning and development. You might like to consider the questions at the end of the chapter.
Further reading and references

Books

There has been a lot written about evaluation, especially programme evaluation, but there are only a few books we can really recommend (all of which are from the USA).


Hirsch, B. J. (2005) *A Place to Call Home. After-school programs for urban youth*, New York: Teachers College Press. A rigorous and insightful evaluation of the work of six inner city boys and girls clubs that concludes that the most important thing they can and do offer is relationships (both with peers and with the workers) and a ‘second home’.


On the net

An introduction to evaluation for informal educators:
www.infed.org/biblio/b-eval.htm
Other references


**Note:** an earlier version of this section first appeared in A. Rogers and M. K. Smith (2006)