

Carmel's Story

Developmental process work: 'from Private Concern to Public Action'

A story and the framework contained within it.

SETTING THE SCENE

Community, and with it a sense of belonging, begins to take shape when we can live in a place we love, with people we love, and do things together that we think are important. It is a journey with others towards an outcome that we can" predict. The personal, social and global patterns that emerge will change in meaning and importance over time as we open up new ways to work together and make changes. Leaders can help us focus issues, and experts can help us weight the fact, but such people cannot of themselves guarantee an outcome. The work and its reward belong to all of us.

Kelly and Sewell 1988:51

For the last twenty-five years, the focus of my public work has been community development,. By community development I mean the active involvement of people in the issues which affect their lives;. a way of working which focuses on the relationships between individuals and groups and, the institutions which shape people's everyday experience.

In this article, I will share a précised version of a true story which emanates from the Arts sector of the Mackay community. I hope that through the telling of this story, you the reader will gain an understanding of a community development method, which has a 'bottom-up' approach¹ and which is anchored in social justice principles. This method, which is shared by a number of other Queensland Community Development Workers, is very important in my work practice.

As the concept 'community development' has many different meanings, my meaning holds in the 'voice of the person/people' and describes a process which captures both collective (people together) and individual experiences. It requires the worker to embrace creativity, 'uncertainty, flexibility, context, process and the lived experience' (Gatens 1986). It is conceptualises 'place-making as place-changing'.(Martin 1999:editorial) ² When I refer to community development, I use the concept 'developmental process work'.

This work is located within the concept of 'community building'³. It connected to space, place and base. Space is where I live, where I belong, the ground under my

¹ As well as a 'bottom-up' approach, I also work at a state planning and policy level, holding a regional and rural perspective

² Dee Martin, editorial 'network news edition 3 1999.

³ When Kelly and Sewell write about community building they suggest: 'the paths we each take will always be different...the struggle and the journey the same'.

feet, the piece of earth I tread; place imparts identity. It connects me to a culture or sub-culture, to traditions, to the lore and folklore which is the wisdom of that place, to history and to language or dialect; and base is where we organise the way we live. Where we make decisions about how to manage common resources, how to relate, (economically, socially, culturally and politically).⁴

Developmental Process work is about the building of active, informed communities where people develop relationships which support, sustain, encourage and value them; make decisions together about things which affect them; act, with others, in relation to things which concern them⁵.

The Community Development Method is ... a purposeful activity. It is the rhythmic movement from private, individualised relationships into organised action for a public purpose.

(Kelly, Morgan & Coghlan 1997:145)

This work acknowledges that the issues which concern us in our personal lives often have wider social causes; that a person's personal experience and personal knowledge is always the starting point; and that when we act with others to find solutions we improve our own and others' lives. The context and strategies may be different but the process work is the same if we hold in people and their issues from the beginning of the activity/project to the end.

There are many principles that unpin developmental process work. Some of them are:

- **Working with rather than for**
- Enhancing **participation** in the community and in decision making especially for the most disadvantaged
- Providing opportunities for **relationship building** within and between communities
- **Building on** the existing strengths, skills and organisational capacities of communities

Jim Ife (1995:175-198) has named twenty-two (22) important principles. Five of those principles which are important to the story are listed below:

- **Confronting structural disadvantage: We must ensure that our work does not reinforce structural disadvantage, and in fact, works to address it.**
- **Empowerment:**– providing people with the resources, opportunities, knowledge and skills to increase their capacity to determine their own future and to participate in and affect the life of their community
- **Process and outcome:** How the work is progressed is an important as the outcome. The two cannot be separated. They are intrinsically related.

⁴ Kelly and Sewell 'With Head Heart and Hand' 1988:42-53

⁵ Ann Ingamells – unpublished work.

- ***The Pace of Development:*** The community must determine the pace at which development occurs. The developmental process can be stimulated and encouraged but not speeded up. It is a learning process for the community.
- ***Defining need:*** It is important that the need definition of the people themselves should be given major importance as long as social justice principles are not compromised.

Having briefly discussed how I see community development and having highlighted some of the principles underpinning it, I will now present a précised version of a true story.

THE STORY

Developmental process work starts with the people whose concern it is. Rather than being owned by the worker, it belongs to the people.

The issue/concern/tension

In the eighties a number of parents, grandparents, piano teachers, as well as music specialists in some primary schools, were keen to foster the love of music in children, through the use of the child's singing voice. They believed that the singing voice is a person's primary instrument and that music literacy could be taught through a vocally based developmental music programme located both in and outside the school environment. All the people all lived in Mackay, a small coastal city 1000 kilometres from Brisbane, the capital of the Queensland.

Although a 'Kodaly-based' developmental music programme was also the policy of the Queensland State Education, neither the teachers nor the children's parents/grandparents believed they had the knowledge or skills to facilitate a child's music literacy using the voice as the primary instrument.

The Facilitator of the Process

The person who facilitated the movement of a number of individual's private concern into public action was a parent herself (let us call her Barbara). Although Barbara was not a paid community development worker, she had previously worked developmentally with a wide range of issues/concerns/tensions. She believed she could facilitate a developmental process even though in this case, she identified with the concern being expressed by a large number of people.

The Outcomes

Through the enactment of community development process work:

- the teachers, parents and some of the grandparents, gained the knowledge and developed the skills to work with children of all ages through the medium of music;
- a network of parents/grandparents and teachers was formed and which still continues in an evolving form, to this present day. The network has both an information sharing and skill development function as well as a social change role
- regional choral festivals were commenced and still continue⁶;
- a community based, community owned regional training programme was developed and which became a model adopted by many other centres in Queensland;
- a local branch was formed of a national organisation which has continued to support the continuation of the vocally based programme.
- the children became part of a process which acknowledged that everyone has a musical instrument (our singing voice); that most of us can learn to read and write music; that we can all access and be active users of facilities such as Entertainment Centres, Sound Shells and so on; and that we can all participate and shape the musical life of our community.

The Developmental Process Method⁷

Barbara understood that there were different ways of working to build a just and caring community. She was aware she could have found the solution to the issue all by herself as: she knew how to mobilise community resources; she had access to the Brisbane people who had the skills and knowledge that the people in the Mackay Region wanted to gain. Barbara had already been to several workshops in other states and had considerable knowledge about the vocally based music literacy method. She also knew how systems worked. In other words, Barbara could have 'fixed' the problem. But this would have been 'working *for*' the people and not '*with*' them.

Barbara chooses to work developmentally and facilitate the collective voice of the people who shared a common concern. She worked from an empowerment principle and knew that people valued having 'ownership' of both 'process' and 'outcomes'.

Barbara decided to listen carefully to the concerns, to understand both the personal and public aspects of the story, to discover if the individual people were interested in joining with others to find their collective voice; and if they were, (once the collective

⁶ In the Year 2000 regional choral festival, 616 choristers from Years 6 and 7 participated. They were grouped into two sections: Group A and B. Each group collectively sang four songs and then the whole 616 choristers combined to sing another two songs. The choristers came from Mackay, Collinsville, Bowen, Proserpine, Moranbah and also the small rural communities near Mackay. The choristers sang a wide range of styles including contemporary Australian composed music and were accompanied by a range of instrumentalists from the secondary system.

⁷ The way Barbara facilitated the movement of people's individual private concern into public action is now contained in a nationally accredited which is owned by a regional community based/managed social planning and community development organisation, The Mackay Regional Council for Social Development'. The short course is known as 'A Short Course in the Community Development Method'.

process had begun), to continue to facilitate the public process until the group had achieved the outcomes they had agreed upon.

The process Barbara facilitated can broadly be grouped into three broad stages. Some community development workers call this the: '*Ordering of the Community Development Method*'.⁸ The technical stages are:

- Stage 1 - Initiating and establishing a relationship of a developmental nature⁹
- Stage 2 - Facilitating and maintaining the process of moving the private concern into public action;
- Stage 3 - Fostering and Maintaining the public Action.

Step 1

Initiate a developmental relationship with Individual people: 'listen to the Individual Stories'

Over a period of time, Barbara heard the concerns of the parents, grandparents, piano teachers and primary school music specialists through her social and musical links with these people. She was aware that she needed to acknowledge both the person's personal hurt, frustration and sense of powerlessness as well as facilitate the naming of the public implications of the private stories.

The following comments highlight the people's sense of powerlessness.

- 'my children can't learn music - we can't afford a musical instrument';
- 'surely there is another way for children to make music other than learning the traditional way we did when we were children';
- 'I want my children to have a love of music, but our school doesn't have many instruments which he/she can borrow';
- 'why are my children being taught by teachers who don't know anything about the State Education Department's Kodaly based music programme';
- 'people say the best time to expose children to music is before they are six years of age. How can I do this? I didn't learn to play an instrument when I was young?'
- 'I am supposed to teach children through a vocal based music programme, but I don't know how to do this. They say you can get training in this in Brisbane. How can I go to Brisbane, I have a job and my own family to worry about'.

Initially when Barbara heard the stories she wondered:

⁸ Refer to the Mackay Regional Council for Social Development's 'Short Course in Community Development Method'

⁹ There are a number of characteristics which determine whether or not a person has established with another person, a relationship of a developmental nature.

- 'What is happening here?
- Why is this happening?
- Why are so many people concerned?
- How is this relating to the wider society?
- Can things be different.

As she heard more and more stories, she began to ask some of the people were they interested in meeting with other people to see what could be done to change things.

A number of individual people were interested to meet with other people who shared their concern. Every person who raised the issue, knew at least one other people who shared their issue.

Step 2

Facilitating and maintaining the Process of moving the Individual's Private Concern into Public Action

There were four steps Barbara used in facilitating the movement of the private concern into public action:

1. She ensured that each individual person now felt they were *not on their own with the issue and that they were ready to link with another person.*
2. She and one other person (who had the issue) made mutual agreements about the actions they would take and that they would carry out every step in this agreement.
3. She ensured that the person understood what the step/s were about and its possible implications both in terms of the action and in terms of their life and relationships.
4. She and that other person agreed to contact at least one other person. They planned the gathering together. They:
 - Set the time
 - Choose the place to meet and decide who will book this etc.
 - Invited people who had similar experiences or concerns, and ensured they are fully informed and resourced to participate
 - Established how the meeting/gathering would be facilitated.

In this story Barbara and the other person (Judy) agreed that they would each contact another person, and that they would meet at Judy's home.

Step 3:

Fostering and Maintaining the Public Action

The process of telling the stories, getting to know the people and the issue, and building the group is very important. These horizontal relationships between people who share the concern are the energy and resource for action. This is also a phase of information gathering.¹⁰

In this stage Barbara supported the group, by:

- Establishing an environment of trust, in which people could listen and identify the shared tasks,
- Helping the group establish meeting locations, mailing lists,
- Helping the group connect to the broader community – who else knows about this issue
- Keeping phone and face to face contact alive
- Help group locate and access resources
- Plan further meetings together
- Ensure the group had information to plan action
- Facilitate the mutual purpose of the group
- Decide on mutual goals
- Generate action options
- Encourage discussion on meaning and significance of action options
- Decide on strategies
- Evaluate the positives and negatives of actions taken
- Support the needs of individuals and the group.

Throughout the whole process Barbara paid attention to the triad of participation, consciousness-raising and empowerment. Differences of opinions were not ignored but were respected and addressed.

The work of community development frequently only acquires any real legitimacy when a level of action experienced by the group, is authentic. ... Even if people don't fully succeed in getting what they set out to get, they are more likely to experience empowerment for being involved in the action processes that can give them a chance to set goals. Try new possibilities and learn new skills in the effort to implement the changes they want.

Zervos-Williams (1999:11)

¹⁰ Ann Ingamells – unpublished article

All our work is based on assumptions and when we review our life we can see the various paths we have taken and the principles which have nurtured a particular path.

The particular developmental framework I have shared with you is anchored in a snapshot of a story which leaves much unsaid. The framework names some micro steps which facilitates the expression of people's issues and also holds in those people as they find both a collective voice and some solutions. The framework constantly evolves as the worker with others engages in a cycle of doing, learning and critically reflecting.

Community development is a human activity which encompasses all aspects of life and amounts to a restructuring of society. It is grounded in the real life experiences, sufferings and aspirations of the people themselves. It incorporates a constantly-growing number of people, who themselves grow and become ever more empowered to work with other people. It can be located in any context. I believe it has important application in the community arts sector.

Developmental process work can speak to how we placemake/place-change. It is 'a complex web of actions, interactions, negotiations, risks, and challenges' (Dee Martin 1999:27) whose focus is to hold in the voice of the person/people who are disadvantaged.

As Tony Kelly has said: 'community development is not the outcome of a warm feeling. It is no place for the bleeding heart. It cannot be done off the cuff. It includes planning and preparation of the work to be done, developing strategies with others for its success, and a regular evaluation of its effectiveness.

It is one way of building a just society.

We all share the journey, the pain and the joy.

With acknowledgement to the Mackay Regional Council for Social Development, the Learning Set, Anne Ingamells, and Maggie Shambrook

Abstract: Carmel Daveson has lived and worked in the Mackay Region for thirty years. In the early seventies she was involved in the Australian Assistance Plan - a Federal Government initiative which provided an arena for community development. This period also saw the development of the community arts movement. In this article, Carmel shares a shortened version of a story whilst highlighting stages of an evolving developmental process methodology. This particular way of working begins with the individuals' concerns and then facilitates the movement of those concerns into public action. The process was based on social justice principles and held 'relationships' as central to the work. The outcomes of the work contained in the story continue even to this present day.. 0408 728 952 mobile 07 49573088 Wk Fax 07 49511701