

The Les Halliwell Address, 2013 Queensland Community Development Conference

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The Power of Structural Community Development to Unlock Citizen-Led Change

I respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are gathered on. It is a privilege to be standing on Country.

At the outset, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge many of you in this room who have been my comrades, colleagues, mentors and teachers. Over my years as a community development practitioner and an emerging researcher you have been fellow travellers who have both inspired me and sustained me on this journey.

I'd like to single out some particular people. My practice of community development began two decades ago when as a disability support worker with the Uniting Church our team made a connection with Tony Kelly at the University of Queensland, and we started to grapple with what it meant to truly build community with some of the most marginalised people in society. Tony's teaching and mentorship ignited my imagination of how to do that.

To the community development practitioners who were participants in the research, many of whom are here, I thank you for your generosity towards me and for sharing your practice wisdom with me. I find your dedication and tenacity to building a better world is both humbling and motivating.

I could not have undertaken the task without the support and guidance from my supervisors, Jill Wilson and Peter Westoby. They gently encouraged me, scaffolded the process, helped me sort through ideas when I was drowning in data, and also provided the required amount of pushing to get me writing, which built my confidence. The journey from 'practitioner' to accepting the identity of 'researcher' was a long, long road, and I am grateful to both of them for helping me.

And finally, I am thankful for my family and circle of closest friends, who were patient, showed me steadfast love, and grounded me when the going got tough. I could not have done the work without their unwavering support.

It is an honour to be giving the Les Halliwell Address here at Deception Bay. Over the years I've made a number of connections with people from the D Bay community. I know of *some* of the fantastic work that is happening here and it will be wonderful to hear about this place tomorrow at the conference.

Before I get on to talking about my research, I'm taking a few moments to comment on how we've been fairing of late. As a network of people committed to social justice and building community, I'm sure you would agree that it has been a challenging couple of years since we last gathered together in 2011.

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As progressive practitioners, we can agree with Susan Kenny's (2011:155) arguments when she named the welfare state as "a failed promise". Governments are no longer honouring the welfare state's promise of looking after the well-being of *all* its citizens. I'm sure I don't need to highlight to *you* this "*crisis of the welfare state*" (Ife, 2013:9). Furthermore, Miriam Lyons (2013:8), director of the progressive *Centre for Policy Development* argues, that we are seeing large parts of our social contract being re-written with very little public scrutiny or discussion.

For the funded community work sector, the backdrop of austerity measures and associated funding cuts is resulting in the lowering of service provision and overburdened workers doing more with less. Many colleagues' livelihoods have been affected by recent funding cut-backs and the ripple effect of that for communities is yet to be measured.

Moreover, the shortsightedness of Governments by defunding 'capacity building' and prevention-oriented work is an astoundingly retrograde move. The evidence on the social return on investment (SROI) and the cost-effectiveness of community development is well known. Recent research has shown that for every dollar invested by government in community development, \$15 of value is created (Community Development Foundation, 2010). For governments driven by an economist-rationalist discourse, the cut-backs we are seeing strikes you as somewhat antithetical. Popularist politics seem to be trumping common sense.

What is more troubling though is our current political leaders' complete lack of compassion for particular groups of people in society. It reminds me of what was the antecedent to the 2005 CD conference in Maleny. Then, John Howard was at his zenith having adopted many of One Nation's neo-conservative policy stances; we'd just experienced the Tampa incident and many more social injustices were occurring. As a result we were seeing a kind of collective sense of despair amongst the network. Community development practitioners felt bludgeoned and worn-out by their attempts to fight for justice, and they were opting out and retreating to places where they could take a break from their troubles.

Perhaps, to be a kind of a salve, the Maleny conference organising group at the time chose the theme of spirituality and community. Tony gave the Les Halliwell Address that year (Kelly, 2005), where he told us about Gandhi's "experiments with truth" and we explored what a sense of mystery can bring to our community work. It was a conference designed to remember our roots; why we wanted to do this work; to refresh; to reconnect to our values and practice principles; and to develop a sense of agency to fight the just fight again. That occurred.

But comparing that period of politics to *today's* politics, you would have to say that Pauline Hanson looks like a progressive. Having just recovered from the daily shock of a new regime of conservative *state* politics, we find ourselves once again in a place where almost everyday we are experiencing what a commentator recently referred to as the "shock and awe" discourses and policy decisions at the *federal* level, from all brands of political leaders.

When Jim Ife (2010a) was describing the 2010 federal election, he claimed both sides of politics were competing with each other for a 'race to the bottom' of political leadership. That is, the bottom of the barrel, where policies and leadership based on values and

principles to which we would ascribe, has been lost. I'm not sure what the metaphor would be now; but the barrel seems well and truly empty, decaying and only good for the compost heap.

But, I have to say that the feeling around the conference planning *this year* is markedly different, compared to 2005. Despite the onslaught of neo-liberalism with its economic efficiency mantra and a new phase of the ongoing 'culture wars' (Edwards, 2013) from our community development sector at least, there does seem to be a decidedly calm self-assurance that progressive or critical community development *is the thing* that we know works; that we know makes a difference to people's lives and communities.

Queensland saw the evidence of this during the recent floods crisis, where communities already well connected and with high social capital showed responsiveness and resiliency when it was most needed. Fiona Caniglia and Amy Trotman's (2011) research with local community development organisations involved in the disaster response in Brisbane showed us the importance of place-based '*people's organisations*', that is, organisations *for* local people, operated *by* local people. At the time of the crisis those organisations were integral to the responses needed. They were well-connected to all parts of the community; they were nimble, responsive and provided a range of necessary supports.

Fiona and Amy's research made the important argument that those people's organisations or that layer of infrastructure in our community, doesn't just fall out of the sky. The daily commitment of people to their communities and to publically owned infrastructure, not *just* in times of crisis but in an *ongoing* fashion, is essential to provide those bases from which people daily develop public goods in their communities.

This is the level of public infrastructure most seriously at risk of being over run by more corporately owned and nationally-operated 'community' organisations. Developing a shared analysis about some of these current trends, those that will have serious consequences for local communities, is the work of the *Coalition of Community Boards* and this is why the conference organisers are dedicating Saturday to these important discussions.

Now that I am a bit more of an arms-distance from the coal-face, I am getting the sense that we are seeing established networks recommitting to each other, perhaps in new ways, and we are seeing new citizen-led social movements emerge, like the *Coalition of Community Boards*. For the next couple of days we are privileged to be here hearing these stories.

And so, I do take heart about that spirit of collectivity, creativity and resiliency to weather the toughest of storms. If community development is about anything, it needs to be about hope. That hopeful spirit became event when the conference organising group chose the theme – *Unlocking Citizen Led Change* – it is a kind of portent for us today.

In a similar fashion, I was hopeful that through research I would find an answer to the 'practice problem' I had. By the end of the research I did feel I'd found an answer to my questions, and I'd like to share some of what I learned from my doctoral research with you now.

Like many of us here, I was trained in an approach to practice, euphemistically known as the 'Gandhian' tradition (Lathouras 2010), because of the method's lineage with people from the Indian sub-continent. The kernel of Gandhi's analysis was that exploitation and dominance creates poverty. The analysis goes, that this 'truth', if pursued, would unleash the most powerful moral, social and economic forces available to rectify oppression (Kelly, 2005), that is, a force of liberation for the 'poorest of the poor'.

I remember becoming completely captivated by the sense of hope inherent within this thinking, and I also remember asking Tony at the end of my course at UQ, "but is it possible to actually do this in the social services sector?" He replied, "Tina, go and try".

This approach to community development was underpinned by radical theory and a structural analysis about poverty and disadvantage. The etymology of the word 'radical' is 'root', meaning that, in this context, radical theories look for the root causes of oppression and disadvantage, and seek to address them at their source (Ledwith, 2011). A structural analysis about poverty and disadvantage stems from structuralist theories, specifically the conflict theories (Giddens, 2009). These theories provide an analysis of the inherent conflicts that exist in society through which certain groups gain and hold power and influence at the expense of others (Popple & Quinney, 2002). Moreover, Mullaly (2007:17) and others argue that a structural perspective views social problems as arising from a specific societal context, not the failings of individuals. This perspective considers issues of social and economic inequality, the distribution of wealth, and subsequently, people's access to or exclusion from, political and other types of power.

During my training in community development I read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire was writing about a related but distinctly different field, that of critical pedagogy. In this, he theorised practice methodologies for literacy education. The aim of critical pedagogy is to critically re-orient students to society, and to animate their critical thinking (Brookfield, 2006). Freire's vision was that, through literacy education, women and men would see themselves as *makers of culture*. Through dialogical "cultural circles" (Brookfield & Holst, 2010:178), a rereading of reality takes place, resulting in the literacy learner's engagement in political practices aimed at social transformation (Freire & Macedo, 1998).

As my practice in the social service sector lengthened, I became aware that the ideas of collective approaches to practice had lost some traction. Individual approaches had ascendancy and, from my perspective, the funded field of community development was at risk of losing knowledge and skills about how to engage in the work. I suggest that ideological forces that amplify individualism, consumerism, competition and economic rationalism shape the neo-liberal context in which community development often operates, and this has created a kind of 'amnesia' about the power of the collective. If, for example, prominent individuals from disadvantaged groups have surmounted barriers, such as racism, there can be a tendency to forget that social justice is about elevating *whole* communities; and changing the life chances of large numbers of people, not just individuals (Healy, 2005; Ife, 2013; Mullaly, 2002).

Using an analysis of the root cause of disadvantage, my practice moved beyond just working with groups of community members at the local level. In addition to this work I took on

roles that involved working with and for peak bodies at a state-wide level, primarily the neighbourhood centre sector and with the *Queensland Council of Social Service* (QCOSS). I thought that trying to influence change at the social policy level might help. In hindsight, however, my decision to get involved in this kind of work left me with the troublesome thought that this kind of structural work seemed to deviate from one of the normative ideas about community development, that is, working *with communities* to facilitate processes of social change. Mostly, when working at these social policy levels, community members were not involved.

That point aside, for now, despite the collective efforts of my colleagues and myself, structural barriers that had negative impacts on people's lives persisted. Community members were experiencing *personally transformative* experiences because of their involvement in community development. However, other barriers to their well being, those seemingly beyond their ability to control, continued to impact negatively on their lives. I was not seeing the collective or *socially transformative* outcomes that the critical community development literature argues should result from practice.

This was my practice problem.

Community development activities can often involve very practical aims, for example, to clean up a littered park, or to develop a community vegetable garden. However, the lesson taken from Freire's critical pedagogy showed that it is possible to undertake practice that has dual aims, a very practical aim (in Freire's case, to learn to read), and an emancipatory aim (the politicisation of citizens). From my perspective, these *structural* implications for practice were those that needed to be problematised.

My analysis also included a lack of clarity about which community development processes or methodologies could be used to redress structural disadvantage. The social and political sciences have conceptualised the notion of the structural and have provided models about social reality (see for example, Blumer, 1991; Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009; Held, 2006; Lefebvre, 1999 & 2002; Martin, 2009; Parsons, 1991). However, I was well aware of the paucity of community development literature in these areas of theory and research (Burkett, 2001; Mowbray, 1996; Popple, 1995).

You could say I was frustrated with the lack of results I was seeing from my own practice and then as a full-time student, when I looked at the literature, I was doubly frustrated by what I was unable to find.

This became the research problem, that community development had not fully integrated diverse thinking around the structural into its praxis. A more nuanced view of structure was needed, one that takes into consideration existing literature and those perspectives held on structure, as well as considering structure from a practitioner-perspective. Such practitioner-theorising or re-theorising as it takes place in situ was needed, and so began the theory-building exercise.

Using a framework from Mikkelsen (2005) I took an approach that seeks knowledge by asking: what *is* happening; what *could* happen; and what *should* or *ought* to happen? I was keen to end up with a normative model for practice and felt justified with this aspiration based on the knowledge that community development is such a *broad field* and prone to

what Biddle (1966) described as the “fuzziness” factor. This is because enthusiasts of the practice can describe very different experiences but lay claim to the same title of “Community Development”, largely because of the varieties of method found in the work, the populations involved and the backgrounds of the practitioners (Biddle, 1966; Gilchrist, 2003). This fuzziness causes ideological and theoretical confusion and contestations within or about the field. It is a very misunderstood practice and its “elasticity” (Shaw, 2007) means it is easily appropriated by sections of community and government who wish to use it for their own particular ends. I will talk more of this point later.

To find out: what *is* happening, what *could* happen and what *should* or *ought* to happen, the research was conducted in two stages. I conducted in-depth interviews with 22 experienced community development practitioners in two Australian states. This was Stage One. I was very privileged to hear lots of amazing stories of practice during the year I did my data collection. I can share just a few of those with you today. During that period of conducting interviews, obviously, I found many things; the amount of data was immense. I analysed that data and wrote a findings paper, distributing it to all who had been interviewed. Then, at Stage Two, I invited them to attend a meeting where we could together grapple with the things I found from the interviews. At these meetings we tried to hone down what the issues were and theorise together what we thought was going on. I then went on and did further analysis and wrote up what I hope is a useful theory of practice which I’ve named as “Structural Community Development” (Lathouras, 2012).

I’m going to present just a few findings in keeping with the theme of the conference. I do hope you might find these helpful to your practice.

The first conveys to a very big absence in the findings paper I wrote and presented to the Stage Two groups. It relates to practitioners having a structural analysis of power and inequality at the *periphery* of practice, rather than as *a central analysis*. Across the cohort an analysis of power and inequality was mostly tangential or implied. Power tended to be discussed in terms of ‘*empowerment*’ rather than the reasons *why* people need empowerment in the first place.

This is important because of the breadth of issues you can work on in your day-to-day practice. Working on things that ameliorate disadvantage should be paramount. Otherwise, one could question if we are only tinkering at the edges, making things more tolerable for people, rather than achieving structural change. A power analysis will help us with that.

Obviously, there were some exceptions to this *peripheral-only* analysis and these often came from people who had been trained in the community development method at UQ. For example, a quote from Q7 illustrates this:

“I do go to a bit of a power model fairly quickly, of who makes the decisions, what sort of powers they have, how you can influence that process for a fair deal for all. And I stand with people who are the least able to participate or the most vulnerable and work with them, and work with the structures that exist. So, it’s usually different levels of government, but it might not be.

It may be a doctor in a medical centre that is very controlling about their practice and what they will do and won't do with their patients. It may be the hospital system, it may be Centrelink, different Government departments who have power over people's lives (Q7)".

Another Queenslanders specifically referred to community development being a process of *community members* having an ability to analyse power. This is known, in the Freirean tradition mentioned earlier, as *conscientisation* or consciousness-raising processes. It is a term that refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive element of these realities (Freire, 1970). An example of such a contradiction comes from Q5 when they discuss assisting people to understand homelessness:

"Often marginalised people will blame themselves for their situation, not the structures that are actually impacting upon their lives. So helping to build that analysis so people understand that when they're homeless, that isn't always only *their* fault. Community work is to build their understanding of the failure of those systems, and to bring about some change (Q5, original emphasis)".

The bread and butter of community development, known to many of us, is what's called 'structuring' the work. Through group formation and collective action there is a legitimate way for people to develop a voice and hopefully have some influence. The next quote is an example of one practitioner's understanding of 'structuring':

"It's quite difficult for unorganised groups to communicate with organised groups. Structure can elevate an issue through the structuring of it. This is so like-structure can talk to like-structure. Otherwise, individuals and little groups can be excluded from those types of discussions. Through collaboration you make an association with a group that's got clout. It's about realising power (Q3)".

There are a number of reasons why many practitioners expressed only a tangential analysis of power, not the least is the fact that for thirty years now we have been bathed in neo-liberal thinking and practice. We've seen a discursive slide from social justice to social capital with its focus on consensus-building and 'win-win' relations. This is what DeFilippis (2008) names as "neo-liberal communitarianism" where there is a core belief that society is conflict-free. This agenda has disconnected communitarianism structurally from political and economic capital (DeFilippis, 2001). Uncritical practice becomes de-politicized and conservative, when we don't hold as central an analysis of inequality and stratification in society.

Another reason relates to just the day-to-day realities of responding to people in need. We are helpful people and we don't want to see people suffering. An example of such practitioner reactivity comes from the analysis of V12:

"It's *too tempting* to decide, 'oh, I'll help that person today', instead of voice my opinion in this other forum. I think CD work should be *about the system* quite a bit; whereas it tends to be people trying to be *helpful* in a

short-term way. They can use a lot of their energy and time doing that (V12, original emphasis)".

A structural analysis of the drivers of disadvantage can help us work more proactively. This practitioner seems to be advocating that we take a wide-angle lens, one where we work both with the situations in front of us and work with what's led to those situations occurring.

This is what another practitioner referred to as the "public" elements within an individual person's "private" story. Talking about people who access a service, Q5 says:

"When they come in, they often don't know that it's even an option to mobilise with other people around addressing a shared need. So, that's what I'm listening for, the public dimension of the private story. That is really the important part of the work, hearing that story, then seeing the potential for that story to become public action rather than a private response only (Q5)".

Perhaps another reason that has complicated things for us is the impact of postmodernism. Postmodernism has created new opportunities and new emphases for practice, but also created theoretical discontinuities. A postmodern social theory examines the social world from *multiple* perspectives of class, race, gender and other identifying group affiliations *and*, at the same time, rejects totalising claims such as those seen in grand narratives like Marxism (Agger, 1991). Through the lens of postmodernism social reality can no longer be understood in terms of a single 'meta-narrative' but is characterized by multiple discourses, fragmented meanings and continual simultaneous redefinitions (Ife, 2013).

This type of thinking was also represented in the data, particularly in relation to the kind of lenses practitioners use, or what they look for, when undertaking a *structural* analysis. This was referred to as a matrix of lenses.

The next quote relates to the fact that in over 22,000 words of interview data the term "social class" was not to be found. For whatever reason, for example, the myth of Australian egalitarianism, or the rise of the middle classes we've been seeing, this concept has seemingly dropped out of our lexicon. For example from the Victorian Stage Two meeting:

One of the questions you posed in the (Stage One findings) paper was, do we not need to worry about 'class' anymore? And I thought, '*of course* we need to worry about 'class'. And one of the issues around some of that 'class' stuff is only the *economic* version of things. I think 'class' cuts across 'culture' and 'culture' cuts across 'class' as well. And so I think you need to have the matrix of them all (VM4, original emphasis).

Complexity is the order of the day when you bring things down to the community level and connect with people's lives. Practitioner analysis of community members' situations occurs in that *holistic* sense. For example a different practitioner's quote:

Thinking about all those lenses, they are then acted out differently depending on time, person, situation, dynamics and location...so maybe

that's where community workers are more complex about it. You can't just have an analysis of power in relation to gender and apply it across everything. We have to work with contradictory analyses at any one time. So, a postmodern structural analysis? (Q1, Stage Two).

These practitioners believe there are multiplicities of identities (Ife, 2013; Shaw & Martin, 2000) and forms of oppression to be acknowledged and worked with in emancipatory processes; analyses that go beyond those with *just a single focus*. That level of sophisticated analysis is laudable. However, a negative appraisal of postmodern approaches, with its emphasis on fragmentation and multiples truths, is that these may lead people to abandon political principles, goals and strategies for a better society, thus leaving a political vacuum which can be filled by those seeking power (Kenny, 2011).

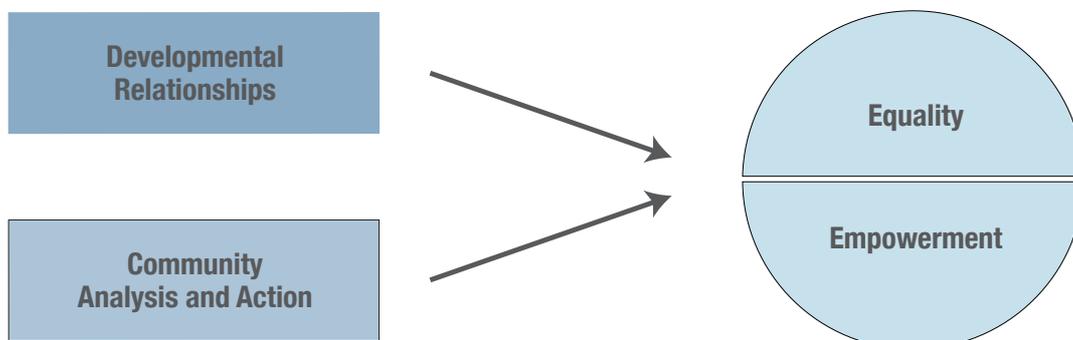
Ledwith (2011, citing Fisher and Ponniah, 2003), argues that any counter-hegemony processes, must tread a fine line between embracing respect for difference and, at the same time, create a common vision, which is the idea of harnessing both difference and convergence. Kenny (2011) and Ife (2013) argue community development practice simultaneously embraces principles that are drawn from both the project of modernity, through critical theory, and the post-modern critique of modernity. Or, in other words, we have a foot in both camps and our job is to harness the emancipatory potential from each paradigm.

This discussion so far has presented us with two key challenges. The first, is to remember the critical nature of the practice in spite of the neo-liberal immersion we are experiencing. Secondly, community development theorists (Kenny, 2002; Ledwith, 2011; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011) argue that there is a theory-practice divide in our field. We need to reclaim community development's socially transformative possibilities and re-engage with the literature on what community development is actually meant to be doing.

So, that all sounds pretty logical. But, you might be asking, like I was, how do I actually do it? To turn now to the three frameworks that came from the data. I named these as *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. Again, I'll just be drawing out elements of those that I think relate to our theme of *Unlocking Citizen Led Change*.

The first framework, *Structural Connecting*, is the one that *all participants had in common*. This framework relates to practice undertaken at the local level and the aim of practice is to be a vehicle for social change. Specifically, the change being sought in this framework includes the 'goals' of *Equality* and *Empowerment*. To achieve these goals, a 'process' dimension relates to *Forming Developmental Relationships* and draws on a 'knowledge' dimension named as having a *Community Analysis*, which leads to *Collective Action*. See Framework # 1, *Structural Connecting*, diagram below:

Framework #1	Structural Connecting
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The key principle inherent within the first framework is about making *connections*. This was seen through both a homogeneous lens, where people band together around *common* experiences, and a heterogeneous lens, where people band together around *different* experiences but a *common vision* is developed. The mutuality of relationships in these groups is key. Here is an example of one practitioner’s analysis that smacks of the Gandhian analysis:

I really believe that poverty is a product of the break down of relationships between people. What I believe community development does is connect people back together again. It doesn’t eliminate the disadvantage but it creates a *context* in which people now have a sense of responsibility *for one another* (Q10, original emphasis).

Story – A Mental Health Forum

I heard a wonderful story about a piece of work that is an example of a process of heterogeneity – working across difference. Local people living with a mental illness and mental health clinicians and bureaucrats were brought together for a forum about mental health. Processes were facilitated where forum attendees were able to hear the perspectives of *all* who were present. So called “top down wisdom and experience” (Ife, 2010b:30), from people trained and working professionally in the mental health field, was *not* privileged over the knowledge from people with lived experience of mental illness, thus equalizing power differentials between the various groups of people attending the forum.

The outcomes of the forum included an appreciation for, and new insights developed, about the circumstances of people living with mental health issues and also the significant role of community work when responding to community members in these situations. This is work outside of the specialized mental health field. This story illustrates that community development can be a platform or space for conversation and dialogue, one that can have an educative *and* liberating effect on those involved.

The characteristics associated with the framework *Structural Connecting* includes: mutuality, reciprocity, sacrificing self-interest for common interest, or simply, the notion of “communion” (Buber, 1937). Through *dialogue* a people’s mandate is established. We work *with* that mandate and together make decisions for strategic outcomes, or “pragmatic strategy” (Owen & Westoby, 2011). This means we deliberate and make choices about what kind of outcomes are possible through collective action. To ensure the process is one based on those characteristics, a practitioner suggested:

“Don’t organise anything without energy and passion being present, so that you don’t have to use rewards or sanctions for people to act because they’re motivated. Then develop structures *around* people and that spirit, passion and sense of responsibility” (Q10, original emphasis).

Importantly, Peter Westoby and John Owen argue this is the point where things can easily come off the rails for community development. They argue that these very formative practices are “fraught with positional biases, tensions around mandates and institutional or systematic barriers and determine, from the outset, the extent to which a community development process will be mutually beneficial or not”. They go on to argue that establishing and maintaining a *dialogical and developmental* ethos rather than a *directive* one, leads to motivation and hopefulness (Owen & Westoby, 2011).

Story – Reducing Inter-cultural Conflict in a High School

Another story speaks to the concept of sustaining action over time. This is particularly pertinent when, because of the entrenched nature of issues, action requires a longer-term commitment. The story involved a complex structuring arrangement. The work centered on helping young people in a high school who were experiencing high levels of inter-cultural conflict. The key players in the structured arrangement included a local government youth worker, theatre arts workers, the principal of the high school and an academic who was providing support through rigorous evaluation of the project. Two years in, the project was achieving good results and had seen a marked reduction in inter-cultural conflict within the student body, as well as a marked reduction in the number of exclusions and suspensions from the school.

When I asked the practitioner, a local government worker, about why this structuring process was used, Q9 commented:

It is so we can have the right people involved in it; and they can have the right level of control. So to preserve the integrity of that collective of those five key people who came together and had a vision, we’ve needed to maintain a structure that left the authority to make decisions with that group, collectively. We, (the local government, Q9’s employer), realised if we messed with that, we would be messing with the potential of the project to deliver (Q9).

The “potential” of the project here, is to give every chance for young people to get an education and advance their lives without degenerative inter-cultural conflict at school. Q9

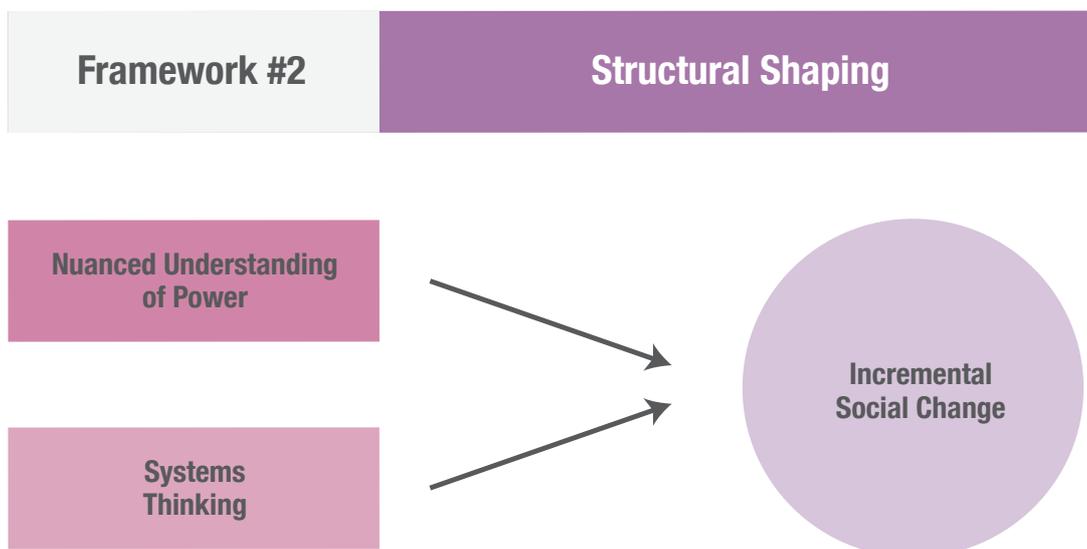
is talking about how *structuring* this piece of work ensured the power and control over decisions made remained with the people *directly* involved in the project. Two structures, a local government entity and a state education department, were both influenced as a result of the community development work. They changed their regular policies and procedures, they provided resources, and they devolved power for making decisions to the project group, thus significantly benefiting community members, the young people from culturally diverse backgrounds attending the high school. It is an excellent example of developmental and sustained work achieving results.

The lesson to be learned from these stories is that relationships are key. Our job is to understand and use the system in a way that creates transformative opportunities. We need to use our ingenuity whilst holding on to the purpose and central analysis of community development work.

This leads to the second framework that emerged from the data, *Structural Shaping*.

The first framework, *Structural Connecting*, was common to all participants in the study. However, *Structural Shaping* only applied to those practitioners who had high theory-action congruency. As I was conducting the interviews I was finding there was often a disconnection between a practitioner's *aspirations* for practice and what they were *actually achieving*. Theory-action congruency (Argyris and Schön, 1974), is a theory comprised of two concepts. "Espoused theories" are used to describe and justify behaviour. "Theories-in-use", or what one actually does, are those that guide behaviour and influence one's capacity for learning. Argyris and Schön (1974:23) argued the more congruency there is between one's espoused theory and one's theory-in-use, the more effective a practitioner will be. This framework, *Structural Shaping*, was one that helped bring the espoused and the actual into greater alignment.

Structural Shaping includes the 'goal' dimension of "Incremental Social Change"; and two 'knowledge base' dimensions including, "A Nuanced Understanding of Power" and "Systems-thinking". With these knowledge bases, practitioners develop agency to effect change. See Framework # 2, *Structural Shaping*, diagram below:



I have already introduced ideas related to postmodernism. This framework calls on us to take a postmodernist understanding, or to develop a *nuanced* understanding of power. For many of the participants in this study, community development's *raison d'être* is analysing power and working in ways to ameliorate its negative consequences. Gaventa (2006) argues that, while power analysis is important, there is no *one way* of understanding power; its meanings are diverse and often contentious. A more *nuanced* understanding of power might be to consider different ways of analysing power and its *inter*-relationships. This is helpful thinking particularly when we are think of powerful structures that oppress. One practitioner, very eloquently, said it like this:

I practice great hope, because I believe that every structure is a construct. So everything that is constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed (Q10).

A nuanced understanding of power is a frame of reference for how practitioners can demonstrate adaptability when conditions change. This adaptability is essential for theory-action congruency. When one understands that dynamic sets of relationships exist and various forms of power are played out across those dimensions, new possibilities emerge for social change.

In relation to the other knowledge base dimension, systems-thinking, Wheatley (2006) suggests that if one sees a problem with one part of the system, one must also see the dynamics existing between that part and the whole system. "The system is capable of solving its own problems" (Wheatley, 2006:145). If a system is in trouble, the solutions are found from within the system and the mechanism for creating health is to connect the system to *more of itself* (Wheatley, 2006:145, my emphasis). The kinds of connecting to which Wheatley refers are "critical connections" (2006:45) where, through webs of relations, participants *co-create* new realities.

Story – Benarrawa Solidarity Group

You may be familiar with the wonderful story of the Benarrawa Solidarity group, which is comprised of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members. These people originally came together to inform themselves about racism and learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture. For the past nine years, they have engaged in a range of projects with both relationship-development and educational aims.

Although the group has developed a range of actions, pathways into the group are not just task or action-oriented. The group aims to keep creating connections with newcomers and has an emphasis on education and building strong relationships. It does this through its many activities in the wider community and their ongoing internal group discussions. This also suggests that the group is open enough to include new people and their ideas despite how sophisticated or developed the Solidarity group's actions have become. This could also be a strategy for keeping the group energized and enhancing its ability to sustain itself over time, as new people and new energy have a replenishing effect on the group and its actions.

Also significantly, the group *makes connections with others beyond their locality* by forming bridges with people in society who also have an interest in Indigenous affairs. They are

using systems-thinking; looking horizontally and vertically in that system, or, they *structure beyond the local*. This indicates that the group has an analysis that there needs to be connections with groups and organisations outside their immediate sphere, perhaps to assist the group to further its own aims, or for the group to be an influence within those spheres. What seems evident is the quality of the relationships across the system is characterised by mutuality and reciprocity, where all participants are valued for the range of gifts, talents, skills and knowledge they bring to the table.

This is an example of how a practitioner with a structural analysis about racism and the historical oppression of Indigenous peoples is shaping processes to bring about social change. Personal connections between people are breaking down barriers across a range of historical divides. Also, people based in local communities and people based across institutions in society are together working towards justice and equality.

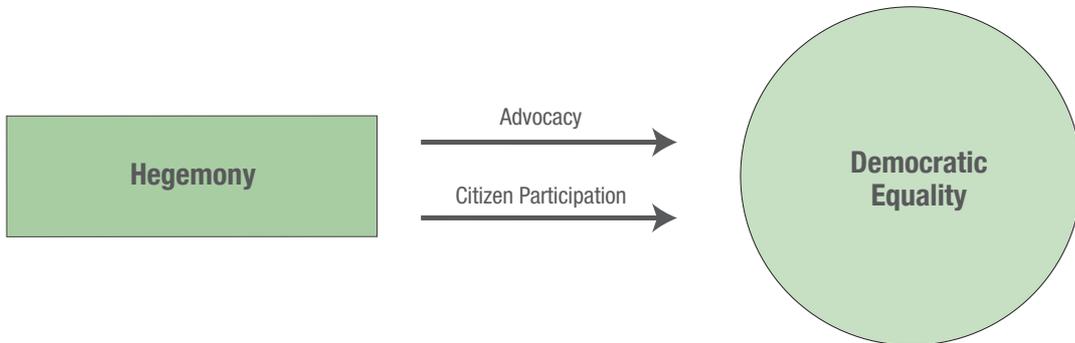
The lesson for us from this framework is to develop a nuanced understanding of power, and to learn to see the whole. That is, establish processes of webs of relationships and spaces for dialogue across a system. Analyses and processes like these make some of the uncertainties associated with social change work less problematic. They fuel a sense of agency to shape the context of the work. They also bring espoused theories and theories-in-use into greater alignment, thus creating greater effectiveness in practice.

Structural Politicking is the final framework. This is the framework that indicates community development is inextricably linked to politics. This third framework, revealed the *greatest difference* between the participants.

Practitioners' analysis about community development being a tool for political engagement differed considerably. It spanned across a continuum from no political engagement to political engagement in two forms. For the first small group, no political engagement, the state was in *the background* in relation to practice, seen as the apparatus through which social policy and its subsequent funding for community development work is obtained. We'll put that group aside and discuss the other group for whom the state is much more in *the foreground* of practice. For this group, social change goals have a more socially transformative essence, aiming for democratic equality. However, the divergence around the approaches to practice this group are employing was quite fascinating.

The framework's dimensions include a 'goal' dimension with a socially transformative essence, that of "Democratic Equality"; the 'knowledge base' dimension, "Hegemony", and two 'process' dimensions, "Influencing through Advocacy" and "Citizen Participation". See Framework # 3, *Structural Politicking*, diagram below:

Framework #3	Structural Politicking
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With this group, for whom the state is in the foreground and they demonstrate a commitment to progressive politics, political action fell into two camps. One group comprised those who see this work as the purview of the *practitioner*, or who engage in *practitioner-led* structural work, primarily through processes of advocacy.

The other group comprised those practitioners who see this work as the purview of *community members or citizens*, and whose focus is on *citizen-led work* or citizen participation in political processes.

Significantly, narratives associated with this citizen-led approach to practice were much more *aspirational* in nature. There were few practice examples.

There were, however, quite a few examples of *practitioner-led* structural politicking. This usually involved social policy reform advocacy, often through sector networks connected to people in local communities, and also practitioner-led action to create infrastructure to support local-level work.

Story – A Victorian Federation of Neighbourhood Houses

I heard a very successful story from Victoria involving a federation of networks, comprising 350 neighbourhood houses, as they call them there. Over a ten-year period this sector has created significant infrastructure through a three-tiered system involving networks of individual houses in a geographic region, which are supported by one of 16 community development practitioners in ‘networker’ positions. The ‘networkers’ also network amongst themselves when connections are made with the state-wide peak body. They have clout. They are using that infrastructure to support and sustain local community development work. In this example, there is the *hope* or *promise* of citizen political engagement. They use processes that involve community members *to some degree* to undertake citizen advocacy about particular issues to benefit the tens of thousands of people across local communities each year who are members of or use neighbourhood houses.

The second process dimension of this framework, that is, *citizen-led* structural politicking, or what we might see as avenues for “citizenship” is somewhat problematic. In the first

instance, it too, like 'class', is not a term in the forefront of people's mind. Only three practitioners discussed the concept of citizenship unsolicited. Generally speaking, it is a concept that is being systemically removed from the lexicon. For example, our new federal government has even taken the term out of its name. I'm sure you're aware that our new government department's name has changed from the *Department of Immigration and Citizenship* to the *Department of Immigration and Border Protection*.

When prompted to discuss the concept of citizenship however, all practitioners readily spoke to the concept. For example, one response goes so far as to say that community development work is about citizenship-making:

"Citizenship is about politicization. Citizenship is an automatic right or condition that is under-utilised, but community development can support people to act like the citizen they already are. To be more active citizens and therefore influence decisions that affect their lives, communities, livelihoods, workplaces and circumstances (Q3)".

There was a paucity of stories told of practice driven by and involving community members that goes *beyond the local level*. One explanation for this could be that community members have become depoliticised because of neo-liberal drivers, and the trend seen with new types of governance arrangements. For example, people in local communities have become dislocated from relationships, organisations and democratic processes that can carry their voice. This is an argument for putting the 'local' more assertively back into 'local government', for instance. The need to have a voice is also the analysis of the *Coalition of Community Boards*, who are concerned about the survival of small to medium community associations and the communities in which they are located.

Another explanation harks back to the 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up' orientation to practice. We could be the ones that get in the way of community members' ability or opportunities for such social change work. Boyte (2008) theorises the decline of civic life when he emphasises the widespread "service economy", one which fosters "technocracy", defined as *control by outside experts*. Technocracy, Boyte (2008) argues, has eroded people's civic development, where the dominant service economy trains professionals to look at people's deficiencies and generates a culture of rescue. Although there was no evidence that the experienced practitioners interviewed for this study ascribed to a rescue culture, constraints associated with their paid roles were widely discussed as problematic.

Citizen-led community development is often at odds with the top-down nature of the service delivery system. I define service delivery as actions or interventions targeted *to* or *for* particular groups in society and are repeated over and over, with numbers of people coming through the service. Work occurs for set time periods, and then people are exited from the service.

Regardless of the quality of this form of work, and I am sure the majority of it is good quality, service provision can be seen as epitomizing a 'top down' orientation, one where the service largely determines the need for programs, obtains the resources, sets the agenda, and because of the structured nature of the processes, can often pre-determine the outputs associated with the work.

You can see why this approach would be appealing to funding bodies who have a neo-liberal orientation, where reducing risk, predicting processes and working with large numbers of people would be seen as “efficient” and a preferable way for governments to invest taxation revenue. Work in communities that is pre-determined, predictable, neat and orderly though, is a far cry from what we read in the community development literature about its purpose. Community development epitomizes a ‘bottom up’ orientation, where we work *with* community members to facilitate social change processes and goals as determined by them.

The great challenge of our time, Boyte (2008) argues, is to develop a civic agency politics as an alternative to technocratic politics. This is called ‘developmental democracy’, which is a politics in which people are *not empowered by leaders*, but *empower themselves* when they develop skills and habits of collaborative action, and change institutions and systems, making them more supportive of civic agency (Boyte, 2008).

Perhaps we’ve become depoliticized too. A greater emphasis on the practice as it relates to critical theory and ‘deliberative democracy’ (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis, 2007) literature does seem warranted. We need to expand our knowledge base to have more of a political science emphasis, that is, a type of citizenship-making practice.

In essence, we shouldn’t leave politics to the elites, and, we need to make sure *we* don’t become the elites. This is particularly important, when we know that backlashes in social and public policy occur, particularly when conservative governments follow progressive governments.

You may have read Christos Tsiolkas’ (2013) recent publication in *The Monthly*, entitled, “Why We Hate Refugees”. It is a compelling piece about fear and racism, where he asks uncomfortable questions of both himself as a second-generation immigrant, and of the reader. He does not necessarily provide answers, but the piece makes you think about what is driving some of our thinking and behaviour in Australia. On this same topic, I’ve been reading the recently published book from the *Centre for Policy Development* about ideas for Australian Progress, entitled, “Pushing Our Luck”. It includes a chapter that provides a good example about the failures of elites driving public policy in relation to this very topical issue. That is, how we, as a nation view people from cultures different to the Anglo-Australian culture.

The author of this chapter, progressive commentator and political scientist, Lindy Edwards (2013) argues that despite our successful history of waves of immigration and economic prosperity, tackling issues to prevent the culture wars is needed more than ever. She discusses the culture wars through the prism of the public policy, multiculturalism. She makes the point that this policy was never part of the story of our national identity. A small group of policy makers and activists drove the agenda of multiculturalism, which sought to rectify the racial hierarchies that had been present in old systems of assimilation and to establish new terms of equal democratic citizenship (Edwards, 2013:161). But we are also seeing those ideas being systemically dismantled. For example, we’ve seen another discursive slide from “multiculturalism” to “harmony”.

Edwards (2013:162) argues that for people who care about the ideas of inclusion and equality, they need to acknowledge multiculturalism's political weakness, which is that it was imposed on the population rather than springing from it. "A story of national identity that does not have deep roots in the psyche of its dominant group is very vulnerable to being torn down, particularly if the elite consensus driving it dissolves" (Edwards, 2013:162).

To prevent the next culture war, Edwards (2013:157) argues, we need to create a sense of unity amongst an increasingly diverse population. It is our similarities and shared values that will craft a national story (Edwards, 2013:167), and about the kind of society we want.

So a critical reading about how we view difference might suggest we ask, "whom should we construct as the villain here"? The answer could be "ignorance". I find it really interesting that a leading progressive commentator has come to the conclusion that egalitarian nationalism needs to be our social glue (Edwards, 2013:165). This is the kind of thinking we've always had in community development. We know what happens when we bring people together and through critical conversations all kinds of cultural boundaries are crossed; irrational fears break down; we see our similarities, and so on. As a result, we see that hearts and minds change and people often commit to each other and to a range of positive actions.

So this framework from the research, *Structural Politicking*, seems quite apt. Inequality, poverty and racism persist because of ideological positions that have ascendancy at this time in our history. With an analysis that inequality serves to benefit the few, I argued in my thesis that a useful theory of Structural Community Development is one that places citizenship at its center, and views practitioners as political actors in this process.

I'd like to leave you with some 'take home' ideas. Firstly, to those of you *not* in formal community development roles but see yourselves as other kinds of social change actors. Ask yourself, what is your 'Community'? Ingrid Burkett (2001) helped us think about the diversity of communities. There are communities within communities, and these provide a range spaces where you have agency to work for social justice and can affect all kinds of positive change.

Secondly, to those of you *not* working at the local community level, but somewhere else, such as a local Government, a peak body, or an academic institution - local community needs you. When local-level practice *structures beyond the local*, you can be the bridge into your own institution, to other departments, to levels of government, and to the corporate sector. You have a particular kind of clout that is not readily available to local community practitioners. If you are a researcher, you bring the ability to help practitioners develop critical reflection about the effectiveness of practice and to develop new forms of empirical knowledge through research that can also provide clout when trying to effect change.

Finally, to community development practitioners, whether you do that work in a paid or unpaid capacity. My research has shown that we should view citizens as doing their own social change work *to a far greater degree*. We need to lead from behind much more (Batten & Batten, 1967) and facilitate work that unlocks citizen-led change.

Some key points I discussed about how to do that included:

1. Remember the critical nature of the practice in spite of the neo-liberal immersion we are experiencing. We need to reclaim community development's socially transformative possibilities.
2. Resist the temptation to 'service' people. Rather, during group formation processes establish and maintain a *dialogical and developmental* (that is, a relational and bottom-up) ethos rather than a *directive* one. This leads to motivation and hopefulness.
3. Develop a nuanced understanding of power; learn to see the whole, and structure beyond the local making micro-macro connections. That is, establish processes for webs of relationships and spaces for dialogue across a system, but ensure those relationships are still based on characteristics of mutuality and reciprocity.
4. See yourself and the people you work with as political actors. At a time when our political leaders are not showing us the way forward, community development processes that enable civic participation leading to greater citizenship is our greatest hope.

In conclusion, President of the International Association for Community Development, Ingrid Burkett, argues this is "a time of possibilities", and requires progressive practitioners to respond to current dilemmas and contexts in the spirit of idealism and creativity, and with clarity of purpose couched within a strong values base (Burkett, 2011).

We can tinker at the edges of *personally* empowering processes only, or we can work to effect change at the source of oppression. Let's put our efforts into making the changes that will matter most.

I do hope some of what I've generated through the research will be helpful to you. I also hope we can dialogue and debate these matters at the conference and into the future. I wish you all the very best in your work.

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