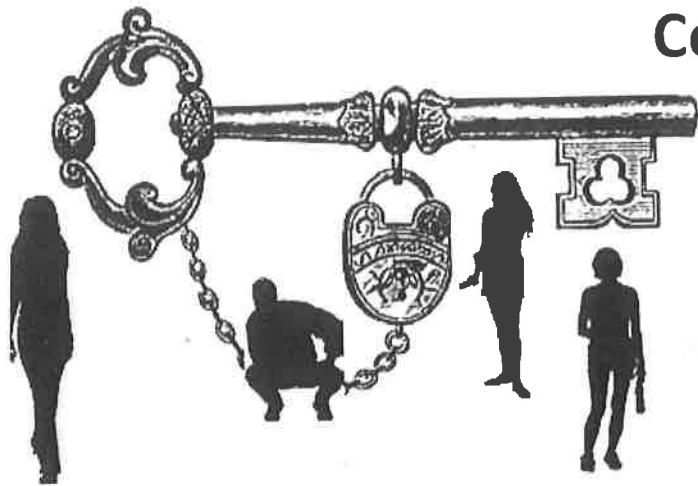# The Power of Structural Community Development to Unlock Citizen-Led Change

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*The Les Halliwell Keynote Address,*
delivered at the 2013 Queensland Community Development Conference, held in Deception Bay, Queensland, 31st October, 2013

I respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathered. It is a privilege to be standing on Country. It is an honour to be invited to give the Les Halliwell Address. I wish to comment on the current context for community development in Queensland and then share some findings from my recent doctoral research.

The current political context is having a significant impact on the community development sector. I am sure you would agree that these are challenging times for those of us committed to social justice and building community. As progressive practitioners, we can agree with Susan Kenny's (2011:155) arguments when she named the welfare state *"a failed promise"*. Governments are no longer honouring the welfare state's promise of looking after the well-being of *all* its citizens. Jim Ife (2013:9) refers to this as a *"crisis of the welfare state"*. Furthermore, Miriam Lyons (2013:8), former Executive Director of one of Australia's progressive think-tanks, the 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. This more pernicious set of circumstances is cause for alarm.

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 local communities is yet to be measured.

Moreover, the short-sightedness of Governments' defunding of '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 economic-rationalist discourse, the cut-backs the sector is seeing appear somewhat antithetical. Populist politics seems to be trumping common sense.

What is more troubling, though, is our current political leaders' complete lack of compassion for and vilification of particular groups of people in society. This reminds me of what was the antecedent to the 2005 Queensland Community Development conference in Maleny. Then conservative Prime Minister John Howard was at his zenith, having adopted many of the neo-conservative policy stances developed by the One Nation political party. Many social injustices were occurring, including the appalling incident where the Norwegian freighter Tampa, whose crew had rescued over 400 Australian-bound asylum seekers from sinking boats, was turned back into international waters. As a result of these and many other injustices occurring at the time, a collective sense of despair developed within 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 the relentless demands of social justice work.

Perhaps, to be a kind of a salve, the 2005 community development conference organising group chose the theme of spirituality and community. Tony Kelly, Lecturer in Community Development at the University of Queensland, gave the Les Halliwell Address that year. Tony told us about Gandhi's *"experiments with truth"* (Kelly, 2005) 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.

Comparing that period of politics to now, one could argue

that the former leader of the One Nation party, Pauline Hanson, looks rather progressive. Having just recovered from the daily shock of a new regime of conservative state politics in Queensland, Australians find themselves once again with a deeply conservative federal government. Almost every day 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) described the 2010 Australian federal election, he claimed both sides of politics were competing with each other for a '*race to the bottom*' of political leadership. Both seemed intent on scraping the bottom of the barrel, subscribing to policies and leadership based on values and principles antithetical to those of community workers. I am not sure what the metaphor would be now, but the barrel does seem well and truly empty, decaying and only good for the compost heap.

However, compared to 2005, the feeling around the 2013 conference planning was markedly different. Despite the onslaught of neo-liberalism with its economic efficiency mantra and a new phase in 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*. We know our practice makes a difference to people's lives and their communities, and thus we persevere.

Queensland saw the evidence of this during the 2011 floods crisis, when over three quarters of the state was declared a disaster zone (Hurst, 2011). Communities already well-connected and with high social capital showed responsiveness and resiliency when it was most needed. Fiona Caniglia's and Amy Trotman's (2011) research with locally-based community development organisations involved in the disaster response highlighted 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 entire response. They were well-connected to all parts of the community; they were nimble, responsive and provided a host of necessary supports when and where most needed.

Caniglia's and Trotman's research mounted the important argument that such people's organisations, or the community centre 'layer' of infrastructure, do not just fall out of the sky; the daily commitment of people to their local communities and to community-owned infrastructure, not just in times of crisis but in an on-going fashion, is essential to provide those bases from which people daily develop public good in their communities.

This is the level of public infrastructure that is most seriously at risk of being overrun by corporately-owned and nationally-operated "community" organisations. Developing a shared analysis about some of these current trends, particularly those that will have serious consequences for local communities, is the work of the Coalition of Community Boards (CoCBs). The CoCBs can be described as a citizen-led social movement, comprised of board members of small to medium community organisations (see www.cocb.org.au). These community organisations play vital functions in local communities. Collaborative action-research being undertaken by myself and Ann Ingamells is currently underway across four regions in Queensland to understand how these networks of small community organisations are meeting the challenge of a fast-changing community service sector.

Through this and many other examples of good collective practice, we are seeing established networks recommitting to each other, perhaps in new ways, and we are seeing innovation and creativity being developed to face contemporary challenges.

And so, I 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 evident when the 2013 Queensland conference organising group chose the theme – *Unlocking Citizen Led Change* – it is a kind of portent for these times.

As a community development worker myself, I had a '*practice problem*' that I hoped I would solve through research. At the conclusion of my doctoral research, I felt I had found some answers to my questions and I would like to share a few of the findings 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 continues 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 in this thinking.

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 structural theories, specifically 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 from 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 ascendency 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. With hindsight, however, my decision to get involved there 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 social policy levels, community members were not involved.

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 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, cleaning up a littered park, or developing 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 (in Freire's case, to learn to read) and an emancipatory aim (the politicisation of citizens). From my perspective, these *structural* implications for practice 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 (e.g. 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).

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 structural perspectives in the existing literature 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 still 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 that it is easily appropriated by sections of community and government who wish to use it for their own particular ends.

To find out '*what is happening, what could happen and what should or ought to happen*', the research was conducted in two stages. In Stage One, I conducted in-depth interviews with 22 experienced community development practitioners in two Australian states. I was very privileged to hear many 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, 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 these same participants to attend a meeting where we could together grapple with the things I found from the interviews. At these meetings, we tried to hone the issues and theorise together. I then went on and did further analysis and wrote up what I hope is a useful theory of practice which I've named "*Structural Community Development*" (Lathouras, 2012).

I present just a few findings in keeping with the theme of the conference, hoping you might find them helpful to your practice. The first relates 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 that the reasons why people need empowerment in the first place, which is important because of the breadth of issues that practitioners address in 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 or 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".

Another Queenslander specifically referred to community development being a process of community members having an ability to analyse power. This is known, in the Freireian 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 who discusses 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*" (respondent's emphasis).

The bread and butter of community development, known to many of us, is what is 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 being that, for thirty years now, we have been bathed in neo-liberal thinking and practice. We have 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) calls "*neo-liberal*

*communitarianism"*, 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-politicised and conservative, when we do not hold as central an analysis of inequality and stratification in society.

Another reason relates to the day-to-day realities of responding to people in need; we are helpful people and we do not want to see others 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"* (respondent's 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 with what has 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".*

Perhaps another reason that has complicated things for us is the impact of postmodernism; this has created new opportunities and new emphases for practice but also theoretical discontinuities. A postmodern social theory examines the social world from the *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 characterised 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 phrase *"social class"* was not to be found. For whatever reason, for example, the myth of Australian egalitarianism or the rise of the middle classes, 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, respondent's emphasis).

*Complexity* is the order of the day when one brings things down to the community level and when practitioners 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 that there are multiplicities of identities (Ife, 2013; Shaw & Martin, 2000) and forms of oppression to be acknowledged and worked with in emancipatory processes, requiring 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, creating a common vision. This is the idea of harnessing both difference and convergence. Kenny (2011) and Ife (2013) argue that 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 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.*

These arguments are compelling and you might be asking - like I was - how do I actually *do* it? I turn now to the three frameworks that emerged from my interpretation of the research data. I named these as *Structural Connecting, Structural Shaping and Structural Politicking.* Again, I intend to just draw out elements of those frameworks that you might find helpful and that relate to our theme of *Unlocking Citizen Led Change.*

The first framework, **Structural Connecting**, is the one that *all participants* in the study *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.* Framework # 1, *Structural Connecting,* is summarised in the diagram below:
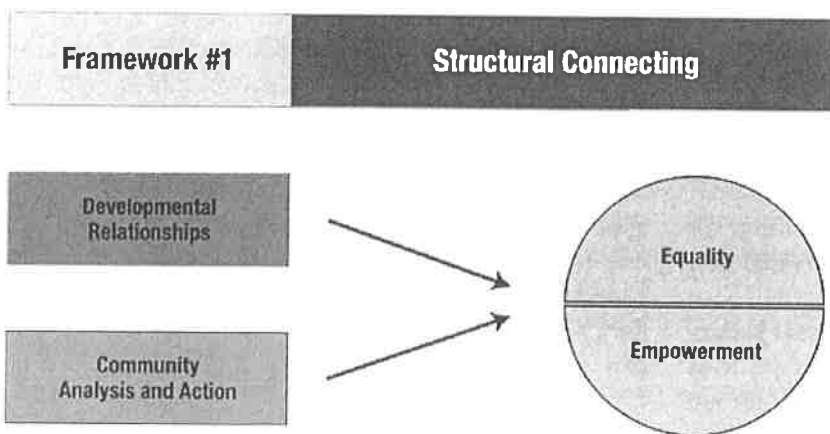


The key principle inherent within the first framework is about *making connections.* This was seen through both a homogeneous lens, where people band together around *common* experiences and a heterogeneous lens, where people band together around *different* experiences but a *common vision* is developed;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

*I really believe that poverty is a product of the breakdown 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, respondent's 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 equalising power differentials between the various groups of people attending the forum.

The outcomes of the forum included a new appreciation for 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 specialised 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* include: 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 a "*pragmatic strategy*" (Owen & Westoby, 2011). This means that we deliberate and make choices about what kinds 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,*

respondent's emphasis).

Importantly, John Owen and Peter Westoby argue that this is the point where community development can easily be derailed as 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 suggest 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, 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 centred 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 school Principal and an academic providing support through rigorous evaluation of the project. After two years, the project had achieved good results and had seen a marked reduction in inter-cultural conflict in 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.*

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 that 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, provided resources and devolved power for making decisions to the project group, thus significantly benefiting 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 analysis of the data, Structural Shaping. The first framework, *Structural Connecting*, was common to all participants in the study, whereas Structural Shaping only applied to those practitioners who had a high theory-action congruency. As I was conducting the interviews, I found there was often a disconnection between practitioners' *aspirations for practice and what they were actually achieving*. Theory-action congruency (Argyris and Schön, 1974) utilises two operational concepts: "espoused theories" refer to explanatory 'rationales' used to describe and justify a person's behaviour or action, whilst *"theories-in-use"* are rationales – often un-explicated - that guide behaviour in practical situations and contexts. Argyris and Schön (1974:23) argue that the more congruency there is between one's espoused theory and one's theory-in-use, the more effective a practitioner will be. The framework of *Structural Shaping* assisted in aligning the espoused and the 'in-use' theories; it also 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. The Framework # 2, *Structural Shaping*, is summarised in the diagram below:



Framework #2 — Structural Shaping

Nuanced Understanding of Power

Systems Thinking

Incremental Social Change
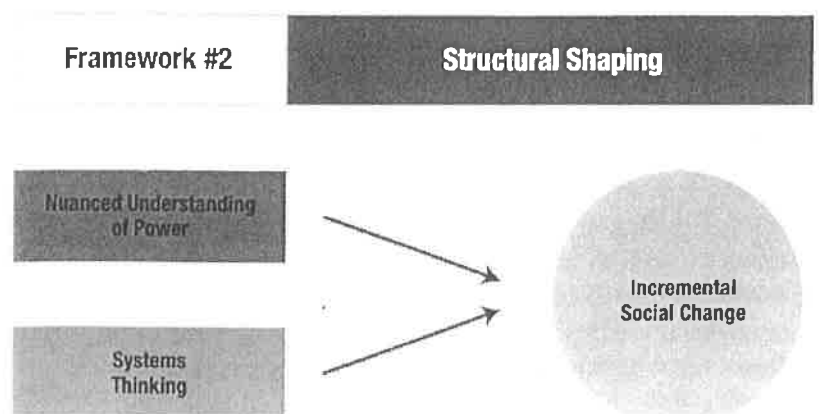
I have already introduced ideas related to postmodernism; the structural shaping framework calls on us to consider a postmodernist understanding and develop a more *nuanced* understanding of power. For many participants in the study, community development's *raison d'être* is to analyse power and to work in ways to ameliorate its negative consequences. Gaventa (2006) argues that, while power analysis is important, there is not just *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 it and its *inter*-relationships, which is particularly helpful when we think of powerfully *oppressive* structures. 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.

As to the other knowledge base, 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, whose membership is comprised of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members. They 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 continue to create 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 on-going internal group discussions. This also suggests that the group is open enough to include new people and their ideas notwithstanding the sophistication and development the Solidarity group's actions have reached. This also keeps the group energised and enhances its ability to sustain itself over time, as new people and new energy have a replenishing effect on the group and its actions.

Significantly, the group *makes connections with others beyond their locality* by forming bridges with other people in society who also have an interest in Indigenous affairs. They are thinking in 'systems', examining them horizontally and vertically and *structuring their analysis and practice beyond the local*. The group has evolved an analysis and strategy that include 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 the spheres in which other groups operate. What seems evident is the quality of the relationships across the system. They are 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 of 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. 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. We must establish webs of relationships and spaces for dialogue across a system(s). 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 and also bring espoused theories and theories-in-use into greater alignment, thus creating greater effectiveness in practice.

*Structural Politicking* represents the final framework, indicating that community development is inextricably linked to politics; it revealed the *greatest difference* between the participants' analysis about community development as a tool for political engagement. It spanned across a continuum from no political engagement to political engagement in two forms.

For a first small group who claimed no political

engagement, the state remained in *the background* in relation to practice; it was seen as the apparatus through which social policy and its subsequent funding for community development work was obtained. I intend to 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, but their diverging practice approaches are quite fascinating.

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



| Framework #3 | Structural Politicking |
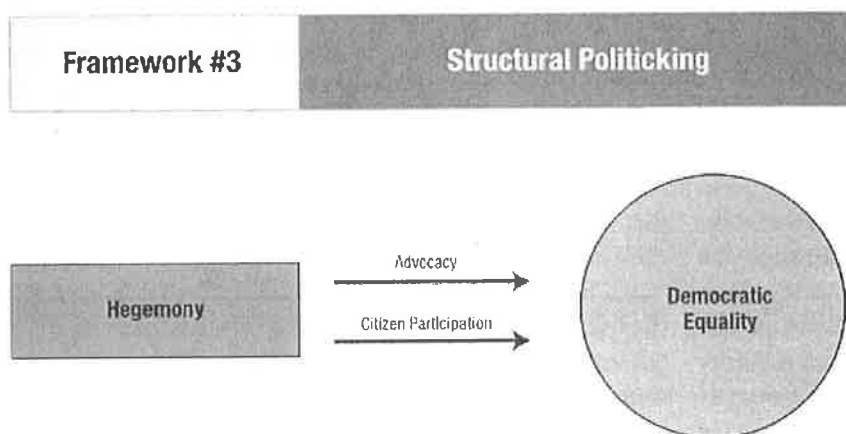
This group demonstrates a commitment to progressive politics and political action falling into two camps; one group sees this work as the purview of the practitioner; they engage in *practitioner-led* structural work, primarily through processes of advocacy. The other group sees this work as the purview of *community members or citizens*, with a focus 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 and only few practice examples were shared. On the other hand, there were quite a few examples of *practitioner-led* structural politicking, which usually involved social policy reform advocacy, often through sector networks connected to people in local communities and practitioner-led action to create the infrastructure to support local-level work.

### Story – The Victorian Federation of Neighbourhood Houses

I heard a very successful story from Victoria involving a federation of networks, comprising 350 neighbourhood houses. 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 and use 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 discussing the concept of citizenship unsolicited. Generally speaking, it is a concept that seems being systemically removed from the lexicon. For example, the new federal government has even eliminated the term from one of its departments; I am sure you are aware that the *Department of Immigration and Citizenship* has become 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 respondent goes as 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 practice stories driven by and involving community members and going *beyond the local level*; one explanation could be that community members have become depoliticised because of neo-liberal drivers and the trend in 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, an

argument for putting the 'local' more assertively back into 'local government'. The need to recapture a voice is also comes from the *Coalition of Community Boards*, 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*, as pratitioners, could be the ones that get in the way of community members' ability or opportunities for social change work. Boyte (2008) sees the decline of civic life linked to the spread of the *"service economy"*, fostering *"technocracy"* or *control by outside experts,* eroding people's civic development by the dominant service economy's professionals looking after people's 'deficiencies' and generating 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 repeated over and over, with numbers of people moving through the service; work occurs for set time periods after which people are exited from the service. Regardless of the quality of this form of work - and I am sure the majority of it is of good quality - service provision can be seen as epitomizing a 'top down' orientation, 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.

One can see why this approach would be appealing to funding bodies espousing a neo-liberal orientation, whereby reducing risk, predicting processes and working with large numbers of people would be seen as an *"efficient"* and preferable way for governments to invest taxation revenue. Work in communities that is pre-determined, predicable, neat and orderly is a far cry from what we read in the community development literature about its purpose. Community development epitomizes a '*bottom up*' orientation, working *with* community members to facilitate social change processes and goals as determined by them. The great challenge of our time, Boyte argues, is to develop a *civic agency* politics as an alternative to technocratic politics, a '*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 too have become depoliticised; a greater emphasis on practice as it relates to critical theory and '*deliberative democracy*' (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis, 2007) literature seems 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 should not leave politics to the elites and we need to make sure we do not become the elites. This is particularly important, when we know that backlashes in social and public policy occur, particularly when more conservative governments follow more progressive ones.

Christos Tsiolkas' (2013) recent contribution to *The Monthly,* "*Why We Hate Refugees*" is a compelling piece about fear and racism, asking uncomfortable questions of both himself as a second-generation immigrant and of the reader. He does not necessarily provide answers, but the piece makes us think about drives our thinking and behaviour in Australia. On this same topic, the recently published "*Pushing Our Luck*" *(Centre for Policy Development)* about ideas for Australian Progress includes a chapter offering a good example about the failures of elites driving public policy in relation to this very topical issue, that is, how Australians view people from cultures different to the Anglo-Australian one.

The author of this chapter, progressive commentator and political scientist Lindy Edwards (2013), argues that despite our successful history of immigration waves and economic prosperity, tackling issues to prevent culture wars is needed more than ever. She discusses the *culture wars* through the prism of the multicultural public policy. She argues 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, seeking 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). We are also seeing those ideas being systemically dismantled, e.g. we have seen another discursive slide from "*multiculturalism*" to "*harmony*" in our policy discourse. People who care about the ideas of inclusion and equality need to acknowledge multiculturalism's political weakness, 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, she argues (2013:157) that 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 create the kind of society we want. A critical reading

about how we view difference might suggest we ask, "*Whom should we construct as the villain here*", to which the answer could be, "*Ignorance*".

It is really interesting that a leading progressive commentator has come to the conclusion that *egalitarian nationalism* should constitute our social glue (Edwards, 2013:165), something we have always proposed in community development discourse. Practitioners know what happens when we bring people together; through critical conversations, all kinds of cultural boundaries are crossed, irrational fears break down, we see our similarities, etc. and as a result, we see that hearts and minds change and people often commit to each other and to a range of positive collective actions.

Given this, the *Structural Politicking* framework seems quite apt; inequality, poverty and racism persist because of ideological positions that have ascendency 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 centre and views practitioners as political actors in this process.

I would like to leave you with some '*take home*' ideas; *firstly*, I address those of you not in formal community development roles to 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 they provide a range of spaces where you have agency to work for social justice and can affect all sorts of positive change.

*Secondly*, I address those of you not working at the local community level, but somewhere else, such as in 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 attempting to effect change.

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

Some key ways to realise this include:

1. Remember the critical nature of practice, in spite of the neo-liberal regressions we are experiencing. We need to reclaim the socially transformative possibilities inherent in community development.
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 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 are our greatest hope.

In conclusion, we can tinker at the edges of *personally* empowering processes, or we can work to effect change at the source of oppression. I suggest we should put our efforts into making the changes that will matter most. I do hope that some of what I have generated through the research will be helpful in your practice. I also hope we can dialogue and debate these matters now and into the future. I wish you all the very best in your work.

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