



InterAct 09 8th Co-operative Education Conference Conference Report

Thursday

The conference started with a buzz on Thursday as delegates started to arrive. Thursday evening was a chance to meet up with everyone and get to know them. We had an evening meal together between 6pm and 8pm, followed by a novel activity called 'Venn That Tune' in the bar which used clues and overlapping shapes to describe a song. We were randomly allocated to teams and worked to identify the songs. We were then given the opportunity to come up with our own 'Venns' that linked the different members of the group. This provided a great chance to get to know our fellow delegates. In the same teams we were then asked to create our own country. We had to think of a flag, a motto, an anthem, a name for the country and two immigration rules! (all in 20 mins!) Some brilliant performances of the anthems followed. The immigration rules generated a lot of relevant and thought provoking discussion. The activity was designed to build a 'conference community' which would allow others to join the 'community' throughout the weekend – a strategy that worked I believe!

The night was rounded off nicely with music from the talented Simon Davey which provided the perfect entertainment for a relaxing evening meeting fellow delegates and building the community atmosphere of the conference.

Friday

A lovely breakfast was enjoyed by all the following morning. The conference started at 9.30am facilitated by CLADA. The Societies welcomed everyone to the conference and the exciting day began with a plenary lead by CLADA that was designed to further build the InterActive community that was established the evening before and to welcome the delegates that arrived that morning to the conference community. This involved interactive activities to explore the transition from 'I' to 'We'. These activities meant that we were not only able to explore the idea of community and look at the purpose of the conference but to also start building the community, exploring the topics of identity, community and cohesion.

This session was followed up with the first band of workshops at 11am and delegates could choose from the following options:-

1. Setting up a Co-operative School Trust:

Maxine Sharman, Midcounties Co-op and Carl Ward and students, Sutherland Business and Enterprise College

This workshop explored the setting up a co-operative trust school and to inform practical opportunities for co-operative involvement. It was also to discover co-operative approaches to learning. The workshop was split in to two different presentations. The first, 'Our Co-operative Journey so Far- from special measures to Co-operative Trust status through partnership with Midcounties', looked at how the school set up and worked upon creating a partnership and also looked at how the school become a Trust School.

Presentation two examined the positive contribution that Midcounties has made to the Sunderland School to do this. They detailed work on attendance projects, educational mentoring, Co-op values and other volunteering projects.

2. The Arts and Community Cohesion:

Jed Grimes, Blue Guitar Media and Simon Davey, 1st Question North

The workshop linked art, music and drama to explore the issues highlighted in the conference. The workshop was in two sections: Simon Davey used the poem "A Case of murder" by Vernon Scannell as an influence for various drama activities including hot seating and pair work to bring the characters in the poem to life and to examine issues that affect a community.

The second part of the workshop was lead by Jed Grimes. He used body percussion to promote interaction within the group. This then lead to an examination of the painting 'The Lady of Shallott' which encouraged the group to look at the painting from different view points. The words that the painting evoked led to the performance of a collectively constructed poem which brought the work to life.

3. Bluffers guide: Development of the co-operative movement, values and principles:

John Boyle, Midlands Co-op

The purpose of the workshop was to explore how we can use the history of the Co-operative movement to show how valuable it still is today and the relevance of its use in the classrooms to explain our values and principles. The workshop looked at how history is a useful tool for learning.

4. Healthy Lifestyles:

Ian Miles, 1st Question East

This workshop was designed to share a 'toolbox' of strategies and activities to support the development of healthy lifestyles. The strategies and activities used focused on reducing tensions and developing co-operation within and between families. The workshop also explored ways of empowering parents 'to grow with their

children', ways of reducing conflict, tackling the issue of 'healthy eating' and developing self confidence for parents and children.

**5. Empowering offenders through social enterprise:
Maureen Breeze, Vice Chair, Erlestoke Prison Social
Enterprise CIC**

The workshop used a case study to show the progress of the pioneering social enterprise set up for offenders at HMP Erlestoke which is a Category C closed prison in Wiltshire. The purpose of this was to provide learning and skills opportunities within a co-operative structure and to increase the offenders potential employability on release. The workshop demonstrated how a closed secure prison is able to create an independent social enterprise as a Community Interest Company for the benefit of its inmates and the local community. It also described how the enterprise is now working with offenders in the community as part of the Community payback scheme. The other aim of the workshop was to show how the social enterprise and community interest model has proven to be fit for purpose and demonstrate its transferability.

**6. Growing People on Community Gardens:
Dan Wheals, Medical Herbalist and Community Gardener**

Dan's workshop aimed to inspire new gardens and share new ideas and experiences to show that community gardens are a way to connect people and inspire healthy lifestyles from growing people and food at the same time. He also demonstrated that people grow into communities when they have space to do so, as gardens offer solace emotionally, physically and spiritually.

During a lovely lunch, we were able to look at and create our own ancient artefacts and jewellery with Ancient Arts.

After lunch came 'The Great Debate!' As Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP, had been unable to join us, CLADA set up a parliamentary style forum where the issue as to whether multiculturalism has succeed or not was 'fiercely' debated. We were split into different groups, which represented community, education, politics and co-operatives. One group from each category was to be for the idea that multiculturalism had failed and one was to be against the idea. A representative from each group then argued their view, and debate ensued! Returning to their groups counter arguments were developed. This resulted in a lot of ideas about multiculturalism and how it is viewed differently across areas of our society. It was also interesting as some delegates had to 'fiercely' debate a point that they, as an individual, may not agree with! 'The Great Debate' then ended with a vote: outcome: multiculturalism - it has not failed!

This was followed by the second band of workshops under the themes of education, co-operation and the next decade. These were:-

**1. Crime & Community:
Paul Cranfield and Paul Martin, Co-operative Group, Maxine**

Sharman, Midcounties Co-op and Dave Snow, Metropolitan Police

The workshop on Crime and Community was designed to give three differing solutions to the question of youth engagement to limit anti social behaviour. The workshop also provided three different examples of successful youth engagement strategies, looking at knife crime, school police strategies and solutions to manage anti social behaviour in a retail environment. We discovered real examples of youth engagement solutions that work in a range of communities.

2. Toxic child hood and a co-operative response:

Peter Duncan CLADA

The aim of this workshop was to explore issues raised in the book "Toxic Childhood" by Sue Palmer, to look at the implications of change facing young people and to look at potential strategies co-operators could adopt. The workshop looked at societal changes affecting young people and how co-operators and educators can support them. The workshop also addressed the issue of the rapidly changing society and the heavy impact on young people and the idea that we need to engage with the issues and dilemmas that they face.

3. Tool box for school councils:

Iain Maclean, Dynamix

This workshop showed how a school council can be an effective vehicle for participation and development and that a good school council provides a genuine experience of citizenship and has a positive impact on the school and local community.

4. Unlocking the potential of communities:

Cathy Henwood and Jane Czornowol, 1st Question North

The workshop demonstrated ways of engaging members of the community with methods that support all to share their views in a safe setting and empower them to take actions for their communities together. Conference participants were also able to experience having their views heard and valued and learn transferable methods for their own community work. This was achieved with a participatory demonstration meeting of an "anytown" community group.

The day was rounded off with a lovely co-operative meal with some very tasty Fairtrade wine, donated by the Societies, to accompany it. Finally Jed Grimes entertained us with 'cohesive' folk songs and The Divi 'rocked and rolled' as delegates danced the night away.

Saturday

The conference kicked off again at 9am on Saturday morning with the wall debate and gallery – addressing the 'Newspaper headlines' and questions that arose from the Friday sessions. The third and fourth bands of workshops followed

1. Creativity – the International Language of Youth:

Julie Ward and Helen Ward, Jack Drum Arts

The workshop looked at the story of an aspirational, transformative long-term programme of youth arts work initiated by a rural arts co-operative working in an international context. The workshop also demonstrated how local artists working with local communities in a global context and over a long period of time can result in profound positive changes for young people and communities where they live. It aimed to show how a sustained programme of high quality creative youth art work, which connects with the wider world can begin to improve outcomes in an area of deprivation. This was achieved with hands-on creative co-operative activities, group discussions and accompanying presentations.

2. Identity and cohesion - a co-operative approach:

Alan Wilkins, CLADA

This workshop considered how we make sense of identity, what identity means to each of us and what happens when we start to discuss identity in a collective social sense. It also looked at the idea that Social Cohesion is achievable when everyone in a group is able to grasp the significance of identity, what acts upon us to create our own sense of self, how we are similar, yet how we are different. The aim of the workshop was to provide an opportunity for participants to explore the concept of identity for themselves and in a social sense, then to apply these insights to a community context in which they endeavour to cohere disparate individuals and groups. This was achieved via a number of activities to show the different dimensions to identity.

3. Payout – Community Cohesion through play:

Roxanne Matthews, Woodcraft Folk

Through presentation, practical games and discussion this workshop introduced participants to the idea of sharing co-operative ways of working through play and using co-operation as a tool for community cohesion. It looked at the idea that as a co-operative organisation, it's a challenge to introduce their ethos to new, but needy, communities who may not actively seek them. Play projects are one solution to this. It also demonstrated that co-operative play provides an opportunity for children and parents to come together and interact within their communities and to work subtly towards community cohesion through co-operation.

4. Metaprogrammes – how people think:

Nadia Cenci, 1st Question East and Ranjit Singh, Co-operative Group

The workshop on metaprogrammes helped us to find out how people filter information when communicating and using neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) to promote co-operation and

understanding of each other. Community cohesion is enhanced when there is a greater tolerance of other's behaviour. The aim of the workshop was to introduce us to the concept of filters and how they can be detected in conversation and the written word and to enhance rapport and understanding between different people.

Band 4 – 11.15 – 12.40

1. Learning through co-operative enterprise - a route to social cohesion:

Mary Rayner, Co-operatives^{UK}

The aim of this workshop was to demonstrate the significant role that co-operative enterprise can play in developing the skills, capacity and awareness of their members by bringing them into contact with cultures and ideas they had not previously experienced.

There was discussion around co-operatives as local change agents – empowering local people to take charge, and that links to the international co-operative movement connect the local with the global. Participants also spoke about the need to understand membership – who they are and who they're not – and match with the wider community. This should be an active process. There was a sense that the movement could make more of its human capital in educating staff on the values and principles and encouraging more staff/member interaction.

The discussion ended on how the movement might communicate its values to local communities such as through ethical labels and possible co-operative 'mark'.

2. Credit crunches and co-operative approaches:

Chris Lee, Timebanking, Sally Chicken, Ipswich & Suffolk Credit Union

This workshop aimed to show the need to educate children about money matters. This involved introducing the notion of saving with a Credit Union to school children from 4-11 and beyond. We were informed about the community banking service which uses paypoint cards to make cash deposits at Co-op stores and post offices. The Savings Gateway, which is being introduced in 2010, was then explained by Sally from the Ipswich & Suffolk Credit Union. The scheme is for people of working age on tax credits, Income Support and other benefits. The scheme means that for every £1 that is saved in this special account the government will donate 50p. Those who are eligible are able to save up to £25 per month for 2 years, after this time the account matures.

The workshop also looked at the theory and practice behind Timebanking with activities exploring the ideas around concepts such as volunteering, Local Exchange and Trading Schemes, the core economy, co-production, social capital, price and value.

3. Tool box for play in the community:

Iain Maclean, Dynamix

The workshop for play in the community looked at the importance of play and that permitting play and creating spaces and opportunities for play, will increase social cohesion. The workshop demonstrated this in an interactive way with various play activities.

4. Social networking for social cohesion:

Jonathan Moore, SAVO (preceded by a brief session "Give me Five" by Jed Grimes!)

In Jonathan's workshop we explored the potential for voluntary sector use of technology in building communities and developing community services. The aim of the workshop was to share how new technological tools can further our cohesion agenda and how the technological revolution can be used to our benefit.

The final plenary session after lunch looked at the impact of what we had learnt and the experiences we have gained in building our 'conference community'. In groups we explored 'what' and 'how', from the ideas and knowledge sharing we had gleaned, we were going to take back to our own organisations. We also suggested themes for the 2010 conference and completed evaluation activities such as 'The Wish Person' and the 'wrap-up' flip chart sheets.

The thank you's at the end reflected on the big co-operative effort put in by a whole range of partners to ensure the conference was a 'co-operative success'.

We all look forward to next year at Northern College, Barnsley 9 – 10 July 2010

**Jane Czornowol and colleagues
12 August 2009**