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What are we **learning about...?**

Community leadership in networks

Every Child Matters, perspectives on community leadership

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Dr. T. Wambui Gathenya, Bob Mitchell, Liz Railton &
Margaret Roberts

Community Leadership Strategy

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

Every Child Matters, perspectives on community leadership

The Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003)¹ issued by the government in response to the Climbié enquiry redefines relationships between key institutions and services and the individuals they serve. It sets the scene for the creation of new professional communities with more responsive forms of leadership. These communities will be designed to meet the needs of young people and children by offering them a response to what they themselves have identified as their primary needs.

Five identified needs of children and young people

- 1 Being healthy** – enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle.
- 2 Staying safe** – being protected from harm and neglect, growing up able to look after themselves.
- 3 Enjoying and achieving** – getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood.
- 4 Making a positive contribution** – to the community and to society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour.
- 5 Achieving economic well-being** – overcoming socio-economic disadvantages to achieve full potential in life.

DfES, 2004²

In effect, young people's aspirations are being used to set the agenda for public sector development. In describing the principles which underpin this development and providing guidance as to how it is to be achieved, the Green Paper explicitly invites public sector professions to work in partnership with voluntary organisations.

This directive is presented on the basis that all children will benefit if education, health, social services, the criminal

justice system and the voluntary sector work together with a greater understanding and appreciation of what each has to offer. But these new forms of professional community will not inhabit a vacuum. They will be superimposed upon thousands of existing communities which are defined by geography, occupation, interest and belief. Most of these have gone through a process of natural birth and growth. It is an altogether different matter to engineer a new type of community or to manage the re-definition of an old one.

In this think piece, community leaders from a variety of education and non-education backgrounds outline their work. They describe the problems they have encountered and their aspirations for the future. They are involved in widely different projects ranging from the establishment of a genuinely inclusive national education system to the provision of a small local resource centre. Some are tapping into existing communities, others are creating new ones. Some are responding to a need they themselves have identified, others act in response to government initiatives. The personal ideals of these leaders and the challenges their communities face are replicated in the Green Paper. What is presented here is a series of personal accounts, informed by an understanding of community leadership practice in networks, but framed and interpreted within the agenda of *Every Child Matters*. □

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the generation of this think piece. In particular, our thanks go to Barbara Spender for her co-ordination of these perspectives on community leadership.

Kate Bond and Maggie Farrar,
Lead Developers

¹ Department for Education and Skills, 2003, *Every Child Matters*, London, DfES

² Department for Education and Skills, 2004, *Every Child Matters – next steps*, London, DfES

1 Being healthy – leaders as brokers

By proposing greater co-operation between basic services, *Every Child Matters* explicitly highlights the connections between health, education and welfare. For the individual there are well researched links between poverty and ill-health and between better education, improved health and longevity. A healthy community is one which meets the needs of all its members. It is essentially inclusive, but with a clear sense of its own context and boundaries.

In Kenya, Dr. T Wambui Gathenya has researched the views and aspirations of vulnerable children – orphans, teenage mothers and street children. They have told her of their longing for an education. It is not lack of interest that denies them the chance – it is lack of availability. Kenya has made a decision to draw these children into the mainstream by making education both free and compulsory.

The first of these objectives has already been achieved, bringing 1.3 million children into the system almost overnight. The second is more problematic. The Kenyan government does not have the resources to meet demand and yet its commitment to equal opportunities and to the human rights agenda makes it determined to find a way. Dr. Gathenya is working with local people in non-formal and community education projects to discover how they might contribute.

“ See a problem,
find a solution. ”

*The Kenyan spirit
of self-help.*

She is creating a series of partnerships with the thousands of separate and diverse local groups who have operated on a self-help basis, sometimes supported by external agencies such as UNICEF, to meet local demand and need. She estimates that there are a further 1.5 million children waiting to take advantage of the government's promise.



*Dr. T Wambui
Gathenya*

There is a degree of inevitability in the Kenyan decision to tap into voluntary education systems, but doing so is also an acknowledgement of the right of individual Kenyans to contribute. Kenyans honour the traditional concept of *Harambee* – ‘Let's pull together’. They don't wait for others, whether they be central government or external agencies, to solve a problem.

Working with these disparate groups demands flexibility and respect. Voluntary groups are often better informed than government about local need and the best way to meet it. Dr. Gathenya knows that these groups harbour some reservations about entering into too close a relationship with government. It's important for them to retain their autonomy and to be respected for their expertise. The government can offer advice and some training, but it does not manage or coerce.

Dr. T Wambui Gathenya is the member of the Kenyan government responsible for liaison with non-formal/ community education groups. She presented a paper to the ICSEI Annual Conference in January 2005 which is available at: www.barcelona-icsei2005.org/Imagenes/



An outdoor classroom in Kenya.

1 Being healthy – leaders as brokers

Pause for thought...?

While Kenya is already acting in response to the demands and aspirations of its population, part of Meg Bond's role in Leamington Spa has been to draw attention to the need for action on pressing social issues. The Bath Place Community Venture is well established as a resource for meeting diverse local needs. It has benefited from the 'best of the 1970s' in terms of enabling volunteers to contribute according to their talents, and from the strengths of succeeding generations. In Leamington Spa, isolation and deprivation co-exist with, and are often obscured by, visible affluence. So Meg has worked to raise the profile of poverty and debt as local issues. She has used skills drawn from a lifetime's experience in the public and private sectors, including research and the management of a European regional project, to ensure that local government sees welfare benefits and debt advice services as integral to the area's future planning.

Bath Place combines a nursery with training opportunities and a money advisory service. At its heart is a subsidised café where local business people eat alongside overseas students, the young homeless and impoverished parents. The centre is not the focal point for the community, it is what creates the community – a safe, welcoming place where a diverse clientele can meet informally, get help with their problems and socialise.

Offering such eclectic services under one roof removes the stigma that some might feel is attached to seeking debt counselling. It also exposes visitors to new ideas and to possibilities for education and training. Meg knows of several individuals who came to seek benefits advice, returned for meals and company, and were eventually guided into training courses in the same building.

“ In the national context of Kenya and in a small town in England, community leadership is being enacted as a constant process of dialogue and interpretation between government policy and local needs. ”



Meg Bond

In the national context of Kenya and in a small town in the Midlands, community leadership is being enacted as a constant process of dialogue and interpretation between government policy and local needs. Neither Dr. Gathenya nor Meg Bond has at their command the resources to produce single-handedly the community and the society people want. They are using their professional skills to build trust and to act as brokers between the many different individuals and agencies whose active participation is essential to their success nationally and locally.

Meg Bond is Vice Chair of Bath Place Community Venture, Leamington Spa. For more information on Bath Place see www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/community/ □



Bath Place Community 'growing workshop'

“Security and opportunity must go hand in hand.”

Every Child Matters, DfES, 2003

2 Staying safe – leaders as facilitators

In Islington, Beatriz Echeverri has also been inspired by a visionary ideal. Training as an architect led her into environmental planning before she was moved by the Earth Summit of 1992 to use her skills to promote and support participation in local action for a sustainable future. Islington is a mixed social area, where immense wealth sits alongside deprivation and poor access to services. Although the area has geographical identity its population is culturally diverse with many residents being recent arrivals in the UK. There is high mobility.

Part of Beatriz's role is to build bridges between people and to find opportunities for them to meet and to articulate what it is they want for themselves and their children. Initially she became involved in the neighbourhood forum sponsored by Islington Borough Council. In 1998 she used government and local funding to work with four groups focused on diverse issues of local interest.

The Time Exchange – one of four Islington time banks – has been pivotal in bringing a diverse community together. It is a form of exchange in which local residents, including children, can contribute. Because it is based on time as the unit of currency, everyone starts from an equal base – everyone has skills to offer and it is a highly effective way of building community and of offering broader opportunities to local people. For example, one of the Time Exchange members offered IT workshops for parents while their children were in school. Another scheme created a similar opportunity with a crèche facility. As well as offering practical training, this scheme enabled people to get to know each other.

The Time Exchange demonstrates how much people can achieve by supporting each other and is true to the principle of giving work to local people wherever possible. Time banks also offer a local network of people and resources which Beatriz can tap into for developing other projects.

Hargrave Park Primary School has given her space from which to do this – originally a 'corner' which has subsequently grown into a resource-base. Beatriz has used participatory methods to give adults and children a chance to articulate their ambitions and their fears. Speaking to a Big Brother-style screen, children have spoken of their dislike of the litter, decay and unfriendliness they encounter beyond the school gates. They and their families want a solution to the drug problems in the neighbourhood. Older children want a place of their own where they can meet and design their own activities outside school hours.

“One of the keys to success is reaching out to people and working with them to improve their quality of life.”



Beatriz Echeverri

Beatriz does not see herself as a leader but as someone who works with local people, looking for practical answers to their needs and aspirations. She thinks that it is essential to be a good listener so that everyone's voice can be heard and she has a strong belief in the principles of justice, equality and working for a fairer world. Young people, she has learnt, need to be offered ways of getting involved in community activities that make them feel wanted and respected. Understanding of cultural differences has allowed the discovery of a lot of common ground in the multi-cultural community she works with. People want the best for their children.

“If you give people the opportunity to dream they will dream! And then they'll be able to say what needs to be done to achieve that dream.”

Beatriz Echeverri is Projects Coordinator, Whittington Agenda 21 Group, Islington. The Time Exchange is one of the group's projects. Information about Islington Time Banks is available at www.islingtontimebanks.org/time_banks/ □

“ Children’s needs are complex and rarely fit neatly within one set of organisational boundaries. ”

*Every Child Matters,
DfES, 2003*

3 *Enjoying and achieving – leaders as visionaries*

Alan Flintham and Margaret Roberts each have a vision of schools at the heart of the community. Alan has had a long career in education and has recently put together Nottinghamshire’s *Building Schools for the Future* bid to the DfES. As an associate priest, he sees schools occupying the same focal position in the community as the church. In the former mining communities where he has spent his working life, traditional forms of employment did not demand high educational attainment, but there was, and still is, a strong sense of shared values and high social capital.

These towns remain independent in spirit and tend to be inward-looking. Schools have come to occupy central roles as repositories of local trust. The challenge now is to build on these strengths to raise expectations of education and to broaden the horizons of young people so that more will be encouraged to stay on into further, higher and lifelong education.

This expectation is already being met in part by a local school, Sutton Centre Community College, which is modelling many of the practices Alan would like to see made available to all of Nottinghamshire’s children and adults. The college has used its geographical position in the town centre to become a major resource-base for the community, combining probation, social services, health and leisure facilities with more traditional educational activity for everyone.

Alan finds this model inspirational. It has fed his ambitions for the area as a whole, but he is also driven by a fundamental belief in the value of the individual. For him, a successful community is one that shares that understanding, and draws contributions from all its members.



Alan Flintham

Raising expectations in a different way, Margaret Roberts has served as a Local Authority governor and Chair of Governors at Shepherd Special School in Nottingham for 20 years. She sees community as something which is not bounded by the school gates. Her school’s population of 100 children with severe learning difficulties is committed to social and academic attainment and to involvement in what the wider world has to offer.

The climate in special education has changed substantially in recent years as a consequence of the inclusion agenda. Margaret regrets some of the narrowness of this agenda, which seems to limit notions of inclusion to what happens inside schools. She thinks there are other ways of acknowledging the entitlement of individuals to a place in the community.

“ A successful community is one that shares that understanding and draws contributions from all its members... It is about living in a diverse and often challenging society. ”

Shepherd Special School is nationally and internationally recognised as a leader in its field. The high standards it achieves are evident in its exemplary Ofsted report (2002) and in the contributions pupils of all ages make through performing and expressive arts. Much of this has been made possible by the individual attention these pupils receive from specialist teachers.

Children with severe learning difficulties need individual support at a level that classroom teachers in busy mainstream schools cannot reasonably be expected to provide, but what happens outside school is equally important. The programme of extra-mural activities and visits undertaken at Shepherd Special School is a visible reminder that education is not just about training for economic independence.

It is about living in a diverse and often challenging society. Her school will also benefit from *Building Schools for the Future*. It is to be given a dedicated building – a School of Excellence – at the heart of a multi-school campus.



Margaret Roberts OBE

Alan and Margaret present two sides of the same coin. For them schools are not closed communities. They are essentially inclusive. Alan sees the need to draw the wider world into school by offering new opportunities and services to adults. Margaret emphasises what special school pupils have to offer society at large. Both are looking ahead to the development of more outward-looking and inclusive communities in which individuals are helped to contribute according to the best of their ability.

Alan Flintham is an associate priest, Headteacher of Quarrydale School, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Consultant Head with Nottinghamshire Local Authority and a Research Associate with NCSL. Further information about *Building Schools for the Future* is available at www.bsf.gov.uk

Margaret Roberts OBE is a Local Authority Governor and Chair of Governors, Shepherd Special School, Nottingham, Vice-Chair City of Nottingham Governors' Association. A copy of the Shepherd Special School Ofsted report can be seen at www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/ □

4 Making a positive contribution – leaders as activists

“Working in the community means building win-win relationships.”

Much of what *Every Child Matters* presents as an ideal has already been realised at Beauchamp College where Bob Mitchell is Vice-Principal of an ‘extended school’. The college offers education from 0-90. Part of Bob’s role is to build relationships with the wider community and to persuade adults whose own experiences of education may have been negative, that the college has something for them. Like Meg Bond, he takes an entrepreneurial, part-business, part-political approach to his work. He works with local residents, joins as many local forums as he can and makes the college a consultation point for local government. Reciprocity is key to his approach. College boundaries are porous – over 150 sixth-form students are involved in working in community projects with agencies such as Age Concern or with local primary schools. The life of the community flows through and is enhanced by the college.

Bob knows that many adults approach the college with poor experiences of education. He sees one of his tasks as breaking down the barriers this has created. He believes in respecting the opinions of others and building relationships within and outside the college. Associate staff are particularly important as they are usually the ‘front line’ of contact with the outside world. He ensures that they are fully aware of what is going on and of their key role in it. More tentative adult learners are encouraged by opportunities to do voluntary work in-house. Sometimes he can talent-spot likely recruits for vacant, paid posts this way. There are also strong relationships with several large local employers who regularly recruit from the college’s adult training courses. Local residents have been invited into partnership so that they can represent local interests together.

Further erosion of the boundaries between different agencies could extend this success. There is tremendous potential in the existing multi-agency partnerships, but at present this is often blocked by contradictory organisational cultures and lack of flexibility.

“Local residents have been invited into partnership so that they can represent local interests together.”



Bob Mitchell

Without a coherent approach to new initiatives it is often easier for the college to act independently. It can make more rapid progress that way but that is not an ideal solution. Local need could be served much more effectively if different agencies developed a common approach to problems and aspirations.

Bob’s commitment is, in part, informed by his own educational history, which he describes as one of early failure. He failed the 11+ and his first attempt at A-levels. On leaving school he managed a betting shop and then worked in a car factory. Realising that he wanted something different out of life, he went to night school and eventually became a teacher and community sports developer, before being head-hunted for his present post from adult education. He thinks this unorthodox background has given him a greater empathy with the local community: “I’ve experienced the more brutal end of the education spectrum.”

Bob Mitchell is Vice Principal of Beauchamp College. The Beauchamp College website is at www.beauchamp.leics.sch.uk

“Planning services in the round can enable a better response to support the child and better value for money.”

*Every Child Matters,
DfES, 2003*

5 Achieving economic well-being – leaders as champions

Every Child Matters requires local authorities to have named individuals with inter-agency responsibility for individual children who come to the notice of a range of professionals. Each authority will also have a Director of Children's Services with a remit to bring together these agencies under a common framework and with common reporting mechanisms. Directors will essentially take up leadership positions within multi-professional communities.

Liz Railton currently combines the statutory roles of Chief Education Officer and Director of Social Services within Essex County Council. This portfolio prefigures the new Children's Services directorships and she doesn't underestimate the difficulties of her task. Coming from a career in social services she has had to build up her understanding of schools and of the aspirations, attitudes and preoccupations of teaching staff in education services. She is always looking for the *“potential for joining things up”*, which will help deliver the responses children want and need.

Like Bob Mitchell, she is well aware that many adults have negative experiences of professional intervention, but she has also seen many examples of good practice and positive outcomes. Essex has had considerable success with one of the Green Paper's specific recommendations – the use of Family Group Conferencing. This involves bringing extended families together to tackle a specific problem, for example, when a teenager is on the brink of permanent exclusion.

Liz recognises the value of voluntary organisations in these sensitive areas. She knows that non-government bodies often have greater capital in the community than official institutions and that they can offer targeted expertise on specific issues. Negotiated partnerships with voluntary groups are a tremendous asset in delivering the services the community wants.



Liz Railton

The development of the director's role is fraught with difficulty, Liz observes; not only the challenge of drawing together different professional groups, but also the practical problems of ironing out local fragmentation evidenced in conflicting imperatives and the different messages and competing priorities emanating from central government. But the Green Paper also inspires Liz through *“the overarching integrity of the five desired outcomes which lie at its heart”*. □

Liz Railton currently occupies the statutory roles of Chief Education Officer and Director of Social Services, Essex County Council. The Guardian's profile of Liz can be found at <http://society.guardian.co.uk/children/>

“Unwarranted optimism is always a good thing.”

End piece

“ Our children are everything to us: our hopes, our ambitions, our future. ”

Tony Blair

The contributors to this paper have described many different types of community and many different forms of leadership within them. Most of these communities have grown naturally from an accident of geography or from a shared perception of need. They have grown organically over many years, nurtured – and sometimes guided – by the leadership described.

In this short piece, there has not been an attempt to give a detailed account of what these community leaders have achieved. Instead, the experiences of these communities have been used to illustrate how different approaches to leadership might contribute to the achievement of the key aims of *Every Child Matters*. Although each of the leaders whose work is presented here is engaged in the community in very different contexts and activities, what they describe presents common features. These individuals are united in the interpretation and enactment of their leadership by their belief in individual worth and an absolute commitment to the principles of participation, democracy and equal opportunity.

The Green Paper envisages a further evolution in the creation of community. Where traditional forms are largely based on voluntarism, *Every Child Matters* proposes a compulsory convergence of professionals with a common purpose, but from very different working cultures. Success in so large an undertaking will require energy and subtlety, the framing of a new, common, inter-disciplinary language and the articulation of a shared approach and shared professional values.

The leaders of these new communities will need to tread a careful line between respecting the expertise of other professionals, and drawing them together in a more coherent response to local need. Community is the place where government policy – public pledges and the words in policy documents – become a real experience for the individual. How good that experience is – how true to the promise – depends on the quality and vision of the leadership at local level. □

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Pause for thought...

Use this page to make notes and record your thoughts.

Pause for thought...?

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leaders as
brokers**



**2 Staying safe –
leaders as
facilitators**



**3 Enjoying and
achieving –
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**4 Making a
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**5 Achieving
economic well-
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