

# Social action and education for citizenship in Scotland

Ian Fyfe<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract: The idea of active citizenship has become a key element in the ongoing democratic renewal of Scotland. The policy priorities of the recently devolved Scottish Government have placed a fresh focus on the role and agency of young people as the future political generation. This paper draws on practice-based experience of a pilot programme of education for citizenship engaging groups of students within a special school setting. The groupwork approach was informed by the social action model of practice that supported the participants in a critical analysis of their own interests, concerns and needs. The programme provided young people with an arena for collective political expression and a vehicle for the exploration of their role as active citizens. The outcomes of the learning process included the acquisition of the base knowledge and core skills necessary for their effective participation as well as the development of a collective agenda for change. The findings of the work point towards the possibilities for the development of a complementary curriculum approach based upon the lived experiences of the young people themselves.*

*Key words: educational groupwork, active citizenship, social action, school/ community partnership*

1. PhD Candidate

*Address for correspondence: Australian Youth Research Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne VIC 3010, Australia. j.fyfe@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au*

## **Introduction: Education for citizenship in Scotland**

Educating young people in ways that prepare them for living effectively and responsibly as members of local, national and global communities is vital to the well-being of humanity, now and in the future .... the overall goal of education for citizenship in Scotland should be to develop children and young people's capability for thoughtful and responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. (Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2002, p.ii)

Following the advent of the Scottish Parliament the idea of active citizenship has become a key element in the democratic renewal of Scotland. Alongside lifelong learning and social inclusion, active citizenship has become a cornerstone of the political priorities of the recently devolved Government whose political goals are embedded in a policy agenda designed to achieve social justice. There is a fresh focus on the importance and understanding of democratic participation in decision making at all levels of governance, and on the active role of young people as the future political generation is seen as essential (Fyfe, 2002). The responsibility for preparation of young people as active citizens is increasingly placed within the curriculum policy of formal education. The subject of active citizenship now features as a core part of the curriculum in Scottish schools. The publication of the Crick Report in 1998 (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998) provided the framework for citizenship education in England both within and outside the formal curriculum. The report details a model of active citizenship characterised by the three learning objectives of social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy (Hall et.al., 2000). In the wake of the Crick Report there has been a policy driven focus within the Scottish Government towards education for citizenship. Between 2001 and 2002 national consultations were undertaken by Learning and Teaching Scotland and Community Learning Scotland respectively (Community Learning Scotland, 2001; Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2000). The findings from this work point towards the need for the development of approaches to education for citizenship in both the formal and informal education sectors

across Scotland. The recently published document *Education for Citizenship in Scotland* makes it clear that the natural home for the learning process lies within the school curriculum (Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2002). There is a stated desire to link the learning experience of the students with accessing rights and undertaking their responsibilities as agents of change within local communities. The report (Ibid., 2002) states that:

This way of seeing citizenship encompasses the specific idea of political participation by members of a democratic state. It also includes the more general notion that citizenship embraces a range of participatory activities, not all overtly political, that affect the welfare of communities. (p.8)

The emerging education for citizenship agenda presents opportunities for innovative and complementary collaboration between the informal and formal education sectors. The informal education sector through youth work and community based learning asserts a role in promoting and providing political and civic education supported by a complementary curriculum linked to real issues of concern for young people.

With this paper I argue that work with young people can, and should, enable them to get to grips with the knowledge and skills base that is an essential prerequisite for active citizenship. My analysis begins with an exploration of social action as a model of education for citizenship through a critical analysis of the theoretical ideas underpinning and informing the approach. The discourse continues with reference to an example from my own professional practice as a youth worker engaging with the education for citizenship agenda through a collaborative pilot project in a special school setting. The paper gives an overview of the learning process highlighting key practice issues and concludes with a discussion on the future challenge presented by the education for citizenship agenda in Scotland.

## **Social Action as education for citizenship**

The social action model is defined by the Centre for Social Action based at De Montfort University (2000) as:

an approach which enables groups of people of all ages and in a range of settings, to empower themselves by taking action to achieve their collectively identified goals. (p.6)

The social action approach is guided by a set of principles drafted by the Centre for Social Action. The principles are committed to the goals of social justice and social inclusion and promote a methodology that engages practitioners and young people in a joined-up approach to collectively analyse issues and take planned action. The issues that directly affect the social condition of young people's lives in civil society forge the agenda. As a model of practice social action engages young people in a collective learning process where 'personal troubles can be translated into common concerns' (Ward and Mullender, 1991, p.28). Practitioners work in partnership with young people to build their capacity to create social change through collective action (Fyfe, 1996). So what are the key elements of the social action approach to working with young people that offers an alternative vehicle for education for citizenship?

### **The social action process**

The role of the worker in the social action process is to facilitate the group through five key stages of development. The workers and young people work together to identify and analyse issues, plan and take action and evaluate the outcomes. The starting point for this collective learning process sees the worker helping the young people to identify what their shared issues, problems and concerns are through a creative exploration of their own lives. Once the issues have been agreed and the agenda set the worker supports the group to explore *why* these issues exist through a collective critical analysis of the identified issues and concerns in relation to wider structures in their lives. For Fleming, Harrison and Ward (1998):

asking the question 'why' is the keystone. It enables young people to move, by putting the issues in the wider context, towards awareness, raised consciousness, the pursuit of rights and ultimately to forms of social change activity that challenges the status quo in which such rights are denied ... It enables them to conceive of new explanations in the wider social, political and economic context and to consider how they can identify and engage with these. It turns the spotlight round from the young people as a problem in themselves, to the problems they encounter, and enables young people to see opportunities to develop a much wider range of options for action and change. (pp.48-49 drawing upon the work of Mullender & Ward, 1989)

The group members then decide *how* they can achieve change. The worker facilitates them in taking planned *action* for themselves. Through the final stage of *reflection* the group evaluates the outcomes of their action to assess how things have changed, measure success and identify new common issues that will inform the ongoing agenda. The vision for this process is the empowerment of young people to take collective control of their own ongoing learning, action and reflection. The key steps of analysis, planning, action and reflection within a cyclical process are familiar signposts in educational theory and practice. Such a framework resonates with other models of experiential learning that can be tracked back through the evolution of contemporary practice.

## **Tracing the theoretical origins of social action**

Writing in 1938, educational theorist John Dewey identified the importance of education starting with an analysis of the social situation of the learners to identify the perceived problem to be addressed. In his book *Experience and Education* Dewey (1938) stated:

the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present .... it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest

for information and the production of new ideas. The new facts and new ideas thus obtained become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented. The process is a continuous spiral. (p.79)

The Action Research pioneer Kurt Lewin supported a staged process of learning and action that 'proceeds in a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action' (Lewin, 1946, p.206). The steps informed a model of research 'which could marry the experimental approach of social science with social action in response to major social problems of the day' (Hart & Bond, 1995, p.15). The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire identifies the dialectic nature of learning and action in his writing, which is encompassed in his concept of praxis. For Freire praxis is defined as 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1974, p.36). At the core of the concept of praxis is the process of naming the world, 'which is both active (in the sense that naming something transforms it) and reflective (in that our choice of words gives meaning to the world around us)' (Kolb, 1995, p.147). The Social Action process is driven by collective goals identified and any action towards change is evaluated by the young people themselves. The starting point or 'what' stage is informed by the lived experiences of the participating young people. The role of the worker is crucial in this process, as outlined in the earlier principles presented by the Centre for Social Action and echoed in the work of Freire (1972) who states that:

The starting point for organising the programme content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilising certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response – not just at an intellectual level, but at the level of action .... It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. (p.68)

The worker is seen, in the words of Brookfield, as a 'helper' who through facilitation supports the development of 'critical thinking' (Brookfield, 1987, p.29). The 'why' stage of the social action process reflects the goals of critical thinking as described by Brookfield. He argues that the process is not purely passive but 'is a praxis of alternating analysis and action' where the knowledge and skills of the participants 'are developed and refined in active enquiry' (Ibid, p.23). The goal of promoting critical thinking and active enquiry within the 'why' stage of the Social Action process is to analyse personal issues in relation to wider social and political structures. According to C. Wright Mills (1959):

to understand the changes of many personal milieux we are required to look beyond them. And the number and variety of such structural changes increase as the institutions within which we live become more embracing and more intricately connected with one another. To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a great variety of milieux. To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination. (pp.10-11)

The stages of the social action process are also mirrored in the methodology underpinning Appreciative Inquiry, which was developed by American Professor David Cooperrider. Appreciative Inquiry is a capacity building process that begins by valuing those elements 'that give life to the community' (Liebler, 2000, p.1). As an approach Appreciative Inquiry, like social action, offers a developmental process that allows participants to positively explore, collectively imagine, collaboratively design and jointly commit to an agreed forward path. The potential use of design as a creative vehicle for enhancing action towards social change, is also acknowledged by Wright (1989) who states that:

design involves searching for ways to improve things, to make them more effective, to give them a better 'fit' with their environment; it has to do with changing, learning, adapting, innovating; and it is concerned with 'doing'; in the end, something is done or built or made. (p.213)

The contemporary blueprint for social action is provided by the *self-directed groupwork model* conceptualised by Mullender and Ward (1991). At the heart of their model of practice is an analysis and understanding of the relationship between oppression, power and change. The process is characterised by practitioners and service users working together to change social arrangements and structures.

### **Social action: A paradigm for change through collective action**

A chronological trawl of the above theoretical models of practice suggests that the social action approach as defined by the C.S.A. has arguably evolved from an established tradition of educational, philosophical and ideological ideas. The involvement of young people in a collective process that is analytical, creative, visionary, developmental and educational is perhaps a tall order for contemporary practice, but the social action process offers the possibilities for such an experience. Through working in partnership with education practitioners young people have the potential to develop their critical understanding of social and political issues, as well as acquiring new transferable skills such as: organising; planning; campaigning; lobbying; challenging; negotiation; monitoring and evaluation: all essential tools for active citizenship. As an approach to working with young people, the social action process clearly demonstrates theoretical and practical merits that respond to the demands of the current policy context in Scotland and clearly seeks to empower young people to become active citizens.

### **The Student Power Project: A case study**

For more than ten years the social action approach and principles have informed my practice as a youth worker. Most of my groupwork experience has been with young people aged between 12 and 21 in a range of informal learning settings with the majority



of my practice taking place within community based projects, both voluntary and statutory. The emerging Education for Citizenship agenda in Scotland presented an opportunity for colleagues and myself to introduce the social action approach within the formal education sector.

The Student Power project was developed in September 2001 as an extension of a pilot initiative that had been run successfully in mainstream secondary schools in Edinburgh over the previous two years with students aged 13-17. From this initial work we concluded that the most excluded students gained a great deal from participating in a programme that supported them to explore the issues they identified as important in their lives, and to reflect on their own experiences in school and the wider community. The development of the project was given further impetus by an evaluation of the summer 2001 holiday-provision for young people with special needs living in Edinburgh. Levels of participation indicated that a large number of students who attend special schools in the city had not been consulted effectively about their needs and had subsequently been excluded from activities targeted at them. Ongoing discussion with service providers in the Community Education Service and the voluntary sector also highlighted that disabled young people were marginalised from mainstream provision and often attended schools outside their own geographical communities. Historically these young people have found it difficult to access local youth services in the city and have had little opportunity to discuss their rights and issues affecting them with their peers. Through targeting young people attending special schools in Edinburgh, the Student Power project presented an opportunity to engage them in a learning process similar to that piloted in a mainstream school setting.

### **Planning and delivering the project**

The agreed overall aims of the project were:

- To engage young people accessing Special Education in a programme of education for citizenship
- To build the capacity of participating students and school staff

to support active citizenship.

The project was designed to be implemented as two distinct phases that focused upon planning and delivery. A third phase designed to consolidate the work was also outlined in the funding proposal, but the specific detail was reliant on the outcomes of phases one and two. Funding to cover the core costs of the project was secured from the Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership.

### **Identifying a partner school**

Following a period of informal consultation with colleagues in the voluntary sector, a list of potential special schools was drawn up. Meetings were held with respective staff and it was decided to develop the project in collaboration with the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh who were very keen to be involved. The school staff were already committed to student participation within the school through support to an active student council. The school was also interested in offering senior students the opportunity to broaden their learning experience in preparation for post-school transition. Meetings took place with the Head Teacher, the senior staff member responsible for curriculum and the classroom teacher. We discussed the social action approach, learning materials and the emerging policy context promoting education for citizenship. The key issue considered was the learning needs of the participating students and it was felt by the school staff that the proposed methodology and aims of the project would complement existing teaching methods and the core curriculum.

### **Target group**

Two groups of students from S4 (Group A) and S5/6 (Group B) were identified as potential participants. There were three young people in each group. One worker met with both groups to discuss the aims of the project, explain the emerging education for citizenship context, describe the social action approach and identify from the students the issues that they would be interested

in discussing as part of the programme. Their participation in the project was voluntary; all the young people offered a place agreed to take part. Each group was invited to nominate a representative to participate in the recruitment and selection of a part-time group worker to support the project.

### **Recruitment of staff**

The two students selected worked with myself to design a job description, short-list candidates, devise interview questions, conduct the interviews and decide on the appointment. This exercise was successful in establishing the ethos of the project by involving the young people in key decisions prior to the commencement of the core programme. The students were supported through a short training programme on recruitment and selection, including equal opportunities. It also assisted me in designing and preparing learning materials (the recruitment papers were translated into tape and Braille format) as well as identifying effective methods and approaches to engage the students.

### **Induction**

The part-time project worker was experienced in working with disabled young people in a range of settings, including the Royal Blind School, and had previously participated in social action training. Prior to the start of the groupwork programme we met to consider current literature outlining the key elements of education for citizenship within Scotland.

### **Negotiating a curriculum**

A basic learning programme was negotiated with each group of young people at the outset of the project in order to reflect the interests and needs of the participants as well as the project's aims. The young people identified a range of issues from their own lived experiences in and out of school. The agreed issues were set within a learning framework that reflected the key elements of active citizenship, namely political literacy, participation, rights

and responsibilities. In the initial sessions we also worked towards a consensus with the students of our collective expectations of the project and each other. This provided a checklist for the group process to which both workers and students referred during the course of the programme. Within the agreed learning framework the specific focus evolved each week based upon the expressed interests of the young people and reflecting their pace of learning. As the sessions developed the young people took more responsibility for bringing information to the group on the issues being explored, thereby influencing the direction of the ongoing programme.

### **Learning materials**

The learning materials were developed and adapted to reflect the issues raised by the students and designed to meet their specific needs and level of ability. All the written materials were translated into large print and Braille formats. This was done with invaluable support from the school staff. A range of creative educational methods was also adopted including: group discussions; games; debating; quizzes; case studies; secret ballots; sensory materials and musical expression. Additional material was accessed with the use of the Internet (with commentary and magnified screens) and taped radio broadcasts. The extensive use of creative resources was essential during the *what* stage of the learning process to support the young people's exploration of the issues of concern in their lives. This created the need for more rigorous preparation to ensure that the learning materials were appropriate and effective. As a worker the main challenge was to ensure effective and imaginative dialogue to support the critical analysis and reflection of the students.

### **Session planning and recording**

As workers we met weekly to complete a planning and recording sheet for each session, which reflected any significant background factors carried forward from previous sessions, as well as stating our practice aims. Immediately following the sessions we recorded

our own observations, together with any issues raised by the young people themselves, as well as any action required for the following week. This information was shared with the young people and was used as the basis for a review of progress at the beginning of each session.

### **The learning process**

The original programme was negotiated to run over 10 weekly sessions. This was extended to 14 sessions for both groups due to holidays, examinations and other curricular priorities. The weekly sessions took place in a classroom setting and lasted for 40 minutes. A part-time group worker and myself facilitated the sessions. The class teacher was also present with Group A (members of which were identified as having additional learning needs). Whilst the presence of the teacher was supportive it was also at times problematic in terms of the groupwork approach. The class teacher's intervention tended to be more directive and affected the pace and focus of the group discussions. After the first three sessions we renegotiated the role of the teacher in the sessions, and they agreed to withdraw from the facilitation role, though they continued to be available for support during the remaining sessions. Following this change the young people were much more open and honest with their contributions and grew in confidence over the course of the project. The sessions were kept as informal as possible; however in the first few weeks we felt that we were being accorded power by the young people. This slightly hindered the development of an effective working partnership. As workers we used first names, which was also a challenge, albeit a small one, to the normal school practice but proved helpful in developing our working relationship with the young people. We also provided a snack that the students selected each week through the use of a range of decision-making techniques. This became a key aspect of the sessions and provided an indicator of group cohesion, leadership and communication issues.

## **Methodology**

We adopted a specific working style in the group sessions, informed by the social action approach. Our primary goal was to encourage the participating students to identify the core issues for discussion and to collectively reflect on these issues within a framework of active citizenship. The young people responded positively to our approach, which allowed them to define the content of the sessions and direct the focus of the ongoing programme. We felt that this approach was the key factor in ensuring the effective participation of the young people in a collective critical analysis of the issues affecting their lives. Through utilising our educational groupwork skills we were able to create a supportive learning environment where the views and opinions of the students were valued. By allowing the students to define the focus for the discussions and debate, the learning outcomes and the action taken by each group was different.

Figure 1 provides a summary of the stages of learning for Group A as we worked together through the social action process. For this group the negotiated starting point for the programme was decision making in their school lives. Our dialogue focused upon the school rules and an exploration of their origin, purpose and importance within the daily life of the students. The collective analysis led to a perception that the group felt uninformed about the meaning of some specific rules and their exclusion from the process of agreeing the areas covered in the current list of rules. The students then agreed delegated tasks between them to obtain more detailed information about both the meaning of the rules and the existing process informing their development and enforcement. Reflection led the group to a discussion about their role in wider decision making and their knowledge and participation in politics. The learning outcomes from the work on the previous issue had created a critical interest in democratic representation through the school student council that highlighted a lack of knowledge, and interest, in party politics. With the use of interactive web sites they were able to gain a broader understanding of the processes, structures and key politicians representing the constituencies in which the students lived, as well as the location of the school. Their

Figure 1. Social Action – Theory in Practice

<b>Group A Stages of Learning</b>	<b>What? Setting the agenda</b>	<b>Why? Exploring the issues</b>	<b>How? A vision for change</b>	<b>Action Taking action</b>	<b>Reflection How have things changed?</b>
1.	Decision making in school	What are the school rules? What do they mean to us? Who decides what they are?	How can we influence decisions about the school rules?	Obtain copies of the school rules in Braille & large print. Contact guidance staff with responsibility for enforcing rules. Identify representatives on student council.	Raised awareness of school rules, how they are agreed and how to influence them in future.
2.	Decision making in the community	Who represents us?	How can we learn more about politics?	Access web based information on Parliament. Identify local politicians. Make contact through surgeries where possible.	Increased knowledge of key politicians in Westminster and Scottish Parliament. Learned about local constituencies. Identified local politicians. Personal contact made by one young person in the group with local MP. Generated further learning programme in classroom.

Group A Stages of Learning	<b>What? Setting the agenda</b>	<b>Why? Exploring the issues</b>	<b>How? A vision for change</b>	<b>Action Taking action</b>	<b>Reflection How have things changed?</b>
3.	<p><b>Voting age for young people</b></p>	<p>How do politicians at Westminster &amp; the Scottish Parliament truly represent the views of young people under 18 with a visual impairment?</p>	<p>Collect the views of other young people in the Royal Blind School.</p>	<p>Conduct research with school students using questionnaire interviews.</p>	<p>Produced statistics reflecting the wider views within the school. Raised the awareness of student peers around the issue of political representation of the needs of young people under 18.</p>
4.	<p><b>Bus Timetables</b></p> <p><b>Possible future action</b> Collect names on a petition in school on lowering the voting age to 16. Lobby politicians about bus timetables.</p>	<p>Why are they not produced in Braille or large print?</p>	<p>How can we ensure that appropriate versions of timetables are available?</p>	<p>Contact local bus companies to enquire about current policy and practice about providing information for the visually impaired.</p>	<p>Bus timetables not available in any alternative printed format. Timetable enquiries directed to the phoneline.</p>



growing interest in this subject took the group into a more focused analysis of representation of the specific needs of themselves and their student peers.

By this stage in the programme the class teacher who supported them in other subjects had helpfully created opportunities to expand their ongoing work into their weekly subject timetable. The group took the opportunity to develop a school wide project, interviewing other students about their views on the voting age for young people, and generating statistical data to support some of their arguments. At this stage in the group process the focus of our work took a change in direction. As described earlier we gave the students opportunities within each session to reflect on significant events in their lives. One such issue was the lack of available translated information on public transport services for visually impaired young people living in Edinburgh. Whilst this was a change of direction, the skills and confidence gained by the students were utilised as they undertook the task of contacting local service providers. This was the last issue considered within the time of the programme, but I left the students considering the possibility of taking further action on issues relating to transport services and their own role as active citizens within the school and wider community.

### **Evaluation: Putting social action to the test**

The recording and subsequent evaluation of the project was conducted within a framework that reflected both the agreed aims and the issues identified by the young people as important in their lives. Structured interviews were conducted with the participating students with the use of a questionnaire translated into Braille and large print. The main outcomes of the project in relation to the aims were:

#### **Political literacy**

The students learned about a range of political processes reflecting both representative and direct democracy. By focusing upon issues

that were important to the young people, we encouraged them to critically analyse their own situations in relation to national and local political structures. The actual subject of politics was in itself not particularly popular, however the students talked a lot about concepts such as participation, and responded well to using forms of democratic decision making in the classrooms.

*I don't like politics and didn't put enough effort into learning about it.*

*It was good when we voted on what happened in the class, like the snack.*

### **Rights and responsibilities**

Increasing the student's awareness of their rights as young citizens was a major achievement in the programme with both groups. Based on their feedback the issue of rights does not appear to be sufficiently covered in the core curriculum in the school. The young people saw the subject of rights and responsibilities as essential in preparing them for life after school. They also felt that it was a subject that should be available to their younger student peers.

*The course would be really useful for first, second and third year.*

*Rights are taught in Modern Studies, not everyone does that subject.*

*It is useful to learn about our rights.*

*I liked discussing rights and responsibilities as a group.*

### **Participation**

By linking the debate to the young people's lived experiences within their own communities, they were able to develop their own understanding of the course material. Throughout the programme young people were actively encouraged to voice their own opinions and develop a deeper understanding of how issues affect their lives. It was stated by the students that in some of their normal classes their opinions were often not taken seriously and in some cases not welcomed at all. They reflected this experience in their own personal lives where they talked about the effects of their disability

on their ability to be accepted as equal within their communities.

*I learned a bit more about what I thought about things and how to get more involved.*

### **Some Conclusions: The challenge ahead**

The current political rhetoric in Scotland that promotes the goals of lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship offers new opportunities for the involvement of young people as agents of change in their own communities. The emerging education for citizenship agenda also provides clear opportunities for complementary collaboration between the informal and formal education sectors. The social action process provides a vehicle for the active involvement of young people in a critical analysis of issues affecting their own lives leading towards the planning, implementation and evaluation of agreed collective action. Within this developmental process the agenda for action is based upon the interests, concerns and needs of the participating young people. All too often the lives and lifestyles of young people are mediated through policy directives loaded with 'generative' and 'pedagogical' metaphors (Bessant, 2002, p.35). Across Scotland a common sense understanding is being created and sustained within the wider community by the media, who consistently portray young people as a problem to be solved. For some the emerging discourse underpinned by a 'new individualism' is promoting an increased scrutiny of the lives of young people, measured against a range of indicators that are as much concerned with anti-social behaviour as they are with educational attainment (Jeffs & Smith, 2002, p.52). In a challenge to contemporary practice social action offers a different approach, and one that according to Skinner et.al (1997):

can demonstrate its effectiveness in engaging with the most alienated and disaffected young people. It not only engages with them, but by tapping into young people's interests, concerns and motivation it activates them to be involved in community work or social change that is relevant to them. They organise and do it for themselves thereby

learning new skills and accepting more responsibility along the way.  
(p.19)

The social action approach provides a vehicle for the goals of active citizenship, both in terms of developing a knowledge base and putting the acquired skills into practice. From the evaluation of the Student Power Project one of the teachers involved stated that:

*Education (in schools) needs to be able to use as many 'tools' as possible to deliver key aspects of education ... this requires a shift from an inflexible curriculum in the secondary school to a flexible approach and the use of other professionals such as community education. This project has been successful for the pupils involved and needs to involve all pupils and more staff and try to integrate aspects into the formal curriculum.*

The Student Power project provided young people with an arena for both collective political expression and exploration of their role as active citizens. For me, working within the school setting at times restricted the possibilities of the social action approach. My experiences of similar groupwork programmes within the community have been more open-ended and not constrained by timetables and the needs of curriculum. The formal education system in Scotland is currently dominated by a culture of achievement and measurement. This may at times challenge the relevance of collective action taken by young people in relation to the priorities of the formal curriculum. The challenge to practitioners working with groups of young people in both the formal and informal education sectors is to forge innovative collaborative practice that embraces the new terrain created by the emerging education for citizenship agenda. The social action approach to working with young people is perhaps a good place to start.

## References

- Advisory Group on Citizenship (1998) *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools* (The Crick Report). London: QCA
- Bessant, J. (2002) Generative metaphors, problem setting in policy and the discovery of youth at risk. *Youth & Policy*, 77, 33-46
- Brookfield, S.D. (1987) *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking and acting*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Centre for Social Action (2000) *Youth Agenda: A good practice guide to working with young people on their home ground*. Leicester: Centre for Social Action & Guinness Trust Group
- Centre for Social Action (2001) *Newsletter*, 3, 2-3
- Community Learning Scotland (2001) *Building an Active Democracy: A discussion paper on the role of community education in supporting active citizenship*. Edinburgh: Community Learning Scotland
- Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*. New York: MacMillan
- Fleming, J., Harrison, M. and Ward, D. (1998) Social action can be an empowering process: A response to the scepticism of Monica Barry. *Youth & Policy*, 60, 46-61
- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Freire, P. (1974) *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum
- Fyfe, I. (1996) Youth work in Scotland: Reactive or proactive? *Social Action*, 3, 1, 10-14
- Fyfe, I. (2002) Young Scots. in J. Crowther, I. Martin and M. Shaw (Eds.) *Renewing Democracy in Scotland: An educational source book*. Leicester: NIACE
- Hall, T., Williamson, H. and Coffey, A. (2000) Young people, citizenship and the third way: A role for the Youth Service? *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3, 4, 461-472
- Hart, E. and Bond, M. (1995) *Action Research for Health and Social Care*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Jeffs, T. and Smith, M, K. (2002) Individualisation and youth work. *Youth & Policy*, 76, 39-65
- Kolb, D.A. (1995) The process of experiential learning. in M. Thorpe, R. Edwards and A. Hanson, *Culture and Processes of Adult Learning*. London: Routledge
- Learning and Teaching Scotland (2000) *Education for Citizenship in*

- Scotland: A paper for discussion and consultation*. Dundee: Learning and Teaching Scotland
- Learning & Teaching Scotland (2002) *Education for Citizenship in Scotland: A paper for discussion and development*. Dundee: Learning and Teaching Scotland
- Lewin, K. (1946) *Action Research and minority problems*. New York: Harper & Brothers
- Liebler, C. J. (2000) *Getting Comfortable with Appreciative Inquiry*. <http://www.geminitiative.org/getting.html> (08/08/00)
- Mills, C. W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Mullender, A. and Ward, D. (1989) Gaining strength together. *Social Work Today*, 20, 50, 14-15
- Mullender, A. and Ward, D. (1991) *Self-Directed Groupwork: Users take action for empowerment*. London: Whiting & Birch
- Scottish Executive (2000) *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: A young people's guide*. Edinburgh: HMSO
- Skinner, A., Boulton, I. and Harrison, M. (1997) Listening to Young People. *Social Action Today*, 5, 17-19
- Ward, D. and Mullender, A. (1991) Empowerment and oppression: An indissoluble pairing for contemporary social work. *Critical Social Policy*, 32, 21-30
- Wright, S. (1989) The design process and social change. in S. Wright, and D. Morley, *Learning Works*. Canada: ABL Group