

Sustainable communities and social work practice learning: Reflections on emergent, learning partnerships

Joanna Blake¹

Summary: This paper explores the ways that social work practice learning, through community development projects, can help take forward the local sustainability agenda. The first part establishes links between three pedagogic areas: education for sustainability, student learning in the community and social work practice learning. The second section presents a case study of a small-scale, sustainability initiative at the University of Plymouth, UK. The paper negotiates an inherent tension between a broad and all encompassing conceptualisation of education for sustainability, and the specific approach to professional training prescribed for social workers and teachers. The tension mirrors the multi-leveled dimensions of the sustainability initiative under discussion. The case study considers the emergent, methodological approach to learning that was adopted. Prescribed outcomes were actively resisted and the paper argues that this approach carries merit. In closing, aspects of partnership working amongst the community development agencies and university, and future trajectories of the project are elucidated.

Keywords: sustainable communities; education for sustainability; social justice; emergent learning; partnership working.

1. Research Assistant

Address for Correspondence: Centre for Sustainable Futures, (CSF) Kirkby Lodge, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth, Devon, PL4 8AA.
joanna.blake@plymouth.ac.uk

Date of publication: 25th June 2010

Education for sustainability

Sustainability is a contested and 'messy' term that eludes simple definition. According to Wals and van der Leij (2008) determining the meaning of sustainability is a process involving 'all kinds of stakeholders in many contexts' (2008, p.17). For Orr it involves several aspects including an 'uncompromising commitment to life and its preservation' (1992,p.137). The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN-DESD) 2005–2014 Draft International Implementation Scheme (2005) suggests a range of interrelated perspectives from human rights, peace and gender equality, to cultural diversity, health, governance, and rural development. Clearly, the multi-dimensional nature of sustainable development means that its scope or content is not confined to environmental issues. The opportunity is that the term sustainability is sufficiently conceptually broad; interrelating the social, political, economic and environmental spheres that comprise human and other-than-human existence to offer a radically holistic approach (Blake, 2007). Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a 'vision of education that seeks to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth's natural resources' (UNESCO, 2007, p.1). It is described as education that helps students to better understand the world in which they live, 'addressing the complexity and interconnectedness of problems' (UNESCO, 2002: 11). This has multiple implications for educational systems. For some, learning around sustainability demands a repositioning of how we understand ourselves, integral to which is a re-examination of how we learn, how we organise ourselves, and what we appreciate as knowledge (O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004).

Sterling's (2007a) three-part model of paradigm change is instrumental to a conceptualisation of an ESD theory and practice. Arguing for a contextual relationism, Sterling asserts that the three dimensions of perception, conception and practice are necessarily interrelated if we want to educate the whole person for a sustainable society. This 'ecological' emergent worldview transcends modernist understandings that emphasise separation and individualism. Far-reaching notions of 'learning for sustainability' and 'sustainable education' emphasise the overlap of educational values such as learner autonomy and capacity-building, on the one hand, and sustainability values such as self-renewal, system health and integrity, on the other (Sterling, 2007b,

p.78). Calder and Clugson (2003) argue that sustainable development is not just another category of environmental, social, and economic problems, but is also a way of thinking about these issues. Universities, they maintain, are uniquely equipped to help address the challenge of sustainability through innovation in teaching and learning. The rise to prominence of ESD in higher education arguably marks a significant step towards addressing the role of the university in producing citizens who understand the unsustainability of certain current practices in the world, and who are central to building a sustainable future. The following section highlights the synergies between ESD and student learning in the community.

Student learning in the community

Higher Education Institutions that engage in local and regional community partnerships can contribute to economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and social and cultural development in the area (Charles & Benneworth, 2001). According to the Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP), community-university partnerships take three broad overlapping yet distinguishable forms:

- Community-university engagement
- Student learning in the community
- Community-based research

Leiderman et al. (2002, p.2) further develop community-university partnership themes into a four-part model:

- Faculty skills and knowledge: Staff acquire experiential learning skills and knowledge
- Institutional infrastructure: Establishing infrastructure to work with communities
- Academic Culture: Creating a culture supportive of faculty experiential pedagogies
- Partner relationships: Strengthening institutional partnerships with community organisations

The exigency placed on HEIs to commit to engage in partnerships with the community in which they sit has a long history. Settlements and social action centres developed in the nineteenth century from the idea that social inequality might be addressed if university people lived alongside the poor of London. The first university settlement was Oxford House, in Bethnal Green established in 1884. The Women's University Settlement (now Blackfrars) began in 1887 and The Cambridge University Medical Mission in Bermondsey (now the Salmon Youth Centre) was founded in 1907. By the 1930s settlements were established in most urban centres in the UK, and in North America. Post-war, in the US, the 1958 publication by Theodore Caplow and Reece J. McGee, *The Academic Market Place*, urged readers to consider the 'university as a social institution' with responsibilities to move away from providing expertise 'for' a community and become more involved 'with' a community through the interaction of staff and students (Sills, 1978, p.95). In the UK the Centre for Adult Education was set up in 1969 with the express purpose of increasing community-university engagement (James, 1974) and in 1970 *Daedalus* carried an article entitled 'The University: Ivory Tower, Service Station, or Frontier Post?' in which the authors, Luria and Luria (1970) argue that the key question for a university is its ethical interaction with the society in which it operates. More recently, Barry (2007) argues that an 'engaged' university would be outward rather than inward looking, interested in its communities and seeing itself as part of rather than apart from local (and regional and international) networks for sustainable development.

Student learning in the community is a central aspect of an 'engaged university', and the links between student learning in the community and ESD are substantial. ESD is characterised by the use of a 'variety of pedagogical techniques that promote participatory learning and critical reflective skills' (UNESCO, 2007, p.23). In addition, ESD is aligned with experiential education that applies reflection to the complex and challenging nature of the 'real world', and facilitated by student learning in the community. Education for sustainability and education for social justice share an approach that is broadly described by Paulo Freire (1970) as 'praxis', that is, personal reflection leading to social action leading to further reflection. Millican (2005) outlines the central arguments for student learning in the community:

'This approach could involve helping to create an experience that

encourages student engagement with people who have different personal histories, and the opportunity to learn from that difference...The opportunity to do this at a local level, in a safe environment, opens doors to broader global issues of social justice and sustainable development.' (Millican, 2005, p.1)

Allen-Gil et al. (2005, p.397) describe learning in the community opportunities as a 'place-based approach' that includes:

- Learning through dialogue, collaboration, community
- Student-centred reflective learning and development of critical thinking
- Learning by doing and serving
- Systems learning

Additionally, Leiderman et al. (2002, p.3) maintain that student learning in the community offers opportunities to:

'Deepen commitments to student learning through the application of learning to 'real world' situations, to develop an understanding of current social injustice issues and to grow through civic, ethical, political and philanthropic activities.'

The following section discusses social sustainability and social work, and draws out the pedagogical and practical links between student learning in the community and social work practice learning.

Social sustainability and social work

The recent disasters of the Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina and the Pakistan earthquake are examples of ecological disasters that became socially constructed catastrophes. By exposing the distribution of social conditions that unduly subject marginalised and vulnerable people to environmental burdens, they are described as 'not-so-natural disasters' (Mitman, 2006, p.502). How we interpret and learn from complex socio-ecological issues raised by environmental catastrophes is of increasing importance in the light of predictions (IPCC, 2007, p.8)

that such occurrences will increase as climate changes (Blake, 2007). Cook (2004) suggests some of the societal challenges associated with ecological and economic change:

As we continue to undermine nature's capacity to provide humans with services (such as clean water and air) and resources (such as food and raw materials), both individuals and the social relations between them will be subjected to growing amounts of pressure. Conflict will grow and public health, personal safety, and other negative social factors will increase in the face of ecological threats and decreased access to nature's services and resources. (Cook, D. 2004, p.45)

The implications for social work practice and education are manifold. Social work practice takes place at the sites where people experience resistances and discrimination, and instigates change in social life in order to improve opportunities for human lives. Butler et al point to the 'complex, contradictory and inconclusive' (Butler et al., 2007, p.294) nature of social work practice; defined by the capacity to use and respect the full capacity of each individual worker, within situational, theoretical and organisational boundaries. For Karvinen-Niinikoski (2004), the challenge of social work is to cope with uncertainty and change and 'create understanding according to the different and particular living situations of people and to find ways and methods of combating social problems' (Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2004, p.24). Arguably, as environmental and economic changes threaten to increasingly expose those already vulnerable to socio-economic challenges, the role of social workers in helping build a sustainable future is of increasing importance. However, there may be a gap between dominant views of priorities for government, firms and voluntary agencies such as cost-saving, efficiency, value-for-money, contract design and compliance, and the all encompassing view of social work and sustainability outlined above. Fook et al. (2000) argue that the social care professions find themselves in an invidious position of being challenged from 'top down' by increased government and managerial concerns as well as pressure from 'bottom up' for greater community and consumer accountability. They continue:

Paradoxically, whilst funding to services shrinks and tighter controls are demanded, the contexts in which services are offered are less amenable

to control – diverse and competing demands mean the fragmentation of service delivery, less democratic participation, and far greater uncertainty and unpredictability. (Fook et al 2000, p.1)

In response to global challenges to which social workers might be required to respond, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) issued a series of 14 International Policy Papers on a range of sustainability themes, from 'Globalisation and the Environment', 'Conditions in Rural Communities', and 'Human Rights', to 'Refugees', 'Women' and 'Peace and Social Justice'. Links between social work and sustainability are made in academic works: 'The eco-social approach in social work' (2001) by Aila-Leena Matthies et al., 'International Social Work: Professional action in an interdependent world' (2001) by Lynne Healey, and 'Ecology and social work: toward a new paradigm' (2003) by John Coates. Furthermore, debates are emerging within peer-reviewed journals. Besthorn (2003) emphasises the links between human suffering and ecological suffering and urges social workers to assist marginalised people to gain access to needed change that 're-fosters commitment to the health and wellbeing of human communities and ecological systems' (Besthorn, 2003, p.90). McKinnon (2008) explores the environmental/social nexus by citing the links between increased incidents of violent crime and increased temperature; rainfall deviations and the increased likelihood of conflict; and the social consequences of environmental pollutants. Additionally, discussions emphasise the centrality of social work education in preparing the profession for the challenges of unsustainability. Cooper (2007) argues that the ways that education ensures that social work students have the knowledge and skills to meet their individual needs and those of society is one of the most important challenges to social work education. For McKinnon, social work's established expertise can support the ongoing relevance of the profession, 'if a focus on social sustainability is incorporated into the social work curriculum, as well as into the continuing professional development programme' (McKinnon, 2008, p.257). In light of ever changing practice contexts, Karvinen-Niinikoski highlights the need for '(innovative) knowledge production in and through the practice context' (Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2003, p.2).

To summarise, sustainability themes have multifarious implications for social work including societal resilience to future ecological and economic shocks. Sustainability is increasingly prominent within social work practice

and teaching discussions. Furthermore, the practice context of social work education is highlighted as key to preparing graduates with the knowledge and skills to respond to sustainability challenges. Arguably, linking social work practice learning to praxis-oriented learning for sustainability comprises one such innovation. The following section turns to the specific context of practice learning and sustainability at the University of Plymouth, United Kingdom before a case study into one sustainability initiative is presented.

Social work practice learning and sustainability at the University of Plymouth

Community Development Placements (CDPs) have been a formal part of the curriculum at Plymouth since 2004. In the process of partnering with a community agency (statutory and non-statutory) with a view to forming a CDP, students are introduced to the said agency as a potential resource; enhancing the project and posing minimal additional time pressure on project staff. The CDPs are managed by a Practice Learning Manager who works individually with students to help them assess their knowledge, experience, skills, values, and learning needs. Importantly, the student assessment of CDPs is based on the students' critical reflections on their learning, and does not reflect the actual work (e.g. background research, video) produced for the community development agency. In addition, practice learning at the University of Plymouth is informed, and supported by a Global Social Work Discussion Group established in 2004. The Group invites students, social work practitioners, community members and organisations and academic staff to congregate around global issues deemed important to network members, and to contextualise local and regional developments within international development perspectives. Past sustainability themes include social-work-as-social-activism in Latin America, student experiences of practice learning in Uganda, and health perspectives in Southern Africa. Indeed, the inspiration and model for embedding formally assessed CDPs in the Plymouth undergraduate curriculum was transnational in nature; deriving from a pilot project led by Chan et al at the University of Hong Kong's Department of Social Work and Social Administration; written as resource paper in 1997, entitled, 'Critical reflection and community work education: A social work

curriculum addressing social deprivation and poverty'. In 2007 a two-year Centre Fellowship with the Centre for Sustainable Futures (HEFCE-funded CETL, 2005-2010) was awarded to a five person team of Lecturers, a Module Leader and a Practice learning manager from the School of Applied Psychosocial Sciences, in the Faculty of Health and Social Work. Aspects of year 1 BSc (Hons) Social Work practice and classroom-based learning have been redesigned to incorporate environmental issues alongside social work's long-standing commitment to partnership working, social justice, and community development. The following section focuses on one sustainability initiative within the practice learning context entitled the Sustainable Communities Project and uses a case study as the medium for exploration.

Sustainable Communities Project: A case study

Research component

The Sustainable Communities Project was a small-scale, experimental initiative in which sustainability themes and processes were embedded into the Community Development Project (CDP) aspect of a group of year 1 BSc (Hons) Social Work students' practice learning, 2007-2008. Qualitative research into the potential ways that community-university partnerships in the form of student CDPs, can help take forward the local sustainability agenda was integral to the design, development and implementation of the Sustainable Communities project. Two sub-questions accompanied the overarching question: ways students develop a multidimensional understanding of sustainability; and effective preparations and processes enabling students to become change-agents for sustainability. Students, community development agency supervisors and staff were invited to participate with the research process in the form of semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, the project was approached via an emergent learning model where the Community Development Projects required aims but prescribed learning outcomes were resisted. The reasoning behind this was that a large degree of learner autonomy appeared to be congruent with both the experimental nature of the initiative and with ecological values elucidated above.

Preparations and processes

Sustainability is described as an 'ongoing social learning process that actively involves stakeholders in creating their vision, acting and reviewing changes' (Tilbury 2007, p.117). In applying this view to the process of embedding sustainability into the practice learning component of the year 1 curriculum, open channels of communication and partnerships based on trust and respect was deemed to be of paramount importance to the longevity of partnership working between the agency and the university at large. Early discussions focused on establishing partnerships with community agencies with a view to co-developing CDPs that would enable students to experience community development work in the context of sustainability, however broadly interpreted. Overall, the Sustainable Communities Project was an opportunity to enhance current practice learning provision by explicitly engaging with sustainability discourses. CDPs were selected on the basis of their potential to support students explore sustainability in the two distinct, yet complementary ways:

- Multi-sustainability themes: the power of self-governing networks in the face of resource scarce agencies and projects, the correlation between environmental and social justice, gendered power differentials
- The sustainability of social work practice interventions

Following negotiations with community agencies, the projects were introduced to the students in advance. The group of 13 students was not selected for the Sustainable Communities project but comprised the pre-ordained learning set that the practice learning manager would work with. The groups' diversity was therefore concurrent with the demographic of social work students across the programme, comprising approximately 100 students. However, selection criteria were employed by the practice learning manager to determine the constitution of the sub groups:

- Participation of one male student on the 'International Women's Day' project (alongside three females) on the basis that creating spaces for male solidarity for 'celebrating women' was an expressed aim of the project by the community agency supervisor
- Diversity with respect to age and sex

Table 1 below details of the four sustainability-focused CDPs that comprise the Sustainable Communities project 2007-2008:

Table 1

Community Development Project	Identified sustainability themes	Project aims
Rural Women's Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment of women through self-organised networks • Strengthening of social networks and its relation to self-sustaining communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in women's network • Gain an understanding of the network • Learn about issues which affect women • Explore possibility of expanding the network • Undertake research identifying strengths and challenges of the network • Identify sustainability themes
Sustainable Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local food production and consumption • Bioregionalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and deliver an awareness-raising, Fairtrade event in a local school • Research awareness of Fairtrade among students and university staff
International Women's Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International perspectives of gender politics • Social inclusion and participation • Partnership working across the city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-organise a diverse, community event • Explore pro-active and positive responses to discrimination and difference
Urban regeneration trust comprised of a network of community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refurbishment of urban green spaces • Economic revitalisation • Collective action and its relation to self-sustaining communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-research strengths and challenges of the network alongside network members • Participate in Clean-Up campaign • Participate in Community celebration event

Reflecting on the process leading up to the commencement of the project, the practice learning manager describes the process as a 'journey into the unknown', where students and community agencies were offered something 'new and novel'. Reflecting on the explicit sustainability dimension of the project one student working with the Rural Women's Network reflected:

Thinking about what sustainability means to a women's network was a valuable starting for the project as it brought us and the leaders of the network together at an early stage and helped shape the aims of the project. (Rural Women's Network student)

A challenge of not strictly defining sustainability was that the links to social work were at times opaque. One community agency supervisor described his initial surprise at being in discussion with the university's social work department, 'I never thought sustainability and social work would be together'. However, the extended lead-in period of four months was highly valued by the practice learning manager as, 'the level of contact with the agencies improved'.

Developing a multidimensional understanding of sustainability

To support students develop a multi-dimensional view of sustainability through the CDPs, focused learning moments were embedded in the project. Three, interactive, half-day workshops were spread across the five-month period. Discussing community-university partnerships, Hart and Wolff (2006, p.126) emphasise the importance of 'opening up new spaces within which to take forward a collaborative agenda'. With this in mind, the four community agency supervisors and thirteen students were invited to participate in the workshops. Table 2 below details the workshops.

Table 2

Title of workshop	Workshop aims	Workshop design/content
1. Sustainability Is...?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and develop a range of working definitions of sustainability specific to the group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 mins 'talking head' video taken from: http://www.bigpicturestv.com • Group divided into small groups and a diamond ranking exercise was employed as an interactive tool to critically evaluate definitions of sustainability: http://csf.plymouth.ac.uk/files/Activity/Activity%203%20Diamond%20Ranking%20.pdf • Group re-formed to rank the definitions
2. Community development and change agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce and apply notions of individual and collective empowerment, and activism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speaker introduced notions of individual and collective empowerment and activism • Small-groups comprising of participants working on different CDPs related the opening discussion to their personal and student life
3. Student dissemination of Sustainable Communities Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-discuss the initiative • Introduce further social work academic and practice staff to the initiative • Learn lessons to take forward to next year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants shared their thoughts and feelings towards the projects with fellow students, agency supervisors and sustainability and social work staff

Whilst three workshops were planned during the project design stage, only workshop 1 was pre-planned in detail. The foci of workshops two and three would emerge from discussions with the author and the practice learning manager around what might be relevant and beneficial to the group. Learning throughout the first workshop iteratively informed future workshops. The term 'sustainability' was

undefined throughout the design stage of the project and during the first workshop. The rationale behind adopting this approach was that the sessions were co-learning moments; the authors intended learning to emerge from participants; personally, professionally, and politically. Furthermore, a transmissive style of 'teaching' was actively resisted. It is noteworthy that individuals involved in the development of the project are not part of the formal teaching staff. From the outset 'learning' was context-, and participant-dependent; a process that might be described as learning without teachers. Reflecting on the workshops, the practice learning manager described feeling 'only one or two steps away from the students'. However, the project was enabled and supported by receiving top-level encouragement from the programme leader, and was synthesised with class-based learning around sustainability.

Workshop 1, entitled 'Sustainability Is ...?' involved group discussions around conceptions of sustainability. Figure 1 below portrays the scope of interpretations that emerged.

In the first round of unstructured interviews with students, it was apparent that whilst a multitude of understandings of sustainability emerged from workshop 1, some students were less comfortable with a diffuse and undefined term when applied to the CDPs as one student suggests: 'I suppose I'm quite cynical...it comes down to money...as soon as the money goes people do not have time to sustain the network'. The difficulty the student had in applying sustainability to the CDP was concurrent with the reflections of his community agency supervisor:

Students were tasked with investigating and identifying solutions to the network becoming more sustainable without the input of the full-time network coordinator by attracting more people who might be able to co-ordinate it. The Sustainable Communities Project was vague and this appeared challenging to inexperienced group of year 1 students. (Urban regeneration network community agency supervisor)

Despite the challenges experienced by some students, findings from the interviews also suggest that an understanding of sustainability in the form of reflexive enquiry and an exploration of power was readily seized by other students. As one student commented, 'remaining conscious both whilst 'in action' and later when reflecting 'on action' means that we can use the ideas around sustainability to guide reflection'. Regarding the hierarchical nature of the urban regeneration network, one student

suggested an alternative model; 'at the moment everything about the network goes through the coordinator. Sustainability should be more like a web'. The role class plays in sustainability initiatives that invite behaviour and life-style change was raised by one student working with the 'Sustainable Communities' CDP that explored local food production and consumption:

I realised that 'educating' people in my community, who are on low budgets, around Fairtrade was not possible as it is more expensive and would make them feel guilty. I am now against the idea...it makes fair trade a class thing. I'm going to ask Fairtrade where they stand on this. (Sustainable Communities student)

For the group of students working with the Rural Women's Network, power dynamics around community development interventions occupied much reflection and discussion time. One student commented that 'it is easy to fall into the trap of doing something for the network but you are with the network...it's a tricky business'.

Change agency for sustainability

The Sustainable Communities Project experimented with preparations and processes that might enable students become change-agents for sustainability in the community. Change agency is defined here as empowerment informed by an exploration of personal motivations, as well as practices, which leads to action towards the transformation of situations deemed incompatible with one's own values and ethics and those of a community. Furthermore, change agency is understood as a continual process rather than a quantifiable objective. Change agency for sustainability does not differ from conventional notions of change agency, rather, the focus is explicitly on interrelated sustainability themes previously outlined. As the practice learning manager stated:

Change agency is what social workers do; the cycle of change, motivational interviewing, indeed the CDP component is about the opportunity for students to become change agents. (Practice learning manager)

The CDPs were designed with scope for students to be resourceful, to question openly and to suggest alternatives. For some students,

becoming influential in processes of change was a challenging proposal. One community agency supervisor reflected that the students she supervised struggled to suggest alternatives where obstacles were encountered:

The overall response was that the network could not continue without the full-time coordinator...[The CDP] made the students think outside the box... they didn't ask how other networks survive without paid staff...they needed support in recognising that they didn't have to accept the negative answers they were given as the end of the enquiry. (Urban regeneration network community agency supervisor)

Responding to the difficulties some students experienced around taking action, and thinking laterally around negative responses, the practice learning manager and the author decided that the second workshop would explore in-depth personal and collective empowerment to effect change. One community agency supervisor described the workshop as a success in supporting the students:

I feel that they began to see themselves as agents for change when they grew in confidence and got their neighbours discussing sustainability in pubs and in the street. (Sustainable Communities community agency supervisor)

The impact was also, felt by agency supervisors. One supervisor relayed:

The change-agency workshop gave me a lot of confidence as well as enthusiasm; I was becoming a voice for sustainability in the workplace, as a radical social work practitioner. (International Women's Day supervisor)

Another community agency supervisor integrated his experience of workshop 2 into a session that he was facilitating with a community group in his capacity as consultant, outside the scope of the project. By inviting community agency supervisors to participate with the workshops, with or without their student group the session fulfilled, in a some small way, a capacity-building role around sustainability in a community development setting.

Conclusions

To conclude that the tentative findings of the case indicate that the Sustainable Communities Project enabled students to develop a multi-dimensional understanding of sustainability and become change agents for sustainability, or not, was not an ambition of the enquiry. Rather, the research dimension of the project allowed the thoughts and feelings of participants to emanate. This process was deemed particularly valuable given that the initiative was a pilot. Findings of the project can be summarised thus:

- The holistic model, where sustainability encompasses and integrates political, social, economic and ecological dimensions as well as learning and project management processes might challenge framings of social work perspectives that are more androcentric, and increasingly managerialist.
- A key, enabling factor of the project was the top-level support it received from the programme leader, alongside its synthesis with class-based learning around sustainability.
- Sustainability is a contended term that embraces a continuum of approaches. Some of this contention is apparent in students' comments and reactions. The comment that Fairtrade was problematic for those with limited incomes may be seen as perfectly reasonable and also, as indicative of some of the challenges of understanding the impact of global capitalism on disadvantaged peoples.
- In a couple of instances the agency supervisors appeared to find the workshops more inspiring and meaningful than the students. This could reflect differences in experience, values and understanding, and different circumstances that might affect tolerance of ambiguity.
- Some students were more comfortable with process-oriented learning than others, who remained more task-focused and wanted to illuminate uncertainty, paradox and conflict. This might be attributed to their characteristics as learners.
- No student described themselves during the research, as an 'change agent for sustainability', however, the research reveals that at times some students politicised their experiences by relating the projects to areas of personal significance such as poverty, class and gender.
- An impact of the Sustainable Communities project was the depth, and potentially long-term nature of relationship it engendered between

the university and community agencies. Furthermore, co-learning partnerships around sustainability between students, community agencies and university staff were forged by the three workshops.

- An aspect identified as lacking from the 2007-2008 Sustainable Communities Project was networking across the Community Development Projects. The Sustainable Communities Project 2008-2009, local food production and consumption, bioregionalism and preventative health comprise common themes. To enhance partnership working, programme staff and community agencies have held a networking meeting to synthesise initiatives across the region. Furthermore, links to undergraduate Nursing and Public Health programmes are being explored in the anticipation that the project might encompass an interdisciplinary and inter-professional dimension.

Note

An early version of this paper was co-presented, alongside Louise Baxter of Mutley Greenbank Trust at the Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) Conference II 'Shared passion, different perspective', in Brighton 2-3 April 2009.

Acknowledgements

The Sustainable Communities Project under discussion was co-designed, developed and facilitated by Andrew Whiteford, Practice Learning Manager, University of Plymouth alongside Louise Baxter, Jane Smith, Oz Osbourne, Jasmine Hacking and Caroline Riggs. The author would like to express her sincere gratitude to Professor Bill Jordan, Professor David Selby and Professor. Stephen Sterling for their insightful comments and reflections on drafts of the paper.

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