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Working with groups

Malcolm Payne

Starting points

Working with groups as educators is a complex task. It demands of us that we bring together in our practice three areas of experience, skill and knowledge: understanding groups; working to promote learning; and project management.

First, we need to understand about groups themselves and how they work. We need to recognise and understand patterns which are common to groups in general (theory) and to transfer our understanding to working with particular groups (practice). Choosing to work with a group (rather than with individuals) involves a number of decisions; choosing how to work with a particular group involves yet more. Practice also involves me – the practitioner. So I need to understand how I work with and behave in groups, so that I can understand how I am working with this particular group. For however much we know about groups, we are likely to be faced at some time with something new in every group with whom we work. And at that point, we need to be able to choose how to move on, based upon some clear principles about who we are as workers.

Next, there is the question of learning. In group settings we have the chance to enable people to learn from one another and from the task or activity in

which the group is engaged. In order to do this we need to know how to use the group setting to promote learning. Education is a conscious process: it implies that the educator, acting with intent, has some purpose in mind. Purpose is closely connected with values – what we believe in. In groups, people are 'acting out' their beliefs and values in how they treat one another and how they express themselves. Every group is a micro-version of our world. It can be a more or less democratic place, a more or less fair place, a more or less creative, satisfying place for those who are part of it. It may confirm 'who they are' in helpful or unhelpful ways, or it may offer opportunities for change. How we work with groups also reflects our own values as educators – the way we see the world and how we wish it to be.

Finally, educators pursue different activities and projects when working with groups which demand a wide range of skills and knowledge to do with defining goals and managing tasks. These management skills need to be integrated with educational purposes and values, and with group processes.

Projects are usually time-limited: they have a beginning, a middle and an end. They may be short-term, lasting only a few hours or days, or be sustained over weeks or months. Taking on a project means that we have chosen to use our resources in a particular way. It implies that a decision has been made to try to meet certain educational goals by, for example:

- running a residential;
- offering a training course;
- helping people to mount a campaign;
- forming a new community group;
- working with a group of excluded students; or
- raising awareness about local environmental concerns.

These are just examples; you can probably think of many other aims which might lead you to decide to work with groups on a project. The list is endless, reflecting the very wide variety of contexts, agencies and tasks within informal education. Often, a project arises from everyday contact – from 'being around' people in the places where we work (Jeffs and Smith, 1996: 67). Listening to their concerns and ideas may lead to the decision to develop a project.

To sum up, then, three broad questions form the basis for this chapter:

- What do we need to know about groups and working with them?
- What do we need to know about learning in groups?
- How can we design and manage projects with groups so that their members can achieve and learn?

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Case study 1: The dance group

The idea to form a dance group had emerged from two or three of a larger group of teenage friends in a conversation about being bored, not having anything to do. For a while, it had just been a 'bright idea' but no more than that. They were unsure about what they could achieve. They met often as a group and there was a shared interest in dance – but could they really become a dance group? Could they perform in front of others?

There would be a lot to think about if they were to become a dance group. No longer could they just turn up at the youth centre and chat. They would need to get organised. Everyone needed to play a part – it could not be left to chance. Decisions needed to be taken – how often they would practise, what music they would dance to, who would take the leading roles and who would be less prominent. And, when they reached a crisis point – and groups often do – where some key members threatened to leave, they had to find a way to talk about what was going wrong and how they would begin to mend some of the relationships which had become damaged. This meant going back over the group's life: did they all want to be there, or was the goal less important to some than others? Some members felt left out – that their views were not being heard. They began to resent the more vocal members who, in turn, felt that the quieter ones were not fully committed.

What was to be done? In the simplest terms, the group needed to learn how to *sustain* itself. That meant giving themselves a regular opportunity to talk about what was going on in the group – their relationships, how they were communicating, how decisions were being made – so that members could learn and practise all of the skills that are required for group life. Before, they had simply focused upon the *task*: putting on a dance performance. Now, they had learned that the *process* – how that task was tackled – was just as important if they were to succeed. The *primary goal* for the group was to dance and to put on a performance. But in order to achieve this, the group had taken on a secondary goal: group *maintenance*.

Working with groups

In many ways human nature is co-operative. We are more like ants and wolves than like cats. We readily join groups and form attachments, and receive powerful biological and emotional rewards for doing so.

(Argyle, 1991: 247)

Case Study 1 illustrates some familiar features of group life that we are likely to encounter when we work with formal groups. To begin with, however, we need to understand what we mean by a group.

Whenever three or more people come together we can call them a group. Three people standing at the coffee bar together, having a chance conversation as they wait to be served, constitute a group in this simple sense of the word.

But to work with groups we need a better definition than that. For the purposes of this chapter we will ignore these sorts of groups – except perhaps to say that such informal groups may be the start of something more. That conversation might lead to an idea, to them meeting again, to the group beginning to have some sort of life of its own, as we saw in Case Study 1. In the day-to-day work of many informal educators, such beginnings can be very important – but they are not our primary focus in this chapter.

Defining these chance groupings as *informal* groups begins to throw some light onto what we mean when we speak about *formal* groups. By formal we do not mean that the group behaves in formal (or conventional) ways, but that the group begins to take on a *form* of its own: its own distinctive shape or identity. In a formal group, we might, for example, know who are its members (and therefore, who are not). And we might begin to see some particular patterns of behaviour – whether we feel these are good or bad. So, relationships in the group might be seen as close, supportive or co-operative; or they may be felt to be distant or competitive. Each of these features of a group's behaviour will affect what the group can achieve. The pattern within a particular group is unique to that group, but the study of human behaviour in groups suggests that most groups exhibit similar patterns.

Hare, writing in 1962, attempted to define the five features of groups which are likely to interest us as informal educators:

The members of the group are *in interaction* with one another. They share a common *goal* and set of *norms* which give direction and limits to their activity. They also develop a set of *roles* and a network of *interpersonal attraction* which serve to differentiate them from other groups.

(Hare, 1962: 5; my italics)

Taken together, these five features of a group represent its unique culture and identity and serve to distinguish it from other groups. They also suggest questions which we can use to think about the group:

- *Interaction*: how are people communicating in this group? What patterns can be seen for different group members? Is there more interaction between some than others? Are some members silent or marginalised?
- *Goal*: what is the group trying to achieve? Are all members equally interested? Does motivation change at times? Are some more confident than others? Is everyone satisfied with the group's progress? What does the group need to learn and do in order to achieve its goals?
- *Norms*: what norms and values have the group adopted, for example about how decisions are made, or who is listened to? How do those affect its members? Are they helping the group to achieve its goals? Might it wish to adopt different norms?

- *Roles*: what roles exist in the group? Are some members more powerful than others? How aware are members of their own and others' roles? Are they happy with them or do some want them to change?
- *Relationships*: what sorts of relationships are there? What patterns, e.g. of dominance, dependence, friendship or hostility (Argyle, 1972) can be seen? Are some members popular while others appear less valued? Are relationships helping or hindering the group?

For educators, formal groups present a range of opportunities for members' learning: about themselves; about themselves in relation to others; and about whatever it is the group is engaged in. This familiar triangle of *individual*, *group* and *task* can be said to define a fertile arena for learning, if an environment is created to enable that learning to take place.

In Case Study 1, the group is attempting to make a difficult transition: from simply being a group of friends (what is sometimes known as a natural group) to becoming something more formal. The group wants to take on a purpose or goal (the task). This will make all sorts of demands upon its members which did not exist before. Some examples of the challenges they face are offered in the case study: getting organised; paying attention to who is to do what; giving themselves time to reflect.

Learning in groups

We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose, makes a great deal of difference.

(Dewey, 1916: 16)

As informal educators we are concerned with enabling people to learn. Research suggests that we learn a lot from being with others in groups. For some, working with groups is a – or even *the* – primary means of encouraging learning, because those with whom we work are able to learn from and with one another, rather than simply from us as the worker. Learning in groups can therefore promote what Mullender and Ward (1991: 11) call 'self-empowerment' – people's ability to make choices for themselves. However, we as educators are still important to this process. The choices we make about how to work with a group will make a difference to what is learned. These decisions represent our attempt to 'design the environment' as Dewey suggested – where the group itself is a central feature of that environment.

Promoting learning by working with groups rather than simply with individuals is probably as old as education itself. The history of what has come to be known in the helping professions as 'group work' is much more recent. Much of the literature which focuses upon such work – and there is a great deal – has been developed in the field of social work since the 1920s. Practitioners have tried, through careful study and reflection about its purposes and methods, to identify how group work can be used, and to what effect, in order to establish this form of work with people as a discipline.

Another origin of this sort of work comes from educational work with groups which 'developed from the need for mutual aid and support' (Kunstler, 1955: 40). This was a way of working which challenged traditional ideas about the 'giver' and 'receiver' of help, and instead recognised people's abilities to support one another and to achieve social change. These philosophical ideas remain important. Original forms of this work were found in informal education settings: self-help groups, playgrounds, summer camps, settlements and neighbourhood centres.

Informal education work with and through groups is not a universal method, however, to be applied in all circumstances. Its use in a disciplined way implies that we must decide when and how to apply the range of methods generally referred to as group work. A decision to pursue particular educational goals by such methods should mean that we think that they will be effective – that they will achieve certain purposes and fit with the ethics of our practice.

Why should educators work with and through groups?

There have been a number of attempts to identify the benefits of working with and through groups (see for example Brown, 1992: 12–27).

- Being part of a group is a normal and everyday experience for most people. Group experience matters for virtually everyone and therefore provides a potentially fertile learning environment.
- Being part of a group makes a number of demands upon people: negotiating what will or will not be done; performing tasks; taking on roles and responding to those of others; sharing thoughts and feelings. Each of these features of group life contains the potential for personal development and growth, if the group environment is conducive to it.
- Many people with whom we work experience a sense of isolation. This may arise from their home situation (living alone, bringing up small children, a family where they are the main carer, for example) or from

other aspects of their life – for instance if they are disabled, suffer from illness, or face discrimination. Being with others, especially if they share some of the same experiences, can reduce people's feelings of being alone in their world. New friendships and support networks can be built.

- People often want to create change for themselves – to find new ways to react or behave, to understand themselves better, or to learn new skills. Being part of a group with others who also wish to change can support learning.
- People seeking to bring about social and political change, particularly those facing oppression, have long seen the potential for groups to raise consciousness among members and confront oppressive social structures. Feminist groups, for example, have an important place in the history of modern social change (see Butler and Wintram, 1991).
- Doing things – whether taking up a leisure activity, pursuing some local political issue, or building a new community group – frequently depends on finding others who share a similar passion or interest. From an early age we learn that there are many things that can be achieved only by co-operating with others.

These ways in which group experience offers opportunities for learning also hint at the wide range of group tasks and projects which educators might pursue. If we were to attempt to mention them all, a very long list would result. Drawing upon Jeffs and Smith (1996) we can see, however, that what they all have in common is that the worker is using the medium of association (people being with others) to enable people to gain and provide mutual aid, a sense of belonging, identity and self-esteem; and to foster learning, change and development. As educators, we must attend to all of the features of groups which might serve to promote these ends. Conversely, since being in a group with others can also confirm feelings of isolation, reinforce oppressive structures or behaviour or damage self-esteem, we must also establish ways of working which avoid – or at least limit – these risks.

Contemporary group work practice, then, drawing upon the history of informal education and social work, attempts to establish a systematic *methodology* to guide our work with and through groups in order to promote learning and growth.

The educator's role in the group

People take on roles when they belong to or work with a group. It is helpful to think about two types: *functional* and *behavioural* roles. As educators, both

aspects of our role are important. There is no one role which can always be applied in whatever group we are working; we need to be flexible and adaptable. In one group, we may need to be much more assertive than in another. Or we may need to be prepared to take the lead until the group's confidence has grown. These should, ideally, be conscious decisions. We must be aware of and be able to choose the roles we perform, based upon our judgements about what is appropriate, ethical and effective. What is constant is the functional role we perform as an educator. In order to perform this, we must adjust the ways we behave and the tasks we take on.

As workers we often hold a lot of authority, power and influence – based upon our knowledge and expertise, our position in the community, our age, gender, or race, or our ability to offer resources to the groups with whom we work. How we exercise such influence in groups is a key aspect of professional practice and goes to the heart of questions about learning and democracy. Gibson and Clarke (1995: 64), discussing the role of youth workers in groups, identify three styles of working:

- *authoritarian*: the worker makes the decisions and presents or sells them to the group;
- *consultative*: the worker offers tentative decisions, invites discussion but reserves the right to decide;
- *enabling*: the worker sets boundaries, shares information, initiates discussion and supports decision making by the group.

It is clear that it is the third style, that of the enabling worker, which is likely to be most empowering to those with whom we work. It most closely accords with the democratic ideals which have shaped group work practice and informal education, because it encourages participation by group members and a climate of support and co-operation. It also reminds us that, when we are able to, we will want to encourage groups to adopt a similar style of decision-making themselves. But not all groups will be ready or able to work in participative or co-operative ways. As Gibson and Clarke point out (1995: 47), good practice in informal education will sometimes mean that we have to exercise our power, to set the boundaries, to persuade or cajole. For example, if we perceive that a group might come to harm, or harm others if we allow it to continue to do something, we need to be prepared to step in, perhaps even to become authoritarian. We cannot avoid such responsibilities at times, although we would want the group to understand why we had to act in such a way.

Davies reminds us that workers may adopt non-directive techniques, trying to appear as self-effacing and uninfluential as possible, but can never succeed in eliminating their own impact. They will see themselves, and the group will see them, as 'the worker' (Davies, 1975: 107). The role itself

inevitably brings with it some power and authority, whatever style of working is adopted.

In our first case study, young people were trying to develop a dance group. Below, the same case study is revisited in order to examine the role of the worker.

Case study 1: Revisited

The youth worker is employed by a local authority to develop work under Local Agenda 21. She sees that there might be an opportunity to support the group to achieve what they want and, at the same time, by working with them, to promote some of Agenda 21's objectives concerned with young people's involvement in their community. Her intentions as a worker, the aims of her agency and the young people's interests are, she judges, congruous. Offering the group her support involves exploring with the group what she is able to offer and what might be their needs and expectations. She is not an expert in dance, but she feels that dance provides a useful vehicle for informal education.

The worker begins by talking with the group about their intentions: what they want to achieve. They want to form a dance group; they want to perform in front of others. She asks why, thinking through with them what the project will involve. She explores some of the possible benefits: for example, that it might show young people in a positive light in the community, as well as lots of opportunities for learning new skills. Worker and group consider what will be needed if they are to be successful: the time that will be required, a place to practise, things to be organised.

The worker needs to take care at this point. It is *their* idea and she must not 'take it over'. She must support, but not lead. She must not push the pace faster than the group wishes to go, but at the same time, she wishes to encourage. She can offer help, but she must do so in ways which they will find acceptable, and which will allow them to retain control.

We need to ask ourselves some sharp questions about our role, and the power and influence we bring to our work. Notice how, in Case Study 1 Revisited, the worker's role is partly defined by the fact that she is employed to pursue the objectives of Local Agenda 21 for young people. That means that she is concerned with such things as citizenship, participation and democracy, and environmental issues. At the same time, she is working from informal education principles. This is a common enough scenario: the agency, job title or funding source provides the focus for the work; our profession (as youth workers or community educators) offers the framework of principles, values and methods. Similar situations may also occur in health education, 'community safety' or school exclusion projects.

It is not always easy to bring these two sets of expectations together. For example, we may be expected to work more quickly than we judge that a

particular group is capable of, or we might be expected to take some decisions on behalf of the group which we would prefer the group to take.

It is clear that, as informal educators, our intentions to promote learning are never value-free. We believe certain human values to be important, and this gives rise to an agenda for the learning we want to promote. Indeed, some would argue that the informal education task is the promotion of learning about values (Young, 1999: 3). For youth workers, Young argues, this gives rise to a learning agenda which is intended to give young people opportunities to examine their own values, think about the principles on which they are based, and make informed decisions and choices.

The choices we make will strongly influence the group learning environment: what and how group members learn, and our relationship with them. Smith refers to this as a choice we make about our *disposition* (1994: 77): how we conceptualise and approach our task as educators. Will we choose to be an expert or teacher, ready to pass on our knowledge and expertise? Or a kind of 'group parent' who will set the boundaries and rules of behaviour? Or perhaps a manager: the person who ensures that the task gets accomplished effectively? The basic disposition we choose will be recognised by those with whom we work. And they are likely to react to us by adopting a reciprocal role, as pupil, child or subordinate.

Group work texts and manuals are not short on lists of roles which workers and members take in groups (see, for example, Harris, 1994). Perhaps the usefulness of these suggested roles lies in what they say about the practitioner's overall task – to work in such ways as to support the group to achieve the objectives of the project in which it is engaged. As with the choice of 'dispositions', this involves the worker making sensitive decisions about what is needed at a particular time. None of these roles is owned only by the worker however: any group member may take any of them on. Indeed, Davies (1975: 106) suggests that interventions by the worker are only justified when they are unlikely to be made by another group member. And the more the worker says and does, the fewer openings there are for others to do what is meaningful for them.

[...]

Case study 2: The anger management project

A youth work agency wishes to offer young people an opportunity to learn how to manage their anger better. Put simply, the experimental project is based upon the idea that, for some young people, becoming angry and aggressive leads to confrontations – at school with other students and with teachers, and outside school with peers, parents and authority figures. The agency's workers have done some

analysis of this issue and want to pilot a project to tackle the problem. They work closely with schools, education welfare, youth justice and social services in order to develop the proposed scheme. Subsequently, they will undertake a careful evaluation of the pilot scheme to judge its effectiveness.

Six young men between thirteen and sixteen are invited to participate in the project, which will consist of an intensive course during school time. All are in contact with welfare agencies, where concern about their anger has been expressed by the young people themselves as well as those working with them. The group project is intended to supplement individual educational work being undertaken with each of the participants by the agencies involved.

Clear aims and objectives are set for the course by the agencies. A conversation is held with each of the young men before the course begins, so that they are fully informed of what it is about and able to decide for themselves whether to attend. The programme reflects what could be achieved by working with a group rather than with individual work. For example, participants are asked to work in two groups and helped to devise a script to be performed by the other group, based on an example of the sort of situation in which they become angry, and how they had dealt with this. The performance was followed by discussion of what had happened and whether there were alternative actions open to the characters.

[...]

Designing and managing projects for learning

In this section we will consider how we set about devising projects in ways which fulfil their potential for learning. The main focus is on two aspects: deciding whether and how to pursue a project, and agreeing project objectives. The section ends with a brief consideration of project management.

As informal educators, we are concerned with what Brookfield (1986: 233) refers to as mutuality: the idea that we are engaged with learners in collaborative activity. Young (1999: 69) uses a similar idea, that the youth work relationship is based upon reciprocity. This leads to two important observations. First, the more we take the lead role as educators in defining needs and designing learning, the less space we leave for those with whom we work to do it for themselves. Second, that in designing learning, the more closely we specify objectives, content and methods, the less emphasis is likely to be given to all of the learning which might arise informally and in response to people's own identified needs and reflection.

Why a project?

When as educators we become involved with people in designing, supporting or running group projects, we will already have made a number of decisions about how we will work. As suggested at the beginning of the chapter, projects are by definition time-limited. Doing a project suggests that the intentions we started out with will be met by the time it is complete. This might suggest that project work is straightforward and predictable. In my experience, however, projects rarely follow a purely logical and text-book process. In theory, the steps might look something like this:

- 1) Identify a need and examine whether or how this need can or should be met.
- 2) Decide whether meeting the need identified fits the purposes of your agency.
- 3) Decide whether meeting this need is a priority when compared with other work.
- 4) Draw up a draft project plan including the objectives to be met, the time-scale and, ideally, the success criteria.
- 5) Identify the resources which will be required to implement the plan.
- 6) Gain agreement for the project plan from those who will be involved or affected.
- 7) Carry out the planned project.
- 8) Evaluate the process and its effects and decide what (if anything) to do next.

The trouble is that what appears as a relatively straightforward process is much more complex when applied to real life. We cannot always see clearly what a 'need' is, and others may have a different view. Agency purposes are not always so clearly defined that, when a new situation arises, we can make a decision about whether we should pursue a course of action. Priorities change: what seemed important yesterday may be overtaken by something more urgent. People may become enthusiastic and we will want to avoid disappointing them; or they may lose interest.

Because of the ways in which we work, projects will come about in a variety of ways, for example:

- someone has a 'bright idea' about which they are enthusiastic and we latch on to their idea;
- in conversation with those with whom we work, we begin to see a way in which a project might create an opportunity or meet a particular need;

- in developing a programme for our centre or club, we try out some ideas for a project which we hope will catch members' imagination;
- a source of money becomes available and we try to think about a useful way of using it;
- we attempt to extend the work of our agency by undertaking some research and developing a project;
- we work with other agencies who have identified an issue or problem they wish to tackle.

Doing projects has to be a mixture of science and art: we must be both rational and creative, logical and reflective, analytical yet opportunistic, prepared to lead and able to 'go with the flow'. So we need some adaptable tools and techniques for thinking our way through the complexities. Perhaps we should return to the two projects we considered earlier in order to illustrate the process.

Case Study 1 involves a group of young people following a dance project that they have thought up themselves. The youth worker responds to the idea. What then, is the 'need' to which she is responding? [...].

A number of points arise here that we can apply to other projects. First, our practice is guided by the way in which we, and our agencies, view our purpose. In this case, as we saw earlier (Case Study 1 Revisited), the worker's intentions arise partly from policy (Local Agenda 21 and its intentions for democracy and participation), and partly from her own professional knowledge, skills and values.

Second, we have to think ahead in order to see what will be needed for the project to work: the resources (skills, money, time, equipment); the motivation of those who will be involved. Can we do it? Will their interest be sustained? Have we helped them to think about the consequences?

Third, we need to be clear about the role we will take in the project. What will the group need from us if the project is to succeed? What is our judgement about the group's readiness – its internal resources of skills, knowledge and ideas, its ability to maintain itself? How can our involvement enable the group's resources to grow?

These initial questions guide our decision to develop (or support) a project:

- What is the need as we perceive it?
- What purposes and policies will be fulfilled?
- What are the intended benefits, including learning?
- What opportunities are available (or can be developed)?

- What resources will be required (and can be obtained)?
- What will be my (and my agency's) role, and who needs to agree?

Case Study 2 is an interesting example. Here, the youth agency concerned did not simply have to ask itself critical questions about the need identified, the intended benefits and impact, but also to think hard about the approach it would adopt and the resources required. This led the agency to pilot the programme in one or two schools before proceeding. From its evaluation, it learned that its first idea was not sufficiently developed: if it was to make a difference to young people's lives, the programme needed to be longer and there had to be opportunities built in for the young people to be supported after the initial course.

The agency also needed to ask questions about its role: what does a youth work agency bring to this issue which means that it is best placed to intervene? Its decision to go ahead was based on the conviction that it could promote learning for these young men that might not otherwise be available to them. This raised questions about how schools would use the programme: for example, did the young people come to the programme under pressure from teachers? This had implications for how the project was designed, as well as raising fundamental questions about whether it should be offered at all.

We need to think critically about the nature of need: what are its causes, whose perceptions are at work? And if we have doubts about a project but still wish to proceed, can we do so in a way that allows us to adjust plans or change tack once we know more? For example, we might agree that there will be a review point after a few weeks, or that we will only commit limited resources in the first instance. The bigger the project, the more important it is to get things right. This is one aspect of what is often referred to as 'cost-benefit analysis'.

Planning the project and setting objectives

Let us assume that you have now made a decision to go ahead with your project. This means that you have:

- a clear analysis of a need;
- a clear purpose and aim;
- an idea for pursuing the project.

How good our idea is will be central to the success of our project. This is the creative side of our work. It doesn't matter how careful is our analysis of need,

or how clear our aim. If people are not attracted to the idea, if it does not win their enthusiasm, it is unlikely to work. Sometimes, we will be able to hitch our plans to their enthusiasm (as in Case Study 1); at other times, we might need to stimulate them to come up with a good idea, or enthuse them with our own. Whichever way we do it, though, a 'trigger' for the project will be needed.

At the same time, we have to recognise that the idea is not in itself the purpose, only the *medium* through which the need identified is to be met, and the aim to be fulfilled. It is the *how*, not the *what* or *why* of our plan.

Before we go much further, we will want to try out our idea to see whether it is likely to get support: from the people we are working with, from our colleagues, and perhaps others too. We will want to encourage as much talking about the idea as we can. There is little point in devising a detailed project plan if the idea turns out to be a dud, so a little 'market-testing' may save a lot of wasted time and energy. In testing the idea, it will usually get better as others' ideas begin to be included.

By now we can assume that there is a viable project idea: we believe it will work. So we are ready to undertake some detailed planning. That will mean devising the objectives which the project will meet: the specific things the project will achieve. Who is going to do this and how will it be done? These are important questions because they demand that we think both about the outcome of our work (in this case, the outcomes of the project), as well as the process by which it will be achieved. We can think back to Case Study 2 in order to illustrate this issue. The youth work agency involved devised the anger management programme with other agencies concerned with young people's welfare. A project group drawn from the agencies devised the objectives.

In this sort of project, there is a strong emphasis upon curriculum. The objectives define what participants will learn – and will reflect perceptions and values held by the agencies and their (adult) workers about young people. In this case, young people themselves are not closely involved in devising the project and setting its objectives. They may have been involved at an earlier stage, but the project is essentially adult-led (i.e. educator-led). This further illustrates my earlier point: the central idea of the project is only the means by which purposes are fulfilled. There may be many other ways that the same overall aim of helping young people to manage their anger could have been tackled, for example through a peer-led project. The agency's view is that the approach it has agreed is, in some way, the most likely to achieve its purpose.

In devising project objectives we are enacting the principles and values by which we work. In Case Study 2, young people are involved by ensuring that they have a clear idea about what the programme will offer, and by trying to ensure that their participation is voluntary. A contract or agreement with each young person is made before the programme begins. Once they are involved,

the programme then gives the young people some control over its content: a broad and agreed framework is set for the learning, then participants choose its focus so that it best meets their particular needs. Dialogue and negotiation are built in to what are broadly pre-defined parameters.

Contrast this with Case Study 1. There, the worker might help the group to identify the objectives to be met. Some may be identified only once the project is under way, for example when the group realises that in order to maintain itself, members need to think more about group processes. It is a much more fluid and organic project. Learning opportunities arise from the task (developing a dance group and putting on a performance), rather than learning itself providing its basis. In Case Study 1 the worker is asking: how can I enable learning to arise from the task? In Case Study 2 the workers are asking: what tasks can we devise which will enable learning to take place?

From this discussion it should be clear by now that in pursuing projects we are likely to use a range of educational interventions, and that these will be reflected in any project plan we devise. There may be an educator-led or learner-led emphasis, but we will wish to pursue approaches which offer as much opportunity for learner autonomy as possible, consistent with our intentions and purposes. This has implications for the approach we take to planning: the extent to which we can engage people in the devising of the project, or setting the objectives.

Each of the six questions we used in creating a plan can be approached so that group members take primary responsibility for following them through. Or the educator may do the planning, with learner influence designed to occur at a later stage. So, in planning the project we can ask:

Who will:

- 1) identify need and examine whether or how this can or should be met?
- 2) decide whether meeting the need identified fits the purposes of the agency?
- 3) decide whether meeting this need is a priority when compared with other work?
- 4) draw up a draft project plan including the objectives to be met, the time-scale and the success criteria?
- 5) identify and obtain the resources which will be required to implement the plan?
- 6) gain agreement for the project plan?

And *how* will we assist them?

Asking these questions at the planning stage says much about whose project this is and the educative role we are adopting.

Managing the project

Much of this section of the chapter has been about thinking through purpose, role and task: what we are attempting to do, and how we will approach it. Managing the project is about following these through, paying attention at each stage to the same questions. Just as in project planning, we are attempting to build mutuality – shared ownership – into the process, so we will wish to do this in project management.

Of course we want to ensure that projects are completed satisfactorily, but not at the expense of people's learning, growth and autonomy. We will want to adopt a role which reflects what we are trying to achieve, including learning about core values of virtue, equality and fairness, caring for others, identity and self-esteem. That means striking a careful balance between completing the project task and paying attention to questions of process and learning: *how* the task will be completed. We are reminded of the triangle mentioned earlier (p. 126) – the balance between maintaining the *task*, the *group* and the *individual*. An enabling role does not mean paying less attention to task completion, but thinking through how it can be achieved in ways which build confidence and maximise learning for those involved. This is the balance between what Herschel Prins referred to as the *enabling* and *ensuring* functions (in Marken and Payne, 1987: 37), and there are potential conflicts between them.

The chart opposite summarises this balance.

The left side of Table 11.1 shows a simple management process. Although it appears as a series of linear steps, in reality we may need to revisit earlier steps as the project proceeds. So for example, questions raised about resources may mean going back to adjust the objectives. Or if we discover that problems are arising for some members of the group, we may need to stop one part of the task while we pay attention to process.

Each of the steps on the left is necessary for a project to be managed successfully. Depending upon its nature, time-scale and complexity, some may be more important than others, but all will need to be present in one form or another, even in simple projects. Think of a relatively straightforward project such as running a workshop on 'young women and the media'. You might expect it to take quite a bit of *planning*, but there may be few opportunities to *monitor and adjust*. Nonetheless, when participants begin to show signs of boredom, or an unanticipated issue emerges, the project managers will need to make a quick decision about how to respond. In more long-term projects, monitoring and adjusting will take place regularly and may result in revising plans and possibly even rethinking the purpose.

We must not assume, however, that for management to take place, we (informal educators) must do all, or indeed any, of the managing. Again, it is

Table 11.1 The balance between enabling and ensuring

Ensuring function	Enabling function: think about
Clarify purpose	Whose need? How is it to be defined, and by whom? What benefits? Whose perceptions will inform our intentions? How will the project fulfil the purpose? How does the project purpose fit with informal education principles? What values are reflected? Who needs to own the project? How can I act to enable their ownership? Have I negotiated a clear role for myself/my agency? How will my role support the group's learning? How will policies, e.g. equality, confidentiality, health and safety, be enacted?
Set objectives	What objectives? Who will set them and how? Who else needs to be involved, and how? Do they reflect the right balance between task and learning-related objectives? Are they achievable? By when? Can we develop a useful learning framework or curriculum?
Identify resources	What resources will be needed? What resources are available? What resources does the group have? How can these be enhanced, e.g. through supporting group learning? How can I help the group to use its own resources? How can I help it to identify what further resources will be required? What do they need from me?
Plan	What steps are required in order to complete the project? How can I support the group to do its own planning? Does the group make clear, shared decisions? What decisions might I need to reserve for myself? Can these be negotiated? How does the plan allow for learning to take place?
Organise and develop	What skills in organising does the group have? Are the group's own roles clear and helpful? Are relationships in the group helping it to achieve? In what ways are power issues being dealt with? Is the group communicating well? How best can I support them?
Monitor and adjust	How will the group measure its progress and make decisions about next steps? Is the group on track? Is the group creating space for itself to reflect? Can mistakes, issues and problems be aired? In what ways can I assist?
Evaluate	How will the group know what it has achieved? Is there a clear end-point in sight? How can I assist the group to gain a sense of achievement? How can individual and group learning be recognised and acknowledged? What next? How can I help them to build on their achievements and to move on? What next for me and my agency? What have we learned? What impact on the need? What should we do as a result?

a question of role: what responsibility are we to take for the project's success? Can we fulfil the ensuring function without taking control and undermining the core principles and purposes of informal education? How best can we perform our educational role?

The right side of the chart suggests some of the questions we might ask of ourselves in planning and running a project. The key idea is simply this: ensuring (a management function) does not have to mean *doing*. I can choose to ensure by *enabling* instead of controlling. In doing so I do not relinquish my responsibility to try to make things happen successfully, but choose a role for myself which gives the group as much control over its own destiny as I can. I support group members' growth and development most by recognising that:

People ... learn social and political responsibility only by experiencing that responsibility ... by actively participating.

(Freire, 1974: 36)

When we work with people we become part of the complex web of roles within the group. The role we adopt as informal educator sits alongside and interacts with their roles. If the educator's management role is to be complementary, it must enable group members to assume responsibility for what happens, to take as much control as possible. We can then attend primarily to the opportunities for learning which the project presents: by encouraging group members to reflect upon and learn from and about themselves, other group members, and the task in which they are engaged. In that way we build in the mutuality and reciprocity that we seek.

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