

Chapter 13

JOURNEY INTO THE ACTING COMMUNITY: EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING AND CHANGE IN COMMUNITY GROUPS*

David N. Thomas

The language of community work conveys *movement*—the word 'community' often prefaces words like 'work', 'development', 'change', 'action' and 'organisation'. Community work is concerned with the movement of resources, service functions, decision-making power (Perlman and Gurin, 1972, p. 57) and opportunities. It is also about movement in people who join neighbourhood groups—such as tenants' associations, playground committees, parent-run play groups, and care groups. I shall consider two aspects of movement concerning people: first, the major phases of a process that Haggstrom has called 'the migration of marginal groups into the acting community' (1970, p. 102); second, the changes that occur to and within individuals—for instance, in their values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence.

But, first, a word of caution: the paper draws upon my experiences as a community worker, the scarce writings of fellow community workers, and the work of others, like community teachers, who have written about their projects. I have seen local people change and develop through the time of their membership of neighbourhood groups—groups which achieved substantial material benefits for their constituents; other community workers and adult educators have also witnessed such changes—see, for instance, the accounts by Sidney Jacobs (1976, ch. 11) and Tom Lovett (1975, ch. 4). But the community worker's own testament to change in group members is not hard-nosed evidence. I cannot be *certain* that people changed through involvement in community action, even though they themselves might testify to it. Such changes may have begun before their participation in neighbourhood groups (and thus explain *why* they became participants), or they may have been wrought by other factors in the neighbourhood, family or work situations of group members of which I was not aware. The reader should know that there have been very few systematic investigations that enable us to be conclusive about the fact of individual change through community action, or about the nature and the

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extent of such changes. What little evidence is available from social science research findings may be found in Rothman, 1974 (see pts 5 and 6).

THE INTERNAL REVOLUTION

Community work is concerned with *product* and *process*—the first refers to the interest of workers in specific, tangible and material products from the efforts of groups; and process goals are 'to do with the worker's perceptions of, hopes for, and relationships with the people who constitute the action system'. These process, interactional, educational or relationship goals 'refer to the enhancement and strengthening of the competence of participants' (Kramer and Specht, 1969, p. 9).

There is considerable disagreement amongst practitioners and writers as to the appropriate emphasis to be given to process goals. Biddle and Biddle, for instance, argue that 'community development is a social process by which human beings can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local aspects of a frustrating and changing world. It is a group method for expediting personality growth' (1966, p. 78). This conception of community work has been criticised by Khinduka who suggests, 'It is just this preoccupation with process and with personality that keeps community development from becoming an effective instrument for large-scale institutional change' (1975, p. 180).

An interest in process also characterises the radical left in community work, which is as often preoccupied with educational and interactional goals, and as often dismissive of the material gains aspired to by local people for their neighbourhoods. Here, the language of process is that of increasing political consciousness and awareness, or developing political capacity and understanding. The development of a critical consciousness helps people better to understand the factors and processes that oppress their daily lives; this is 'conscientisation'—a learning that enables one 'to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (Freire, 1972, p. 15). Conscientisation includes an enabling process to train the working class. This training occurs at three levels: political training to enable men to participate in power at all levels; economic training to take up roles as the producers, distributors and consumers of products; and social training to enhance men's awareness of their duties and responsibilities as members of the working class (Alfero, 1972, pp. 7–8).

The work and thoughts of Paulo Freire on education as a 'practice for freedom' have done much to re-emphasise process goals even amongst those pursuing community work as a radical alternative, who had no stomach for the personality growth values of writers like Biddle and Biddle. There have been other influences beside Freire, and two are worth mentioning. First, the integration of community work and adult education

activities in developments like the Liverpool Educational Priority Area Project and the appointment of community workers to adult education institutes, and as link people between schools and local communities. Second, the influence of radical philosophy, particularly that of Pateman (1975), who, in discussing obstacles to revolutionary change, identifies the importance of communicational activities, and hence that of process and educational goals, in political change and, I would argue, in community work. Pateman suggests that certain cognitive and linguistic behaviours perpetuate oppression and these have to be changed if people are to understand and confront the world for what it is in order to change it.

MOVEMENT INTO THE ACTING COMMUNITY

Communities, suggests Haggstrom, have two guises: first, there is the community as *object*—'it is an interdependent system of neighbourhoods, bureaucratic work organisations, interest groups, political parties and other sub-systems, tied together by processes such as transportation, communication and the circulation of money'. Second, there is the community as an *acting community*—'an entity that engages in collective action and embarks on one or more social journeys'. A group in the acting community participates in identifying community needs and problems, and participates in decision making and often the implementation of these decisions. A group in the object community is acted upon, whereas a group in the acting community acts for itself and upon others.

People and groups have differential access to the acting community, an access that is determined by factors like class and economic position, race, stigma and educational opportunities. Groups who seldom get into the acting community, and are more usually the objects of others' actions, include immigrants, single parents, children, the mentally ill, the poor and the homeless. These people comprise Haggstrom's 'marginal groups'. The community worker can help such groups and neighbourhoods to create organisations to make the journey into the acting community. The making of this journey to, and entry into, the acting community provides the major opportunities for growth and learning for individuals in community groups—I act, therefore I am.

The learning of the individual on this social journey, through which acting brings about an affirmation of being, affects his capacities for *reflection, vision, planning* and *action*. In practice, learning occurs simultaneously in these areas, and we find that they are interlocking and mutually supporting. This is particularly true of reflection and action: Alfero has described reflection as 'a structural factor, inseparable from practice', because it generates new actions and supports that which has already been accomplished (1972). Aneurin Bevan put it very succinctly: 'action and thought go hand-in-hand in reciprocal revelation' (1952, p. 18).

I think that the dialectic between reflection, vision, planning and action is embodied within Goodenough's concept of 'culture' – which he takes to consist 'of standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about it' (1963, pp. 258–9). Goodenough suggests that successful outcomes in community development may be contingent on local people making changes in their individual cultures. He describes the complex interplay between social and economic change in a community and changes in the private cultures of individuals.

People in marginal groups will remain powerless where their private and subgroup cultures (in Goodenough's sense) are inappropriate, inoperative or undervalued in the acting community. The responses of the people described by Dennis to the threat of demolition by the local authority of their homes (e.g. 'I went to the Town Hall about it, but they want it, so that's the end of it. There's nothing more we can do . . .') are good examples of individual private cultures that need to be changed if people are to deal with threats to their well-being that emanate from one system (the local authority) in the acting community (1970, p. 346). The community worker must work with people to achieve private and group cultures that will be as effective as possible when up against the norms and procedures of the acting community. The revitalisation of reflective faculties is a first step in the development of an effective operating culture.

REFLECTION

Reflection, meaning an internal process of contemplation and reasoning, is a means through which people and groups overcome what Rowbotham has called a 'paralysis of consciousness' (1974) and become able to understand, conceptualise and articulate what goes on around them and impinges on their social, economic and political lives. Reflection of this kind may produce an understanding of how to intervene to affect these forces, and to predict, control and overcome them. The importance of this reflective process is that people, if they are to undertake a social and political journey that will not be without its costs, need to be aware that the journey is, first, necessary and, second, that it will have benefits for themselves and relevant others.

The community worker will work with people to develop a critical awareness of themselves in their local situation in respect of an issue or problem around which a group is forming. Group members will come to grasp, first, a sense of their own marginality in the community and in society at large, and a linked understanding of the futility of individual efforts to achieve the goals they have in mind. Secondly, reflection produces an understanding of the dynamics and power of the acting

community, and an appreciation that there are people and agencies within the acting community who need to be changed in order to achieve something. Thirdly, there develops in reflection a sense of individual and group worth and the beginnings of an understanding of the varied potentials of people in a group, and the potential powerfulness of group action. Here, too, the individual begins to conceive of himself as part of a system acting with others for change, and to recognise new roles and responsibilities.

Reflection is part of the process through which local people achieve the changes in identity or self-image that are often fundamental to success in community work. These changes are fundamental because a good deal of community work involves populations where there is often considerable apathy and resignation, little confidence, and no sense of personal and collective worth. Despite a wealth of indigenous talents, the organiser often finds that there is no desire to change when people view their selves and their situations as impossible to change. Specific techniques have been suggested by Clinard for use by community development workers in facilitating changes in self-image (1966, pp. 301–8).

Reflection, then, should help individuals to give up defining themselves as powerless, and their own or neighbourhood situation as a constant, immutable given. There are, in principle, no limits to the objects that may be reflected upon, and eventually the community worker may find an awareness in individuals about wider, structural issues in society. There are, however, a number of obstacles to learning in the reflective process and these include:

- (1) the confidence that people have in the validity of their own perceptions is, as Dennis has claimed, often 'systematically and powerfully under attack by opponents . . . decked in all the paraphernalia of prestige and scientific professionalism' (1975, p. 146);
- (2) the complexity and breadth of a person's reflections on the reality that confronts him, his neighbourhood and his class may depend in part upon possession of an elaborate language code with which to name and conceptualise the world (Bernstein, 1971). Pateman (1975, p. 34) and Rowbotham (1974, ch. 3) have also suggested other conceptual and verbal factors which may explain limitations in the development of our critical consciousness;
- (3) reflection, and dialogue between group members, and between them and the community worker, may be impaired by certain communicational activities and conventions. These, according to Pateman, include idle and repressive forms of discourse and evasions of argument. Pateman argues that 'If widespread through a population, and pervasive in their influence, . . . evasions . . . can be of considerable political significance. For such evasions sustain, in

practice, all existing social institutions, since they stand in the way of any critical (reflective) consciousness' (1975, p. 47).

Techniques to facilitate reflection have been developed and used by community workers. Alinsky, in particular, is well known for his repertoire of interventions designed to stimulate people into a thinking awareness of their situation. Much of his writing emphasises the importance of reflection and he argues, for instance, that 'the function of the organiser is to raise questions that agitate, that break through the accepted pattern . . . [to raise] . . . the internal questions within individuals that are so essential for the revolution which is external to the individual' (1971, pp. 72-3). He provides a very vivid example of stimulating 'internal questions':

Organizer: Do you live over in that slummy building?

Answer: Yeah. What about it?

Organizer: What the hell do you live there for?

Answer: What do you mean, what do I live there for? Where else am I going to live? I'm on welfare.

Organizer: Oh, you mean you pay rent in that place?

Answer: Come on, is this a put-on? Very funny! You know where you can live for free?

Organizer: Hmm. That place looks like it's crawling with rats and bugs.

Answer: It sure is.

Organizer: Did you ever try to get that landlord to do anything about it?

Answer: Try to get him to do anything about anything! If you don't like it, get out. That's all he has to say. There are plenty more waiting.

Organizer: What if you didn't pay your rent?

Answer: They'd throw us out in ten minutes.

Organizer: Hmm. What if nobody in that building paid their rent?

Answer: Well, they'd start to throw . . . Hey, you know, they'd have trouble throwing everybody out, wouldn't they?

Organizer: Yeah, I guess they would.

Answer: Hey, you know, maybe you got something - say, I'd like you to meet some of my friends. How about a drink?

British community workers have also described their techniques for promoting reflection (see, for instance, Mitton and Morrison, 1972, p. 30). One of these techniques that is being used more and more as an educational, consciousness-raising tool in community work is video. Equipment and techniques in video, and an analysis of its strengths and limitations in community work, are discussed in a handbook produced by Inter-Action Trust (Inter-Action Advisory Service, 1975).

Besides dialogical and other techniques used by the community worker,

significant developments in reflection may also occur for individuals as a result of events and decisions in the wider community. For instance, a tenant may become more aware of his marginality, and more motivated to take the chairmanship of a group, when he experiences uncaring behaviour from 'putter-offers' at the Town Hall.

VISION

Reflection enables men to understand the situations that limit them and to attempt to overcome them. Vision follows on from reflection - increased consciousness of me-in-this-situation can lead (but so seldom does for marginal people) to a vision of me-in-another-situation in the future.

Effective action is contingent upon local people being able to conceive of themselves as 'new' people - a conception of themselves working at tasks, taking on roles, and exercising skills and knowledge in ways previously unimaginable to them. The community worker's task is to facilitate people's ability to articulate a desired future state of affairs (such as better housing, a new playground), and then to work with them to realise it. The challenge facing the community worker, however, is that before, and at the outset of people becoming organised, group members are often not visionary. They may perceive something is wrong, but often they do not know what they want to do by way of improving the situation, or how to go about it. The community worker's task, then, is to develop in people a capacity for visionary thought, to help them cross 'the frontier which separates being from being more' (Freire, 1972, p. 71).

The process of becoming able to articulate alternative visions about themselves and their neighbourhood situations may itself be a growth experience for local people. Haggstrom has described a 'psychological conflict' that occurs in marginal people at the outside of joining an organisation - conflict between an image of themselves as inferior beings that has been internalised from the definitions and stigmas of the acting community; and the beginnings of a vision of themselves as being as competent and able as anyone else. Growth occurs as 'marginal people ward off the definitions of their inferiority and act on the basis of assumptions about their potential equality within the acting community' (1970, p. 105). Previously apathetic or uninterested members become 'galvanised into action'. This galvanisation, which seems to come from a synthesis of reflection on the here-and-now and vision about what might be, is a significant point of development for people in local groups. Alinsky has described its sustaining, almost therapeutic qualities very vividly: 'If people are organised with a dream of the future ahead of them, the critical planning that takes place in organising and the hopes and the fears for the future give them just as much inner satisfaction as does their actual achievement' (1969, p. 49).

The community worker will often be purposively catalytic in galvanising group members to cross the frontier between 'being and being more'. The worker can do this by using his own vision of a better world to inspire group members. Haggstrom has written beautifully of the mobilising effects of the community worker's vision:

An organiser must not only perceive how people are, but it is also essential that he be *unrealistic* in that he perceives people as they can be. Noting what is possible, the organiser projects this possibility and moves people to accept it and to seek to realise it. The organiser helps people to develop and live in an alternative reality in which their image of themselves and their abilities is enhanced . . . People are moved to accept the new world of which they catch a glimpse because it appears to be attainable in practice and intrinsically superior to the world in which they have been living. (Haggstrom, 1970, p. 106)

But moving people to accept this new world, to migrate into the acting community, requires at least three things of the community worker. First, that he works with group members to develop an appropriate organisation and decision-making processes; second, that he works with the group to transform visionary statements into operational goals; and, third, that he helps people to see leadership as located not just in himself but in themselves and other members of the group. This facilitates the development of a leadership nucleus, a leadership that represents both the aspiration and the means to a slowly forming alternative reality. How does this leadership nucleus emerge? At one level, the community worker struggles to shift basic assumption activity (Bion, 1961) in the group from dependence (on himself or the imagined magical potency of the group) to controlled pairing (between members, or between himself and the chairman or secretary). At other levels, the leadership nucleus that best embodies the group's collective vision emerges in response to events in the community like a meeting with a prestigious decision maker, or the setting up of a cinch fight by the community worker, and through constant dialogue and disputation within the group and between it and its opponents in the acting community.

PLANNING

As the vision establishes itself the means to realise it become important concerns to the members, and the community worker seeks to stimulate an awareness in the group about the need for planning—the need for conscious, intentional and purposeful decisions and activities that take the group forward to the achievement of its goals. Many group members have to be weaned away from relying on familiar but inappropriate methods of

organisation and decision making. Mitton and Morrison have pointed out that taking action in groups to tackle a problem was in itself an unfamiliar experience to the mothers with whom they worked; a consequence is that people 'do not develop skills in organising themselves collectively, making group decisions, handling group funds and so on. The traditional ways of doing things, such as keeping accounts in one's head or passing information on the grapevine, are suited to everyday tasks but were not always adequate for playgroup business' (1972, p. 156). It has also been suggested by Rainwater that working-class people are suspicious of and hostile to participation in organisations and this hinders the community worker's attempts to involve them (1968).

Daniel Schler has described four areas in which local people must learn a planning or social technology in order to push forward the interests of neighbourhood groups (1970, p. 126). People need to acquire and improve their skills in:

- (1) rational goal setting, so that the activities of individual members are more likely to be focused on collectively agreed tasks and targets;
- (2) identifying, acquiring and planning the use of resources in and outside the group so as best to achieve the goals of the group;
- (3) rational processes of dividing up labour, in order, for instance, that no one person becomes overburdened with the group's work;
- (4) administering and co-ordinating the various subgroups and activities within the ambit of the neighbourhood group.

Planning also involves the formulation of strategies and tactics on the part of neighbourhood groups, and here again members need to acquire competence and confidence. According to Brager and Specht there are five areas in which the group needs to become skilled. They are:

- (a) the development of a tactical game plan—involving the identification of the essential players in the game, and an anticipation of their likely moves;
- (b) researching the target—the group must acquire knowledge of the weaknesses and strengths of the target system;
- (c) empathising with the target—'to observe, hear and understand the target permits more informed tactical judgements and increased tactical options';
- (d) image management—learning to choose the image that is most appropriate for the tactics of the group;
- (e) timing the action—groups need to learn that the sequence and timing of events influence outcomes (Brager and Specht, 1973, pp. 272ff).

ACTING

Membership of neighbourhood groups demands of individuals that they learn new skills and knowledge, and extend what they already bring to the group. This is particularly the case with those who take up leadership roles such as chairman, secretary and treasurer. Several writers have made the point that, in relation to the size of their constituency or neighbourhood, the number of people who significantly develop in this way is quite small.

People are called upon to expand their skills in both task performance and group maintenance, both of which require that group members gain *technical* and *interactional* skills and knowledge. There have been many recent descriptions written by community workers of the need for local people to acquire these skills: for instance, Mitton and Morrison, 1972; Benington, 1975; Thomas, 1975, 1976; and Jacobs, 1976. Many of the texts already referred to in this paper also contain analyses of the technical and interactional skills required of both community workers and members of neighbourhood groups. And several attempts to list the knowledge and skills that community workers need to have (for example, Naish and Filkin, 1974; Association of Community Workers, 1975) can be seen also to describe many of the areas in which local people need to acquire competence.

(1) Technical Skills and Knowledge

There are a variety of jobs to do in a neighbourhood group, and they will vary with the nature of the group's concerns. But in most groups individuals have to develop civic or committee skills to some degree or other—drawing up agendas, writing minutes, implementing decisions, keeping financial accounts, printing and distributing a newsletter, using a telephone and writing letters. The writing of letters is usually one of the first significant explorations of personal skill and confidence by group members, and writers have drawn attention both to its importance in the process of personal change, and to its limitations as an instrument of negotiation in social change (see, for example, Benington, 1975). Members in many groups have also to master techniques involved, for instance, in doing a survey, getting round a petition, arranging a deputation to the Town Hall, holding a press conference, and organising a rent strike or demonstration.

People are also likely to improve their knowledge, in pursuit of the group's goals and the interests of its constituency, in matters like personal, work and welfare rights; aspects of social problems and issues; legislation and conventions that impinge on the work of the group (in housing, health, play and planning, for instance); resources in the neighbourhood and wider community; political processes and the workings of private and public

bureaucracies; tribunals and public inquiries; and the knowledge and roles of specialists in the community, like the planner, the health inspector, the community worker and the solicitor.

(2) Interactional Skills and Knowledge

These are of two kinds: first, political skills and competence; and, second, caring and supportive capacities within the neighbourhood group.

Group members need to become adept in political transactions within the group, and between the group and the constituency that it represents. The group also has to develop skills in managing its relationships with systems in its environment—the Town Hall, service agencies, potential resource people and groups, the press and television, other neighbourhood groups, councillors, MPs, trade unions and private and public industries. Relationships with all these systems require broad political skills in representing, and negotiating for, the interests of the groups. It also includes competence in executing and evaluating chosen strategies and tactics.

People who take leadership roles in neighbourhood groups also need to be caretakers of the emotional life of the group, and to be aware of the effects of people's intra- and inter-personal relationships (within or outside the group) on the group's work, as well as events in their social and economic lives. Caring for the group also involves 'training' members for leadership roles, sharing the burden of the work, and attending to the recruitment of new members. The community worker and officers need to understand, and mobilise in the group's interest, the original and changing motivations for membership of the group, and to be sensitive to the effect of behaviour in the group like scapegoating. A fuller discussion of group behaviours has been provided for community workers by McCaughan (1977a).

LEVELS OF APPLICATION OF CHANGE

People in neighbourhood groups thus change and develop their operating cultures in the four areas of reflection, vision, planning and action. But what is the significance and the extent of this change as it occurs and is applied within and outside the community group? I think there are three levels of application of change, and I shall look at these below.

Primary Application

The individual develops in ways that are of immediate and prior application within the context of the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to perform assigned roles and responsibilities within the community group; and between the group and those in its environment with whom it must interact.

Secondary Application

The effects of the changes may be felt in the individual's transactions in his life outside the community group – at home, in the neighbourhood and at work. It is often hoped that learning acquired within the group will enable individuals to become more aware of, and more effective in (1) their civic (including trade union) responsibilities, and (2) sectional or class responsibilities in pursuing structural change.

There may be ways in which membership of a community group enables an individual 'better' to function within his family and social life. Schler has argued that membership of community groups is *intrapsychically* beneficial: 'individuals are encouraged to think and express their feelings towards the community . . . and to divert those feelings into constructive actions . . . which may lead to gratifying accomplishments rather than to failure, frustration, apathy or alienation' (1970, p. 125).

The mere act of involvement in a neighbourhood group can provide relief from, and support in, domestic and work situations. Membership provides opportunities for friendship, support, ventilation, a legitimate outlet for anti-authoritarian/anti-establishment feelings, the use of previously unused talents and energies, a sense of creativity and fulfilment, and the excitement of discussion and controversy. It also provides an 'escape' from domestic problems like overcrowding, loneliness and isolation, routinisation and marital stress. Group membership can provide *relief* through expression, and *restoration* through participation and acceptance: 'Being a respected and effective member of the group, being accepted, being able to share, to participate, belong to the basic constructive experiences in human life' (Foulkes and Anthony, 1965, pp. 15, 27–8). Participation in a group leads, too, to a sense of worth and accomplishment that is gained through being able to help others.

Involvement in community groups can also lead to greater *interpersonal competence*: 'individuals may learn more about how to take others into account and to negotiate for consensus and common goals, rather than seek to dominate through positions of power, authority or status . . . continuous participation in such groups provides the individual with recurring opportunities to experiment with improving his own group performance as well as aiding other individuals in their improvement' (Schler, 1970, p. 25). This interpersonal competence in the group is carried over, it is suggested, into relationships with others in the home and work situation. Mitton and Morrison have provided two examples of this kind of 'carry-over'. In the first, a husband describes the effect on his wife of her involvement in a community group:

At night time she would trot off and be gone for an hour or two and the next day you'd be discussing what had been discussed the night before

and she really did this thinking she was doing some good. She was a person who had been content to do the housework and sit about and go from one day to another, and this certainly made a different woman of her. She met new people, people who I had never met before . . . They all come round to have a chat with her and it really excites her to have these conversations. (Mitton and Morrison, 1972, p. 154)

The second example is a quotation from a general practitioner describing one of the consequences of a community worker's intervention:

At the time of her work here, the number of families who always used to attend surgery began to drop. I've seen women become very independent, expressive people able to organise, able to get information and feel that they were doing something constructive. (1972, p. 160)

Women often experience some liberation from traditional and oppressive sex roles as they take up leadership in community groups, and this has an effect on their relationships with their husbands and family.

Finally, it is important to note that participation in neighbourhood groups helps some people to become more ambitious about the direction of their lives, and thus to try, sometimes successfully, to develop more competence in traditional roles like spouse, parent and breadwinner. Local people improve their jobs, 'go straight', acquire mortgages and houses, attend training courses, and aspire to and take on jobs like welfare rights workers and play group leaders.

Tertiary Application

The acquisition and internalisation of knowledge and expertise becomes especially clear when local people pass on their new-found competence to others within the group, their families and to people in the wider community. The role of group members as educators becomes apparent when they feel able and confident enough to participate in activities like advising other neighbourhood groups; attending inter-group meetings in the community; taking community work students on placement; giving lectures and talks to college students; representing constituents at tribunals; getting up petitions; using the press and the television; and producing newsletters. Internalisation of changes is particularly well advanced when local people are able to challenge and modify the views of the original 'trainer' – the community worker.

HOW LEARNING TAKES PLACE

Little seems to be understood, or written, by community workers (and others, for that matter) about just how people do learn and grow through

their membership of community groups, though much that is relevant may be found in accounts of experiments and projects in the fields of adult education, group dynamics and social psychology.

The community worker's task is to help create a climate in a group in which people want to learn *in order to realise the vision they have for themselves and the neighbourhood*. This is the single fact that most helps the worker in his concern with the educational aspects of his work—that 'knowledge . . . becomes an arsenal of weapons in the battle against injustice and degradation. It is no longer learning for learning's sake, but learning for a real reason, a purpose' (Alinsky, 1969, p. 173). Adults learn best where they have problems to solve, and especially problems that impinge upon their own day-to-day existences (see Knowles, 1972).

One of the most potent forms of learning in community groups is learning through doing—'a skill is learned by practice . . . practice is not possible until there is some confidence . . . confidence develops from observing demonstrations of skill by others, over a fairly long period' (Mitton and Morrison, 1972, p. 43). Many community workers have in their minds, and are on the look-out for, especially at the start of the life of a group, a sequence of events and decisions that will incrementally build up the confidence and abilities within the group.

Learning also proceeds through dialogue, conversation, argument, conflict and disputation both inside and outside the group. Direct tuition is also possible—for instance, where local people and community workers go on day courses together or where 'experts' are invited to talk about some aspect of the group's work or interests. But some of the most enduring learning takes place through modelling. Local people change and develop values, attitudes, relationships, behaviour, etc. through modelling themselves on someone like the community worker, another professional who is helping the group or a more experienced or able group member. I have described elsewhere some of the possible drawbacks of this kind of learning (1976, p. 162).

CONCLUSION

I expect that some readers will be cynical and wary about some of the claims I have made about individual change in neighbourhood work. This may be caused by the paucity of substantive evidence, and also by a suspicion that I have romanticised the working class, and made it appear that community action was either a kind of people's university, or a growth experience. Perhaps, then, it is well to remember that in the groups in which I worked there were many individuals who did not change, or changed very little, through their experience of community action; who were often overwhelmed and defeated by the demands made of their skills, energies and time (and just as often bounced back); who dropped out of groups; and

who expressed and acted out the feelings of despair and hopelessness that we all experienced in the work. To the extent that they carried this projective burden, they freed other group members to seek and 'to do the truth' through neighbourhood activities, winning important material benefits for their constituents and the community.