

COMMUNITY-LED LEARNING CITIES

A Collaborative Exploration

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Other reports from the Catalyst Fund can be found at the link below.

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Arts & Humanities
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Fostering Community-led Learning City

The aim of this project was to explore what a ‘community-led Learning City’ might look like and how to enable it. To carry out this exploration, researchers built on three existing projects that reconceptualised the relationship between university and communities. Their objective was to frame and develop connections between the projects and look for insights into the Learning City concept.

This report focuses on key aspects to be considered in how to foster a community-led Learning City. It briefly outlines the projects that led to the collaboration, the activities carried out in the exploratory process with the other parties involved, as well as emerging insights and proposed next steps.

INTRODUCTION

This Working Paper has grown out of three distinct AHRC funded Connected Communities projects. These projects were all in their varied ways about agency in community and how that agency emerges, evolves, and then often comes to a halt when confronted with institutions and authority. The authors came together to develop their case studies and to discuss whether their research had common threads that could enable them to further conceptualize the challenges of generating change in low income communities that may feel excluded from decision-making processes.

The authors also sought to reconcile two separate ongoing conversations with Salford Council. One is focused on reframing a civic understanding of ‘creativity’ and ‘culture’ building on insights from a recent research project in the area. The other is interested in framing Salford as a ‘Learning City’ to articulate a range of community cultural, educational, and other processes, including the potential formation of a ‘Community University’. A third strand of the project drew insight from a research project on the Salford-Manchester borders looking at the grounded experiences of organisers and visitors to a well-respected local community centre.

The report brings together the critical reflections of the three researchers on the dynamics and potential of citizen-led learning from their field research and considers how the insights can feed into Salford Council’s Learning City. As the researchers already had connections to the Council, the potential for influencing the framing of the Learning City provided focus to the encounter. In addition, the paper considers the ‘bottom up’ approach to the Learning City idea to consider ‘ownership’ of learning by communities according to their varied experiences and interests, as well as being supported by the Council-led activities.

This paper is intended as an accessible document to non-academics, and its key recommendations have been developed with some of the Salford/Manchester community

actors who participated in the initial projects. It is organized into three sections. The first section brings out the key empirical findings from each of the research projects which enable us to identify the ways agency and autonomy are expressed in varied environments from Cheetham Hill Road (Manchester), Ordsall (Salford), Broomhall (Sheffield), Queensbury, Manningham and Braithwaite Estate (Bradford). The second section brings in social and pedagogical theory to try and explain aspects of this discussion on agency in context, which can be illuminated through the writings of key thinkers. The theory employed here is to enable us to conceptualise why agency in communities might be important to any initiative led by institutions, and how theories of knowledge and learning enable us to understand the dynamics involved. This is not theory for its own sake, but theory to help us with practice and policy. The third section brings together the empirical and the theoretical to argue for how a Learning City idea might become a 'bottom up' as well as a 'top down' initiative. Finally, we will offer a series of recommendations for further research and for the policy and practice development of the Learning City and Community University. The Working Paper will be discussed with Councilors and Council Officers of Salford and Manchester, and with interested academics from Salford and Manchester Universities. It also feeds into the emerging network from Edgehill University aiming at a Greater Manchester approach to knowledge exchange and intellectual enhancement between universities and academics.

Key Empirical Findings

This paper presents the results from a reflection on the role of the communities we worked with in our different Connected Communities projects, whilst also suggesting recommendations for policies and for research. Our aim is to foster the development of a community-led Learning City strategy. The three original projects focused on 1) **Social Action and Power in Community**; 2) **Maximising Already Existing Potential** and 3) **Commoning and Engaging with Public Spaces**.

1. Social Action and Power in Community

Jenny Pearce produced a scoping review for an AHRC Connected Communities project '**Social Action and Power in Community**' which explored the concepts of power in Northern England communities and focused in particular on people's desire for non-hierarchical, discursive decision-making practices. An outcome of this AHRC funded research was a pilot experiment in Bradford of building a 'Community University'. The Community University in Bradford was built by university academics and participants in the Power in Community Scoping Study. Together they built the curriculum, decided on the best forms and times, and submitted a successful bid to the EHRC and Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The experiment (Pearce 2017) generated a great deal of learning about how to develop horizontal pedagogies within hierarchical institutions. The tensions that arise need to be recognized and understood. Knowledge hierarchies invalidate the very sense of 'having knowledge' of those who do not imagine they could aspire to attending a higher education institution. Progressive academics, despite their discursive commitment to horizontality, find it hard to shed the linguistic and other practices which create barriers between the 'educator' and the 'educated'. A process of knowledge *exchange* requires reflexivity amongst academics as well as participants in the spaces of mutual learning, which recognizes the value of the different knowledges in the spaces. Building on the learning from Bradford's Community University as well as experience in Latin America with popular education methodologies, Dr Pearce is interested in experimenting further with the idea of 'Community Universities' in the North of England and how they might foster new forms of knowledge exchange between universities and their communities. The aim would be to open up pathways to reskilling in deindustrialised northern cities, enhancing citizen participation and agency, overcoming inequalities in accessing higher education and recognizing the multiple forms of knowledge required to solve social problems and generate dynamic, change oriented urban life. Through discussing this with Salford Council, the idea of the Learning City was born.

2) Community-led engagement and research

Ideas4Ordsall was a 'community engagement' component of '**Cultural Intermediation**', a large AHRC Connected Communities project that focused on Birmingham and Salford. Anthropologist Dr Jessica Symons (formerly at the University of Salford, now University of

Manchester) focused on Salford's aspect of the research agenda and outputs. In the process, she developed a method, now called the Ordsall Method as a 15-step process to support academics to carry out impactful research in communities (see www.thisisordsall.org).

Jessica developed this method with her project colleagues in response to a strong push within the community to 'maximise' what was already happening in their area. She encountered frustration and anger in the low-income community about their representation as 'hard-to-reach' and reframed the project to emphasise and support ideas that people had in the community working with local intermediaries (Symons 2017, Perry & Symons 2016). This approach produced good engagement in the project with strong and enthusiastic participation. The method was well received by academics, community organisations and council officials and has informed the development of a cultural strategy at Salford city level.

These insights have led to an emphasis on supporting self-determination and the importance of participant engagement in any city initiative that comes from the individuals and communities themselves. Symons argues that a reframing of perspective which puts the citizens in charge and public officials in responsive mode will produce a more resilient and socially engaged society. Her focus is on how to stimulate citizen enthusiasm for a so-called Learning City.

3) Commoning and Engaging with Public Spaces

Anthropologist Luciana Lang worked as a Researcher on '**Understanding Everyday Participation**', a large AHRC Connected Communities project, and as a Researcher-in-Residence in a related project, where she focused on a local park in Cheetham Hill in North Manchester. Lang used a number of methodologies to tease out from participants their narratives of Cheetham Hill, such as historical walks, photo elicitation, peripatetic interviewing, and 'talking-while-gardening'. As part of the Connected Communities Festival, the research team organised a community engagement event to promote a prototype 'stewardship' group for the Park. The festival activities fostered a reflection on engagement with the park and the museum.

The researcher's commitment to consolidate the connections that had been created led on to two other projects with similar dynamics, thereby multiplying the effects of the university-researcher-community involvement. The emerging research focused on the notion of 'commoning', and on how local people engage with and transform public spaces. In its articulation with the Learning City, commoning can be seen as an exercise in autonomy to regain control and share available resources.

In Conversation with the Literature

An analysis of the three case studies mentioned above makes salient both the successes and limitations of community-university entanglements. The concept of the Learning City is based on research by Pearce (2017) into the relational dynamics between universities and their surrounding communities. While universities are focused on paradigm shifts in education relating to student dynamics (O’Flaherty & Philips 2015), digitization (Goodfellow & Lea 2013) and competing in the global economy (Hazelkorn 2015), our fieldwork has shown that communities situated geographically very close to the university are also increasingly vocal about their inclusion in university strategies (Symons 2017). These aspirations align with initiatives within universities such as Connected Communities, the Impact agenda and Widening participation (Facer & Enright 2016). The notion of a ‘Learning City’ situates the university in its geographical and cultural context. It emphasises the inclusion of local communities in university strategy development, thereby pushing them up the agenda.

The existing literature on the topic of education and communities can help us reflect on related experiences elsewhere, and better evaluate practices and policies. The concept of the Learning City invites us to think in terms of new pedagogies in order to break away from the stiffness of old pedagogical models that hold participants in a teleological straightjacket rather than recognising learning as an open ended and never-ending process of embracing new ideas, skills and knowledge. The philosopher Jacques Rancière, author of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991), described this educational model as a ‘pedagogical fiction’, since it keeps a large proportion of people in a perpetual state of marginality. According to this author, this myth of democratic progress becomes even more restraining when projected globally, whether into different territories of the city, or across to the Global South. Based on notions whereby some are ‘slower’ or ‘less clever’ than others, existing educational guidelines perpetuate inequalities. Barriers imposed by language, cultural skills, or digital bureaucracies separate people further and impede the ‘underdeveloped’ from becoming the autonomous beings universities are supposed to create.

In his investigation into the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, the philosopher and educator Paulo Freire debunks the perception of the ‘educated’ as an empty vessel that should be filled by the ‘educator’ (Freire 1996). For the author, education can be an instrument of oppression. He proposes instead that it should be a practice of freedom as emancipation. The core idea of his work is that pedagogic techniques should be elaborated by people themselves, rather than for them. The process would result in a ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ to unleash intellectual emancipation, an endeavour already pursued by the educational philosopher Jean-Joseph Jacotot (1823).

Freire highlights the alienating nature of education when dissociated from the lived experience of the subject, a point also made by the sociologist of education, Pierre Bourdieu

(1984), who sees education as a symbolic form of domination. When analysing the reasons why some students fail at school, Bourdieu concludes that the cultural capital specific to each social class produces a differentiation in the academic levels of students, given that school curricula generally follows a particular interpretation of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984:53). Émile Durkheim (1922) suggested that to educate translates into teaching to think. However, we go beyond this proposition to stress the reflexive potential of education, where the resulting self is different from the initial one and that this is a form of capital. While changes to individuals' economic capital depend on factors that lie well beyond the capabilities of educational and community-based institutions, cultural and social capital can be developed in fertile environments, such as the idealised vision of the Learning City. Against this backdrop, culture and class take on an important role in the concept of the Learning City. Given that both culture and class are intertwined with historical relationships of labour and power, they are both defining elements in people's sense of belonging and exclusion.

The Learning City hopes to tap into those social aspects that are shared by a group, rather than project elements from an outside culture. Our underlying concern in the Learning City as a process is that its methodology and content should be contextually and locally grounded. Thus, methodologies should be designed in a participatory manner taking into consideration local histories and voices; and content should be the result of discussions with participants. Rather than having the 'educator' as the carrier of the word and agent of the narrative, the 'educated' is the one that chooses the narrative that matters, and one connected with her or his reality. Even when this produces ideas that are uncomfortable. The Learning City offers the possibility of enhancing cross-pollination and unblocking existing obstructions that stop people from engaging in a productive manner by respecting their right to their beliefs. As the educated builds their learning from their own social and cultural experiences, so they gain confidence in their experiential knowledges and open up to the potentialities for exchange of knowledges. Academic knowledge now becomes something eagerly embraced and sought after, rather than a form of knowledge which obliterates all other knowledge. Respect for differing views can produce social cohesion.

Collaboration Activities

Building on the existing research, the three researchers designed several activities to stimulate discussion and develop insights. These included the following:

Activity 1: Brainstorming workshop on the role of the university post-Brexit: community/university action research

In May 2017, we brought together academics to discuss ways that universities engage with communities particularly in a post-Brexit climate. The workshop stimulated discussion, identified potential collaborative projects and a set of discrete actions. Participants included academic representatives from Liverpool John Moores, Goldsmiths, Edge Hill, Coventry, Staffordshire as well as the researchers from Manchester and LSE.

The discussion brought out a philosophical concern around the inequalities, injustices and transformation of politics into performed messages which are increasingly and unashamedly unrelated to realities. A strong discomfort/frustration/anger at the failure of universities to respond to communities' needs and respect their agency and knowledge, to give voice to critical academics, and to value work which recognised the importance of community social action and movements. There was a lack of respect for local history, culture and worth in many localities. Working class autodidactic learning strategies and associational life, underpinned by a confident labour movement, had been deeply eroded. Intellectual ideas were becoming associated with a distant, privileged, and 'liberal' elite, reducing incentives to further study and love of learning for its own sake and Universities are becoming less and less part of local communities. As student bodies become increasingly drawn from overseas countries, this issue becomes particularly pertinent.

The possible collaborative projects built on a rich set of existing experiences in working with communities, which included theatre, participatory arts of varied kinds as well as anthropological work and creative community engagement work. Freirean methods were valued by many. We brainstormed ideas, potential activities and funding opportunities that we might individually, in partnership and collectively be interested in. Amongst the initial threads that resonated for many people and which linked our varied English locations, was that of canals, docks, railways, threads associated with trade, colonialism, migration, class and labour and the changing character and meanings of these in the age of Brexit. Rather than tap into what is 'Englishness', a focus on these elements of place, labour, production and transport could generate new thinking about the past as about having 'controlled others' as well as 'being controlled' by varied economic forces and actors. Inventories of how communities expressed their association with the past and their dreams of the future, could enable us to approach Brexit from new angles, which do not question the direction of travel as such but generate a new kind of debate and academic/community knowledge

exchange, capable of informing what is likely to be a polemical and manipulating national debate.

Various practical ongoing activities were discussed, such as the Learning City in Salford, the community struggles in Deptford, theatre and community driven arts and learning in Croxteth, community history in Staffordshire, migrant and refugee self-organizing in Hull, re-imagining creativity in Salford and Manchester, plural histories in Cheetham Hill, and the Community University in Bradford.

We also discussed what resources the universities had to offer communities and how they could access them, identified ideas we were interested in taking forward, and which funding agencies we might approach. These activities sowed the seeds of working on particular processes under some shared overarching goal, submitting projects together in groups or as a whole, building a shared approach to the question: what is the response of the University to Brexit and its relationship with communities, whatever they voted? A longer-term goal was how to rethink the role of the University together with communities, and how to bring the University back as a space for intellectual endeavour which serves people, liberates the valued intellects of all, and nurtures new thinking about the meaning of economic life.

Activity 2: Writing workshop

In July 2017, the three researchers retreated to a rural hotel for a writing workshop to develop the ideas further and plan a community encounter aimed at stimulating and capturing insights into what a community-led Learning City might look like. We aimed to engage our existing project partners in the process but also needed to respect their time and use it carefully and in a directed way as many community organisations are concerned by academics 'wasting' their time. The workshop was facilitated by Hannah Wadle from Fairer Tales, who guided the discussion and writing process (<http://fairertales.org/>). Wadle produced a reflection on the workshop which informs this section of the report.

Over two days, the researchers shared their experiences of working with residents and community groups in Bradford, Salford and Manchester, with particular focus on Ordsall and Cheetham Hill. They shared their insider knowledge about interests and the debates held in the political sphere and debated their own intellectual engagements with the concepts of learning, agency, and community. Questions concerned on the one hand the appropriate academic influence and role in shaping, facilitating, and monitoring policy agendas in the processes of their realization. On the other, they concerned a more general intellectual engagement with ideas around urban community pedagogies on a global scale.

A core theme that emerged in the process of the workshop – including thematic discussions, collaborative and individual writing, peer-reviewing, and planning – was the different modalities of academic and non-academic collaboration. Particularly fruitful grounds for unpacking assumptions about collaboration was discovered in cases where collaborations

and learning interventions had taken unexpected directions, where they had stimulated emotional turmoil, or when they were rejected by one side of the learning encounter. These cases included experiences from the respective fieldwork settings and they also included experiences of collaboration between researchers during the workshop itself. As a result, one could say that the workshop space became both a place for reflection on collaboration, and an experimental setting for collaborative work processes.

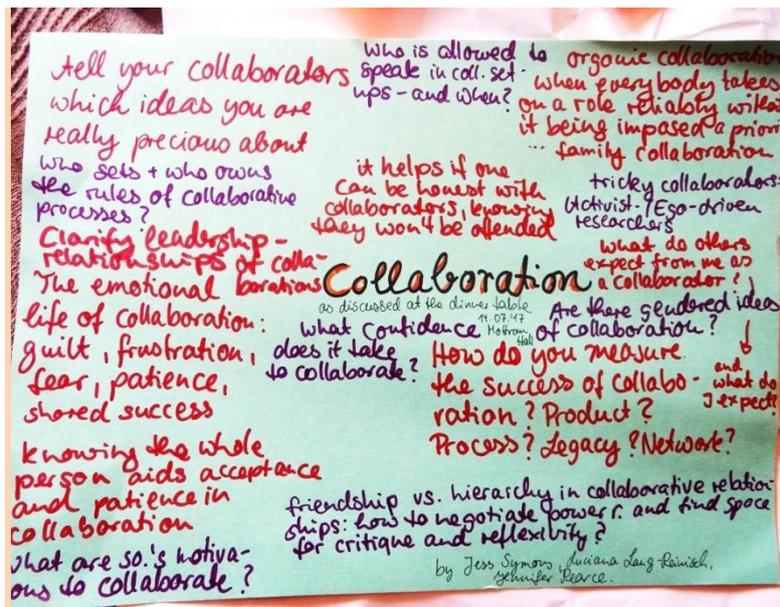


Figure 1: Perspectives on collaboration. Source: H. Wadle

Critically, the encounter stimulated the realisation that underlying assumptions needed clarification before effective collaboration could occur. Further discussion revealed significantly different understandings of what a Learning City might look like and how it could be facilitated. Before we could talk to others about a Learning City we needed clarity of meaning and approach and here we struggled to find common ground. Three key perspectives emerged in the discussion which each required different approaches in communicating a 'Community-Led' Learning City:

Version A relied on a clear and shared understanding of exactly what a Community-Led Learning City would look like – with everyone operating under the same 'umbrella'. However, this approach relied on a consensus which did not emerge. Version B focused on adopting one person's vision of a Learning City and people following that leadership and vision. This approach however relied on an individual stepping forward and leading from the front. Version C (which was ultimately adopted) was a 'jigsaw' approach which allowed for different perspectives on a Learning City with collaborations developing on an ad-hoc and convenience basis.

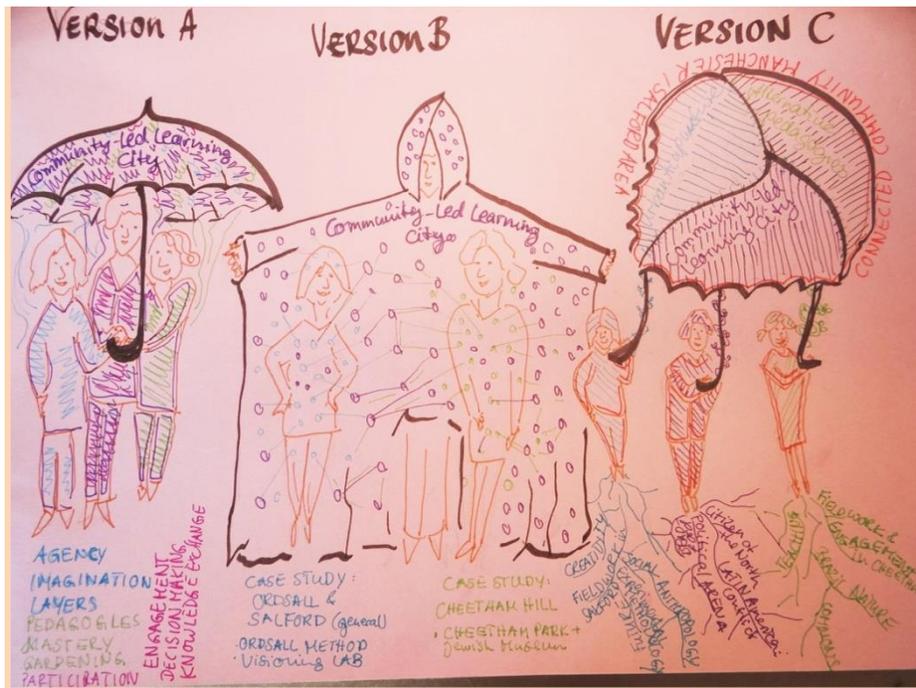


Figure 2: Framing the Learning City agenda. Source: H. Wadle

During this workshop, a plan emerged to carry out a ‘knowledge hackday’ at the Wai Yin community centre where Lang had existing relationships. The focus would be on mapping existing sites of learning and capturing how local people wanted to develop their learning opportunities.

Activity 3: Community encounters

In November 2017, a community event brought the concept of the Learning City into a North Manchester community centre as a ‘Knowledge Hack’ for engagement and elaboration. This next phase was supported by additional resources from University of Manchester which paid for further organising time and space in the venue. It brought in academics at the University of Manchester interested in digital learning (Gary Motteram, Education) and social infrastructure (Angela Connelly, Planning) thereby increasing university engagement in a community context. The event also included project participants from the previous Connected Communities project (Mark Greenwood from the Wai Yin Centre, Chris Doyle from the Chapel St Community Arts, and Barney Francis from the Manchester Histories - Francis was asked to attend by Karen Shannon, formerly Let’s Go Global and now Director of Manchester Histories).

The main purpose of the workshop was to stimulate discussion about learning opportunities and perspectives through the production of a map of informal learning places. The workshop considered how to make self-directed learning opportunities easy to access and whether an online Wiki space would help people to find learning resources. This was a preliminary exercise for the academics and community organisations representatives to

explore how these emergent ideas about a Learning City worked in a community setting with direct feedback and interaction from people at the centre.

The Wai Yin is a vibrant community centre with multiple diverse visitors coming daily for lunch and support such as people on low incomes and looking for work, people from multiple ethnic backgrounds, with specific physical and mental health needs and including a high number of refugees and asylum seekers. Mark Greenwood, the Wai Yin co-ordinator was interested in the Learning City idea and keen to explore an ethnographic approach to research insight and collaboration which involved turning up and chatting to local people as they went about preparing food for lunch, looking after the garden and chickens, learning IT and English, asking for legal or benefits advice, cutting hair or doing beauty treatments. The community centre turned out to be a model for the kind of community-led learning activities proposed as part of a Learning City concept.

The day-long event was clustered around five themes: learning languages, making food, making stuff, imagining, and using digital technology. The concept of networking, or ‘making connections’ permeated these themes.

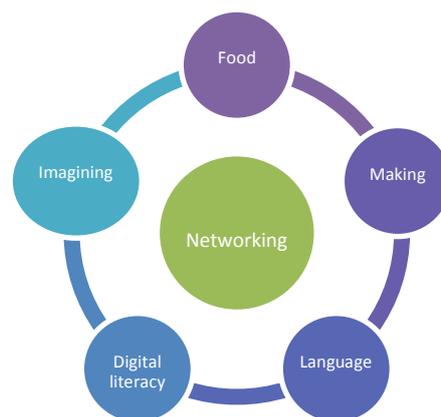


Figure 3: Themes for event. Source: L.Lang

A set of questions were prepared and maps printed out to stimulate conversation and locate points and spaces around the themes as they arose. Each academic chose a theme to explore and prepared a plan for how to engage local residents. For example, Symons brought paper and drawing materials to stimulate discussion about dreams and ideas about the future and, working with a community representative based at the centre, talked to people about imaginative processes. Her most enlightening conversation came through having her hands painted with henna in the ‘beauty room’. Connelly was interested in learning around food and set up a stall with different food items to share as a way of stimulating discussion about cooking and eating. Lang spent time with the English Language group, developing a textile map about their learning experiences with their teacher. Motteram worked with the IT worker in the computer room developing the wiki to capture learning experiences, and Pearce talked to people using the maps as a way of stimulating conversation. Greenwood, Doyle and Francis talked to local people about their learning

experiences and also provided a perspective as community intermediaries on the academic engagement process at the event.

Regular visitors to the centre were informed about the event through posters and Lang's visits to discuss the activities for the event with them. Through this engagement several regulars asked to share their insights and learning as part of the day, including one who prepared a PowerPoint presentation about the construction of an outside shelter. Some key findings from the workshop are as follows:

Language Learning

The language cluster used the existing ESOL class at the Welcome Centre to explore places of informal learning. Participants were between 20 and 60 years old, originally from Pakistan, Italy and China. We worked with three maps: a world map where participants marked their countries of origin; a local map of Cheetham Hill where they indicated the places where they learn, and a 'textile map', where participants worked on a hand-made representation of Cheetham Area marking their 'learning experience' with a symbolic depiction of respective outputs. For example, a woman from Pakistan made a textile clock and sewed it on the map. She explained this by saying that her learning activities around Cheetham Hill, which included English classes at the Wai Yin Welcome Centre, cooking as a volunteer at the centre's kitchen, training as a carer at another local community centre and clearing waste from the streets with a local neighbourhood group, taught her the value of discipline and being organised and on time. Another participant described her learning experience as a flash of light. A third participant could not explain the skills she learned in the form of images, opting instead to use the word 'voice': learning to speak English meant that she could communicate to her local doctor and explain her symptoms, she could talk to school teachers about her daughter's progress, and she could shop at stores where people did not speak Punjabi. The pilot activity of making a textile map unleashed the dynamics of pictorial language, which did not come automatically but proved to have potential. Through a series of word associations and examples, participants started to envisage ways of symbolising their learning experience and translating it into English.

Looking after the chickens

Vicky, a regular visitor to the centre, explained what she learned through looking after the chickens. The centre was given five chickens two years ago and Vicky immediately volunteered to look after them and was proud to share her experience 'I made a third generation of chickens!'. The chicken coop was built by herself and her husband and another two volunteers, Geordie, from Newcastle, and Adam, from Poland.



Figure 4 - The chicken coop, made by Lee, Vicky, Adam and Geordie. Source: L.Lang

Vicky praised the ‘hands on experience’ she acquired and that when given the chance to do the chickens, ‘I gained all this knowledge’. She now has two ducks at home, a baby chick in the incubator, and is the main carer for the fifteen chickens at the Welcome Centre.

“I’ve learned all sorts, from ways to get different breeds, to feeding and housing. I didn’t know there’s no need for heating with them. There are more than 20 Facebook groups that I joined just to swop tips about chickens. I spend hours reading them!”.

Drawing with Henna

In another room on the ground floor, now transformed into a beauty parlour, three women drew with henna while chatting with each other. When asked about the origin of the patterns, the artist says ‘In my mind, it’s all in my mind’.



Figure 5 - Henna hands by Sania. Source: L.Lang

But there is more to this space than henna painting. Children are brought in their push chairs and quietly watch their mums receiving different types of care in the make-up process of bringing colour, form and creativity to a routine day.

Constructing a shelter

Before lunch, some of us gathered in the main room to listen to Edouard's PowerPoint presentation of his learning experience. Edouard was born in 1946 in the Czech Republic, in a big industrial city. He decided to move to the UK because of 'the language, the history and the pleasant people', and has been here for nearly two years. He says that now he is free, 'there it was like a prison'. The Wai Yin Centre really helped him and 'I will do anything for this centre'. For him, industrial places like Manchester and the city where he comes from are more 'disordered' and 'people are hard'. He would like to live in a quieter place like Bury. He used to be a university lecturer in communication techniques. While he had sent CVs and cover letters, he never had a reply. He has English classes and Maths classes at the centre in the hope of improving his chances of securing a job. His presentation was about the structures he built in the garden at the Welcome Centre: a sleeping pod and a shower room, which are currently being used by homeless visitors.

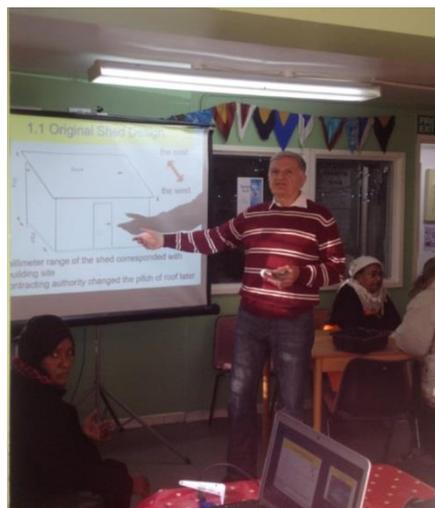


Figure 6 - Edouard, from Poland, explains the making of the sleeping pod. Source: L.Lang

Discussing his learning experience during the making of the structures, Edouard said that the size was 'given because there was no money' so they had to work with the pallets donated and his design followed those dimensions:

“Around 8 pallets for the sleeping pod. The drawing was by head [sic]; the plan I had in my mind.”

He enjoyed the process and seeing it develop 'slowly, slowly'. Students from university came and suggested things for the roof.

Learning through watching and doing

For Nikky, another regular visitor to the centre, a British born from Pakistani parents, her learning comes through personal interaction. 'I socialise and learn about people', she said. Terry, a former roofer, explained how originally he had just held the ladder of the roofer he was working with. He didn't dare go up himself for two years but he learnt by watching. For a fencer, the important thing was to 'get it right'. There was one way of putting a fence up, as otherwise you risked health and safety. He feels good when the fence is up perfectly. They both agreed that you learnt better when you don't think you are being taught. You could ask questions and learn that way. People remembered early school experiences that made them fearful of learning.

Event insights

At the end of the day, the group shared their experiences of the event with each other. It became clear that the event was good-natured and well attended. Lang had a longstanding relationship with the Centre and this was invaluable. We were all welcomed on the basis of the trust she had previously built. The invitation focussed on an interdisciplinary conversation with community members to explore in practice some of the premises of the Learning City as a more engaged and empowered exchange with communities, including a critical reflection on the role of universities.

Emerging insights from the event focus on the importance of going to where people already are and building a learning strategy that is specific for their particular needs and strategies for learning.

Conclusion from Exploration: Learning With and From Communities

Building on the Ordsall Method

The 'Ordsall Method' started life as a structured approach for academics to co-produce research in communities by working with local intermediaries and supporting the development of local ideas. It is based on the principle that research is easier and more effective if it aligns with, and maximises, what people are already doing. The Method can be extended and used by any organisation seeking to work with communities to co-design and develop projects that are mutually beneficial.

The Ordsall Method was designed during a large AHRC Connected Communities research project in collaboration with community members, local organisers and academics at University of Salford. It drew on existing understandings of community development and empowerment, social entrepreneurship and aspirations for self-determination. By recognising that research objectives should also boost existing activities and agendas in communities, academic activity can have a positive impact for the people and stimulate their enthusiasm for participation. See www.ideas4ordsall.org for more information.

The Method can support Learning City objectives through its emphasis on the need to work with local intermediaries who have good networks and relationships in the area and on the need to support local people to develop their own ideas. The 15 steps in the Ordsall Method use the existing Ideas4Ordsall project activities for ideas and evidence on working with local intermediaries to successfully engage people in communities and 'give them a boost'. Many of the ideas in the project focused on learning transfer – from cooking and bike maintenance workshops to a mining museum and art collective, people demonstrated an enthusiasm for community-led learning.

Learning and knowledge as 'tools' for discovery

A common feature in this collaborative exploration is that the researchers had chosen or been assigned 'hard to reach' communities. When stakeholders use the term 'hard-to-reach', they can mean a number of things: that the communities are 'deprived' or 'impoverished', that they are disengaged, or that they belong to a certain class of people who for reasons related to class or culture are 'not interested' in community projects. After all, what is there for those who give out knowledge besides getting a free meal? There are a number of ways around reaching them, and they are often related to strategies that offer locals value for their time in the form of money, services or food. When the stakeholder interested in reaching those communities is the university, the exchange rate demanded is local knowledge, which will later be translated into a desirable academic commodity in the

form of publications which yields status and a better position in the job market, not to mention the research grant that allowed researchers to produce that item.

So how to enable a community-led Learning City? In our view, education and knowledge are tools for discovery, they are processes. We have learned from the communities we interacted with far more than they learned from us, so in many ways, our researches are community-led in terms of production of knowledge. But while we, as social scientists, acknowledge this learning, we are nevertheless the carriers of scientific authority. The proposal of the Learning City is to make a bigger effort to share this authority by making the learning process more participatory both in terms of content and form.

Co-designing learning practice with people in communities

A challenge here is between 'top down' and 'bottom up'. Salford Council has embraced the idea of framing their city around the encouragement of lifelong learning but also new approaches to the quality and nature of the learning process which would generate community ownership. Already, they are engaged in innovative ideas and practices with young people across the city. The framework of the Learning City is an opportunity to link their ongoing initiatives with a strategic direction, which could involve key institutions of the city, such as the University, the College, the Lowry Arts Complex, the Community and Voluntary Sector and others. They are inspired by the Ordsall Method, which argues for aligning research and engagement activities with existing community ideas and priorities.

Citizens who feel disengaged are not however likely to respond to the 'call from the Council'. These bodies are very aware of this. So, the challenge is how to embed the Learning City idea in an organic process, nurtured 'from above' but delivered 'from below', in a way which allows communities to experiment themselves and to set the agenda of what is learning for them. In a climate of few resources, where higher education is increasingly market driven and oriented, these ideas are counter to the times, and require creative thinking aimed at releasing energies which are latent or dormant. It is here that thinking from the arts, from digital technologies, from critical pedagogies, from popular education emerges not as theoretical abstractions, but as methods to be brought to the process and to be reshaped, discarded, adopted according to lived realities and social dynamics within communities. Our research process aims to feed into thinking about what this 'organic process' might look like, and work with communities some of us have already been involved with. Developing **with** communities the Learning City implementation methodologies which guarantee the ethos and principles of the idea and ways of systematically learning from practice, is one of the goals of our research collaboration.

Next Steps

The researchers involved in this project are adopting a 'jigsaw' approach to the Learning City where they build on the insights from their discussions and activities to develop new projects. Where appropriate they are collaborating and align their activities with each other. These are as follows:

- Pearce is working with Salford City Council in her role as Visiting Professor at the University of Edgehill's Institution for Public Policy and Professional Practice to develop a Learning City strategy. This includes bringing together Salford College, the University, CVS and the Lowry and is generating real understanding of what the Learning City is about and what support it needs. This strategy will build on the Ordsall Methods and other innovations in practice and aims to balance the bottom up/top down approach, building interest and ownership with communities.
- Symons is part of the Salford Mayor Cultural Strategy Working group and is also supporting the development of the city's cultural strategy. This includes reference to the Ordsall Method and insights from Ordsall research project and this collaborative. She is actively encouraging a community-led learning agenda in this strategy. She is also talking to Manchester City Council and East Cheshire Council in how to adopt community-led learning approaches in their cultural agenda.
- Lang is developing a new project with Wai Yin which builds on the Learning Together event focusing on bringing academics from the university into the community centre using a similar model of engagement which is open and discursive. This includes:
 - Motteram visiting to run a digital language learning activity in the new year
 - Connelly visiting to run a music learning activity
 - Symons visiting to run a 'futures imagining' workshop

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Luciana is an anthropologist working in socio-ecological anthropology in urban contexts focused on human-disturbed environments, in homespun alternatives to cope with socio-economic effects of increasingly precarious scenarios, and in community use and management of the commons. She has explored an urban fishing community and its transformation in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and urban ecologies in Manchester exploring the use of common land. In addition to ethnographic methods, she uses map-making techniques, oral histories and photo-elicitation to tap into people's perceptions of their surrounding and changing landscape.

Professor Jenny Pearce

Jenny is a political scientist working with anthropological and participatory research methodologies on social change, violence, security, power and participation in Latin America and bringing that learning to the realities of urban conflict and tensions in north of England. She set up and directed the Bradford International Centre for Participation Studies in Peace Studies 2003 to 2014. She was Visiting Professor at the University of Monterey, Mexico, and Bolivariana University, Colombia and since 2016, she has been Honorary Visiting Professor at the University of Edgehill's Institute for Public Policy and Professional Practice, where she works on participation and knowledge exchange with communities. She is currently Research Professor in the Latin America and Caribbean Centre, LSE.

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Jessica is an anthropologist exploring idea development and creative processes. She is focused on how organisational structures affect people's ability to realise their ideas. This area of enquiry has led her into disadvantaged communities, parade organising, the halls of government, creative industries, cultural strategy development and smart city / futures activity. She argues for creativity as an adaptive process and the need to recognise class dynamics in cultural definitions. Jessica is currently working as AHRC Creative Economy Engagement Fellow at the University of Manchester.

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