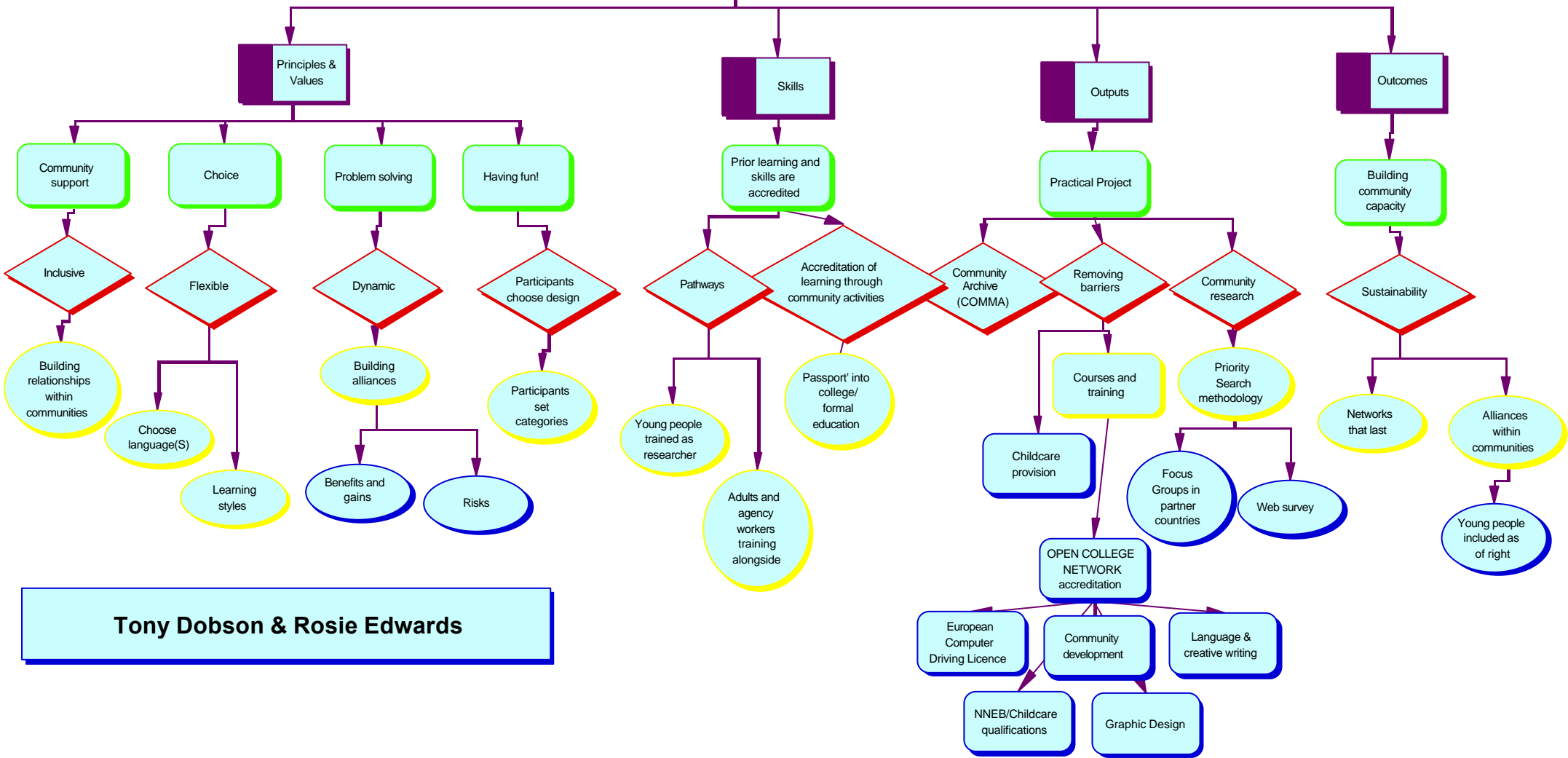


Building Skills for Social Inclusion



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Building Skills for Social Inclusion (B.U.S.S)

Background

This model attempts to draw together what we know from our own practice – in community work, community development, social work – about what works and then to combine this understanding with our *a priori* assumptions – the beliefs and values which we hold – and which motivate us - in our work with children, young people, neighbourhoods and partners.

Organisations often struggle to hold an '*organisational memory*' – a recollection and an understanding of what we have done, how we have done it (and why!); what has worked, and what has not – and what we can learn from both success **and** failure. This struggle is all the more challenging for an organisation such as The Children's Society, which was founded in 1881.

In fact, to call it a model is perhaps a little grand; rather, it is a map of the territory we are working in – both the practical and the ethical. It is an 'aide memoire' – to remind us that we **do** work from principles which should always be our reference point, but that our principles must have practical manifestations, which need to be planned effectively, resourced and implemented appropriately and evaluated in creative ways.

The 'map'

Attached is a diagram which attempts to map the main elements in the concept of 'Building skills for social inclusion'.

There are four main strands:

Principles

- The need to ensure that our work has the support of the communities and community organisations with which we work. In an ideal situation, initiatives should be identified by (or jointly with) communities/community members.

So, the use of Priority Search (as a tool for surveying opinion and for evaluating programmes of work), or the use of COMMA (as a means of recording and collating the life, histories and aspirations of communities) must be relevant to the participants – it must be a real-world activity.

- That there should be a real choice for participants – whether to take part at all, and what commitment they wish to give

- We should always proceed from a positive position – capacity-building (whether individual or at a community level) – does not use a ‘pathological’ model; people always have strengths, even if those strengths have not been acknowledged by themselves or by others. This rule should also apply to professionals!
- Having fun is not easy, but it is a vital component of the ‘model’. This is especially true when working with children and young people. We should not ‘steal’ children’s childhood or use children as a raw material in pursuit of adult ends. It is to be hoped that the professionals involved will also share the sense of fun.

Skills

- Skills – acquiring new ones and building on existing ones – are an essential part of tackling social exclusion. It is important to provide the opportunity for these skills to be validated and for ‘*prior learning*’ to be accredited.
- Participants in any community development activity must be able to exercise choice – whether or not to follow routes which incorporates an educational element. However, professionals have a responsibility to create ‘pathways’ in advance by, for example, anticipating potential areas for learning (in the case of COMMA and Priority Search, such areas as child-care, graphic design, community development, creative writing, European Computer Driving Licence). Negotiations should then take place with local Colleges and with accrediting bodies (e.g. NVQ or Open College Network) to accredit staff, the institution and then to develop course materials.
- Young people can undertake accredited training separately (singly or in groups). They could also learn alongside adults from the community and even together with professionals working on the same initiative. Learning together has the advantage of cementing relationships and partnership structures.
- Priority Search allows young people (as well as adults) to become trained as ‘researchers’ in their own community, and to acquire skills and accreditation in the process (if they **choose** to).

Outputs

This describes the practical activities on the ground – the services, initiatives and programmes which are actually experienced by community members. Such activities should be appropriate to the community (including ‘*communities of interest*’), should be of practical value and benefit and should be sustainable without professionals after an agreed period.

- ❑ COMMA (Community Multi Media Archive) provides a means for communities to take, and retain, ownership over its own history and the narrative which is applied to that community.
- ❑ Different – and even conflicting – stories and histories can be captured within the archive database.
- ❑ A wide range of materials can be held, organised in a non-technical way, and searched through the relational database. These are some of the types of file/material that can be included:
 - ❑ Plain text
 - ❑ Scanned images and artwork
 - ❑ Word documents (including documents containing images and illustrations)
 - ❑ Powerpoint presentations
 - ❑ Movie clips
 - ❑ Sound samples (music, speech etc)
- ❑ Scanned images, text and audio material can be created and inputted directly into the COMMA software, without the need for additional software or switching between packages.
- ❑ Priority Search gives power back to young people and others in a community by providing an ‘approachable’ methodology. It can combat the trend toward ‘professionalising’ community research; often highly-paid commercial companies will be commissioned and will often behave in an insensitive way – and will certainly leave few, if any, skills behind.
- ❑ Priority Search can be used as a platform for community development as well as research skills and accredited learning. Young people can be paid for their role in the research operation.
- ❑ Both Priority Search and COMMA can be used in transnational programmes, and face to face and Web-based Priority Search surveys can be undertaken. Views and opinions across member countries can be explored; commonalities and differences can be illuminated
- ❑ In practice, any such activities are likely to require crèche/childcare provision to minimise barriers for prospective participants. This, in turn, creates another avenue for training young people (in the area of childcare/child development).

Outcomes

The ultimate aim is to aid the process of community capacity-building. However, the emphasis is on the role of children and young people in this process – both as participants or ‘actors’ and as beneficiaries.

- Some change will be attitudinal; increased self-confidence and self-belief, for example.
- In addition, the position of young people in the skills and job market will be enhanced.
- At a wider community level, interaction around common (and worthwhile) activities and programmes is likely to reduce intra-community tensions and assist in developing community cohesion and the ownership of community issues.
- For young people, their legitimate role in community life is a desired outcome.

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