

# BECOMING ECO-RESPONSIBLE, ACTIVE CITIZENS THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN THE ECO AMBASSADORS PROJECT — A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

**THIS** article offers a reflective analysis of the Eco Ambassadors Project as an example of the some of the ways in which learning about environmental issues and active citizenship can be encouraged and enabled through collaboration and negotiated participation. Some policy background to the project is given, followed by a critical consideration of the theoretical framework of situated learning; participation in a community of practice is then presented in relation to the project, alongside theories of citizenship. Three activities undertaken during the project are highlighted and these are critically examined in relation to the theories under consideration. The paper argues that the theoretical framework of learning by participation can usefully augment and help better explain how learners develop their identities as citizens, and that through participation people can become active members of communities that are environmentally and politically aware.

**Key words:** Citizenship, communities of practice, learning by participation, situated learning.

## Introduction

**IN MARCH** 2005, three separate strands of Welsh educational policy and practice within higher education came together: the pilot introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate, the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) document *The Learning Country* (2002) and the publication of learning outcomes for work-related education (2000). Consequently, the University of Glamorgan made a successful bid to the WAG's grant scheme for projects that fall within the category of 'Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship', resulting in the establishment of the Eco Ambassadors Project. Designed to promote the principles of environmental and global citizenship and to foster democratic practices within a South Wales Community, the project started in September 2005 and is still in progress.

The Eco Ambassadors Project is made up of four partners: a boys' secondary school, a school for pupils with special needs, a residential home for elderly people and the University of Glamorgan. The Eco Ambassadors Project through its focus on citizenship, sustainability and inter-generational working brings together disparate groups, which traditionally have not had many opportunities to meet. This includes A-level students, pupils with special needs and senior citizens, as well as staff from the University, the school and the residential home.

The overarching principles behind the Eco Ambassadors Project are citizenship and stewardship. The project team took these principles and developed a programme that pro-

vides a participation framework for the Year 12 students from the boys' school and the pupils with special needs to practise the principles of citizenship, democracy and stewardship<sup>1</sup>, whilst working with local senior citizens. The objective is to create a community of 'Eco Ambassadors' in the locality comprising senior citizens and young people participating in collaborative, mutually agreed activities.

The environmental<sup>2</sup> and sustainability theme of the project has been encouraged through the completion of construction and environmental activities, such as building and installing a bird table and two bird boxes from reclaimed wood at the residential home, together with the construction of a recycle bin area. At the boy's school, recycling bins have been installed and recycling activities are now taking place. At the special needs school, already highly active as a school with positive recycling initiatives, polystyrene cup recycling facilities have now been installed.

To encourage the ethos of active citizenship and stewardship the project has organised sponsored events and activities, resulting in £200, £100 and £100 being raised respectively for the project's chosen charities: National Children's Homes (Action for Children from September, 2008), Wales Air Ambulance, and the Mumbles Lifeboat Station. In order to raise this money, the project participants carried out a sponsored litter pick, a sponsored night sleeping in a box and a sponsored dig. In addition, more than 30 shoeboxes filled with Christmas presents have been prepared and donated to the Operation Christmas Child charity appeal every year since the start of the project.

The educational trips and visits undertaken as part of this project have also helped to foster the principles of conserving and preserving the environment, and becoming active, more involved citizens. The Eco Ambassadors have visited the Alternative Technology Centre in Machynlledd, the Welsh Senedd in Cardiff Bay and the National Botanic Garden of Wales.

Given the innovative nature of this collaborative, community-based project, the purpose of this paper is threefold. Firstly, much good, cooperative practice has been generated through this project and this seemed worthy of dissemina-

tion. Secondly, the project team believe that a reflective analysis of the Eco Ambassadors Project provides a useful precursor to a future evaluative research study. Using the theoretical framework of situated learning (Rogoff, 1990) and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), with the addition of the idea of reciprocal causation from the social learning theories of Bandura (1977 & 1997), this paper seeks to critique the strengths and limitations of the framework with regard to the extent to which it can be applied in the context of citizenship and environmental education. Thirdly, it seeks to suggest that there is an apparent synergy between the theories of citizenship (Marshall, 1964; Ahier *et al*, 2003) in relation to Lave and Wenger's ideas that better explains active citizenship education, an area that—until comparatively recently—has been acknowledged as being under-theorised.

## Background to the project

**THE PARTICULAR** educational context in Wales suggests that a discussion of the relevant WAG policy initiatives would provide a useful background and setting in which to locate the Eco Ambassadors Project.

*The Learning Country* policy document (WAG, 2002) was a steer from the Welsh Assembly that acknowledged the need for a broader curriculum for 14- to 19-year-old students and emphasised the importance of embedding work-focused education and 'learning by doing' into the school curriculum. There were two important initiatives that arose from this directive: firstly, the development of the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification for sixth-form students; secondly, the development of work-related learning outcomes for Key Stage 4 students by the Welsh Curriculum Authority (ACCAC). Another feature of this attempt to broaden the curriculum was the WAG recommendation that the principles of sustainability and citizenship should be infused within the curriculum, hence the inclusion of units within the Welsh Baccalaureate regarding the environment, citizenship and work-focused education.

During the development and pilot phase of the Welsh Baccalaureate (2003–04), two disused allotment sites, local to the Glamorgan University campus, became available and

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1. These principles are derived from the themes contained in the WAG's (2005) project stream 'Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship' (ESDGC) which funds the Eco Ambassador Project. The policy documentation highlights the role of participation in its definition of education for sustainable development as "...those actions which enable people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to *participate* in decisions about the way that we do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future." [p1, our italics]

2. The definition of environmental citizenship adopted was the definition advocated by Prior *et al* (1995). This defines 'green' citizenship as comprising new types of rights and obligations both to protect individuals from the effects of environmental pollution and other abuses of the natural world and to safeguard the environment itself for present and future generations. Consequently, the main aims of the project are to encourage participation in a series of practical activities and to make sustainable changes by encouraging each institution to reduce the amount of refuse they generate and to reuse, repair and recycle wherever possible.

were offered to a small wholesome food association set up under the auspices of the University. Given the political agenda within Welsh education at that time and the expertise of the University of Glamorgan staff involved, the idea was mooted that the allotments could be used as a vehicle for providing real, live, environmental work experience for sixth-form students in local schools.

As a result, two foundation-level modules were devised that met the environmental and community work needs of the Baccalaureate. These modules, which became known as the Grow Project, were to provide real, live, environmental work on the University allotments, clearing land and growing chemical-free produce. These modules were piloted with a local school in the first part of academic year 2004–05, and during this period a group of 15 students successfully completed the voluntary work and assessments associated with the Grow project. However, problems with the organisation and assessment of the Baccalaureate and with gaining fencing around the allotment site then intervened, and in the second half of the year the Grow project was temporarily suspended.

During the time of Grow project inactivity, the WAG announced its Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) project funds. The University decided to make a collaborative bid to this fund in partnership with two different schools and a residential home for the elderly. The thinking behind this was to broaden the remit of the Grow project to include a sharper focus on active, environmental participation and citizenship. This was achieved through the development of modules in social and community enterprise, through which students' voluntary work experience in social and citizenship activities could be accredited. The initial Grow project was thus developed and transformed into the Eco Ambassadors Project with the aim of nurturing a community of learners, both young and old, which could effect change in their community.

## Theoretical considerations

**THE ECO AMBASSADORS PROJECT** provides opportunities for partnership working and learning through participation and collaboration for all those involved, from University departments who work together to provide learning opportunities, to students and residents who together seek to achieve goals of sustainable development and eco-responsible citizenship.

The Eco Ambassadors Project is grounded in theories of learning by doing (Kolb, 1984) and situated learning (Rogoff, 1990) through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Theories of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) argue that people learn in a framework of

participation in a community of practice within a cultural setting. A community of practice, as defined by Wenger (1998), is a collective of people involved in shared purposeful activity where learning happens through participation. These theoretical perspectives serve to extend understanding of learning beyond the traditional pedagogy of the dyad of the learner and the teacher to participation in collectives and communities. Lave and Wenger (1991, p15) argue that "Learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind". Within a participation framework, people taking part in the Eco Ambassadors Project learn by participating with others in activities that are culturally situated. As a result the participants discover new meanings and construct knowledge; they develop and grow as does their sense of identity. This notion of a person's identity expanding and developing through participation in a community (a social setting or space) has strong similarities with civic notions of citizenship. According to Ahier *et al* (2003), people's views about their own sense of citizenship can be defined not in an overtly political way but through their sense of sociality and the reciprocal relations that occur when people are bound together by mutual engagement within structures, groups or communities within the public sphere.

Learning by participation in the social world, according to Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on communities of practice, revolves around the concept of legitimate peripheral participation. Legitimate peripheral participation is "a process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice" (p29). They observe that—within a community of practice—beginners participate on the periphery, through such activities as observation and practise. Gradually over time, they begin to participate more fully, moving towards a position of full participation. This idea of participation has clear parallels within theories of social citizenship, Marshall (1964) himself described participation in a range of social rituals or practices as a vital and potent way of generating a sense of shared citizenship, while Ahier *et al* (2003) suggest that people express their sense of citizenship through social membership and attachment to larger social groupings or communities.

Where learning happens via participation, four other aspects are worth noting. Firstly, the concept of engagement in mutual, negotiated activities, which for Lave and Wenger is a key characteristic of the community of practice. It is from such engagement in negotiated activities within a cultural setting that they suggest learning is generated. Interestingly, the notion of mutual engagement can also be found within commonly accepted ideas of citizenship. Citizenship is defined by Ahier *et al* (2003) and Marshall (1964) as concentrating on the rights and obligations of being a good citizen through mutual engagement in a civic space, i.e. the groups, communities and social structures of society.

Secondly, learning by participation involves the whole person, and, as a result of participation, people change. Here, "Learning...implies becoming a different person" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p53) and is linked with issues of identity. Learning is holistic; not only do participants in the project learn about environmental issues, they also learn about themselves as people<sup>3</sup>.

Thirdly, as people participate in communities, so the community itself is transformed over time, as cultural practices adapt and change, and new meanings and knowledge are generated. Communities of practice therefore are not static, but they change in the light of the experiences of those participating within them.

Fourthly, the notion that communities of practice are not static raises the question of how learning happens in such communities. Clearly the transfer of learning is not a one-way process, from expert practitioner to novice learner, in a community that is fluid and changing. It is argued here that Bandura's (1977) work on the concept of reciprocal causation is a useful addition to Lave and Wenger's views and helps to explain how learning occurs in these changing communities. Bandura suggests that when people learn through participation in a social context, there are three variables that can influence learning: the person, the behaviour and the social environment in which this takes place. He suggests all these variables can have an influence on each other and that there is reciprocal causation between any and all of these factors.

In contrast to Bandura's views, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that "learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners" (p29), and that learning through participation "takes place no matter which educational form provides a context for learning" (p40). For Lave and Wenger, where people are in communities, learning will inevitably take place via participation, irrespective of the culture or setting. The experience of the Eco Ambassador's project contradicts Lave and

Wenger's position in this respect and, in line with Bandura, the project team suggest that not to take into account the culture, or social context where the learning takes place misses a vital part of the learning mix. As such it is argued that Bandura's ideas provide a useful and necessary addition that enhances Lave and Wenger's theory of learning via participation. Further, the Eco Ambassador's project has raised a number of questions with regard to Lave and Wenger's work, namely: is learning in a community of practice inevitable or can it be restricted? Is the learning that takes place always positive or can negative learning experiences occur? Is it accurate to say that everyone will learn or will some within the community need more support than others? In relation to the Eco Ambassadors Project, this could be seen to be particularly pertinent<sup>4</sup> for the students with special needs. It is these questions that the following reflective analysis seeks to address.

## Reflective analysis of three typical project activities

**THREE** examples follow, showing typical activities undertaken within the project to date. A brief discussion of these activities is included, using Lave and Wenger's ideas to demonstrate the ways in which the activities have contributed to the development of a community of practice, encouraged learning by participation and contributed to change within the whole person.

### Example 1: 'Reuse repair and recycle'

To promote the ethos of 'reuse, repair and recycle', the sixth-form students helped to rub down and repaint benches and wooden flower tubs at the residential home. Three of the older residents took an active part in this activity and helped with sanding and painting the flower tubs. For two hours the sixth-formers and older residents sat on the ground, around large wooden flower tubs discussing and completing the task at hand. There were two important outcomes from this activ-

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3. Some comments taken from the presentations of the sixth-form Eco Ambassador Project participants are included here as an example of how the boys' 'identities' have evolved.

"J" 05/06: "During the Eco-Ambassadors Project I have learnt to work in a team and be responsible for my actions...I also started quiet in work but I am now speaking my mind and getting involved with people and finding out more about them. If it wasn't for this course I would still be standing around in the background and not be asked for my opinions on anything."

"G" 06/07: "I believe my skills have vastly improved during the Eco Ambassadors [Project]...Also my team work skills have improved as we do everything together."

"S" 05/06: "During the Eco Ambassadors [Project] I have learnt and developed my skills. I have been more comfortable talking in front of people that are unknown to me and outside of my circle."

4. Offering inclusive opportunities for participation needed careful planning in order to seek to maximise the full participation of these more vulnerable students and to foster their development as people. For instance, during the visit to the Alternative Technology Centre in Machynledd, the special needs pupils and sixth form boys all took part in an environmental quiz / tour of the centre. As many of the special needs pupils were not confident readers they were paired with a sixth former in order to ensure everyone could read the quiz, understand and participate fully in the activity. This also served to promote cooperative working relations between the two disparate groups of students.

ity. Firstly, during the conversations that took place whilst completing this activity, the suggestion was made that the students could record the residents' memories of the locality and how it had changed in their lifetime. The idea was proposed that the project could use these stories in the first project newsletter. Secondly, the residents spontaneously gave the students a round of applause, tea and cakes in appreciation of their DIY efforts.

Further to Lave and Wenger's ideas, this practical activity raises the issue of the varying roles of the members of the 'community of practitioners'. In this instance, defining a community of practice may not be as straightforward as it first appears. It was clear that the sixth-formers thought they were the lead practitioners in the task. Yet, when the older folk were able to make sensible suggestions about how to carry out the tasks, it became evident that they had more experience of painting and sanding than the students. It was apparent that the sixth-formers were not the only experts in this situation. It was interesting to then observe the change in the tone of the activity, as the students moved from swaggering confidence to a more reasoned and cooperative stance as they realised the value, experience and common sense that the older folks' suggestions brought to the task. In contrast, the older folk started the painting and sanding tasks in a somewhat diffident, under-confident manner. Yet their confidence grew as the task progressed as they realised that they could have—and were having—a positive impact on the task.

This raises a question in relation to how communities of practice operate according to Lave and Wenger and how these communities are defined. The sixth-form students perceived initially that they were the lead practitioners in the painting task and were clearly surprised that the older folk were able to provide a valuable input. The notion of who held the expertise in this instance is not obvious as both the students and older residents were sharing skills and expertise during the task. The suggestion here is that the community of practice was a fluid, cyclical phenomenon, passing back and forth between the students and the older residents. This illustrates the value of Bandura's idea of reciprocal causation as an addition to the idea of the community of practice. There was no distinct set of experts in this task and both the sixth-formers and older residents jointly contributed. The learning that took place was both practical and social in nature, and clearly arose from the environment and situation involved.

Another issue that could influence the identification of the community of practice also needs to include the perceptions of the actual participants within the community, as to who they regard as the practitioners or experts on any given occasion. Defining who are the community of practitioners—the 'experts'—is an issue that needs further clarification and

should be regarded as fluid and changeable depending on the context, knowledge and perceptions of the actual participants within the community of learners. Lave and Wenger rightly argue that communities of practice are not static and that they change in the light of the experiences of those participating within them. The painting and sanding activity did indeed change the community because it allowed the students and the older folk to talk to each other whilst participating in a 'live/real' task, not an artificial activity. From the ensuing conversations, the request came to hold a session recording the older folks' memories of their locality. This request was generated from within the group of participants and was added as an extra outcome to the project. This clearly demonstrates how participating in an activity leads to change within the group or community and how new knowledge can be discovered through negotiation with others. The 'memory afternoon' that was held a few weeks later was a successful joint activity in which the students interviewed the older residents about their memories of the locality, and how things had changed since the Second World War.

## Example 2: Computer lessons

Using the University's mobile computer classroom at the residential home, the sixth-formers led basic computer lessons with the older residents on how to send and receive e-mail and use the internet. During the sessions, the residents sent their first e-mails to lobby the WAG Education Minister to request that they be allowed to keep the laptop computer bought for them out of the Eco Ambassadors Project funds. Defining the community of practitioners here was clear cut as the sixth-formers held the expert knowledge in this instance. Yet this computer-based situation highlighted another factor concerning communities of practitioners which could impact on the learning that takes place within a situated activity; this concerns the ethos or culture among the community of practitioners. For learning to take place there needs to be a culture that encourages, is patient and is generous in being willing to share expertise.

Using the mobile computer classroom example to illustrate this point, the older residents were nervous and under-confident using the computers and had very slow keyboard and mouse skills. The temptation for the students could have been to lose patience and offer to type the e-mails for the older residents as the students would be much quicker doing this. However, the students showed remarkable patience and generosity as teachers in letting the older residents persevere in their tasks and letting them carry on at their own pace. The students showed generosity in sharing computer expertise and information, volunteering to create a fact sheet for one of the residents using website information she was

researching herself. This voluntary offer of help demonstrated support to the older residents and obviously helped them feel valued as learners as their research topics were being taken seriously by the students. The offer also helped develop a team culture where all participants were helping each other and, as a result, the disparity between the experts and novices began to lessen. Lave and Wenger suggest that when learning happens via participation, learning involves the whole person, and in the mobile computer classroom clearly the participants' ideas of who and what they were changed. The students discovered reserves of patience and the urge to help those less knowledgeable than themselves, while the older residents discovered that they could enter into the previously mysterious world of computers with more confidence than they had suspected. The factor that made this possible was the culture within the community of the sixth-form computer-able practitioners which was encouraging, patient and generous in wanting to share knowledge.

### Example 3: Charity event

To address the community and global citizenship part of the Eco Ambassadors Project, the staff involved decided to organise a charities information event at the boys' secondary school. The purpose of the Charities Fair was to create an exhibition that would generate learning about the democratic rights and obligations of being a good citizen (such as the right to vote) and which would allow the project participants to put these democratic principles into action. The goal of the fair was twofold: firstly, to give the Eco Ambassadors the opportunity to find out about the work of a selection of charities through hosting an information and awareness-raising exhibition fair; secondly, to enable the project participants to select and vote for two charities at the fair by holding a formal democratic ballot. The Eco Ambassadors would then go on to support the work of the two selected charities by holding fund-raising events throughout the remaining duration of the project.

All project participants helped to organise the Charities Fair. The pupils issued written invitations to a selection of environmental or citizenship-themed charities asking if they would like to attend the event. All involved took part in publicising the event, through leafleting and putting up posters in the local area. During these preparations the suggestion arose to invite the local WAG Minister to open the Charities Fair. The sixth-formers helped the older folk to compose and send an e-mail invitation. A positive response came back and the minister duly attended and opened the charity event. The sixth-form students prepared ballot papers and two official ballot boxes were borrowed for the occasion. Two Eco Ambassador volunteers were designated as scrutiners and ballot coordinators for the day. During the opening of the

Charities Fair, the WAG Minister invited all present to come to Cardiff Bay to see the new 'Senedd' Welsh parliament buildings.

Three important outcomes, one unexpected, were generated by this event. Firstly, the responses from the various charities to the Eco Ambassadors' invitations were addressed to the pupils themselves at their school address. These official replies from the charities generated great excitement and a sense of importance amongst the project participants. For some of the special needs pupils it was the first time they had received an official letter addressed to them in their own right. The actual result of the mail shot was that 15 charities agreed to attend the event. Yet, the unexpected learning from this letter writing activity was far greater than the tangible result. Self-esteem, confidence, and engagement with the project were notably improved, especially among the pupils with special needs.

Secondly, these activities show the Eco Ambassador participants engaged in tasks and enterprises that were mutually negotiated between the members of the group. Both Lave and Wenger and the citizenship theories of Marshall (1964) and Ahier (2003) propose that through mutual engagement, people change and develop or grow, as does their sense of identity. How people define themselves as citizens develops through the mutual reciprocity of the relationships they form within the groups, communities and societies to which they belong. While there seems to be accord here between both theory strands, it is argued that the notion of mutual engagement proposed through the ideas of citizenship lacks a sense of dynamism or vitality. The theory acknowledges that people's identities develop, but how this happens is not explored. In contrast, Lave and Wenger, with their concept of learning happening through mutual engagement in negotiated activities, bring an element of movement and growth to this idea of social citizenship. Lave and Wenger's idea augments the citizenship notion that how people define themselves as citizens derives from the social groups to which they belong and adds the element of those people engaging in activities within those social groups. To Lave and Wenger, these activities are the catalyst that fosters and develops learning and hence our identities as citizens.

Thirdly, Lave and Wenger acknowledge that the dynamic and fluid nature of the learning that takes place within a community of practice means that often unexpected learning occurs. This was definitely the case with the Charities Fair. The unexpected outcome here was that a political aspect to the citizenship activities emerged as a direct response from interest within the Eco Ambassador community to the WAG Minister's invitation to visit the new Welsh Senedd. This generated learning about the political and democratic processes

within Wales and resulted in a visit to and tour of the National Assembly for Wales buildings in November 2006.

This was a highly interesting development from the perspective of the project staff as it had been a deliberate and conscious decision to organise the Charities Fair event and to run a ballot in a non-political context. The low turn-out of voters in the last two UK general elections, taken with the general concerns in the media about political apathy, had led the project staff to believe that politics would not be of interest to the Eco Ambassador participants. The staff wanted the project participants to engage in, own and direct these democratic activities in ways that suited themselves and—if a political interest were to emerge—the staff would support it. The project staff were pleased that this is exactly what happened and that the community did indeed take control and actually set a political direction to the citizenship activities by requesting the visit to the National Assembly for Wales buildings.

According to Ahier (2003), one of the criticisms of citizenship education is that many teachers do not include knowledge of the political and democratic processes within their citizenship curricula but instead prefer to concentrate solely on the rights and obligations of being a good citizen. This non-political agenda, misses a crucial aspect of citizenship described by Crick (1998), cited in Pring (2001) as “political literacy”<sup>5</sup>: the idea that knowledge and active engagement in democratic, political processes is a factor of citizenship too important to ignore and one that should be encouraged through education. This missing political content would have been a criticism that could have been levelled at the Eco Ambassadors Project, if it were not for the unexpected learning that arose out of the mutual activities and interests of the Eco Ambassador community. The unexpected political learning generated here suggested to the project staff that practical citizenship activities could be a forum for rekindling interest in political democratic processes and the institutions of government. This observation resonates strongly with the views of Ahier (2003) who believes that it is in the civic spaces or communities where people are engaged with one another that people find their (often tenuous and nebulous) notions of citizenship. Ahier proposes that we should use these civic spaces and communities of participants to revitalise or reconnect civic ideas of citizenship to active participation in the democratic political processes. The experience of unexpected political learning being generated within the Eco Ambassadors Project would seem to suggest that Ahier’s views are worthy of exploration and may be a productive area for further research. From

the observations of the Eco Ambassadors Project, exposing people to democratic activities could well be a practical strategy with which to revitalise interest and engagement in political and democratic processes. Further, Lave and Wenger’s framework of learning through participation and mutual engagement in a community or cultural setting could be a useful framework to describe the learning that takes place and to inform the curriculum design of citizenship education.

## Conclusions

**As with** all new projects there are areas where improvements can be made, but on many levels the Eco Ambassadors Project has been a success. Throughout the duration of the project to date, 26 sixth-form boys have participated in the project, completed presentations on their voluntary work as Eco Ambassadors and have gained foundation level credits from the University of Glamorgan as a result. In addition, 30 special needs pupils and 12 senior citizens have participated in the project. However, the staff involved in the project believe that it is not meeting the set targets that make this project a success, but the unexpected learning that has occurred as the staff, sixth-form students, special needs pupils and senior citizens have slowly begun to work as a team and develop into a community of learners. The project has seen reciprocal bonding between staff from the University and participants from the boys’ comprehensive school, the special needs school and the residential home, all of whom have enjoyed working together.

Despite the funding only being for one year in the first instance, the project has carried on for three years and will continue to run for the next academic year. The practical, environmental activities have enabled everyone to work and learn side by side and have been especially valuable in helping the participants to integrate and develop a rapport. It is the opinion of the staff involved in this project that creating a framework of participation using mutually negotiated, inclusive, and purposeful tasks has precipitated the emergence of a community of practice, a community of learners that has changed and developed as a result of the learning activities in which the participants have been involved.

Although the Eco Ambassadors Project is still in progress, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions about the project in theoretical and practical terms. The project is achieving its aims of encouraging three sectors of the community, who would not normally have many opportunities to meet, to work together on ‘live’ tasks. Through a series of environ-

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5. The principle of political literacy has been adopted in the English National Curriculum and citizenship is now a subject in its own right. In contrast, in Wales, citizenship is a cross-curricular theme and part of the ‘Wales Europe and the World’ element of the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification. According to the QCA (2007), the three principles of effective citizenship education set out by the Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools are that citizenship should develop social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy.



mental and citizenship-themed activities a growing sense of comradeship and team spirit has begun to develop between the participants. There are also theoretical conclusions to be drawn. The three illustrative activities discussed previously highlight several potential gaps within Lave and Wenger's concept of the community of practice. Firstly, it is not always possible to define clearly who the practitioners are in a given situation and so defining the community of practitioners needs to be further clarified. That definition may vary depending on the knowledge base and the perceptions of the actual participants involved. Secondly, the examples presented suggest that positive learning within a community of

practice only happens when there is a culture of encouragement, patience and generosity or willingness on behalf of the community of practitioners to share their knowledge. Thirdly, Bandura's views that people, behaviour and environment all interact to foster learning provide an additional, useful explanation of how learning happens in a fluid and changing community of practice. Finally it is argued that Lave and Wenger's framework of learning through participation and mutual engagement in a community of practice has much to offer citizenship theory in better explaining how citizenship identity is formed and that this could provide a productive area for inter-disciplinary research.

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