

<b>Institution: De Montfort University</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 22 – Social Work and Social Policy</b>
<b>Title of case study: Participatory methods and social action</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>This case study draws on work undertaken by the Centre for Social Action (CSA) to improve publicly funded services through service-user engagement in both research processes and service delivery. The centre combines applied social research with service and policy evaluation, consultancy, training and information services to the fields of youth work, community development and social and health care. The social action methodology for practice and research undertaken using this participatory approach has had an impact on services and policy internationally (e.g. classroom teaching in the US and the development of social work services in Eastern Europe), nationally (e.g. evaluations of national youth participation projects such as Participation Works and U R Boss for the Howard League) and locally (e.g. work with Leicester City Council). Impacts have been wide ranging, and include methodological innovation, development of training curricula and materials for practitioners, and policy changes which have a profound impact on people's lives.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The CSA has developed, utilised and studied participatory methods in practice and research to further its commitment to social change via a distinctive approach to applied social research, with a special emphasis on involvement of users as co-participants at all stages of the research process. The methodological exploration of social action as a participatory approach began in the 1980s [e], and its use and development has continued ever since. The underpinning research and innovative theoretical approach has been developed and refined by a large number of researchers across many projects and publications [see e.g. a], produced both for academic and non-academic audiences.</p> <p>Social Action is a combination of six principles and a clear process, and Social Action Research is a distinct methodology within participative approaches and has the following key elements, as defined in the seminal work by Fleming and Ward in 2004:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory – facilitates the full involvement of research subjects and other stakeholders in all stages of the research.</li> <li>• Inductive – draws theory out of data rather than interprets data and organises data within predefined or given frameworks.</li> <li>• Critical – grounded on a power perspective, committed to social change to the advantage of those currently without power.</li> <li>• Anti-oppressive – actively challenges assumptions which underpin unequal social relations, with an explicit commitment to empowerment and social justice.</li> <li>• Iterative – builds up theory and knowledge progressively.</li> <li>• Cyclical – a process that continually revisits and evaluates its building blocks (Fleming and Ward 2004).</li> </ul> <p>The research underpinning this case study has involved a number of DMU staff, primarily Prof D Ward (Professor of Social and Community Studies, DMU 1994 - ), J Fleming (Director, CSA, Reader in Participatory Research and Social Action, DMU 1995 - ), Dr T Boeck (Senior Research Fellow, DMU 1998 - ), Dr H Weich (Senior Lecturer, DMU 2001 - ) and Prof R. Smith (Professor of Social Work Research 2006-2012).</p> <p>The methodological approach and insights into the use of social action and participatory methods for both practice and research were developed through application in a variety of research projects locally, nationally and internationally [e.g. c, d]. All of these projects were gained through competitive tender or peer reviewed application. All the projects gained through competitive tender were commissioned with the specific view of influencing policy in the commissioning organisation or more widely and thus often led to immediate and tangible impacts. Since 1993 the social action methodological approach has been used directly or to inform the methodology of many high quality research projects funded by (for example) the European Union (TESR), DfID, Community Fund, Big Lottery, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Dept of Health, local authorities (e.g. the City Councils of Leicester and Nottingham, Bedfordshire County Council), national bodies (e.g. Id&amp;ea, SCIE), voluntary organisations (e.g. Howard League, Volunteering England, Participation Works). Research grants (five) and commissions (more than 10) totalling over £1.4m have been awarded between 2008 and 2011.</p>

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Whilst each of these projects has been unique, key findings can be grouped under three broad headings:

- Identification of significant recommendations for policy and practice of organisations based on the views of service users and community members.
- Recommendations for policy and practice derived from the focus of each study for increasing the involvement of service users and community members in the design, delivery and evaluation of policy and practice in that area/organisation.
- Methodological developments and learning about the use of the participatory Social Action process in research and practice.

### 3. References to the research

**Bold** = DMU staff at time of the research. All Peer Reviewed (except b)

- a. **Fleming J** (2010) 'Young people's involvement in research – still a long way to go?' *Qualitative Social Work*, May 2010, pp207-224
- b. **Fleming, J. and Ward, D.** (2004) 'Methodology and Practical Application of the Social Action Research Model' in Maggs-Rapport, F. (ed) New Qualitative Research Methodologies in Health and Social Care: Putting Ideas into Practice. London: Routledge.
- c. **Boeck T and Fleming J** (2005) 'Social Policy – A help or a hindrance to Social Capital' Social Policy and Society 4:3, pp259-270
- d. **Fleming J and Keenan E** (2000) 'Youth On The Margins In Northern Ireland, England And Ukraine' European Journal of Social Work Vol 3 No 2, pp165-177
- e. **Fleming, J. Harrison M., and Ward D.** (1998) 'Social Action can be an Empowering Process', Youth and Policy. No.60, pp 46-61

### 4. Details of the impact

The Social Action approach has had consequences and has made a distinct contribution outside the academic community. The impact of the Social Action is diverse, has a significant number of beneficiaries at a variety of levels and is extensive with considerable reach and significance. The Social Action approach, which can be applied in both research and practice, has underpinned the provision of wide-ranging consultancy, applied research and training to voluntary and statutory agencies in the UK, and internationally, giving both breadth and depth to the impact of Social Action. For example, during the assessment period, Social Action has impacted upon local council policy in relation to community cohesion and resilience, the design of evolving voluntary and statutory social and youth services in countries of the former Soviet Union through partnerships with international NGOs and national government departments, the development of student directed learning in the United States through a long collaboration with the National Writing Project (a national professional development agency for teachers), and informed the training of 200 young people in South Africa to undertake peer research exploring the community support for young people affected by HIV/AIDs. In the JISC funded DIEGO (Disseminating Impact from Engagement with user Groups and Organisations 2011-12) project Fleming linked with Impact Analysts from University of Edinburgh to look specifically at the impact of participatory research in the area of Social Action; this project applied a previously developed impact approach to analyse and evaluate the impact of participatory research and created two case studies evidencing the impact of our work in relation to Teenage Pregnancy in Leicester and children's services in Ukraine.

The following specific areas illustrate the reach and significance of the outcomes of our research:

**International impact: (a) America** The CSA has a long-standing formal and active partnership with the National Writing Project at the University of California, Berkeley. Fleming worked with the organisation and its teacher members for a number of years to explore the application of Social Action in the classroom setting. This partnership culminated in the publication in 2006 of 'Writing for a Change: Boosting Literacy and Learning Through Social Action' (Berdan et al, 2006), which won the 2007 annual award of the American Society of Educational Publishers for the most outstanding materials in the field of teaching and learning, which has sold over 6,000 copies. This book is used as a key text at the University of Massachusetts on their Civic Engagement course and is the basis of their service learning projects. Social Action training delivered as part of this collaboration was utilised by one particular teacher (Kristina Berdan) who has worked with groups of pupils in her Baltimore school over many years. Ultimately they opened their own young-people led community youth centre – Youth Dreamers. Youth Dreamers has impacted positively on the lives of over 500 young people over a period of some 10 years by providing a safe haven with opportunities for youth to accomplish personal goals, develop leadership potential and participate

in improving their communities.

**(b) Moldova** Fleming and Weich (SL in social work and associate of CSA) have been engaged as international experts on the Social Services strand of the 'Support to the Delivery of Effective and Sustainable Social Assistance Services in Moldova'. Funded by the UK's Department for International Development and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, this project aimed to support the development of the newly created post of Community Social Assistant. We provided consultancy for the development of job descriptions for the social assistants, ensured service user involvement, and contributed to the development of primary social care legalisation adopted by the Government of Moldova in December 2008. We developed a participative training strategy and curriculum for training that is being rolled out nationally. The CSA's work on participation and community development is central to the curriculum and materials written by **Fleming and Weich** for inclusion in manuals produced by the Moldovan Ministry of Social Protection Family and Child. By the end of the census period (i.e. 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013) ca. 1000 social assistants and their supervisors had received training based on the curriculum and manuals. This work has had an impact on the 800 community social assistants and hence an estimated 170 000 beneficiaries of their services.

**National impact:** Standards We Expect Project This Joseph Rowntree funded consortium project on the subject of person-centred support utilised the Social Action research methodology. A guide for practitioners was one of a range of academic and non-academic outputs at the end of the project (Croft S, Bewley C, Beresford P, Branfield F, **Fleming J**, Glynn M, Postle K (2011) Person-Centred Support: A guide to person centred working for practitioners, Shaping Our Lives in association with Joseph Rowntree Foundation). The action points in this guide were used to create a poster published in Community Care and sent to all social workers by The College of Social Work. The guide is accessible on a number of different websites, and in March 2013 it received between 80-120 views from at least four different countries each week on **Fleming's** academia.edu page alone indicating its popularity as a practice resource. The findings from this project were subject to a Guardian Roundtable focusing on the funding of social care with subsequent reporting in the Society pages of *The Guardian* (10/8/11) and the press more widely.

**Local impact** Leicester City Council – Leicester teenage pregnancy prevention (LTPP) strategy 2006/7 onwards. LCC commissioned the CSA to undertake the Leicester teenage pregnancy prevention (LTPP) strategy evaluation. The report contributed to better informed public policy and to improved services. It has been influential, informing the commissioning of new services. The teenage pregnancy rate in Leicester has reduced. The project was included in a guide produced by Involve (national advisory group to support greater involvement of public in health and social care research) as an example of good participatory research practice.

Leicester City Council – Survey of Leicester (2006 – 2013) Through the work of **Boeck**, the CSA have had a long-standing partnership with Leicester City Council. Most recently introducing our participatory methods into the Council's 'Survey of Leicester'. This generated a better understanding of how residents perceive their communities and therefore identify local issues that are important in different areas for different communities. This process actively engaged with a diverse group of Leicester's residents and explored people's attitudes towards a survey and identified different ways to best administer it. The partnership work and participatory process had a substantial impact on the work of the 'research and intelligence' team of Leicester city council. As a result of this and other work done with the council, several departments have integrated a stronger focus on the capacity of individuals and communities to respond to challenges, and to 'absorb' and 'bounce back' in a way that maintains or even enhances wellbeing within their remit. This is a substantial shift away from perspectives which only look at deficits within communities, stressing vulnerabilities rather than resilience.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### International Impact: (a) America

- Email correspondence from the publisher of 'Writing for a Change: Boosting Literacy and Learning Through Social Action' provides evidence for the sales figures claimed and is available upon request. The information is also reiterated in a testimonial from the Director of the National Writing Project. She also states that: "More importantly, we see that our collaboration continues to have an impact on our work. For example, teacher-leaders in the Educating for Democracy in a Digital Age project in Oakland, California, used *Writing for a Change* as a way to understand how they could build system-wide curricular approaches around youth participation and civic

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engagement. The social action approach has influenced the ways that these educators have been able to frame practices in relation to youth and participatory politics. As this project develops, we hope to see continuing expansion of interest in social action among teachers in the National Writing Project.

- Information about the Youth Dreamers and its impact on young people's lives are described at <http://youthdreamers.org/> (accessed 12/08/13). A testimonial provided by Youth Deamers (which can be made available upon request) states: "Since starting the Youth Dreamers in 2001, 618 students have been served in our programs, 251 students have been employed to teach in our programs, 17,194 service-learning hours towards graduation have been earned by students attending our programs, 15 programs have been designed and implemented by youth, 23 community art projects have been completed, and 520 volunteers have participated in service days. In addition, of our nine founders, six have gone onto college, four are now in graduate school (...). It would be fair to say that the social action approach and its participatory methods have directly impacted upon the lives of each of these young people." And "*It's hard for me to begin to explain how much the Youth Dreamers has positively influenced my life personally, academically, and socially*" (the second part is a statement in the letter from Chekana Reid, graduate student at Towson University, founder of the organization).

**(b) Moldova** The impacts claimed in Moldova can be evidenced through hard copies of the training materials etc. (which can be made available upon request) and from a testimonial provided by Oxford Policy Management, from which the following quotation has been drawn: "The technical assistance provided by the Centre for Social Action contributed to the adoption by the Government of Moldova of the National Programme on the Integrated System of Social Services, passed in December 2008, and the approval by the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child of related regulations during 2009 and 2010."

The Moldovan Training manuals are:

- *Mobilizarea Comunitatii Ghid de aplicare Practica* (approved by Moldovan Min of Social Protection, Family and Child nr 022 din 04.12.2009 – published in Romanian and Russian) *Training manual for the initial training of community social assistants* (Working with groups and the community pp80-88 in English version) (approved by Moldovan Min of Social Protection, Family and Child no 56 15.06.2009 – published in Romanian and English)
- *Support de Curs pentru formarea continua a competentelor profesionale fundamentale in asistentta sociala* (aprobat prin ordinal Min Muncii, Protectiei Sociale si Familiei nr 115 din 04.06.2010 – published in Romanian)

**National Impact** The '[Person-Centred Support: A guide to person centred working for practitioners](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/transforming-social-care-person-centred-support)' guide can be accessed from <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/transforming-social-care-person-centred-support> (accessed 12/08/13). Copies of the emails confirming the number of views of the site from Academia.edu Analytics Snapshots are available upon request, as is a copy of the articles in the Guardian.

**Local Impact:** The guide produced by Involve can be provided upon request.

The LTTP coordinator when interviewed as part of the DIEGO project recently said she thinks they are on target to meet their reduction in teenage pregnancies in 2013 – there was a significant and welcome drop in conceptions in 2012. The LTTP co-ordinator also said that the research was "about the best we have ever had." They have "commissioned a lot of services based on it; it was still being referred to and had, thus, been very useful and influential."

**The Survey of Leicester pilot:** according to a testimonial provided by The Research and Intelligence Manager at Leicester City Council: "The pilot work has had a number of impacts on city council practice. Firstly, it has reinforced the council's commitment to more participative policy-making and service administration(...). As well as the introduction of minimum standards to ensure consistency (...) staff are working alongside council departments to tailor individual consultation exercises so that they build on day-to-day channels of communication and, where necessary, explore new ways of reaching out to engage those likely to be affected by proposed interventions. Second, it has informed the approach to evaluation taken by the council's transforming neighbourhood services initiative. This project (...) is adapting the methods developed in the Survey of Leicester pilot study(...). Finally, the pilot work has prompted the council to further invest in developing capacity for local research through the creation of a new, fixed-term post of Project Co-ordinator (Community Insight).