

The Crossroads Lifelong Learning Partnership

A New Model for Rural Community Education at Crossroads for the
21st Century.

A Proposal document outlining the vision and some of the ideas we have to recreate a 3
– 18 years school and lifelong learning educational institute within the Crossroads
community of East Ayrshire.

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Executive Summary

This initiative came about following the closure of Crossroads Primary School in East Ayrshire and is part of a more widespread attempt to regenerate and further the development of the Crossroads Rural Community.

We have set up a Development Trust which is coordinating the community initiatives which are being undertaken. These include the setting up of a farm shop selling local food and produce. The overall remit of all the community development projects that are being planned is Lifelong learning.

The school proposals are built around the Curriculum for Excellence, how effective is it as a learning model, how it might be transcribed and developed across other areas and what areas of the model are in further need of development.

The educational concept behind the school is Place based education – education based on the geographical situation, better utilisation of local culture and history, increasing local democratic participation through the promotion of active citizenship and awareness of local economic factors, how they affect the community and how can a locally driven education best meet these future issues.

The main focus of the school is to increase community involvement in education; identify and address key community issues through our education process; build effective bridges between other communities.

As a rural school we want to understand better how to increase our visibility and therefore our viability; become increasingly sustainable; promote our way of life and improve access to and throughout the countryside.

We are currently developing an after school learning unit promoting education in life skills, outdoor education, rural life and following this an expansion to youth and adult education.

We have Planning permission to begin conversion of local farm buildings to house the educational hub, where we can build up evidence of need for the full re-establishment of a primary education unit, which we hope we will be able to extend as demand dictates.

Background

This project came about after Crossroads Primary School in East Ayrshire was closed due to the dilapidated state of the building, despite huge community protest.

A community wide survey, of over 70 households, undertaken during the school consultation process showed that there was overwhelming community support for local initiative and widespread concern that the loss of the school would adversely affect social, economic and educational development within the community.(1)

Since the closure of the school, we have set up the Crossroads Development Trust to oversee several community initiatives that the Crossroads community is currently developing.

A Rural Primary School is one of these. Others include a local food hub, a café, meeting facilities, a community hall and a lifelong learning hub.

Aim and Purpose

The aim of this proposal is to establish a pilot project to assess several aspects of primary/rural/community schooling and if feasible, re-establish a primary learning establishment in the Crossroads community. We envisage starting with after school /youth /adult education classes based in converted farm buildings that can then grow and develop into a best practice, place-based rural school in Crossroads.

The purpose of this proposal is to enable the Crossroads community to engage and develop ownership of its own educational establishment. While it is hoped that we will all benefit personally from this process, we hope that shared ownership and responsibility will provide fulfillment and appreciation of the benefits which can be conferred through making a valued contribution to the greater good of the whole.

The School at a Community level

I have been influenced by several different schooling/educational models, which have been particularly successful and useful for rural communities and their children.

These include –

- Henry Morris and his work in rural Cambridgeshire in the 1930's to 1960's;(2)
- The work of FUNDAEC, an NGO in Latin America which has developed a Tutorial Learning System for secondary education to foster education, training and development in rural areas and a University Centre for rural well-being. (3)
- The original thinking from the Danish free school movement,(4) with some of the more recent English free school (5) and USA Charter school developments (6); and
- The Place based rural school movement in the USA. (7), (8).

Their recurrent themes resonate with the Crossroads community – fluidity between school and community, emphasis on “place,” acknowledgement of local economic issues, addressing key community issues, reducing rural youth migration, appreciation of local history & culture and developing open learning & lifelong learning communities.

I am also suggesting a school model which promotes a shift in the rights, roles and responsibilities of not only communities, councils and government, but also between families, schools and state provision, and even the child, parents and teachers.

The first shift between communities, councils and state will occur as public service cutbacks mean that communities must now be willing to accept more responsibilities (3rd sector involvement). In return, they can expect their rights to be conferred in greater depth than what is currently occurring within local education in the Scottish educational system. More involvement, more say, more ownership, but also more inter-dependency.

The shift between families, schools and state education will occur as we open up the language and concepts of education at a community level.

Employing the Curriculum for Excellence as a general lifelong learning model is an attempt to begin this process. By de-mystifying the learning process, we can make the education system more transparent and encourage inter-generational learning.

There will be more opportunities for lifelong learning, increasing chances for cross transferal of skills and better integration of education into life skill development.

There will also be more opportunities for the skills of teachers to be applied within the community setting, extending to business, continuing professional development and culture.

The re-alignment between the child, parent, teacher and community is through more child-centred, family orientated and participatory models being applied, which is covered in the next section.

In this sense and as several others have attempted in the past, we are building “Schools without walls.”

The School at an Educational level

As a community we have learned much from the campaigns to save our school and now to get a school re-established. I feel it is imperative that we take measures to learn from these experiences, which are now part of our local history and that we take stock, educationally of what areas we feel need more attention so that our school addresses current key local educational issues as well as potentially addressing national areas in need of further attention.

These include Active Citizenship; Emotional development and facilitation; the Rights of the Child; Teaching Philosophy to Children and the development of Parenting skills and involvement.

The report "By Diverse Means – Improving Scottish Education" by the Commission on School Reform (2013) recommends a shift in emphasis from developing successful learners to also understanding more fully how we can become more effective contributors, confident individuals and responsible citizens. As you will see, these proposals do begin to make that shift.

The report also proposes greater autonomy for schools, diversity, improved means of implementing change and ponders changes in governance. These proposals touch on all of these issues and we suggest that this is a model which could be used/adapted/evolved to meet these current demands on a rural/local/national level.

Active Citizenship

While it is acknowledged that the Curriculum for Excellence has philosophical roots that imply that citizenship is inherent within the curricular framework – "Responsible Citizens" being one of the 4 main Capacities which the curriculum aims to develop, it is also widely acknowledged that teacher skills in teaching active citizenship are still lacking.

Historically this is an area which has not been well developed in schools and in recent times although the younger generations have disengaged from party politics, youth involvement in global internet campaigns increases and membership of special interest campaign groups also continues to grow.

At a Primary level more work could be done to increase levels of involvement in active citizenship. To this end I have worked closely with a contact in London, Jamie Kelsey Fry who has published a Citizenship textbook for GCSE students and is willing to adapt it to suit Primary level.(9)

The Crossroads school campaign is included in the book under the local campaign chapter.

www.newint.org/books/reference/citizenship-toolkit/

We have a long standing working relationship with Scott Communications. John Scott is a PR and communications consultant and with their partners they have helped us to develop a coherent strategy to keep moving things forwards, develop a better understanding of the media, how it works and develop skills that promote positive, active citizenship, within the Scottish context and beyond.

Emotional development

While emotional development is included in the CfE within the key skills under Health and Well-being there is evidence to suggest that teaching can be a highly stressful occupation.(10) Like other professions, teaching could benefit from psychotherapeutic supervision, which could reduce stress related disorders, and develop a school culture of facilitation and more open acknowledgement of emotional factors at play in daily life, for teachers, parents and children. (11) There is criticism of small schools, as in the council consultation on the closure of Crossroads, and as there often is in the rural context, that emotional development may be suppressed in schools like Crossroads.

This may be because it is thought that class sizes are often smaller or there are reduced opportunities to meet children from different socio economic backgrounds or there is a reduction in peer influence due to multi composite classes.

It is my feeling that none of the above is true and I would like the opportunity to dispel myths like this, which are routinely propagated against small, rural schools.

The recently published report from the Commission on Rural Education has highlighted issues around rural education in Scotland regarding quality of delivery, funding and community involvement.(12)

Regarding educational benefit there was little evidence that standards were lower and much to suggest that CfE was being well delivered even considering the seeming reduction in resources due to scale and geographical challenges.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0041/00418669.pdf>

Nevertheless, to further develop evidence, I would like to evaluate the emotional development of children educated within the rural context and within their community to assess how best practice could evolve. How can a place based, community school best equip our children with emotional skills and how can this be placed within the CfE framework. Exploring this would be a key component of developing confident individuals, who are aware of themselves, can express themselves and can empathise with others.

Finlay Macleod, in his paper “Personal Schooling- thinking beyond the curriculum” (13) questions the role that the school plays in maintaining our communities, whilst making allowances for their growth.

I have been working with a psychotherapist, who also works in education (specifically emotional development) at a council level and we may be able to begin the process of mapping out a suitable model that can be developed within our setting.

I have also been looking into the viability of using the Kit Bag system to aid positive emotional support, which is promoted by the International Futures Forum.

In essence this school will be a Being (Place based); Feeling (Emphasis on emotional development); Thinking (Integrating Philosophical enquiry) and Doing (Practical and skill based) School.

The Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights on behalf of children.

I have looked at the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), for guidance in the area of citizenship and it seems a good starting/reference point upon which we may be able to build, resulting in the delivery of appropriate age and stage citizenship skills for each child. (14)

It is also potentially a useful starting point from which to build a school ethos.

I have been developing links with Professor Wallace from the Robert Gordon Institute. She has expertise in the CRC and may be able to provide more direction in this area. Prof. Wallace has also indicated that she could input into ethical issues and funding around research proposals that we may make and it's possible that we may be able to submit some joint funding proposals.

Clear guidelines on rights, conferred together with roles and responsibilities will, we hope will go some way to addressing issues around disenfranchisement, isolation and disempowerment at local decision making levels.

Teaching Philosophy to children

Teaching philosophy to children is also a key unit of the citizenship element and I have met with academics from Strathclyde University with interests in the teaching of philosophy to children, citizenship and policy development in education.

St Andrews University has a strong philosophy department and they have a developing outreach service for the teaching of Philosophy in schools. I have been taking advice from them and they have provided contact with Morag Gaut co-author of “Teaching Philosophy to Young Children” (15), who has offered to help us to develop this work.

A study in Clackmannanshire evaluated IQ changes following 16 months of weekly philosophical enquiry with 10-12 yr olds. Scores were raised by an average of 6 points and improvements remained on follow up, following cessation of classes. They also found that there were strong gains in self-esteem in academic matters: that is, as learners and active problem solvers. There were also strong increases in the children's participation in discussion, with improved reasoning for their own and others' views. (16)

Teaching children critical thinking skills is also a component of increasing and improving self-directed learning and for Crossroads, given multi composite classes, higher than average parental/community involvement and

the small school setting allowing for greater self-directed learning to take place; this is an important dimension to emphasise and develop.

With the Ayrshire Home Education Network we have trialed Philosophy classes for 5yr olds and 8-10yr olds with some success. The children have thrived on the opportunity to voice their opinions in a respectful and open environment and have not been overwhelmed by the subject matter or held back by any limitations in their own knowledge. We have the support of a philosophy graduate who is keen to continue to develop these classes within their own right and possibly as curricular material for the future.

Parenting Skills and Involvement

The original Crossroads school had managed to cultivate a high level of parental involvement and I feel it has been important to understand the factors which created this and how we might be able to continue to emulate this success.

It is becoming clear that parental involvement will play a significant role in any new community schooling model and in an attempt to continue to develop this area I have identified the Triple P Parenting system as a potential model, which we are currently in the process of trialing.

It has international recognition as a progressive approach to teaching parenting skills, but whatever system we advocate for this area, there will need to be a level of individual tailoring as each family and each parent has inherently different skill levels and maintaining involvement can only be done if individual needs can be consistently met.⁽¹⁷⁾

This is an area which I hope to develop in consensus with the parent community of Crossroads, which at best would be an attempt to build and reflect individual, family, community, national and international ethics and values. Meeting modern issues and concerns openly, in a reflective environment.

To this end I have taken advice and guidance from Ronnie McEwan of the Kinharvie Facilitation Institute ⁽¹⁸⁾ regarding the possibility of using this organisation to increase community participation.

They have advised on how best to develop community initiatives and they will also be an invaluable resource we can refer to should the need arise for mediation in any disputes or misunderstandings.

In terms of developing effective contributors this area will provide rich opportunities for families to learn to work more easily within themselves and to feel like they are also playing a key part in developing as a community and our children will have the opportunity to grow up contributing to their community as their education is based upon it.

Local cultural, economic and historical issues

The Crossroads community is a small, accessible rural community on the outskirts of the relatively large, urban conurbation of Kilmarnock. It is surrounded by 10 small/medium rural villages/ towns. It is composed of mainly small/ medium family farms, with 2 larger rural/ farming estates with tenanted farms/properties. It includes 3 hamlets, various smallholdings and detached and semi detached rural properties.

The name Crossroads came from the fact that the hamlet of Crossroads sat at the meeting point of 4 Church parishes and a school was present at the original site for 150 years.

The farms were traditionally family dairy farms although since the deregulation of the dairy industry in the UK in the late 80's there has been a steady decline in the number of family dairy farms and many have turned to beef, sheep or off farm incomes to remain viable. More recently this diversification has been towards renewable energy sources for income.

Some local producers/retailers from rural smallholdings and farms may have benefitted from the Farmers markets which have enjoyed a relative level of success in the past decade, but they are under steady pressure from supermarkets, health and safety regulators and the economic squeeze on consumers as they attempt to continue to maintain their viability.

Commuters from rural areas have also come under pressure from the continual increases in fuel prices, the continuing delays at busy times on the approaches to and from Glasgow and Ayr.

Looking further back I have turned to Professor Tom Devine who has researched the Lowland Clearances of the 17th to 19th centuries as I felt that there may be patterns to rural migration or lessons to be learned from a clearer understanding of this historical context. (19)

Shifts in rural economies appear to occur due to several coincidental factors colliding and understanding lowland rural depopulation in the 20th and 21st centuries would need a similar analysis.

Prof. Devine has pointed out in his book "Scotland A Nation" (20) that the lowland clearances have been relatively ignored by historians. While there is scope for a greater understanding of the past lowland migrations there is also much scope to understand the current issues if we are to offset the potential exodus if rural schools across Scotland are closed under the current impending public spending cuts.

I think it is important to explore how lowland, accessible rural Scotland has been consistently marginalised in terms of its identity, compared to the Highlands. As the "Back Garden" of West Central Scotland this loss of, or not a well enough securing of, our identity has increased the urban/rural divide.

Prof. Tom Devine has offered support and encouragement to the initiative and has emphasized that it is also important that primary aged children become well-grounded and versed in their local history, as a starting point for extended learning and understanding of history.

A literary review carried out by Professor Lynn Jamieson and Dr Leslie Groves (21) on behalf of the Scottish government states that;

"All of these studies emphasise and to some degree demonstrate an association between migration and the desire for higher education and graduate employment or 'good jobs'. They give voice to young people's feelings that they have to leave rural areas in order to take up education and/or opportunities for employment that engage and develop their skills and qualifications."

Furthermore, they support a shift in emphasis in the future, concluding that;

"All of these studies indicate that a portion of young people anticipate leaving the area from an early age, and that those who are most likely to be prepared for leaving have parents who benefited from higher education. Jones and Jamieson's study suggested that young people without university educated parents considering migration do not always receive adequate professional advice and guidance, and they thus argue that support and information are needed for the migrate-or-stay decision (Jones and Jamieson, 1999). Many of the studies illustrate a range of views among young people, including strong ambivalence about leaving and a wish to return at some future date, and as such government and local policy should be about offering real choice to young people rather than be designed simply to retain them in rural communities (Jones and Jamieson, 1997)."

We feel it is imperative that young people are given the time and the opportunity to see the value of their rural upbringing and rural education in order for them to truly have freedom of choice, and to make informed decisions as they get older. It is thought that the loss of Crossroads Primary School has further reduced the opportunities within our community to see such values and would increase the likelihood of increased migration from our community.

"In giving voice to young people's attitudes to migration and staying, these studies reveal an often repeated view that leaving the area is evidence of seeking to make the most of yourself and being open to change, while staying is evidence of arrested development, lack of ambition and closed attitudes. These are stereotypes that reflect complex discourses with connotations of social class, including the presumption of the greater worth of formal qualifications over locally learned skills and that trade on the devaluing of rural places in comparison to the presumed complexity and sophistication of city life. While this view is more often repeated by would-be migrants and migrants in preparation for or justification of migration (Pavis et al., 2000, 2001), it is a view also repeated by young people who feel trapped in their local community (Jamieson, 2000)."

The above quote demonstrates how it is often deemed heroic to leave and 'better oneself' than to stay, support and build one's own community.

One could say that this is due to the urbanisation of our Scottish culture in general and that the countryside and matters concerning it are still in many ways mysterious, but of little interest to the majority of urbanites. Nevertheless, feelings are strong in rural Scotland that we are at the brink of monumental change in how we not only regard ourselves, but how we come to be regarded by the majority of our fellow citizens. Farming is at a crisis point, with the average age of farmers now in the late 50's. Massive world food shortages looming, CAP reform, immense pressure from supermarkets to produce cheap food are all continually bearing down upon our farming communities. There was never a more important time to maintain our rural economy, to strengthen it and to build upon it.

Ayrshire has traditionally had a strong agricultural base and there is no reason why it cannot grow and develop to meet the needs of the 21st century. This will not happen if we are unable to develop strong roots from which our children and their children's children can be encouraged to love, respect and explore their rural heritage. It has been shown that education can be approached in a different way to enhance the likelihood of maintaining rural communities (20)

We have lost so many generations to urbanisation and emigration and there never seems to be enough political will to make the choice of remaining here, for the non prodigal son/daughter, to be seen to make the heroic gesture. The time for a shift in emphasis, for a building of our own nation and careful stewardship of our own land is within our grasp and in no small way is Crossroads school a part of this restructuring.

Research, evidence and developments

As part of the school campaign we undertook a community survey,(1) consulting over 70 households on issues covering educational, social and recreational, and economic issues. This gave widespread support for a range of community measures and included strong support for the school and the attendant social advantages it conferred on the community.

In turn there was recognition that a school was integral to reducing rural youth migration, itself an endemic issue in Scotland, as the survey highlights and provides references.

These links between education and community sustainability are fundamental ones to explore and with them we would also take account and assess the social, economic and political implications, which might also be inherent to understanding what are the most effective ways of maintaining and developing rural communities in Scotland and in particular at Crossroads.

To this end we are in the process of formulating a research brief with Prof. Wallace and Dr Sarah Skerratt of SRUC, with advice from Prof. Bronwen Cohen of Edinburgh Uni. and Sandy Longmuir of the Rural Schools Network. Potentially looking at a long term, comparative study into the relationships between education and community development.

The Crossroads Community Hub

From the Development Trust being set up the food hub has emerged. This group is working on a Social Enterprise model where local food is sourced and sold with profits going back into the project and the community. Wind turbines are also in the planning process. Conference / meeting rooms, cafe, kitchen teaching areas, and allotment plots are all being considered at present.

Grants have been awarded and we are currently in the process of investigating a community buy out of the land on which the original school stood. A feasibility study has been undertaken and we are now constructing a business plan, which would allow us to begin drawing up and securing the land.

The entire remit of the Development Trust is "Lifelong Learning." Whilst we acknowledge the value of grant aid to initiate our developments, the long term aim for all of them is that they become self-sustaining and economically viable.

The Political Context

The Scottish Futures Forum (23) has provided a reference point for several aspects of these proposals. As it is in essence, a futuristic evidence base this organisation has highlighted to us the importance of strengthening local initiatives, increasing local levels of participation and improving levels of local decision making and hence policy making, which is relevant and effective at meeting local needs and aspirations.

Both COSLA (24) and the Scottish Government (25) have stated policies to increase Third Sector/Community involvement, but we recognise that it will take a considerable shift from all the stakeholders in policy making if more democratic reforms are to be brought about. If indeed there is to be a significant shift from the traditional, representative government to a more transparent, participatory style of governance in Scotland.

The current debate leading up to the Referendum on Scottish Independence in 2014 is an opportunity to air and assess what historical and cultural trappings we take with us as we potentially attempt to either assert greater levels of self-determination or perhaps inflict more power with less economic and emotional security attached to our policy making processes.

I have been attempting to alert the Government to the fact that much work still needs to be done if the less constructive scenarios outlined by the Scottish Futures Forum are to be avoided and we must begin to work with a less risk averse culture attached to our decision making processes.

I have been working with Willie Coffey, our local MSP who has made a valued contribution to this vision, provided guidance and been the main point of contact for me with the local council and the Cabinet Secretary for the Scottish Government for lifelong learning, Michael Russell, who initially supported my efforts to re-establish a school following the inadvertent closure of the original school. He indicated at an earlier stage that he was interested in some form of change in school governance, but has since retracted on this issue. Nevertheless the report from the Commission on School Reform raises the issue again and it will become more relevant to us as we progress.

Regarding local rural policy, I have raised issues to the council regarding the formation of effective rural policy making and have brought to their attention the need for affordable rural housing (a universal recurrent theme for rural communities everywhere it seems), the potential for more access tracks, developing local waterways, maintaining basic community infrastructure, and encouraging micro business set ups.

I have engaged the support of a rural academic, Professor John Bryden who has expertise and special interests in rural policy development, improved IT use in rural communities and place based education. In the past he has advised the EU Commission, Scottish Office, OECD, the World Bank, HIE, BT and many other organisations. He has co ordinated 6 European research programmes.

More recently we have managed to bring together Professor Rebecca Wallace and Dr. Sarah Skerratt, from the SAC research policy unit and we are now working towards an evaluation of funding sources for undertaking a long term study at Crossroads and are formulating the research brief.

Dr Carol Craig of the Centre for Confidence and Well-Being, (26) when I asked how this school might fit best with the Scottish psyche advised that Pluralism provides the best model. By engaging with pluralism, I believe we can develop a democratic school model, where everyone has a voice and a vote. There are currently other pilot projects using the pluralist model from which we may be able to learn and gather ideas, for example a long term project at Harvard University which is evaluating whether pluralism can make sense of the increasing levels of cultural and religious diversity within contemporary American society.(27)

<http://pluralism.org/about/mission>

It seems though that not only should the conversation between the community and the state be an attempt to “hear the many voices,” but following this there needs to be some form of adoption of a doctrine which allows not only for understanding the key community issues of each individual community, but we then need to discern how each community can best make progress.

The Development of a Community Development Plan, enhanced by input from academia, individuals and organisations with special interests in communities, rural issues and educational development should go some way to formulating a constructive template.

The Plan in Development

We are currently re-establishing the after school club/youth and adult classes, through this grant aided learning hub. We intend to be able to offer classes across the generations.

We have a farm building here at West Overland Farm, which is in process of being converted into the first class room/community space, with kitchen and toilets to house the learning hub. We have been granted planning permission and following passing building control issues, we will proceed with this conversion.

We also have access to 2 retired head teachers who are acting as educational consultants. They have wide experience in the primary education sector, one has further qualifications in School Management and has specialized in autism and SEN. The other has experience of rural and urban educational schooling. We have been awarded a set up grant from Social Enterprise funders, Scotland unLtd to get these first classes off the ground. We aim to continue to pilot classes with the local home education network and local volunteer families between now and Easter 201. This period between now and next Spring will also give us the opportunity to implement our organisational structures, put together a staff of educationalists, both academics and teachers, better familiarize ourselves with regulatory processes, apply for more grants, continue to develop our bank of tutors and training structures and build community support.

The After School Club.

The original Crossroads school had a very well developed After School Club, which was a major part of developing a very strong school/community culture of involvement in our local education. Therefore, it seems rational to begin re-establishing an educational institution by starting from this previous position of strength. To this end we have been piloting various after school modules with the Ayrshire Home Education network and have been awarded a social enterprise grant to establish the Club on a more formal basis.

Local market research has also confirmed that there are considerable opportunities for private tutoring services for literacy and numeracy and the local council provides a wide range of sport and leisure activities. However, there is a gap in the market for applied learning opportunities, in a rural setting, with a view to increasing sustainable living in rural areas. Developing the fabric of our rural social, economic and cultural life and be able to provide educational experiences which will be relevant to local demand. To this end, our plan is that these classes will be extended to become an intergenerational opportunity for lifelong learning.

Research in Alaska (28) provides positive affirmation that good work can be done, in terms of decreasing drop-out rates and increasing uptake of college educational places through increasing the integration between local community knowledge and the formal state education system. Our model to allow local community members to develop their commitment to education in the local setting will begin a step process to harmonise between "school," "education" and Life.

Following being awarded a knowledge skills exchange grant by DTA Scotland 2 of our group to visited Sawston, the first Henry Morris Village College in Cambridgeshire and Impington V.C. designed in the Bauhaus style, to reflect the healthy balance that can exist between community, school and lifelong learning. We came to understand more about his vision for rural community education, the challenges the Colleges have faced to remain true to his vision and how they have evolved to meet the changing times in which we live. We hope to continue to build on the positive relationships we have developed with the Henry Morris Trust and personnel involved with the Colleges.

We are currently investigating how best to develop our Community Tutoring Service which will offer those within our community or with an affinity for it, an opportunity to formalise information that may have become instinctive to them, learn how to construct a lesson plan and deliver it, become familiar with constructive methods of maintaining the engagement of the class and implementing assessment procedures.

Already we have found that even informally, this process can offer people opportunities to explore potential areas in which they might want to do further training; take a hobby or interest to a new level; provide a platform to utilise under developed previous qualifications; through disability issues explore how they can convert applied skills into teaching material and capably deliver it.

We have met with the Ayrshire College to discuss how they will engage with us in the development of this venture and they are willing to help us to implement processes and develop community capacity.

The Lifelong Learning Initiative

The After School Classes that we are piloting are also the setting up point for the youth and adult educational initiative. Borrowing heavily from the Village College rural community schools and community developments envisioned and developed by Henry Morris, we are concurrently developing the lifelong learning classes. The closure of the Agricultural College at Auchencruive, also amidst much community protest has been felt by many to represent a marginalisation of rural interests in Ayrshire. Many feel that Ayrshire, a county with a proud agricultural heritage is still predominantly able to make a valued economic, social and educational contribution to other industries, professions and communities and should be able to support a considerable tertiary education component. We are hoping to extend the choice of rurally based learning opportunities through the facilities we are developing at Crossroads, which should complement what is still available at the Ayr Campus of the Ayrshire College, where the SRUC is now based. This initiative also links with Government priorities to increase community learning and development.

"Community learning and development (CLD) is learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities using a range of formal and informal methods. A common defining feature is that programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants...(CLD's) main aim is to help individuals and communities tackle real issues in their lives through community action and community-based learning". (29)

The National Priorities for CLD are:

- Raising standards of achievement in learning for adults through community-based lifelong learning opportunities incorporating the core skills of literacy, numeracy, communications, working with others, problem-solving and information communications technology (ICT).
- Engaging with young people to facilitate their personal, social and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence and place in society.
- Building community capacity and influence by enabling people to develop the confidence, understanding and skills required to influence decision making and service delivery.

Through the development of our Community Tutoring system and our youth, adult and inter-generational classes we will be able to meet these outcomes, develop a range of classes which meets the needs and aspirations of our community and empowers us to engage positively in local, lifelong learning. To this end we have entered into discussions with the Ayrshire College about how they could help us to develop, how we would link in with their courses and if tertiary education students could use some of our projects as applied learning work experiences.

Beginning from this point and conducting a staged development process, which will eventually take us from "the cradle to the grave" educationally would indeed bring a new dimension to the debate on what a lifelong education system might begin to look like.

In Conclusion

At this stage I can say that both recurrent themes and areas in need of more clarity are emerging;

- Developing the Place based/ community orientated rural education model, within the Scottish context.
- Increasing and promoting the role that education and schooling plays in rural community development
- Clarifying which aspects of local, regional and national needs a pilot project such as this could most make a contribution towards.

- Increasing input and direction from academics, individuals and organisations with special interests in educational, community, rural, economic, philosophical and political spectrums to name but a few, would be helpful to our cause. Developing partnerships which will be of mutual benefit would also be useful.
- We are building up a “bank” of local community tutors and teachers who are able to support the project either through teaching part time; provide input into building the Curriculum; have an interest in developing the After School Clubs; may have an interest in working more directly with communities or within local businesses, industry or in the development of Continuing professional development. Not only taking communities into schools, but taking teachers into communities.
- Our first informal partnership arrangement is with the local Ayrshire Home Education Network. Working together we are running weekly literacy and numeracy classes as well as so far piloting clubs including cycle maintenance, art classes, orienteering, philosophy, French, basic mechanics, which along with others, will become the basis of our after school club.
- I have explored with the Government how this proposal might begin to gain Parliamentary support, whether through raising a Parliamentary petition / gaining the support of the Educational committee / through a Private members Bill and / or amending current legislation.

References

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