The dilemmas of development work

Ethical challenges in regeneration

T • Marjorie Mayo • Chris Miller

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Paul Hoggett, Marjorie Mayo and Chris Miller

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For Jeremy Brent (1950–2006):

Youth worker, intellectual and trade unionist

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Some parts of this book draw upon articles which have previously appeared elsewhere. Chapter Five draws on P. Hoggett, M. Mayo and C. Miller, 'Private passions, the public good and public service reform', (2006) *Social Policy and Administration*, vol 40, no 7, pp 758–73. Chapter Six draws on P. Hoggett, M. Mayo and C. Miller, 'Individualization and ethical agency' in Cosmo Howard (ed), *Contested Individualization: Debates About Contemporary Personhood* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Chapter Seven draws on P. Hoggett, M. Mayo and C. Miller, 'Relations of authority', (2006) *Organisational & Social Dynamics*, vol 6, no 2, pp 224–40. Chapter Nine draws on M. Mayo, P. Hoggett and C. Miller, 'Navigating the contradictions of public service modernisation: the case of community engagement professionals', (2007) *Policy & Politics*, vol 35, no 4, pp 667–82.

ONE

Introduction

Changing nature of development work

Development work, broadly defined, has traditionally included a range of activities designed to strengthen the capacity of local groups and communities to identify and give effective voice to their needs, to draw in resources from public and private sources and to effect changes in the policies and strategies of government at local, regional and even national levels. Development work has focused on disadvantaged communities in both rural and urban areas and, as we demonstrate in more detail in Chapter Three, although its origins lay in work with the urban poor of industrialising nations at the beginning of the 20th century, it has since become a major intervention strategy in developing countries.

Typically in current usage, the term 'development' implies development in this latter sense, international development in the global South. In this book, however, we use the term more generically, exploring a range of policies and strategies to promote social change, with a particular focus on disadvantaged areas and communities, recognising that these are to be identified within as well as between national contexts, North and South. In parallel, throughout the book we refer to 'development professionals'. We use this in a similarly generic way to refer to all those workers, professionally qualified or not, who have social, community or neighbourhood development contained within their job descriptions or their remits as community representatives in structures of governance. In Britain – unlike the global South – there are very few workers who have the specific job title of 'development worker' (although there may be different patterns in other countries of the global North). The nearest to this job title in Britain would be that of 'community development worker', and community development workers feature in this book. But subsequent discussions are not confined to the roles, challenges and dilemmas of community development workers per se. In recent years, a growing number of professionals have been tasked with engaging with service users and with communities more broadly. From police officers to housing workers to healthcare professionals, teachers and planners, professionals are expected to spend various amounts of their

time engaged in long-term development work, in this broad sense of the term. As writings on 'community practice' have demonstrated, the focus for community 'practitioners' has widened beyond professionals' remit to work with individual service users in relation to a specific need or problem, moving on to the task of strengthening the capacity of groups, organisations or neighbourhoods or facilitating the emergence of new groups or organisations, engaging with structures of governance (Banks et al, 2003).

While the terms 'community practice' and 'community professional' capture much of the essence of these changes, the focus on the 'professional' needs to be broadened for our purposes to include those whose involvement goes beyond their professional roles – for example, the teacher who has become a community representative because of his/her standing and involvement in community issues in the neighbourhood of their school. We also reflect on the appropriateness of the term 'community engagement', a term with increasing resonance in contemporary policy discourse in Britain. But this term has tended to be associated with government initiatives to promote community engagement, from the top down. We wanted to find a term that would also include community initiatives from the bottom up. So we decided to stay with our original formulation, concluding that 'development professional' best captures the essence of this work without allocating it to a specific job role. When we refer to 'development work' and 'development professionals', then, we use the term in this generic sense. When we refer to specific professions such as 'community development' or 'youth work', or when we refer to specific roles such as those of workers employed to promote regeneration, we use the relevant terms, reserving the terms 'development work' and 'development professionals' for broader, generic discussions.

Development work in disadvantaged communities has always posed significant ethical challenges for the development professionals involved. Given the location of such workers on the boundary between state and civil society these ethical challenges are partly inherent to the nature of the job. The work can at times involve a significant challenge to the state, as communities become involved in direct confrontations with government around issues ranging from slum clearance to action around the rights of women and children. But interestingly enough, in recent years, development work has become increasingly involved in the modernisation of governance itself. In Britain this has become foregrounded in strategic interventions to decentralise government, to engage citizens with the monitoring of agency performance and to connect citizens with service planning and service delivery as well as

the traditional concern to address issues of poverty and social exclusion. For practitioners, these strategies involve increasing complexity and inherent tensions. They struggle to balance emergent audit cultures and the requirements of the new public management (NPM) (including requirements for quick, tangible and measurable outputs) with the need for flexibility and creativity, building community engagement through longer-term development strategies. These potential tensions are especially marked in socially and culturally heterogeneous communities in which different interests and value systems compete (Miller and Ahmad, 1997).

In this book we aim to reconnect our analysis of current developments with an important but dormant tradition in social policy research that has recognised the dilemmas inherent to policy implementation at 'street' or 'community' level in different contexts, including the US and Britain (Marris and Rein, 1972; Lipsky, 1980). This book updates this early theorisation of the dilemmas of implementation by drawing on reflections on contemporary professional ethics, rooted in debates in moral philosophy and political theory, current debates about the modernisation of governance and psycho-social perspectives on emotion, identity and ethical agency.

In moral philosophy there has also been a growing interest in how people act ethically in ambiguous and conflictual situations where there is 'no right thing to do' (Williams, 1973, 1981; Bauman, 1993). In such uncertain situations the individual often feels torn between the claims of different groups and decision taking and action can involve considerable anxiety, guilt and remorse. Applying this to the task of the development worker we argue that this kind of work is therefore both ethically and emotionally challenging and, to illuminate the latter, we draw on concepts from the sociology of the emotions (Hochschild, 1983) and the psychoanalytic perspectives of Melanie Klein and Wilfred Bion (Anderson, 1992).

We therefore seek to introduce some new ways of thinking about the challenges of development work, but all new developments draw on and are nourished by past traditions. The three authors of this book have been immersed in these traditions, and in particular the idea that community workers operate in that precarious location of being both 'in and against' the state (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980). It follows that we share certain views and perspectives, for instance, about the nature of the state and structural inequalities while each of us also brings some uniquely different ways of thinking. In writing the book each of us took the lead on particular chapters, passing our first drafts on to our co-authors for their thoughts to which

we then responded by producing further drafts, and so on, through a process of dialogue. So we do not pretend to write with a single voice in this book but rather different voices predominate at different points and at other times several voices might be present together.

Paul Hoggett worked in London's voluntary sector in the 1970s in a radical community mental health project called the Battersea Action and Counselling Centre. For many years he combined various forms of political and community activism with a passionate interest in psychoanalysis, for it seemed to him that very often injustice seemed to 'get inside' people, affecting their soul and sometimes breaking their spirit. Psychoanalysis seemed to be the only theory around which was willing to get to grips with the depth of human suffering. Moreover, he was struck by the ways in which many political and community groups engaged in behaviour which at times seemed quite irrational, practices which certainly undermined their potential effectiveness and which often seemed to contradict their espoused democratic and egalitarian values. This sparked his interest in groups and behaviour in groups. Working with groups was a way of keeping alive an engagement with practice that, as his direct political involvements declined, became increasingly important to him. Finally he decided to pursue training as a psychotherapist, which he completed a few years ago, thereby reconnecting to his original involvement in mental health. More recently all of these interests have converged around what, in Britain, is becoming known as psycho-social studies, a multidisciplinary approach to exploring the ways in which the social/political and the deep psychological interact. Paul currently directs the Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at the University of the West of England, Bristol.

Since starting work in the 1970s some aspects of the world, such as the extent of injustice and inequality, have remained starkly problematic or have become more polarised, while others, such as the increasing social diversity of a society like Britain, have changed remarkably. We have come to appreciate the sometimes complex interplay between class, culture, 'race' and gender. The collapse of communist states and the rise of postmodern theory has also led us to be more circumspect about universals such as the common good and, indeed, of community itself. We now recognise the diversity of different voices and experiences but this very diversity presents huge challenges for democratic practice. Who has the right to represent whom? Who speaks for whom? By whose criteria is a given practice a democratic one? There are no longer (m)any simple answers. Development workers are in the thick of this and it was this sense of them having to traverse this new, ambiguous, contested and shifting terrain which informed Paul's conceptual analysis

in Chapter Two, and explorations of some of the dilemmas of practice in Chapters Five and Six.

Marjorie Mayo comes from a social policy and community development background. Drawing on Marxist and feminist analyses, she starts with a focus on the ways in which structural inequalities shape the opportunities and constraints for development work, arguing that a critical understanding of these is an essential prerequisite for effective practice. These perspectives have informed her approach to the analysis of the modernisation of governance and public services (Chapter Eight), together with the ways in which the modernisation agenda is being negotiated (Chapter Nine) and some possible implications (Chapter Ten).

While Marjorie came to the research that underpins the empirical evidence discussed in this book without a psychoanalytical background – with continuing reservations about aspects of psychoanalytical approaches – she values the importance of the concept of emotional labour, recognising the value of exploring the interconnections between the personal and the political, whether these connections are to be explored through the lens of second wave feminism, through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the 'habitus', or both. Through the research process she has also been impressed by the ways in which the participants themselves explained their own motivations and values. With little if any prompting, they began by outlining their own formative experiences, exploring the influences of family and community as well as the subsequent influences of the workplace and political and community engagement. Without necessarily sharing some of the reflections that draw more explicitly on psychoanalytical perspectives, she values their contribution to the development of a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the dilemmas facing development workers, and the implications for how to develop progressive strategies forward, in the current context. Marjorie is currently Professor of Community Development at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Chris Miller grew up on a post-1945 Bevan council estate in North East England. He failed every education test thrown his way until the age of 16 when he requested a transfer from a secondary modern 'sink' school to a grammar school where he did just enough to take up a degree in sociology and politics in 1968. As the son of a highly educated Polish army officer war refugee who found himself working in the dockyards and factories and a mother who escaped shop work to become an education welfare officer, he experienced first hand the internalisation of injustice and its corrosive destructive capacities. He trained as a social worker on a programme that on

reflection attempted to provide a psycho-social understanding and was drawn simultaneously to both community development work and mental health while influenced by radical and Marxist politics. The relationship between structure and agency has continued to be an intellectual, professional and personal struggle ever since, reflecting on his early life experiences with his first encounter with sociological and political theoretical frameworks. He worked in local government as a community development worker and social worker and in the non-governmental sector for local organisations and an international development agency, as well as being actively involved in community politics. He has continued with his interest in things psycho-dynamic over the years as a social policy and development academic, teaching youth and community development workers and more recently public service managers, and has participated in Tavistock-based experiential events. He is a Professor of Social Work at Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.

Working closely with people whether in groups, families or as individuals who have experienced significant and continuous disadvantage it is difficult not to despair at damaged or restricted lives and their capacity for further destruction while being full of admiration for the resilience and capacity of the many, often to their own detriment, to make something positive out of intolerable circumstances. Understanding the basis of such defended strategies and according recognition to the humanity of the other is the first step in a development process that offers the potential for progressive social and individual change within a sometimes overwhelmingly constraining socio-political and economic context. Yet community development itself as a largely state-sponsored activity is plagued by contradictory objectives and while espousing ambitious aspirations is limited in its practical possibilities. It is this experience and understanding of development that has helped shaped Chapter Three as well as the practice dilemmas highlighted in Chapters Four and Seven. To enable others to act, to make a difference requires a reflexive understanding of one's own motivation and capacity to act, and development workers must engage continuously with their own inner selves. Those who participated in our research very generously gave us some access to these personal and professional struggles and the values that shaped their practice, tolerating and even appreciating our reflections.

The research

The day-to-day challenges which make up the working lives of development workers are still relatively unresearched. Moreover, with a few exceptions (Banks, 1995, 1999, 2004) there are still few empirical studies of ethical agency in welfare and development work and little understanding of what helps and what constrains individuals in such situations. The research basis for this book comes from a 27-month Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded project entitled 'Negotiating ethical dilemmas in contested communities', which was completed in November 2005. The project involved extended contact with 30 development workers in two cities over a period of 18 months.

This research set out to explore the ways in which these development workers identified and addressed the challenges of their roles. Drawing on insights from psycho-social approaches to social research, the research aimed to develop our understanding of the ways in which development workers' own personal backgrounds and experiences – their unique biographies – interlinked with their motivations and values, as front-line development workers, engaging with the dilemmas of community practice, community development, youth work, regeneration work and community engagement as professionals active within structures of governance. The sample was selected, in each city, to include a range of front-line professionals engaged in development work, including professionals whose involvement had emerged from their main professional roles (such as roles involving community safety, or education, including community-based adult learning).

The development workers came from differing backgrounds and employment from the public, voluntary and community sector (selected to provide a range of contexts and experiences) and they included men and women from, as well as working with, black and minority ethnic (BME) communities as well as from white British communities. Beginning with a life history interview, each development worker was interviewed on up to six occasions so that their response to ethical challenges could be tracked as they occurred. This was followed by a series of group interviews and interviews with national actors and policy makers.

Despite the differences between the development workers who were involved, in terms of their backgrounds and experiences, a number of common factors emerged from the study, factors that struck the development workers themselves as key, when our initial findings were fed back to them. In particular, the significance of development workers'

personal motivations, values and commitments was striking. So was the way in which these motivations, values and commitments impacted on their approaches as workers, together with the ways in which workers drew on their own personal strengths in coping with the dilemmas of their roles, in varying contexts. While the research findings re-enforced the relevance of a psycho-social approach, the findings also deepened our shared understandings, in turn. In subsequent chapters we draw on examples from this research to illustrate our arguments. But this was a two-way process – our arguments have also been developed more generally as a result of our engagement with this particular research. While the research for this project was carried out in Britain, the issues have far wider significance, we would suggest, with potential resonances for development work around the globe.

Structure of the book

Drawing on the ESRC research the book provides case studies and vignettes that vividly reveal the ethically complex and emotionally challenging nature of development work in multiply disadvantaged communities.

Chapter Two provides a broad conceptual foundation for what follows. It explores different (liberal, Marxist and other) perspectives on the nature of the relationship between state and civil society and introduces concepts and arguments from contemporary social theory (Zygmunt Bauman on modernity) and moral theory (Charles Taylor and Bernard Williams) that contribute to our understanding of ethical agency in ambiguous and contested contexts. We argue that governance in a socially diverse society exemplifies such ambiguous and contested territory. The framework offered by such contemporary theorists is compared with that provided by writers such as Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire, whose work provided guidance to earlier generations of development workers. We also reconnect with the earlier work of Michael Lipsky, and Peter Marris and Martin Rein and indicate how these writers were more in touch with the emotional dimension of the ethical challenges of this kind of work.

What used to be called 'community development' in Britain is now frequently termed 'social cohesion', 'regeneration work' or 'capacity building'. While development work is now commonly thought of as only applying to developing countries, in Britain and other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries there are an increasing number of professional roles that now require a proficiency in development activities without these skills and capacities

being formally recognised. In Chapter Three we argue for the continued value and relevance of the concept of 'development' and 'development worker' in Britain too. We briefly outline some of the key traditions and principles of development work both in Britain and overseas. We illustrate this through a detailed examination of some of the typical dilemmas that development workers face when doing the job.

Chapter Four draws on material from the life histories of development workers. What personal resources do they require to be able to cope with the ethical and emotional demands of the job? We explore concepts of resilience that highlight the internal (psychological) and external (social) resources that enable people to cope with stressful life events. We suggest that 'being a survivor' can itself become a crucial psychological resource. We argue that both professional and managerial support for development workers is often lacking, and this can compound the stresses of the job. We also explore some of the strategies that development workers deploy to cope with the demands of the job, in particular the need to manage the boundaries between self and role, and self and other. We also problematise prevailing positivistic models of evidence, effectiveness and success, arguing for a 'complex systems psychodynamic' approach that recognises the centrality of 'emotion work' and 'relation work' to the development task.

In Chapter Five we explore the types of values that development workers have and where these values come from. We argue that unlike some other public sector professions, so many development workers are motivated by more than an ethic of care. We examine the very strong sense of social justice that drives many of them and the mixture of compassion and anger underlying this. Their preoccupation with power, inequalities of power and the need for oppressed people to 'take the power' means that they are committed to a solidaristic rather than altruistic ethic. The implications of this for liberal notions of the public service ethic are examined.

The focus on values continues in Chapter Six, but here we focus on their role and function rather than on their content. In dilemmatic space there is no 'right thing to do' but one's values can provide a crucial resource for navigating a terrain that is ambiguous, shifting and contested. By using a detailed case study we examine the role of values in providing 'orientation' in moral space. We also examine the proposition that what is crucial is how these values are held – what we call 'moral narcissism' lies at the root of many abuses of professional power. The chapter introduces the idea of personal capacities, something different to skills and therefore requiring a different approach to learning and development.

Development workers are immersed in complex power *and* authority relations. These terms are often confused but an understanding of what is distinct about each is vital for development work. Chapter Seven looks at some of the dilemmas of authority and power that typically face development workers and gives examples of how they have attempted to handle these. We argue that authority can assume different forms – positional, reputational and personal. We focus in particular on the latter by introducing the concept of self-authorisation that, we argue, is a vital capacity in development work. Again, using examples from people's life histories, we examine the roots of this important personal capacity.

The second part of the book moves on to explore the specific implications of public service modernisation. Chapter Eight situates our analysis in the context of the changing relationship between state and civil society with a particular focus on Blair's Britain. Labour's 'modernisation agenda' is situated in terms of processes of public service reform that were first set in train under Margaret Thatcher. Two dimensions of modernisation under Labour are considered – as a set of policies designed to address the perceived social problems relating to young people and disadvantaged communities and as a strategy for institutional change. Development workers involved in regeneration are both agents of modernisation (spearheading community governance, for example) and objects of modernisation (subject to the same processes of managerialisation as other public sector professions, for example). We highlight the inconsistencies and contradictions of modernisation and the way in which this therefore contributes to the dilemmas that development workers face.

The modernisation agenda construes spatial and other communities as both a problem and a solution. As a problem they are the site for 'out of control' young people, cycles of deprivation and conflictual community relations. As a solution they are the vehicles for public sector reform and will step into the democratic deficit left by the emasculation of local government. Thus, ostensibly, they become the harbingers of community governance and the new 'localism' that has been advocated by all three major political parties in Britain. There are powerful parallels with decentralisation strategies pursued in development contexts in the South. But the voluntary and statutory organisations and the international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that employ development workers are themselves the objects of modernisation. As a consequence, the profession is subject to the same contradictory pressures involving competition and bureaucratisation as others. Chapter Nine examines the ways in which

workers are able to keep doing effective development work *despite* the contradictions of government policies. How do they respond to attempts to managerialise the job, collaborate with agencies that are also competitors, establish a 'bottom line' beyond which they will not go? The chapter concludes by considering whether the profession has reached a 'tipping point' beyond which development work simply becomes a form of project management in an environment where workers and agencies are fragmented and divided.

The concluding chapter makes the case for the continuing importance of development work in the context of continuing social change. Drawing from the previous chapters it argues that there is a set of distinctive and important values and methods that are unique to development work in advanced Western societies. We return to our argument that development workers are uniquely located on the boundary between state and civil society. As such they are located at a space of acute social contradictions and this has an important impact on their role. The implications for the education, training and continuing professional development of development workers is explored, together with the implications for their roles as advocates in relation to community governance policies, present and future.

In summary, then, the following chapters provide a theoretical framework for understanding the dilemmas facing development workers, drawing on life history interviews to reveal who these workers are, where they come from and what values and capacities they bring to their work. They also provide detailed case studies of the kinds of ethical challenges involved in this kind of work, including the challenges posed by the contradictions inherent to government policies, together with strategies for addressing these, holding on to professional values, while pursuing agendas for social justice and social solidarity.

Social development work takes place in the grey area between government and the voluntary and community sectors. This book, written by three well-known educators and researchers in the social policy and development field, explores the ways in which front-line professionals working with communities identify and address the dilemmas inherent in the current policy context.

Drawing upon original material, the authors examine:

— how 'community engagement' workers negotiate the ethical and emotional challenges they face;

— how they work through problems of community representation at interpersonal and team levels;

— how they manage the conflicting roles of local activist and paid worker;

— what role colleagues, management and others play when responding to such challenges.

The dilemmas of development work reconnects to, and updates, an important tradition in social policy which explores the dilemmas of 'street-level' work. It draws on contemporary political theory and current debates concerning the modernisation of governance and psycho-social perspectives on identity, values and agency. Combining theory and practice, it will appeal to practitioners, policy makers and undergraduates in social and public policy.

Paul Hoggett is Professor of Politics and Director of the Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at the University of the West of England, Bristol.

Marjorie Mayo is Professor of Community Development at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Chris Miller is Professor of Social Work, Flinders University, South Australia.

This book offers a timely and important insight into the values, motivations and dilemmas of development workers in the context of modernising public services. The skilful interweaving of material from interviews with critical analysis of the current policy climate makes gives it a unique and important focus.

Professor Sarah Banks
School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University

This book casts a refreshingly comprehensive eye on a deeply ambivalent sphere of practice. What makes it particularly valuable is its focus on the increasingly complex dilemmas and challenges faced by development professionals in a rapidly changing world.

Mae Shaw
Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh

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