

# Community Psychology, Millennium Volunteers and UK Higher Education: A Disruptive Triptych?<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I critically explore the ideological underpinnings of pedagogical and political practices in UK Higher Education (HE). I first map out the political and pedagogical features of community psychology and then describe the Millennium Volunteers project at the University of Northumbria—a scheme that integrates voluntary placements into undergraduate degree programmes, reflecting on the political and pedagogical premises upon which it is based. I consider the political context and recent social policy trends in UK HE. Through exploring the ideological underbellies of community psychology and Millennium Volunteers I describe the tensions created once both are situated within a HE student's learning and a lecturer's teaching portfolio. I reflect on how each appears to share similar wish lists but conclude that a surface comparison of the pedagogical practices of each can leave unrecognized serious ideological, ethical and political differences that can cause disruption at the interfaces of staff, students and HE institutions. I recommend making the political and ideological assumptions behind pedagogical practices and education policy initiatives more transparent to both students and lecturers alike and outline the reasons for doing so. I conclude by reflecting on implications for the widening access agenda in the present political climate from the standpoint of a community psychologist. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

*Key words:* Higher Education; pedagogy; widening access; employability

## THE TRIPTYCH—HOW I WAS INTRODUCED TO IT

Community psychology values, UK Millennium Volunteers (MV) politics and Higher Education (HE) social policy all collided for me as I accepted a lecturing position as a community psychologist at Northumbria University. The position was funded under the UK's MV Scheme to set up a project to incorporate volunteering into the university's academic curriculum. In addition to setting up the project I used my academic appointment to create two new community psychology modules in a Northumbria University psychology undergraduate degree programme. This was my first lecturing appointment

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and my first opportunity to develop new undergraduate modules in community psychology in the UK HE sector. By combining community psychology and MV into my teaching portfolio at Northumbria University a disruptive triptych appeared in my pedagogical and political work with students. As it entered my teaching so it entered students learning portfolios with increasing numbers of Northumbria University students being introduced to the politics and pedagogy explicit in community psychology and implicit in MV and the UK HE environment. In this paper I unravel this triptych. I first describe the politics and pedagogy of community psychology, MV and the HE sector and then describe the tensions between them. This involves setting HE sector social policy in the context of UK government initiatives such as New Deal, political concepts such as employability and the ideology of social democracy and third way politics. I conclude with my reflections on the implications of the widening access agenda in HE from the standpoint of a community psychologist.

### **COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY: POLITICS AND PEDAGOGY**

Mainstream psychology has historically operated at the level of the individual and emphasized programmes of treatment over prevention. The person under psychological investigation becomes atomized and de-contextualized from the wider nested social, economic and political systems in which people live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Both in theory and practice mainstream psychology is engaged in the 'widespread reification of intrinsically social and economic problems within communities as individual medical aberrations requiring clinical and medical treatment rather than socio-political intervention' (Duckett & Pratt, 2001, p. 817). Thus people become blamed for their own socio-economic exclusion (victim-blaming). Community psychology seeks to facilitate structural changes that promote psychological well-being (Cowen, 2000; Rappaport, 1987). This stands in contrast with mainstream psychology that seeks to fix the person not the place. Moreover, psychology has an oppressive sub-plot with a history of engaging in oppressive practices towards non-dominant groups in society including women, gay men, lesbian women, ethnic minority groups and disabled people (i.e. Albee, 1988, 1996; Albee & Perry, 1998). In reaction to microscopic, pathogenic and oppressive psychological practices, community psychology positions itself ethically and politically against mainstream psychology. Community psychology: confronts victim-blaming ideologies; facilitates the empowerment of socially, economically and politically marginalized groups; disrupts the hegemony of professional knowledge; seeks to identify and remove structural, socio-economic inequalities; and, aims to promote psychosocial wellbeing. Community psychology is not alone in critiquing mainstream psychology, having particular synergy with critical psychology (Rappaport & Seidman, 2000), feminist critique of the social sciences (Unger, 1983) and the human rights movement more generally (Swift, Bond & Serrano-Garcia, 2000).

For community psychology to attain ideological and ethical consistency in its theoretical, empirical and political venturing it needs to address its pedagogical practices. Here I focus on pedagogical practices in UK HE, though they can be transferred to other educational settings.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Community psychology is marginalized in UK HE. Few UK universities offer community psychology at undergraduate (e.g. Stirling, Northumbria, Manchester Metropolitan) and postgraduate (e.g. Exeter, Manchester Metropolitan) levels. As such, its teaching practices in the UK remain idiosyncratic to the particular concerns of those who teach.

In community psychology the hegemony of professional expertise is challenged and the expertise of the para-professional is acknowledged and valued. With considerable empirical research demonstrating professionally trained psychologists are rarely more effective and sometimes less effective at offering psychological support than people who have received no professional training in psychology (Cowen, 1982), community psychologists recognize the need to 'give psychology away' (Miller, 1969). Thus, experience and expertise in working as a para-professional psychologist offering psychological support in a community setting has parity with the experience and expertise of professional psychologists. From a community psychology perspective HE students should be viewed as having psychological expertise that holds parity with the expertise of the professional psychologist who subsequently teaches them. Therefore, community psychology valorizes the skills, experience, practices and knowledge of students and problematizes the hegemony of the tutor's expertise.

Community psychology recognizes the power stratification inherent in HE institutions and the power imbalances between students and tutors. Teaching practices are viewed as embedded in the local social and political environment of a HE setting. A community psychologically informed pedagogy redresses the unequal distribution of power between tutors and students through carving open spaces for students to occupy empowering roles in the educational process. As such person-centred teaching practices (Rogers, 1978) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972) are approaches that fit with the value-orientation of community psychology.

In recognition of the power inequalities between tutors and students community psychology also positions itself against victim-blaming in HE learning environments. For example, rather than blame student drop-out or poor academic performance on students' poor motivation or inability to learn, such failures are viewed as symptoms of inadequacies in the learning environment. The issue is contextualized in the broader issue of patterns of unequal distribution of resources in the HE environment, stratified by gender, class, socio-economic group and ethnicity (Caplan, 1994; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). This contrasts with a dominant discourse in HE that finds the organizationally least powerful (students) as more culpable for problems in the HE sector than the organizationally most powerful (social policy-makers).

## **MVs: PEDAGOGY AND POLITICS**

Millennium Volunteers (MV) is a Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)<sup>3</sup> funded scheme targeted at young people in the UK between the ages of 16 and 24 years. MV are expected to commit a sustained period of time to voluntary activity in their local communities. This activity is recognized in terms of a MV Certificate for 100 hours and a MV Award for 200 hours of voluntary activity. The scheme's explicit objective is to increase the employability of young people (RADAR, 2000). Voluntary work is seen as an important learning environment for the development of personal qualities sought by employers including commitment, motivation and reliability (soft skills).

The division of psychology at Northumbria University received 3 years DfEE MV funding to integrate voluntary placements into the university's degree programmes. In 2000 we embedded MV modules into our psychology degree programme. Students have the

<sup>3</sup>Re-organized in 2001 into the Department for Education and Skills.

opportunity to take two successive MV modules each offering 10 academic credits and 100 MV hours.<sup>4</sup> Each option introduces students to the ideas of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and the reflexive practitioner model (Schön, 1987). Northumbria University MV has considerable parallels with developments in service-learning in academia where community needs are addressed in the university's teaching curriculum (Shaffer, 1993) and is part of a growing number of projects in the UK HE sector specifically targeting the voluntary sector as a learning environment for HE students. This occurs through the integration of volunteering into existing degree programmes (Currie, 2000), promotion of volunteering among HE students through Student Voluntary Action UK (Utley, 1998) and an increased recognition of the home, the community and the workplace as important learning environments (Hall & Hall, 1999a, 1999b; THES, 1997). Work experience is becoming an increasingly prominent feature of UK HE with the establishment of the National Centre for Work Experience in June 1998 (Tysome, 1999).

The voluntary sector plays an important role in the UK political landscape (Hedley & Davis-Smith, 1992). In the run up to the UK General Election in 2001 the voluntary sector was used as a political key-pin. Both the Conservative and Labour parties offered economic and political sweeteners to the voluntary sector (Pybus, 2001). The voluntary sector is growing in political importance and its partnerships with the public and private sectors are becoming more prevalent as the voluntary sector takes up an increasingly central role in the welfare state (NCVO, 1980) and the education and employment landscape (SCADU, 1998).

## **HE: PEDAGOGY AND POLITICS**

A pedagogy characterized by didactic teaching, rote learning and strict student surveillance has been referred to as the 'pedagogy of poverty' (Haberman, 1991) and has been related to Habermas' concept of 'communication pathology' (Gosling, 2000). It is a system of teaching that can be found throughout the educational system from primary through to tertiary education. It makes students (and tutors) 'mark hungry' (Coffield, 2000)—an obsession for quantitatively measured learning outcomes (exam results, degree classifications) rather than qualitatively measured learning processes such as deep learning (Gibbs, 1994; Knight & Trowler, 2000). This obsession with exams and the quantification of learning is viewed by many educationalists as damaging the quality of learning (Marshall, 1999). The passivity of students in such learning processes has been criticized widely in the academic literature (e.g. Resnick & Resnick, 1992). Despite this there has been an increase in the use of quantitative techniques of learning assessment in HE (Paxton, 2000) and traditionalist teaching practices have on the whole remained intact. This lack of progress may appear unsurprising given the climate in HE that rewards research but not teaching: 'the quantity of research publications is more important to the careers of university professors than is the excellence of their teaching' (Smith, 1991, p. 31). Though partially ameliorated in the UK by the establishment of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in June 2000 (a professional body that promotes excellence of teaching in

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<sup>4</sup>Visit our MVs website for more information ([www.unn.ac.uk/~evpd1/MVHomePage.htm](http://www.unn.ac.uk/~evpd1/MVHomePage.htm)).

HE) the second class status of teaching in relation to research remains deeply entrenched in the HE organizational culture.

The HE sector is further riddled with unequal distribution of resources both between institutions (Baty, 2000; Swain, 2000) and within institutions (THES, 2000). Power inequalities are embedded in the learning environment (Gosling, 2000), stratified particularly harshly against women (Caplan, 1994; Bell & Gordon, 1999; Reay, 2000), disabled people and ethnic minority groups (Perna, 2001). Typically students occupy a disempowered position in HE, reflected in the passivity of their prescribed role in a learning environment dominated by didactic teaching and rote learning (Canaan & Epstein, 1997; Coffield, 2000).

Alternative learning environments have been posited, though these are largely confined to secondary rather than tertiary education. Such alternatives have been developed in the US including 'Schools within Schools' where students are given greater control over the educational curriculum (Plath, 1965). In the UK Cultural Studies, though marginalized, offers a radical pedagogy for HE. It seeks to facilitate the empowerment of marginalized groups (Canaan & Epstein, 1997) and promote such practices as collaborative group work with students (McNeil, 1997). Alternatives to traditional forms of education find their ideological roots in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972) and person-centred education of Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1978). Alternatives to a pedagogy of poverty include teaching processes that involve shared decision-making between students and tutors (Ballantyne, Borthwick & Packer, 2000; Goodlad, 1984), active learning (Wang & Palincsar, 1989), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), reflexive learning (Schön, 1987; Cooper, 2000) and negotiated student assessments (Gosling, 2000). Impoverished pedagogical practices have been targeted for change in UK HE following the publication of the Dearing Report.

### *HE and the Dearing Report*

The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Ron Dearing, was the first major review of HE in the UK since the report of the Robbins Committee (Robbins, 1963). Reporting in 1997, Dearing's four main suggested reforms of HE were: to develop the individual for personal intellectual growth, to be equipped for work and contribute to society; to increase knowledge and encourage its application; to serve the needs of the economy; and, to contribute to a democratic, civilized and inclusive society. The last of these hold the ideological key to reforms both in education, employment and welfare social policies under the New Labour government—the concept of active citizenship (Etzioni, 1967). This is reflected in David Blunkett's (who at the time was Secretary of State for Education and Employment) vision of education as a place for people to '... develop to their full potential, to contribute economically, and to play a full part as active citizens' (Blunkett, 1998). Active citizenship describes the promotion of individual duty and responsibility to meet the needs of society as defined by government social policy. A key element of this contribution is defined in terms of economic activity (employability).

The Dearing Report further sets out a number of 'key skills' to be acquired by HE students: numeracy, information technology, communication, and learning to learn. Again, the last of these gives the lie to the underlying ecology of the Learning Society and Lifelong Learning. Here, the process rather than the content of learning becomes prioritized in an era in which specific knowledge can quickly become obsolete though fast

moving technologies and work skills can become transitory due to the short-term, insecure nature of employment contracts dominating the labour market.<sup>5</sup>

The Dearing Report emphasizes widening access to HE through increasing the participation of under-represented groups. This is part of a long history of calls for a reduction in social inequalities in HE participation rates (Johnston, Raab & Abdalla, 1999) and was reflected in the Robbins Report (1963) that led to the setting up of the new universities in the 1960s and the first UK distance learning university—the Open University. The Dearing Report asks that ‘... funding bodies consider financing ... pilot projects which allocate additional funds to institutions which enrol students from particularly disadvantaged localities’ (Dearing, 1997, p. 110). With the UK government setting their sights on increasing participation rates in HE the widening access agenda is gaining increasing momentum. The widening access agenda seeks to expand the number of people who have access to HE as well as increasing the number of people who consider themselves to be lifelong learners and organizations that perceive themselves as learning organizations (THES, 1997).

The Dearing Report has placed work-based learning centre stage, stating it should be bedded into the university curriculum (Farquharson, 2000). It affirms the importance for HE students of ‘some exposure to the wider world ... via work experience, involvement in student union activities or work in community or voluntary settings’. The report, however, goes much further and explicitly identifies the ultimate goal for HE of wealth creation. The two aims are welded together in the aspiration to bring vocational and academic qualifications into closer alignment (Winter, Griffiths & Green, 2000). Accreditation of Prior Learning is further recognizing parity between non-HE and community and work-based learning environments and opening up HE learning environments to new generations of previously excluded students. Simultaneously it is increasing access of business interests to HE.

Closer connections between HE and the business community is evident in the evolution of new ‘corporate universities’ (Jarvis, 2000) and corporate degrees. This is further evident in the establishment by the DfEE of a Higher Education Reach-Out To Business and Community Fund (Tysome, 1999) backed by a £50 million initial 3-year investment. Increasingly HE is being measured against and being asked to work with industry to deliver value for money, particularly in developing countries (Gill & Gill, 2000). Indeed, the HE sector has become increasingly entrepreneurial following a cut in the HE grant and the introduction of efficiency gains (Research and Teaching Assessment exercises) that require universities to become more responsive to the demands of the market (Jarvis, 2000).

Important political agendas that feed into HE reforms as well as the voluntary sector are Employability, the New Deal welfare programme and Social Democratic and third-way politics.

### *Employability and New Deal*

Current UK social policy holds employment as a powerful panacea for society’s ills. Frank Field, the former Minister for Welfare Reform, insisted that: ‘The most powerful weapon against poverty is a job’ (Field, 1998, pp. 60–61). Employability refers to a person’s job-readiness or job-preparedness. The concept of employability has grown into a dominant

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<sup>5</sup>The insecurity of employment contracts has seeped into HE through the abolishment of academic tenure (Jarvis, 2000).

discourse in education (e.g. Blackstone, 1998), though it has for a long time dominated discourses around disabled people (e.g. Farley, 1984; Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Policies that stem from the concept of employability focus on both the skills and incentives people need to take up employment and (often) for welfare claimants to come off the unemployment register. These incentives can be both benign (golden hellos, cf. golden handshakes) and malign (the threat of welfare benefit withdrawal).

Welfare reform is a priority area for many Western governments, particularly those experiencing a downturn in economic growth and high levels of unemployment and underemployment (poorly satisfying, poorly paid, insecure employment). The New Deal is part of a package of welfare reforms in the UK that signals a toughening up of the administration of welfare benefits and a 'roughing up' of welfare claimants. A dominant theme to welfare reforms like New Deal is to balance the obligations of society to provide for its citizens with the obligations of citizens to meet the standards expected by society. The focus on citizen's having to meet their obligations to society before becoming eligible for welfare benefits is at the ideological heart of the New Deal (King, 1999; White, 2000). Such an ideology underpins workfare programmes in the US that are beginning to impregnate UK welfare reform (e.g. Mead, 1986).

New Deal is aimed at unemployed welfare benefit claimants. Like MV it is targeted at young people (under 25 years). The scheme is also targeted at the long-term unemployed, single parents and disabled people. The New Deal rhetoric states it aims to match potential employees with employers. An individual on a New Deal scheme spends 4 months as a 'Gateway' service client, a service that offers four options: 6 months' subsidized work experience placement with an employer; up to 12 months in further education; placement on a voluntary sector scheme; or, placement with an environmental project.

The government describes New Deal as a voluntary scheme. However, welfare benefit claimants who are offered a place on the New Deal and who do not join the scheme risk having their benefits cut and eventually withdrawn (Convery, 1997; Lamb, 1998). Some commentators have viewed New Deal as a draconian measure meant to deter people claiming welfare benefits (White, 2000) and to artificially lower the unemployment claimant count. Even if New Deal is a policy purely informed by concerns to make people more employable rather than reducing the number of unemployed people who are seeking benefits, it remains misguided.

Employability and New Deal are supply-led policies (aimed at increasing the numbers of people ready for employment) that contrast with demand-led policies (aimed at increasing the employment opportunities ready for people). It can be argued that supply-led employment policies remain blinkered to the labour market context in which they are embedded as they focus on the job-readiness of people rather than the job-readiness of the market. The UK labour market has high levels of unemployment and underemployment. This creates inherent dangers to adopting supply-led employment policies. Rigorous research by Turok and Edge (1999) concluded it is the shortage of jobs and adequately paying jobs not the lack of job-ready people that is the major reason for high levels of unemployment and underemployment in the UK. Empirical evidence from studies of welfare to work programmes in the US point to their tendency to force people into low paid employment (Gueron & Pauly, 1991; White, 2000). In the UK there is no evidence that the New Deal has had any significant effect on promoting the employment prospects for its unemployed clients (Grove, 1998; Hermeston, 1999; Jolly, 2000; Roulstone, 2000). Moreover, by focusing on the employability of groups who have traditionally been discriminated against in the labour market, blame is apportioned with the job-seeker rather than

the discriminatory recruitment and retention policies of the employer organization. Such policies can seriously misrepresent the causes for people's economic and social exclusion (Roulstone, 2000). Providing more job-ready people does not increase the number of jobs/adequately paying jobs ready for people.

### *Social Democratic social policy and third-way politics*

Employability and New Deal are centred in a Social Democracy social policy tradition (Crouch, 1999)—the social policy agenda adopted by the Labour government in its first term of office. Such policy stresses the responsibilities and duties of citizens to play an active part in the labour market. Through such social policy, employment has become a duty of 'citizenship'. Similar social policy reforms are evident across Europe where welfare benefits are increasingly being used to coerce people to become employable rather than compensate people for an absence of employment: increasing numbers of sticks and fewer numbers of carrots are being used to promote employability.

Amid the adoption of Social Democracy policy is a rhetoric of third-way politics. This 'new' politic is described as resolving the tensions between the heightened individualism of the political right and the welfarist policies of the political left. It fully emerged onto the political landscape with the start of the Clinton administration in the US in 1992 and the Blair government in the UK in 1997. This new politic is said to lead to a new consensual, conflict free form of governance. Third-way politics has come under considerable critique for flattening the political landscape and the paralysis it seeks to impose on political dissent.

The third way challenges the idea that politics is about conflict and change. The world around us is changing so fast and so dramatically that all we can do, perhaps, is keep up with it in the best way we can. Or is politics still about grabbing hold, criticizing, challenging inequalities of resources and power, thinking differently about the future? (Franklin, 2000, p. 142)

## **TENSIONS AND TAUTOLOGIES: COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY, MV AND HE**

Community psychology, MV and HE appear to share similar wish lists. However, a surface comparison of the pedagogical premises of each leaves unrecognized serious ideological, ethical and political differences that can cause disruption at the interfaces of staff, students and HE institutions.

Table 1 summarizes the points of political and pedagogical convergence and divergence between community psychology and MV. Community-based learning initiatives sit

Table 1. Convergence/divergence between community psychology and MV

		Community psychology	
		Agrees	Disagrees
Pedagogy	Community-based learning and lifelong learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• De-centring locus of expertise</li> <li>• Experiential learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate-led academic agenda</li> </ul>
Political	Widening access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victim-blaming</li> <li>• Supply-led policy</li> </ul>

Table 2. Politics of MV, HE and community psychology

	Key political components
Millennium volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Active citizenship</li> <li>● Employability</li> <li>● New Deal</li> </ul>
Higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lifelong learning</li> <li>● Widening access</li> <li>● Wealth creation</li> </ul>
Community psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Avoid victim-blaming</li> <li>● Redress structural inequalities</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Giving psychology away</li> </ul>

comfortably with the community psychology mission to break the hegemony of profession-led psychological expertise and promote experiential learning and value the expertise of groups in society who have previously had their expertise denuded. Widening access fits community psychological values that promote social inclusion through promoting access to educational opportunities throughout the life course. However simultaneously MV are in conflict with community psychology—the ideological underbellies of MV causes friction with community psychological values. In Table 2 I have summarized some of the key political components prevalent in MV, HE and community psychology.

The changing face of HE could mean that community psychology will get more institutional support with many of community psychology's pedagogical aims (experiential learning, community-based learning, promoting social inclusion) appearing commensurate with the new face of the UK HE sector post-Dearing. However different causes can result in the same effect and sharing a similar wish list does not mean that we make our wishes for the same reasons. Community psychology becomes the disruptive component in a MV, HE, community psychology triptych through its concern that learning and skill development are becoming conceptualized as individual responsibilities (CBI, 1998; DfEE, 1998). Thus, individuals rather than employer organizations and government are made culpable for skills deficits in the labour market and ultimately unemployed people will be viewed as culpable for their own unemployment. In this regard, MV can be seen as a close bed-fellow of draconian welfare reforms such as New Deal.

Both tutors and students working in HE risk embracing initiatives that facilitate innovative pedagogical approaches at the risk of being blinkered to the political ideologies upon which they are based. This risk is ever greater considering the urgent need for innovation in learning, teaching and assessment in HE given the poverty in the sector's pedagogy and the encroachment of third-way politics into the settings in which we work. MV is part of government policies structured around the concepts of employability and lifelong learning. These social policies place the onus on individual agency on tackling systemic socio-economic inequalities. This in turn is making individuals culpable for their own education and encouraging acceptance of socio-economic policies that are creating an increasingly insecure and hostile labour market. Through stripping away the context of labour market conditions in the UK such policies are both myopic and malignant for the individuals who are most affected (students, volunteers and welfare benefit claimants). Moreover, the adoption of social democratic social policies and third-way political thinking sidelines attention away from the systemic factors that are responsible for the structural inequalities that exist in society.

Individuals are encouraged to take the opportunities offered to them by the Government and if they fail to do so, they become, in effect, responsible for their own inequality. (Franklin, 2000, p. 139)

## **CONCLUSIONS: WIDENING ACCESS TO WHAT?**

In widening access to HE the question that it begs is: What are we widening access for people to? Aside from the poverty in teaching practices, the HE sector is not an obviously health promoting institution for those who work and study within it. It has been described as a social, economic and political environment that contains both physical (Campbell & Bryceland, 1998) and psychological risks (Watson, 2000) to wellbeing. Empirical evidence of the high levels of mental ill-health of staff and students in HE is amassing. Further, given the changes in HE post-Dearing, we may find that through widening access to HE we '... siphon off the majority into vocational education and training programmes where they can survive on a bland educational diet of employer-driven key skills' (Payne, 2000, p. 462).

Historically universities do not serve their surrounding communities well (re: Rappaport, 2000) hence the dichotomy known as 'town and gown'. It has been argued elsewhere (Comer, 1976, 1987) that schools do not serve their students well when they are in disjuncture with their surrounding communities. Typically, those who have become tutors in the HE sector have come from a predominantly white, male, non-disabled middle-class background while non-dominant groups still face barriers in gaining access to HE as students (Johnston et al., 1999; Power, 2000; THES, 1998; Tysome, 2000). Despite the climate of widening access few universities have adequate equal opportunities policies and fewer monitor their equal opportunities practices (Thanki & Osborne, 2000). Indeed, disabled students remain unprotected from discrimination in HE (Disability Rights Task Force, 1999) and HE is seen as largely immune to litigation stemming from discriminatory selection practices. 'The combination of subjective faculty evaluation systems and blind allegiance to vague standards of academic excellence has made the academic world virtually impregnable to legal attack for gender, ethnic, or racial discrimination' (West, 1994, p. 143).

With the widening access agenda in education it is likely that university staff will no longer share the same culture as students due to ethnicity, class, impairment and life experience and this may have an impact upon teaching practices. Access needs to be widened to the very management and administration of the HE sector and become more responsive to community interests. Recent trends suggest 'community interests' are rapidly becoming defined as the interests of the local business community (Jarvis, 2000). Indeed, one of the four key aims of the Dearing Report's vision for HE is to serve the needs of the economy. Increasingly industry is having a greater say in the running of HE.

New Deal, Active Citizenship, Lifelong Learning and Employability are politically framed around the promotion of individual responsibilities over collective entitlements and are bedded in the centre-left Social Democracy social policy drive of New Labour. This political ideology is reflected in the New Public Health movement and the concept of the Risk Society (Peterson & Lupton, 1996) where social and economic issues become atomized as individual, personal responsibility involving issues of consumer and lifestyle choices. Conspicuous to these social policies is a theme critiqued by community psychology, a fascination with the individual and the tendency to make the person rather than place culpable for socio-economic and structural inequalities. Not only is corporate

responsibility being side-stepped, but through social policy changes corporate interests are gaining increasing access to the structuring of HE.

Community psychology in HE needs to ensure it is not immune to its own knowledge and as community psychologists we need to 'think within our own walls' (Wolff, 2000, p. 747). Though community psychology would welcome the increased value placed on community-based learning, as captured in the Northumbria University MV project, it needs to be cautious over the increasing control of commerce and industry over HE. The widening access agenda is not only widening HE to previously marginalized sectors of the community but simultaneously widening to some of the most powerful corporate players in our economy and to some of the most divisive and draconian social welfare policy initiatives the UK has experienced for almost a century. HE is becoming more accessible both to groups in society who have previously been discriminated against in society as well as becoming accessible to corporate interests who for most of our history have done most of the discriminating! If we do not ensure to keep this potential contradiction transparent and seek to disrupt it where and when we can we risk opening the door to groups who have previously been discriminated against by HE into a new institution where such past injustices become fused in a distinctly new form of oppression.

In conclusion, I would urge that in the UK we must not be caught up in New Labour's desire to play down political distinctions in the interests of an inclusive politics that inhibits opposition and dissent. The critical nature of community psychology will be among the antidotes to complacency towards social policy on education and employment. For this reason I believe we need to make the political assumptions behind our pedagogical practices transparent to students and tutors alike so they can choose how to resist disempowering and oppressive political discourses and become active, conscientized participants in HE.

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