

CLD from Vision to Practice: Purpose, Values, Ethics and Competence

Introduction

The Standards Council for Community Learning and Development for Scotland is the body responsible for the registration of CLD practitioners, the approval of training courses, and the continuing professional development of the sector workforce. The Standards Council's vision is

“...one of leading and supporting the continuing improvement of community learning and development practice to provide quality services for communities and individuals across Scotland.”

This vision and the specific functions as outlined only make sense within the context of a shared understanding of the purpose of CLD. Such a shared understanding has been elusive, and the Standards Council sees its responsibilities as including clarification of understandings of the profession, both for CLD practitioners and others.

The Standards Council has worked with the CLD field to reaffirm the values that underpin the profession, to develop for the first time a Code of Ethics for CLD and to update the CLD Competence Framework. These provide the foundations for a shared understanding of the CLD profession.

This paper aims to go a stage further by setting the values, Code of Ethics and Competence Framework in the context of the purpose and role of CLD within industrial and post-industrial society and by drawing out the connections between the different elements.

The Purpose of CLD

CLD has its origins in the welter of intellectual, political, economic and social changes that swept through society in Scotland, the rest of these islands and beyond in the 18th and 19th centuries. Through the Enlightenment, science and technology displaced religion as the dominant source of truth. New industries rose up on the back of new technologies, demanding new sources of energy, new sources of labour, and new forms of knowledge and education. Land use changed dramatically, with hundreds of thousands of people dislodged or evicted from their ancestral lands and ending up in the cities or on migrant ships to the New World.

While the old world had scarcely been egalitarian, in the capitalist world of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, new forms of poverty and inequality emerged. With the smashing of ancient connections to land, extended families were broken up and people became more mobile, more dislocated and more individualised: and often, more vulnerable. Ancient community and kin-based ways of bringing young people through into adulthood, making decisions at the community level, and finding a place for every person within the life of the community gradually (sometimes not so gradually) dissolved.

Democratic decision-making through the ballot box, wealth through individual enterprise and equality of opportunity through universal, free, state-provided education promised routes to a brave new world where everyone would have a stake in the system and an opportunity to make their mark; but all of these routes have proven to be strewn with barriers for those who have borne the brunt of disruptive change. Persistent disadvantage, often related to where you were born, your race or gender, has continued.

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Schools have provided social advancement for a few, but the schools themselves remained unequal and unequally suited to children from different backgrounds: school failure has cast a long shadow, often across generations. As young people have become more and more cut off from older family, workmates and friends, they have increasingly had to invent their own paths into adulthood without guidance and without resource, and with an adult world that was at best ambivalent about them.

The result is a society whose claims to be democratic are contestable, where opportunity is far from equal, and where individual striving can meet unsurmountable obstacles based on nothing more than a person's background. Or worse, where people have long learnt that it is not worth trying in the first place.

This is the place where Community Learning and Development practitioners are to be found: at the point where the structures of society have convinced individuals, groups and societies that they no longer have a choice, that their decisions don't matter, and that no matter what they do, nothing will change. The great skill of CLD workers is to get alongside people in that space, to build relationships with people who are often jaded and suspicious of people from outside, and to work collaboratively with them to find a way forward, to find a way for them to feel that their lives once more belong to them and that what they want matters.

The Settlement Movements, the Workers Educational Association and the Mechanics Institutes, the YMCA and the Boys Brigade all emerged in the 19th or early 20th centuries to meet this challenge. What we now know as CLD has been present and active, in various forms, in Scottish society (and indeed all industrialised societies) from the Industrial Revolution onwards.

The basic reason for this is that CLD, in modern society, is socially necessary. The consequences in communities, particularly disadvantaged communities, where no community learning and development is happening can be seen in intergenerational poverty, drug use, ill health,

poor education, crime rates and other social ills. Not that this profession is there to mop these things up: the police, the health service, the formal education sector and other professions have direct responsibility for these things. But we find consistently that if people feel their lives are worth living for, problems like this fade into the background.

Essentially, it is this commitment and purpose that the statement of CLD values, the Code of Ethics and the Competence Framework are trying to express. In its most explicit statement about the purpose of CLD, the Code of Ethics states that:

“CLD seeks to extend the reach of effective democracy, particularly by actively engaging those who are excluded from participation in key social processes that shape their lives, and to widen the scope of democracy to enable full participation in the common wealth.”

It also indicates that CLD practitioners “have in common a commitment to their constituents as their primary clients, and to the power of informal education to transform situations, structures, communities and individuals.”

Each of the individual competences within the Competence Framework has a purpose statement. Several of these refer more to how the particular competence enables the practitioner to deliver or support particular aspects of learning and empowerment processes, rather than the purpose of CLD in a broader sense. Two of the purpose statements relate directly to a sense of overall purpose; these are:

- “So that people can identify and achieve their individual and collective goals”; and
- “So that people can take individual and collective action to bring about change.”

If we use these statements in the Code of Ethics and the Competence Framework as the basis for a statement of the purpose of CLD, what we arrive at is something like:

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“The purpose of CLD is to enable people, particularly those who are excluded from participation in key social processes that shape their lives, to identify their own individual and collective goals, to take action to bring about change and through this to achieve these goals, and while doing this, extend the reach of democracy, widen its scope and enable full participation in the common wealth. In pursuit of this, CLD uses informal education to empower people and communities and to transform situations and structures.”¹

The Purpose of the CLD Standards Council

The Standards Council was established in 2009-2010 to:

“Work with the sector to establish and maintain high standards of practice in CLD across Scotland.”

This is important from the point of view of CLD as a field of practice. CLD is already a profession, but in order to constitute ourselves convincingly as such, CLD practitioners need to be committed to establishing and maintaining high standards. The Standards Council provides CLD with a means of articulating its own purpose, and with support to establish and maintain the high standards required by that purpose.

Prior to the Standards Council’s inauguration, Community Education Validation and Endorsement (CeVe) had developed an effective and influential set of understandings for the practice using a *competences framework*. This approach used surveys of what workers were already doing to analyse the skills and knowledge they needed to do them. For the first time, the field defined the

practice in a systematic way. Employers knew what to expect; training courses in colleges and universities know what they had to cover.

When the CLD Standards Council was inaugurated, this work fell under its remit. In fact, the Council began the consultation on refreshing the previous competences for community education even before being fully established in 2010. Part of that conversation was about the areas of *understanding the practice* that the competences framework couldn’t (and shouldn’t) cover: especially ethics, attitudes and commitments. With the refreshed competences for community learning and development in place, a code of ethics for CLD practitioners was developed for the first time.

This paper aims to assist further in constituting CLD as a profession by locating the Code of Ethics and the Competence Framework within the purposes of CLD as a profession and of the Standards Council.

The CLD profession: values, competences and ethics

The CLD field has committed itself to a value-base for practice focused on its purpose; the elements of this have been widely agreed:

- Self-determination – respecting the individual and valuing the right of people to make their own choices.
- Inclusion – valuing equality of both opportunity and outcome, and challenging discriminatory practice.

¹The Scottish Government, in its Strategic Guidance on CLD for Community Planning Partnerships (2012) describes the purpose of CLD:

“Empowering people, individually and collectively, to make positive changes in their lives and their communities, through learning.”

It goes on to say that CLD’s “specific focus” should be:

- Improved life chances for people of all ages, including young people in particular, through learning, personal development and active citizenship;
- Stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities.

Clearly this is a statement primarily about the government’s policy goals for CLD; it is less concerned than the Standards Council needs to be about the purpose of CLD as a profession embodied in distinctive set of activities, and more concerned about what CLD will deliver, directly relating to current policy concerns.

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- Empowerment – increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence issues that affect them and their communities through individual and/or collective action.
- Working collaboratively – maximising collaborative working relationships in partnerships between the many agencies which contribute to CLD, including collaborative work with participants, learners and communities.
- Promotion of learning as a lifelong activity – ensuring that individuals are aware of a range of learning opportunities and are able to access relevant options at any stage of their life.

The purpose and the values we share have an essential role in guiding CLD practice and assisting practitioners to set an overall direction for their work; they are also essential in CLD constituting itself as a profession. But they are broad in their reach, and most are shared with many other professions and disciplines. To guide us in ensuring that the value-base genuinely informs practice and to clarify what makes CLD unique, we need a framework for translating the purpose and values into practice.

Achieving the purpose or purposes of CLD requires interventions in people's lives and in the functioning of communities to achieve change through learning. This is complex: on the one hand, it needs a range of skills, knowledge and understanding, that underpin particular techniques and methods, in order to be effective in bringing about change. On the other, the actual work must be directed by the purpose, values and ethics, to ensure that whatever techniques are used, the practice recognises the risks and responsibilities that this kind of intervention carries.

The Code of Ethics for CLD and the Competences together provide a framework that enables both these sets of considerations to inform practice. The Code of Ethics sets out the core commitment that practitioners make to the people they work with, and to the society that provides the resources for their work. The Code is brief, but demanding, asking high standards of practitioners and an uncompromising focus

on helping young people, adult learners and communities to take control of their destiny. The Competences lay out the skills that are needed to carry this commitment into reality, to make it work.

The Values set out what we believe is important. The Code of Ethics defines the CLD relationship through which these values are to be expressed, and the ethical principles that follow from the values in order to clarify their application to practice. It provides a means for practitioners to explore and challenge their own practice, and to set appropriate boundaries for their role and actions. The Competences indicate what a competent CLD practitioner will be able to demonstrate in their practice.

CLD is defined by the purpose, values, ethics and competence framework and not by one or more specific job titles or roles. In other words, those who align themselves with the purpose, values and code of ethics, and whose practice aligns with the competence framework, are in principle embraced by the CLD profession, whatever their job title and whatever context they work in. Empowerment and inclusion are central to the values on which CLD is based, and must be reflected in the way the CLD profession is constituted. A commitment to high standards of practice is central to this professional identity.

The Values, the Code of Ethics and the Competences also define the difference between CLD and other professions. For example, the Code of Ethics states that CLD practitioners' *primary clients* are the communities, young people, and the adult learners with whom they engage. In other words, in any decision they make, CLD practitioners must firstly consider and give priority to the interests of the communities, young people, and the adult learners with whom they engage. Social workers do not, and should not, make this commitment: their role is to balance the different interests of different stakeholders and seek to find the best outcome for all. Their different relationship to the State and to legal sanctions places them in a different relationship to the people they work with than CLD workers.

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The BASW Code of Ethics says, for example, that “Social workers should only take actions which diminish peoples’ civil or legal rights if it is ethically, professionally and legally justifiable” (Clause 2).

Therapists would share the sense of the person as the primary client, but the scope of their work is different: they are interested in the client’s internal psychological life. CLD workers work with people around their social context, their relationships and connections, how their social networks are working for them, rather than their internal psychology. Teachers would share the commitment to education, but the student is less clearly their primary client (for example, the curriculum is prescribed by the State) and the scope of their practice is determined by the school as a learning institution. Though they recognise the impact of the social context of the student, it isn’t their job to work with students to change it. Police officers’ primary duty is to the Crown. Doctors are primarily concerned with physical and mental health, not with social context, although their patient should be their primary client, and an awareness of social context should arguably be an important element in their practice.

These are not criticisms. They reflect the different commitments of different professions, and the points at which it would be important to refer a constituent to someone else. For example, for family mediation, we would involve a social worker; if someone is struggling with the spectre of suicide, we would refer to a psychiatrist or psychologist. The differences between our professions are a real strength in partnership working, and it is important to understand them. And while we have a lot in common, we will also sometimes disagree.

How the Code of Ethics and the Competence Framework underpin work to improve standards in CLD

The Standards Council’s objectives are that:

- Individuals, groups and communities will be supported by reflective, competent and confident CLD practitioners (whether paid or voluntary) to achieve their goals and aspirations.
- Practitioners will receive appropriate initial training and support to fulfil their roles.
- Practitioners will actively and continuously develop their skills and practice.
- The CLD sector will engage in a raised standard of professional debate with groups, communities and practitioners.
- Employers will promote, acknowledge and value the skills, knowledge and understanding of practitioners.
- The CLD sector will be widely recognised and valued amongst other professional disciplines, policy makers and the general public.

So, in line with its name, the Standards Council aims to raise standards of CLD practice, so that the CLD sector can deliver its purpose as described above as effectively as possible.

The Standards Council sees the development of CLD workers as reflective practitioners as the essential process through which standards are improved. This process of reflection should be embedded in the Approved qualifications that have a key role to play in developing and assuring these standards. It also provides the basis for opening pathways to professional recognition for those who are unlikely to access qualifications through traditional routes.

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The Standards Council's responsibilities follow directly from its purpose and objectives. The Standards Council is committed to:

- Approve CLD training, skills and development opportunities;
- Implement a system of registration for CLD practitioners;
- Work with partners to develop models and standards for the delivery of continuing professional development and training;
- Work with employers and partners to ensure high quality workforce development strategies, including the design of their supported induction;
- Advocate on behalf of the sector on matters pertaining to registration, training courses and CPD in CLD; and
- Advise government with regard to registration, training courses and CPD in CLD.

In order to carry out any and all of these responsibilities, the Standards Council needs to have a rigorous basis for its work and its decisions. To secure credibility and command respect, it needs to be able to demonstrate this rigour. Just as the Code of Ethics and the Competences provide the framework for CLD as a professional discipline, so they are the core framework for the Standards Council in working with the field to raise standards. They underpin:

- The approval of CLD training, skills and development opportunities;
- The development of a system of registration for CLD practitioners;
- The development of models and standards for continuing professional development;
- Work to ensure high quality workforce development strategies; and
- The Standards Council's role as an advocate for the CLD sector.

At the core of all this, they provide the framework for practitioners to develop as critically reflective CLD workers, and for CLD practitioners collectively to develop as an inclusive profession with a commitment to high standards of practice.

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