

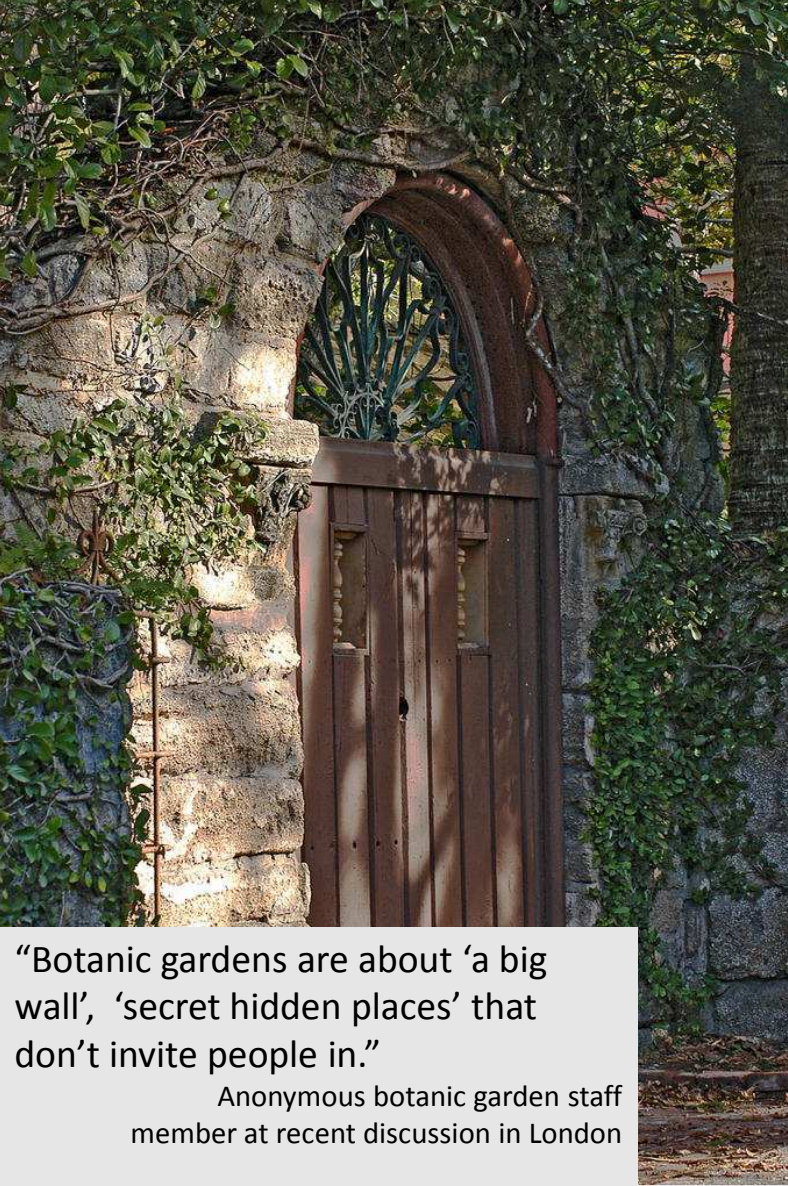
The paradox of participation for botanic gardens

Dr Bernadette Lynch

BGCI International Congress

St Louis, Missouri

April 2015



“Botanic gardens are about ‘a big wall’, ‘secret hidden places’ that don’t invite people in.”

Anonymous botanic garden staff
member at recent discussion in London

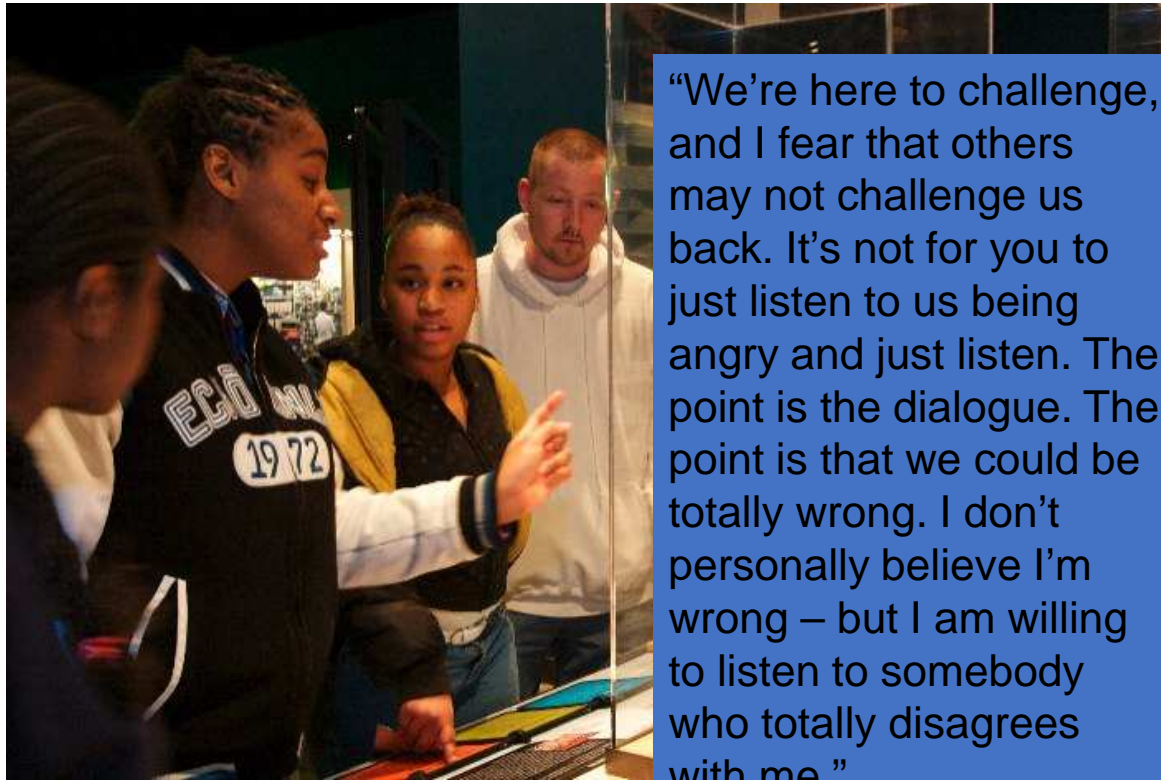
“If botanic gardens are to genuinely reposition themselves and redefine their social purpose...they need to examine their social and environmental roles and communicate and evidence their value more within and outside the sector.”

From ‘Redefining the role of botanic gardens
– towards a new social purpose’,
RCMG, University of Leicester, 2009

Botanic gardens in a troubled World:
Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse?

“... there is no point in addressing sustainability issues by engaging with only 5% of the population, most of whom are white, middle class, older visitors.”

David Rae
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh



“We’re here to challenge, and I fear that others may not challenge us back. It’s not for you to just listen to us being angry and just listen. The point is the dialogue. The point is that we could be totally wrong. I don’t personally believe I’m wrong – but I am willing to listen to somebody who totally disagrees with me.”

“Whatever the recent successes of civil society organisations in helping to address such challenges, it seems that current responses are incommensurate with the scale of the problems we confront. It is increasingly evident that resistance to action on these challenges will only be overcome through engagement with the cultural values that underpin this resistance.”

T. Crompton, *Common Cause: The Case for Working with our Cultural Values*, Oxfam, 2010

Social and environmental connection

“My understanding of climate change is that it needs everybody to be on board. My understanding of diversity is that it includes everybody. This is where botanic gardens come in.”

Tracy Ann Smith, Director, Diversity in Heritage Group (DHG)

“We can’t any longer walk around the garden and ignore climate change and food.”

Dawn Sanders, academic specialist in botanic gardens,
Uni. of Gothenburg, Sweden



Feedback from UK colleagues
on
Communities in Nature

Benefits of Communities in Nature

“There’s a lot to celebrate!”

Sara Oldfield, ex-Secretary General BGCI

“Communities in Nature’ opened up a mechanism for communicating with the general public about environmental issues- both for CGF and other funders, and not many other had been thinking about botanic gardens. It’s opened up the notion of public education via botanic gardens.”

Sarah Ridley, ex-Executive Director, Tubney Charitable Trust

“It’s the best thing I’ve done in my horticultural career – I don’t think that I will ever do anything that will top it.”

Edwin Mole, Head of Horticulture, Bristol Zoo

“I think it's a wonderful project and really important to highlight the different roles a botanic garden can play for different audiences.”

Bronwen Richards,
Schools Education Officer,
Cambridge University Botanic Garden

“How easy it is to begin removing barriers to participation and how rewarding it is.”

Sharon Willoughby,
Manager Public Programs,
Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne

CiN offered significant breakthroughs in working with health and wellbeing....

“The wellbeing aspect is now very high on the agenda everywhere, with more knowledge and opportunities to measure its impact.”

Laura Bedford, Geffrye Museum

On reaching out to the public

“Botanic gardens have the capacity to host and gather people – they can lead public debate and imagination.”

Lucy Neal, *Happy Museum Project* & Transition Movement, Tooting

“It shouldn’t be a trend, it should be a purpose.”

Chandan Mahal, Participation & Learning Manager, Kew Gardens

“It’s not an ‘add on’ here, it’s frankly the only way we keep going.”

Rosie Plummer, Garden Director,
National Botanic Garden of Wales

How relevant do you feel 'growing the social role' is for botanic gardens? Why?

Following the 'Communities in Nature' programme, not one UK respondent has said anything other than 'extremely relevant', in fact most have said that they consider it 'urgent' that botanic gardens actively embrace this role.

Why?

Three main reasons given:

- **Their own survival**
- **Their social and environmental responsibility**
- **The uniquely well-placed opportunity they offer**

What have been the **challenges** of being part of the 'Communities in Nature' initiative?

“There is still a reluctance on senior level to see it as a priority.”

Westonbirt Arboretum

Curators

When looking at Communities in Nature, it is “important to focus on impact on curatorial perceptions rather than contain it within educational discussions...

...The curator has to be a risk-taker and think in a broader manner about the garden. To see the garden as a hub rather than entity – that resonates across communities.”

Dawn Sanders, academic specialist in botanic gardens, Uni. of Gothenburg, Sweden

Funding challenges

“FUNDING!!! Funding keeps getting in the way. The Communities in Nature project is where we want to go. The reality is we have to follow where funding is available.”

Rosie Plummer, Garden Director, National Botanic Garden of Wales

“What’s not needed are vast quantities of money, just a different way of thinking, for example [gardens] use volunteers anyway, but the question is, which volunteers and could strategic partnerships help with this?”

CiN programme commentator

“There is a potential tension between commercial and community engagement but it doesn’t have to be an issue. For example, zoos that do both are also attracting lower income groups.”

Garden senior manager

“Gardens are in danger of becoming simply a green back drop for posh parties and weddings.”

Dawn Sanders, academic specialist in botanic gardens, Uni. of Gothenburg, Sweden

Leadership

“Often the discussions are not at Director level they’re only at Education level.”

Paul Cook, ex-NESS Botanic Gardens, Uni. of Liverpool, The Wirral

“What responsibility do directors have in championing this work and taking it forward?”

Anonymous commentator

“There is still a reluctance on senior level to see it as a priority.”

Anonymous member of staff of one of the CiN gardens

“The fact is they thought they were doing some nice community engagement work and they found there were organisational implications.”

Anonymous commentator

“It feels like what’s needed is a leadership programme.”

Anonymous commentator

BGCI and Leadership

“BGCI needs to have a much bigger conversation at Director level , not just about projects but what botanic gardens *are*, as well as a series of debates and lectures, to link with leadership programmes and change management... to work with directors and curators to shake up notions of gardens and what science is in the 21st century. ”

Commentator, CiS programme

Volunteers

“Break the mould of who is volunteering!”

Commentator, CiS programme

What needs to happen next in the 'Communities in Nature' programme?

“It has to be committed to – seen as a priority. It needs dedicated staff resource. Needs to be embedded across the whole organisation so everybody thinks about their role.”

Sarah Ridley, ex-Exec Director, Tubney Charitable Trust

“...need some lead gardens...to show everyone else it can be done... the long-term benefits of taking it further.”

Paul Cook, ex-NESS Botanic Gardens, Uni. of Liverpool, The Wirral

“Overcoming the nervousness of volunteers that working with the Drugs Project was not going to mean syringes all over the place...the transformation from scepticism and nervousness - that the garden does have great potential.”

Simon Toomer, Westonbirt Arboretum

Multi-stakeholder meeting in London, March 2015

Communities in
Nature UK:
Challenges and
future planning
meeting.

Calouste
Gulbenkian
Foundation,
London, March
2015



Partnerships

“There is tremendous scope here for partnerships.”

Paul Smith, Secretary General of BGCI

“We are very aware in the current economic climate that we all have to do cross-sectoral partnerships.”

Tracy Ann Smith, Director, Diversity in Heritage Group

“We’ve had a lot of support in urban food gardens – the profile has been raised over the last decade. We are now very keen to connect it to others in the horticulture sector...I can see a shared apprenticeship scheme – two days a week in botanic gardens and two days with us.”

Clare Joy, Organiclea

Learning from other sectors

“Instinctively museums and botanic gardens should be a really good match.”

John Orna Ornstein, Director of Museums, Arts Council of England

“My advice to the botanic gardens sector is *not* to make the same mistakes as the museum sector – putting money into short-term projects...it’s a waste of time.”

Tracy Ann Smith, Diversity in Heritage Group

Training, skills development, peer support and mentoring

I think that it would be really beneficial to have shadowing opportunities in another organisation (e.g. an expert mentor).

Ben Oliver, Learning and Participation Manager, Westonbirt Arboretum

“You need to get people to give each other feedback as peers, and to get one-to-one mentoring. There’s a big role for mentoring.”

Tracy Ann Smith, DHG

CiN has raised discussion on diversity and botanic gardens

“The diversity world has been very good at looking at arts and history, but not so good at including science and botany. The responsibility for doing that is for horticulturalists to step forward to use their intellect to marry these two worlds of diversity and science and understand what it means for diversity.”

Tracy Ann Smith, Diversity in Heritage

“...there’s a powerful role for gardens as a multicultural resource in the cultural diversity of big cities...But there needs to be more open, engaged discussion about this work in gardens. Before grabbing a group to work with, need to re-frame how to do this work and work powerfully with academics, activist groups etc.”

Dawn Sanders, academic specialist in botanic gardens, Uni. of Gothenburg, Sweden

Overall views from botanic garden staff members to the consultation event in London

“Botanic gardens are about ‘a big wall’, ‘secret hidden places’ that don’t invite people in.”

“The culture of botanic gardens often invites us to be spectators rather than participants – we need to try to evolve that culture.”

“Currently there are so many barriers created by botanic garden structures and culture.”

Anonymous botanic garden staff
members at the recent discussion on CiN in London

Community of Practice

“Do we see ourselves as individually or collectively working together on this?”

Julia Willison, Kew Gardens

“You can feel very isolated if you don’t feel part of a community.”

Paul Cook, ex-NESS Botanic Gardens, Uni. of Liverpool, The Wirral

“I think a lot of Gardens have interest [but] I think there is not a great community of practice..”

Matthew Cole,
Director of Education,
Denver Botanic Gardens

Feedback from international colleagues

“Find a way to reach into organizations. That is, share information not just with the directors of institutes, but with staff at all levels of institutions. Information does not always flow from the top managerial level to other levels of the organization and this can impede creativity that could lead to greater engagement of the institution in "social roles".

Kimberlie McCue, Program Director,
Conservation of Threatened Species and Habitats,
Desert Botanical Garden

“First, seek out (or be open to) institutions that at least conceptually have a focus on these types of programs. If the mission/vision, overarching ideals of an institution align with making inroads in "social roles" be ready and willing to assist them in getting programs off the ground, even if it is a new foray for them.”

Kimberlie McCue, Program Director,
Conservation of Threatened Species and Habitats,
Desert Botanical Garden

“Programs such as "Communities in Nature" and the like are actions that directly and indirectly benefit the entire global population... such programs help us have environmental balance to achieve sustainable development and a healthy environment ... it is the responsibility of everyone to help and support these actions because the benefits [and the] problem-solving concern us all... all botanical gardens should put more effort in spreading knowledge and dissemination of their activities and initiatives for adding each day more people interested and educated on the importance of environmental stewardship and conservation...”

Sofía Lizbeth Vega Juárez,
Environmental engineer,
Sociedad Jardín Botánico de Los Mochis, IAP

“This program has guided us to grow in our social role and conduct projects and more strengthened and successful initiatives.”

Sofía Lizbeth Vega Juárez, Environmental engineer,
Sociedad Jardín Botánico de Los Mochis, IAP.

“The delight is that programs [such as CIS]...truly can and do make a difference in real peoples' lives. Gardens are more than just pretty places. **Gardens are agents of change.**”

Kimberlie McCue, Program Director, Conservation of Threatened Species and Habitats,
Desert Botanical Garden

“We are convinced that the social role of botanic gardens should increase...”

Yuri Naumtcev, Director,
Botanical Garden of Tver State University

My preliminary conclusion

Stuck!



Botanic garden sector cannot scale up excellent individual examples of practice from some gardens and the general will and enthusiasm from across the sector (and beyond) to take CIS further, **unless**:

- There is a move away from short term projects and the marginalisation of this work in gardens
- There is agreement on a definition and standards of practice that can be evaluated, drawing on definitions and standards that already exist in other sectors
- There is a re-examination of mission and roles in BGCI and gardens that situates this work as 'mission critical'
- There is strong leadership from BGCI, working with directors and championing lead gardens as mentors to help set the standard and instigate peer training between botanic gardens for *all* staff
- There is a clearly defined ongoing programme based on collaborative 'ways of working' with each other as a 'community of practice', acting as 'critical friends', and working with other sectors and 'community partners' to inform, 'co-produce', collectively monitor, and make publicly known this new 'way of working' for the future of botanic gardens and their communities.
- Can it be done? Absolutely!

Tackling organisational inertia
and perceptions about the social role
of botanical gardens



Dr Bernadette Lynch
BGCI International
Congress
St Louis, Missouri
April 2015

Its about a “small revolution” in thinking

Nina Simon

The Participatory Museum

It's about understanding your theory of change?



Is your theory of change effectively treating people as passive beneficiaries or active agents?



Beneficiary?



Active agent?

“...it’s about defining what your core values are and then working around that.”

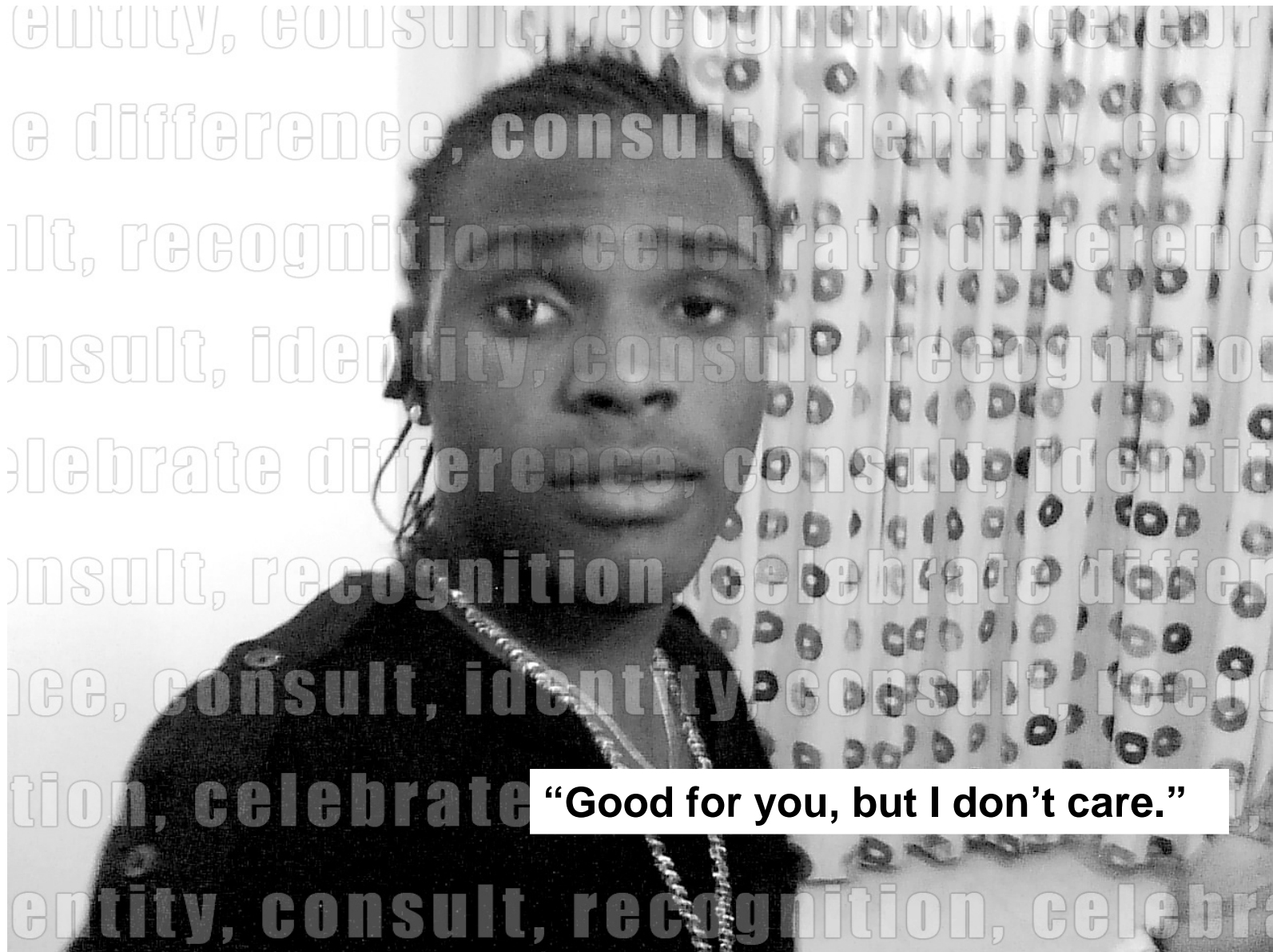


Anonymous botanic garden staff
member at recent discussion
on CiN in London

The 'perpetually helpless'

The Communities in Nature “video is great for illustrating to other organisations and government what we do...and why [but it is] a little too condescending for playing to communities ('the sick the weak and the poor')...”

Phil Pettitt,
Community Greening Coordinator,
Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney



“I don't believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is vertical, so it's humiliating. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person and learns from the other person. I have a lot to learn from other people.”

Eduardo Galeano, (2004, 146)

Empowerment-lite



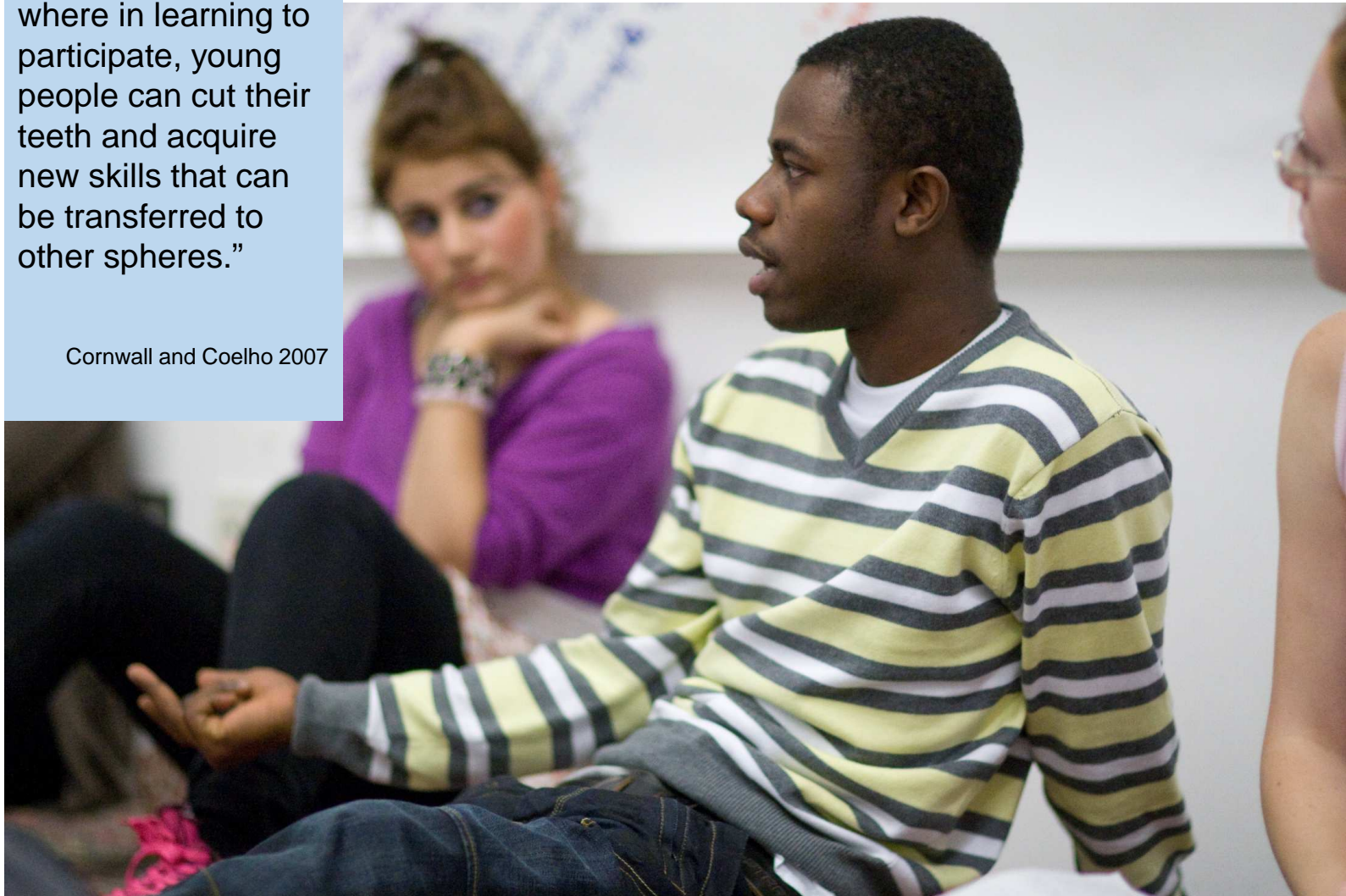
“Capability development.” Amartya Sen



Promoting activism through increasing opportunities for the development of young people's social consciousness, active agency, responsibility, and creativity.

Creating "...a 'space where in learning to participate, young people can cut their teeth and acquire new skills that can be transferred to other spheres."

Cornwall and Coelho 2007





Henry Giroux proposes that young people, youth workers, and [botanical garden] educators can begin to “work together against a politics of certainty, a pedagogy of censorship, and an institutional formation that closes down rather than opens up democratic relations.”

“...[Activism] includes the creation of public [places] where individuals can be educated as political agents equipped with the skills, capacities, and knowledge they need...”

Henry Giroux



Active citizenship



critical thinking,
active democracy,
and community
action for social
change

An 'activist practice'

“No one can imagine another’s life well enough to develop services for them without involving them directly in that development.”

Mark O’Neill, Glasgow Museums, 2008

“Go Ask!”

Can't do without them!

“Conservation could not be achieved without support from local communities. I learned this from these NGOs.”

Ximin WANG, Head of environmental education team

Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden, China

What does 'good' look like...

“Community driven, designed and built projects with less money but strong long term appropriate staffing support will be the most successful...

...seeing key community members become pillars within their suburb, starting further initiatives and activities from the skills, support and confidence we and our partners have given them.”

Phil Pettitt,
Community Greening Coordinator,
Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney

“Always working as closely as possible together with local authorities and social communities.”

Herbert Voigt, Leiter Botanischer Garten,
Botanischer Garten der WWU Muenster – Germany

“This work is essential for making the Earth a place hospitable to people and all of Nature...”

Sophia Shaw, President & CEO,
Chicago Botanic Garden

“...to create flagship gardens/ to support exchanges/networks/capacity building...getting botanic gardens understood outside of the botanic gardens niche – how you cross-fertilise with what’s happening so dynamically in other parts of the environmental movement—...funders could help do this through being aligned.”

Louisa Hooper, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

“Spread the initiative as widely as you can.”

James Wheeler,
CEO, Birmingham Botanical Gardens



“Whose cake is it anyway?”

*A collaborative investigation into engagement
and participation in twelve museums and galleries in the UK*



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Available on the Paul Hamlyn Foundation website :
phf.org.uk