

A Workshop with Building Community through Arts (BCA)* 4th Living Buddhist Conference April 2006



We were challenged by the theme of the conference presentation by David Brazier: the individual and the community

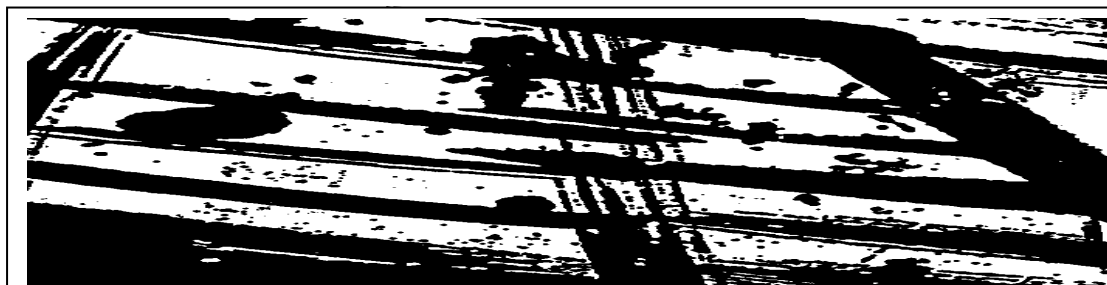
How can we gather individuals of widely disparate backgrounds and give them an opportunity to '*build community*' together?.

This is what has absorbed our energies over the last 10 – 12 years. Working in the community and in residential homes we have devised a workshop plan in which teachers have worked alongside students, professional care workers alongside clients, family members and neighbours have been included, and people isolated by disability or dementia have been drawn in.

We have used the arts, as there is then no need for discrimination between those with high intelligence or those whose cognitive faculties have failed, or in status, ethnicity, or age. We have held to two basic quotes to justify our choice of activities: *All that is human we have in common (Franck)* and *Every child is an artist, the problem is how to remain one when we grow up (Picasso)* We each, we believe, have a fund of creativity, latent or expressed, which may reflect our common humanity, and if brought to the surface, well-presented, talked about, may bring individuals together in community.

In our experiential workshop at the Conference we were mainly concerned to demonstrate our usual way of developing individual creativity, and learning how to facilitate the process. With more time available we would have given each participant a saucer of black ink, a stack of paper, and unusual tools to play with – twigs, pieces of card, sponges, a toothbrush, string – with the instruction to PLAY, EXPERIMENT, make unusual marks on your paper. This can be an absorbing exercise!

In the event we gave each of our participants a piece of paper already covered with random marks and invited them to select a small portion which interested them, using a ready made frame. Again, with more time we would offer a variety of frames, both in black paper and white, and a pair of L – shaped pieces of card to isolate their chosen piece.



The next stage of the workshop works in threes, each participant taking a turn at being the artist – presenting their work to the others; the facilitator – helping the artist to express themselves; or the observer – noting ways in which the interaction between the facilitator and the artist developed, how creativity was encouraged or perhaps frustrated, and keeping attention on the task.

In this stage each artist is encouraged to describe why their chosen piece attracted them: what the image evokes for them, perhaps what memories might have surfaced, certainly what their feelings were in making their choice.

This was followed by a time of individual reflection in which each participant was asked to find a title, write a sentence or two, to give some meaning to their selected piece, within the overall theme of relating individuals to the community. These reflections were then gathered together, and in their groups of three participants were challenged to find the connections which could draw their pieces together as expressions of individuality within the community.



Wind, Storm and Inclement Weather...

Finally each group offered their combined work to the whole workshop, and the BCA team gathered up the pieces to produce a booklet with Japanese style binding, for each participant to take home. The last 15 minutes were spent reflecting on the whole exercise.

These were some of the comments:

I love metaphor and this process is so rich with it

The introduction to facilitation was very effective indeed. I am a facilitation trainer and I can see just how I would use this on my courses...

I edit a newsletter in black and white and I have been wondering how to illustrate it. Now I know...

I work with unemployed young people trying to engage them and get them to do CVs and it is so dry and difficult. This would be such a wonderful way to engage them, so imaginative.