Children and young people making real change happen through social enterprise, social impact business, and innovative approaches to education – ideas and lessons for policy and practice from the US and Canada

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Abstract

Given current global challenges, we must find better ways to educate, do business and make positive social change happen. Children and young people can be capable, creative and committed social entrepreneurs when given appropriate support, and they can provide us with some answers here, but the systems surrounding them – particularly schools - don't tend to develop these abilities to the fullest extent. Nor do we often place young people in positions where they can innovate and make real social change happen for themselves and their communities.

This research report analyses a diverse array of practice and policy in this area in the US and Canada, and from this aims to draw both concrete lessons and wider strategic and policy implications for the UK – particularly education, cultural and social enterprise sectors and organisations:

- Focusing on schools, universities, and social impact businesses where learning, support and development for children and young people is purposeful, engaging, authentic, and carries positive wider consequences.
- Exploring ways that creative, innovative and socially enterprising ideas can be developed and sustained at both a grassroots level and through strategic interventions – moving from projects to emerging and sustainable businesses that create rewarding jobs longer term, and leading to ongoing social and environmental impact.
- Identifying different ways to measure, account for, support, value and communicate the impact of all of this creative and socially enterprising activity – to change policy and practice, and generate further investment in the organisations, young people and businesses themselves.

Key words

Social enterprise, social impact business, children and young people, education, schools, teaching and learning, community service, art, culture, creativity, innovation, US and Canada, policy and practice.

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1. Introduction

Supported by a Churchill Fellowship I travelled to the west coast of Canada and the US in October and November 2013. The Fellowship provided me with the richest learning experience of my life and I want to begin by thanking the staff at the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (WCMT) and all those individuals and organisations I met on my travels. Their professionalism, generosity, positivity and ideas have shaped me in so many ways and I am a profoundly different person as a result.

I learnt so much from this experience, on so many levels, that structuring and writing this report has been a real challenge; not least because I continue to learn as each week goes by – and will continue to do so. The visit had such depth and resonance for me, and echoes and ripples continue to play out as I have returned to my 'day job', home and family. I have felt some pressure to write a 'good' report, in order to properly honour and do justice to the people I met, and to convey with integrity the ideas, approaches and ways of working and being that I encountered along the way. But how to capture and write about something that continues to shift and resonate on so many levels?

In the end I have had to accept that I probably can't write such a report. So here instead is my best shot: an analysis of the key themes that emerged, the most valuable ideas I saw, and thoughts about how these themes and ideas can inform and shift practice and policy in my own organisation, community and country. The photos used are my own.

2. The background to my research

Through much of my adult and working life I have been driven by a mix of determined passion, and quiet anger and frustration (positive and negative sides of the same sense or drive I think – but both good motivators during difficult times, in their different ways.)

First, that schools and the wider education system are not 'real' enough, and that this carries serious societal and psychological consequences for us all. Success at school seems to involve a high degree of pretence and artifice, certain narrow modes of behaviour, and successful regurgitation of pre-determined 'knowledge'. It is often more about learning to fit in, absorb content and pass exams than about discovering what you are truly good at, maximising your unique gifts, and then learning how these can then be best deployed in the world; to build a better, happier, fuller and richer you; and a better, fuller, happier and richer world as a result. And I say this as someone who was highly 'successful' through the educational system – an excellent 'performer' indeed. These arguments apply equally across the spectrum of socially-determined 'achievement'.

Being in school feels a bit like the inside of a Tupperware container: some light permeates but there is a tendency towards sterility and not enough connection with the wider world. In addition to this disconnection or dislocation, the basis or framework is unclear (why are children in there in the first place? I don't think we are actually very sure on this.); the metrics aren't great, and often drive student and teacher behaviour in perverse ways (what are we measuring and why?); and the content of the box is far too subject to political (and often personal) vagaries depending on which politician is in charge of content at any given time.

It is vital to add that I am talking about schools at a systemic level. I have met and worked with many wonderful Heads and teachers over the years, and many schools, who passionately and diligently create pockets of space and opportunity for children and young people to develop, grow and flourish. But my feeling is that this brilliant and beautiful work often happens in spite of, rather than because of, the philosophical and policy context, and that we could be doing so much more to help these highly impressive and pragmatic professionals. They can suffer from the system too.

And second, as a result, that we are at best neglecting, and at worst wasting, the unique, creative, and 'socially enterprising' talents and potential of children and young people. Children and young people have such good ideas, such individual passions and raw intelligence – and they are more than capable of making change happen in their lives, schools and communities if we give them the space, support and time to do so. How can we get them to 18 years of age (or so) with this wit intact, built upon, honed and ready to deploy in positive ways?

Unfortunately, the educational system does not seem to be set up with the prime aim of springing happy, creative young people out of the top of it, brimming with energy, new ideas and potential – and yet this is what we need if we are serious about building stronger communities, healthier societies, and a better world, with more equal and positive ways of working, developing and being at heart. Indeed, this is, uniquely, what the young can bring us if we listen and enable them to do so; and if we can find ways to prevent a stripping back or a limiting of their potential and energy during their early years.

So when I came across the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust I knew exactly what area I wanted to explore.

3. The purpose of my research

I set out with the following overall purpose:

> *Given current global challenges, we must find better ways to do business. Children and young people are naturally socially enterprising and can provide us with some answers, but the systems surrounding them don't develop these abilities to the fullest extent. Nor do we often place young people in positions where they can make real social change happen for themselves and their communities.*

I chose to travel to North America for two reasons. First, because of the central place of enterprise and entrepreneurialism in these societies, and the wider relationship between the individual and the state and its government – which is very different than the UK. Enterprise forms a driving pulse in the US in particular, and I had no idea to what extent this applied or shaped the organisations I was visiting, and the approaches they used, until I saw it first hand for myself.

Second, because of the diverse and sustained approaches to 'real' in education - from primary schools through to universities. For example, the US has a widespread and well-understood notion of 'community service learning' (CSL, and all its variants) and this notion permeates many schools and colleges, and underpins significant amounts of purposeful, impactful and community-connected teaching, learning and activity in these settings, as well as giving rise to networks, institutes and diverse programmes of professional development for practitioners. There is also often a more porous and mutually beneficial boundary between school and community, including local businesses. We don't even have this concept of CSL in the UK to any great extent and so I was keen to see what I could learn from it on a policy and practical level.

I had three more specific aims in terms of my visits and what I wanted to explore in more detail:

- *Connect with schools, universities, and businesses where learning for children and young people is purposeful, real and carries wider consequences, and young people are encouraged to develop social enterprise ideas that make positive change happen.*
- *Explore ways that young people's social enterprise ideas can be developed and sustained – moving from great ideas and projects to emerging and*

sustainable businesses that create rewarding jobs longer term and lead to ongoing social and environmental impact.

- *Explore different ways to measure and account for the impact of this type of socially enterprising activity – against a 'triple bottom line' (social, environmental, and economic), and ways this value can then be determined and communicated more widely – to change policy and practice, and generate further investment in the businesses themselves.*

This third aim in particular may seem like a technical point. But having worked with a range of different funding streams, forms of investment, and programme and policy interventions over the years I have often seen how what gets measured ends up being what gets valued, how metrics can end up driving activity, often erroneously, and how a range of separate and different intentions in this space get tangled up together (the desire for good evaluation and research to be carried out; the need for external monitoring; the need for internal performance and quality management; and the desire to persuade and advocate to stakeholders and others), with the result often being that none of these things end up getting done very well.

The interests outlined above have underpinned the work I have done in helping found and run a social enterprise in the UK: the Real Ideas Organisation (RIO) Community Interest Company (CIC), as well as previous work I have carried out in policy and research fields, and in the community and regeneration sectors.

Our work at RIO work is wide-ranging, underpinned by social enterprise, and with a central theme of supporting people to build better futures. We provide support to schools, enabling them to make learning purposeful and real, and helping them operate in new ways, make best use of assets, generate new income, communicate more effectively within their communities, and become more resilient. In essence, thinking about schools as social enterprises.

We also focus our efforts in particular places, and are involved in or leading a range of community regeneration initiatives across the SW of England. We operate a shop unit on the high street in Liskeard and from that work more widely in that community, aiming to create jobs and opportunities for young people through art, culture and social enterprise activity, as well as help bring some vitality back to the town centre. And over the last few years we have created a social enterprise hub, heritage centre, bakery and cultural venue at the Devonport Guildhall as well as bringing back into use the neighbouring 124ft Victorian column, establishing a viewing platform on top (the view is amazing!), and equipping it with wifi for the benefit of the local community.

Finally we provide one-to-one support and learning programmes for individuals, often young people who have dropped out of education, work or training or those experiencing unemployment, including developing qualifications and programmes for them that are 'real', meaningful, connected to their passions and interests, and that support them to be more creative and socially enterprising.

Social enterprise as a principle and operating mode is therefore very important to us. We specifically chose this way of doing business and of making change happen. It gives us a form and standpoint that is congruent with the types of changes we are attempting to make in society, i.e. we practice what we preach.

Previous experience with both purely public or private sector approaches had also convinced us that there surely had to be better ways to attempt to make change happen, with public sector methods often proving unwieldy, slow, risk-averse, bureaucratic and overly orientated towards Ministers and politicians, rather than citizens and customers. And private sector approaches seem to us particularly thorny when trading or interfacing with public institutions such as schools. In essence, we don't believe that profits from this type of work should necessarily leak out of the system away from the area where the taxpayer is expecting to see public benefit. In a CIC like ours these profits are re-channelled back into work with children and young people, which sits better for us from an ethical standpoint and, we would argue, is a position easier to square with children, their parents and wider society.

In Canada and the US it was incredibly reinvigorating to connect with individuals, organisations and communities of similar practice – after a long and sometimes tiring period helping build and run an organisation from scratch. However, RIO, the work I do in the organisation, and my wider networks gives me a great framework to readily apply my learning back into my home context. I pull out the practical and policy lessons I am now pursuing throughout this report.

I spent just over 5 weeks travelling down the west coast of Canada and the US in autumn 2013. I stayed for a week or so in Vancouver, Seattle, Portland and San Francisco, and also spent a few days exploring the areas around each of these cities. They were chosen because of the level of innovation found in these places in my area of interest.

4. Differences in context and implications for transferability

A key responsibility with a Churchill Fellowship is the requirement to bring back ideas and practice and apply them for the benefit of others. I visited many amazing projects, programmes, people and organisations in Canada and the US, and learnt much from them.

But I also realised how different the context was too, and it became important for me to think through and work out the interrelationship between the work and ideas I was seeing and their environment. Otherwise I will be importing palm trees and expecting them to flourish in a different soil and climate; and they simply won't. But it will be because they are not suited to the new context; not because of their innate quality.

America is an incredible place and it pulses with a set of primal forces and energies – enterprise, capital, love, passion, faith, patriotism, creativity, individuality, independence, warmth and generosity. I had a growing sense that if I could understand the US, I would then understand the whole world a bit better, particularly the forces of enterprise and capitalism. And I wanted to understand these forces in order to apply them more effectively within my own socially enterprising endeavours. It is, however, also a country riddled with contradictions, tensions and blind spots – one that challenges any simple understanding at every turn.

For example, I met large groups of 'liberal-minded' citizens working in the social sector, and through my curiosity discovered that many of them owned guns, which surprised me a lot. Their justification for this was either: self-protection and the fact that everyone else had one so they needed one too; or a deep, innate need to preserve an individualism in relation to the government, which in many ways was even more surprising. Big questions and issues in relation to race, the legacy of slavery, and the founding of the country out of an often brutal wrestle with First Nation people also permeated – but rumbled underneath rather than ever becoming overt.

In many of the big cities the extreme levels of homelessness I saw also shocked me, and there was an obvious overlap with severe and unaddressed mental and physical health issues. In Portland, for example, there were very large, semi-permanent encampments of homeless people living under some of the city's bridges. The rationale for this was most often explained to me by citizens as due to the fact that the city had such good facilities for homeless people, and that they were therefore

attracted there from across the state and beyond – though I struggled to reconcile this with the state of the camps I saw and the feedback from some of the social enterprises I visited working on this issue.

At the same time, I have never before travelled to another country and been met with such openness, love, care, hospitality, and honesty by practically every single person I met. This apparent contradiction was a great conundrum for me, and one I am still trying to understand. I try to outline below the main differences in context that I experienced.

4.1 Individualistic but generous and socially-minded

So people seemed to be both very individualistic, and yet highly generous and socially-minded in their personal interactions. I wondered if this explains why there seemed to be fewer large 'societal', governmental or structural responses to such an obvious problem as homelessness, and an explanation for it from many people that rooted the issue within the individuals concerned, and their perceived lack of drive or positivity, rather than in society as a whole, and its currents and forces.

But then, of course, when people do intervene in issues or problems to make some form of change happen, they seem to do so from their heart and soul, with a real passion, and usually not because the government says so - as can happen here in the UK where many of our social initiatives are funded, specified and framed by the government or public sector.

I have worked in the delivery of many government schemes, some successful and some less so. I have noticed that this framing brings a very different energy to the intervention: one that can limit both the enterprise of workers and participants and any focus on the individual beneficiary; gives no sense of an overall culture of warmth or care (how can a bureaucracy or framework care, even if the people working on that scheme bring their best?); has a feeling of 'top down' in terms of delivery; and possesses an insidious orientation towards Ministers and politicians rather than the recipient, which destroys or limits many of the feedback loops with 'customers' that could help the service get better and better and creates a climate of risk-aversion[1]. I would argue, for example, that schools and hospitals experience many of these issues, as well as their consequences.

[1] In section 5.5.3 I discuss the work of Tyze, a social enterprise working in innovative ways to break down these divisions between public and private, and to unleash the potential of these feedback loops for all those involved in providing care to individuals in need.

4.2 A fundamentally different approach to enterprise, entrepreneurialism and 'failure'

I have touched on this innate difference already, and, indeed, it is what drew me to North America in the first place. The place crackles with enterprising energy, and the organisations I visited were naturally deploying enterprising solutions to social problems, rather than state-led, funded or commissioned projects or programmes, as often happens in the UK. I will outline some of these organisations and solutions later in the report as illustration.

The US, and particularly the west coast, also has much higher levels of entrepreneurialism than the UK. In the first year of recession in the US a dominant individual response was small business start-up – with over 500,000 new ventures launched in that year alone; representing an incredible bounce-back spirit. In each of the cities I visited there was a significant culture of support and encouragement for entrepreneurs – with over 20 start-up support programmes available in Portland alone, provided on a commercial basis.

And linked to this, I encountered very different attitudes to 'failure' compared with the UK. I spoke to some very wealthy investors in Seattle and they declared that they rarely invest in anyone's emerging business unless they have 'failed' a handful of times before – as this is how they will have learnt how to run a business well, and honed their approach. I found this to be an incredibly refreshing approach and way to value something often perceived as negative in this country. Think, for example, of the negative value attached to 'failure' and 'getting it wrong' in schools, and yet intelligently taken risks and thoughtful failure are two of the key drivers allowing us all to learn and get better at what we do.

4.3 'Social enterprise' definitions and starting points

In Canada 'social enterprise' had a far more specific connotation than in the UK – often taken to mean a commercial venture set up by a non-profit. And in the US there was a whole heap of emerging terminology, definitions and perspectives on the fusion of enterprise approaches with work towards explicitly social goals. I learnt that I had to take care when translating terms and definitions backwards and forwards, and not assume we were necessarily talking about the same thing even when using the same words.

At a bigger picture level, from the organisations I visited I noticed that they often had different starting points for their own ‘flavour’ of social enterprise than is commonly found in the UK.

This is a slight oversimplification, but I feel that many UK social enterprises begin with the social goal or issue, and then seek to find enterprising ways to solve that issue, or work with it, and there are areas of RIO’s business where we have done just this. So we tend to begin at the left of the diagram above and move towards enterprise from this starting point.

In contrast, many of the North American organisations I visited were beginning with enterprise and then seeking to build or maximise the social return, value or impact on top of this.

Of course we then often meet in the middle; with some form of balanced fusion of social and enterprise. And the fact that there is such a large ‘fuzzy’ middle area here illustrates the challenges of defining ‘social enterprise’ too, as anyone operating in this middle space could claim they are a social enterprise, though a key factor for me is also how any excess profits are used and distributed. I would argue they need to go back towards the community of interest.

But, whatever the definition, the chosen starting point defines the journey and the challenges we tend to face along the way. In the UK the challenge is becoming business-like quickly enough, putting in place efficient business processes, developing and working with the customer base, integrating commercial (as oppose to social) skills into the endeavour, and long term sustainability (which comes from customer revenue).

And in North America, the challenge is levering enough social change (or radical enough change?) out of the enterprise itself.

4.4 The attitudes and actions of business in relation to social and community endeavour

Along with the approach to enterprise, this was probably the biggest difference I experienced in the US. I have been working in local communities, on regeneration programmes, and in social enterprise for around 20 years, and I experienced more genuine and positive business and institutional engagement in local community, educational and social concerns in my first two weeks in the US and Canada than in my whole working life in the UK,

which is both amazing, and rather shocking from a UK perspective.

This involvement takes a variety of forms, including:

- Committed business membership of boards of social enterprises and non-profits - these boards are, in turn, active, supportive and engaged rather than remote and purely 'holding to account' without a true full picture of what is happening in the organisation anyway, as can happen in some UK non-profits and partnerships.
- Linked to this, bringing fresh connections, ideas and social capital to social enterprises and, overall, building a more porous interchange between sectors. This can only be a good thing as ideas, ethics, and approaches to both business and social change flow both ways.
- Active use of supply chains, including procuring and leveraging social value alongside financial. For example, businesses and large institutions in downtown Vancouver buy many services such as catering, car washing, site cleaning, graffiti removal and maintenance from social enterprises working alongside them. And enjoy, gain benefit from, and publicise the fact that they are doing so – in essence, they are procuring social impact from social enterprises.
- Cash! Sometimes businesses were simply giving decent-sized donations to social enterprises, in order to subsidise their social impact or provide them with start-up investment.
- Providing jobs, internships, pathways and 'stepping stone' placements for young people and those in need, with these employees being passed to the business and initially supported by the social enterprises.

In terms of why the businesses do this, the responses I received were very heartening and enlightened. The business leaders I talked to were very straight: there are of course practical PR benefits to be had, in terms of how customers and stakeholders then perceive the businesses involved, but they also saw it as good business sense in terms of their relationship with their local community (healthy community = healthy businesses), customers (who care about their local area and want their businesses to do so too) and employees (who want a richer work experience than simply making money) – and over and above even this, simply as the moral and right thing to do as a citizen and business owner.

A small illustration of this was the sign I saw in the window of a local dry cleaners in Portland (below) – I could not imagine the same offer appearing in a similar UK business' window, but it would be very easy (and low cost) for them to act similarly.

They seemed to bring a wider and more holistic perspective to their role and position in the community. My sense in the UK is that business, in general, would see their role in a more limited way, would see themselves paying significant and fair taxes, and on a sub-conscious level then expect 'the government' to sort out any social problems or issues on their behalf. Perhaps as most people do deep down?

I wonder whether, as I have already touched on, this relation between the 'individual' (whether citizen or business leader) and 'government' leads to a tendency to passivity or stepping back from authentic engagement in the social sphere in the UK? In North America, it may be that because government is less advanced on this space, a vacuum is created, and citizens and businesses step in or are drawn in to help? At a societal level we are making different choices about how we intervene in this space, and these bring different consequences, approaches and energies with them.

This aspect of difference has given me much food for thought and absolutely convinced me that we need to make far more concerted attempts to engage and bring business partners to the table across a range of our work, particular employer partnerships, so we can offer more onward pathways and placements for young people, and in our regeneration work, given that vibrant places need vibrant business of all types and it is in all our interests that we help make these places so.

4.5 The ‘newness’ of the country and a feeling that more is possible

I am a passionate and keen student of history, and in each of the places I visited I connected with local history groups and followed walking tours. North America feels ‘new’ (though of course it isn’t, and this is one of its blind spots – the dominant history that is told, though, is recent).

For example, San Francisco boomed in 1849 following discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada. Hundreds of ships, carrying thousands of people from around the world, arrived in the bay of a relatively small town and most of these ships then lay idle or rotted at the dock as passengers and crew left en masse to seek their fortune, though very few found it. Downtown was formed from and then built upon these docks, decaying ships and the leftover detritus from the gold rush influx. And in just 150 years or so it is now one of the wealthiest and most energetic cities in the world – with Google, Ebay, Apple, Twitter and many other tech companies triggering another, very different boom in the city and surrounding valleys.

This is an incredible pace of development and transformation in such a short space of time – underpinned by radical and diverse enterprise, often revolutionary. History as told in San Francisco is a story of pioneers, individuals, entrepreneurs and strange and quirky ‘characters’ falling over each other in a forward tumble of human energy and endeavour. You can see, touch and meet the workplaces, sites of significance, relatives, offices and products of these characters all around you when you visit. And as a result of this physical and psychic proximity, you feel as if it could also be you making the next splash or impact in the city.

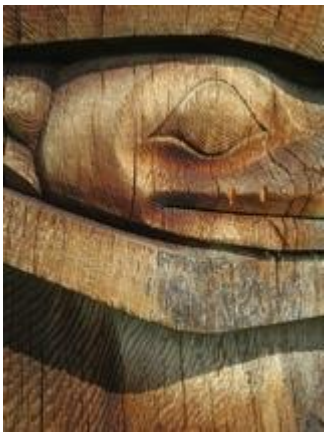
Plus of course, people needed to be enterprising to be there in the first place - witness the thousands on those boats heading to the gold rush, and then all the other waves of immigration driven by a drive for a better life. Perhaps the less enterprising stayed at home, continuing to farm in the Scottish borders, for millennia (as my ancestors did.)

This feels such a contrast with the dominant notion of ‘history’ in the UK – told in often stifling fashion as a series of ‘great events’, driven by grand and remote figures, and stretching far, far back into a very dim and distant past – one that is now largely untouched by the combined efforts of crazy, radical and enterprising individuals. There is stability, but also an ossification, to this feeling and notion of history. And in turn, you feel as if it is unlikely to be you who could make a big change happen. As, if at all, that it will more likely be someone from a top public school, or a Knight, King or Queen…

The remarkable introduction of the Portland Arts Tax (outlined in detail in section 5.5) is an example of the type of initiative far more likely to happen in the US because of this context: a small group of driven individuals working together to shape the future in a highly significant and radical way; I can’t conceive how that particular development could happen in the UK (an hypothecated arts education tax paid by all citizens), but perhaps I need to challenge myself more about that in-built sense of ‘it could never happen here’, otherwise the effect of a dominant historical narrative becomes self-fulfilling.

4.6 The West Coast 'soup' (money, technology, start-ups, universities, conscience…)

Finally I was conscious that I was visiting a very particular part of North America, one with its own highly distinctive culture and characteristics. The West coast is a fantastic swirling mix of money, cutting edge technology and invention, enterprise, start-up energy, globally significant cultural activity, leading academic institutions (but often not very conventional ones), diversity and difference (and real pride in that), innovative thinking, conducive climate, stunning environment and various strands, explorations and forms of radical and questioning consciousness. This soil is extremely supportive of innovation that fuses together social change and enterprise, and many of the organisations I visited contained this complex and rather beautiful dna.



5. Practical implications and lessons

It was important for me to understand these factors and differences as I visited a range of amazing and highly socially enterprising organisations down the west coast – in order to then pull out and distil from this background environment the aspects of practice and the relevant and transferable lessons for my own work, community and context. Plus, gain a better sense of what ideas and lessons will transfer and work here, and at what level. For example, I saw some fascinating examples of micro-social enterprise that would translate in theory, but they could not happen here without changes in benefit regulations and environmental markets.

Rather than present the organisations and people I met in chronological order or by city, I have grouped them into themes and types, with issues and practical lessons outlined for each section. I hope this makes for more interesting and effective reading than a possibly interminable diary format!

5.1 Social enterprises creating real work for young people and those most in need

Each of the cities I visited had at least one, and often more, of these types of organisation; and they are unlike any organisation I have come across in the UK before. We have shades of their practice at RIO; but only shades, and with much to learn from them, outlined below. I visited and spoke to some, and researched others in more depth where it was not possible to meet. They include:

Mission Possible, who provide a range of services for those experiencing homelessness or extreme poverty in downtown eastside Vancouver. They also run a range of social enterprise business units in diverse areas including property maintenance, security services, and recycling.

MISSION POSSIBLE

People • Purpose • Paycheque

For over the past 20 years Mission Possible has walked alongside people challenged by homelessness and poverty. Every day we provide street-level care for those with immediate and critical needs as well as create jobs that build a bridge to stability through a variety of enterprising ventures. Mission Possible is helping people renew a sense of dignity and purpose through meaningful work. **Learn more**

New Avenues for Youth in Portland, who provide programs and services to empower homeless youth to exit street life. Their social enterprise business activity includes operating several Ben and Jerry's franchises across the city and a print shop.

New Door Ventures in San Francisco, who help at-risk youth get ready for work and life. They believe that solving the problem of homelessness requires jobs, skills and opportunities, in addition to love and emergency shelter. They provide job internships through their own businesses (Ashbury Images print shop and Pedal Revolution bike repair shop). They also run the Ally program, which creates job internships for young people through local business partners.

Evergreen Lodge, based on the edge of the Yosemite National Park in the Sierra Nevada. The Evergreen offers a very high quality hospitality experience to visitors to Yosemite (accommodation, activities, food etc.) and also, very much 'behind the scenes', operates and self-funds an employment program for young adults from urban areas in California who work in various departments as paid seasonal interns. This allows the young people to leave their normal lives behind, and learn and work at the Lodge – gaining a range of new skills in a customer service and recreation business as well as experience the 'outdoors' and wilderness, often for the first time. They argue that their employees' work is more rewarding as a result of their Youth Program, and that their guests 'can feel good knowing that, by staying with us, they are helping young people to gain experience that they would not otherwise have access to'. They are a certified B Corporation[2].

And finally, Juma who run a youth development program serving more than 1,200 low-income students in six cities — New Orleans, New York, Oakland, San Diego, San Francisco and Seattle. Their program combines employment in social enterprises (including food and beverage franchises – many of which are awarded by and based in large municipal sports stadia), college preparation, and financial asset building to create a safe, supportive community where low-income youth can achieve their dreams of a college education.

[2] A new classification of company that began life in the US but is now spreading internationally: B Corps use 'the power of business to solve social and environmental problems'. I would strongly recommend their website, assessment tools and metrics – free to use on their website. They are clear and well organized, and very useful for any practicing social enterprise.

All of these organisations work in a similar way and have a number of common characteristics.

- The levels of need they are dealing with in their client or ‘customer’ group are very high: young people and adults with chaotic lifestyles, drug users, long term homeless, and young people who are not in college or education. They are helping people who really need it, supporting them to move on in life, in a range of positive ways.
- They provide very holistic and flexible support, and often a physical centre, meeting a wide range of basic needs, and functioning as a first port of call for those in difficulty, including food, clothing, education and basic skills, financial skills and help and so on.
- They provide training and development pathways for their clients; moving from basic and life skills, and general ‘work readiness’, on into some more technical or skilled areas.
- These organisations are intrinsically enterprising and they do all they can to move their clients into meaningful and real salaried work.
- To help do this each organisation runs a set of sustainable business units or subsidiaries. And in turn they also often link with a wider network of businesses and partner organisations in their locality who can provide further pathways, employment opportunities, internships and jobs for their clients or young people. As they are only able to create so many ‘stepping stone’ jobs in their own internal business units; this gives them more reach. Interestingly, sometimes the organisations find ways to monetise this relationship as a service they provide to these partner businesses, i.e. they help the business recruit, train and retain young people from challenging circumstances in their workforce; and the businesses are prepared to both pay for this support and work hard to recruit these young people in the first place, which impressed me immensely.
- In addition to jobs, they often provide practical financial help and support, including money management skills, access to bank accounts, and encouragement to save. Juma, for example, match fund any savings that their young people are able to put to one side for college. All of this helps build good financial habits and literacy.

This enterprising approach in turn brings them a range of benefits including:

- Significant new revenue streams (e.g. from ice-cream sales) that can then be used for social benefit.
- Job creation through an enterprising approach (rather than just relying on friendly employers and the wider labour market for places).
- In turn this gives them control over their own work environment and the job placements for young people – and the training and development that takes place there – which also means they have greater control over the likely outcomes for young people. And some of them also then sell this expertise to other businesses on a consultancy basis too, i.e. ‘we can help you employ and develop young people in need from your local community…’
- An overall operating ethos that tends more to business-like rather than charitable or non-profit, with an enhanced ‘customer focus’, dynamism, results-focus and efficiency.

- A position within markets and the business community, rather than off to one side, and an ability to talk to other businesses as an equal, rather than a charity seeking a favour. This leads to mutual respect, ease of communication, a high level of connections via boards and partnerships, ready access to supply chains etc.

My initial experience of all of these organisations was that they were run with a real rigour and sharpness. They felt highly professional; with clear processes, progression pathways for clients, and very efficient operational systems. They were very 'business-like' and focussed on results and outcomes, in the best sense of the word. In turn, this also helps build momentum, energy and progression in their clients' lives.

They were also driven, to an extent, by faith (sometimes explicitly, though even then in a low key way) and by passion - again, in the best sense of the words. They exist because their founders, board and employees want to make a difference in a particular area and way, not because a government says they should exist or is funding them to provide these particular services. In fact most of them received no government funding. This gave them a real clarity and feeling of driving independence.

This faith and whole-heartedness had a knock-on positive impact in a range of ways. For example, their work readiness programmes and curricula focussed not just on the skills and abilities needed to get on at work, such as timekeeping, and teamwork, but also on developing the attitudes and ethos you need to move forward in this context: pride, 'workmanship', work ethics, emotional wellbeing and commitment, looking out for others etc. These programmes were very different than those I have seen operating in UK contexts – far more well-rounded and with an honest integrity to them; exploring how work done well and with dignity can give fundamental meaning to a life, whatever the work is.

At Mission Possible they also have a collective 'celebration' when clients move on and secure a job: with a bell being rung in their team office by that person each time this happens. That made me realise how these moments of pause, reflection and recognition are actually very important, for all involved – honouring the individual and appreciating that big changes are made up of lots of incremental moments like this, rather than hurtling on to the next challenge, which has been more my way.

Their websites and communications are highly impressive too: very focussed and direct. From their websites it is clear how you can relate to them, whether as a young person needing help, a business who could partner with them, or a donor who could provide some additional support. You are then channelled effectively in an appropriate direction, towards concrete action of some form. They also explain in brilliantly clear, easily understood and quantifiable terms what they do, why and the social benefits or value they create as a result. Witness Juma's overview statement of impact as an example:

- *Juma has been rooted in social enterprise, and now operates 12 social enterprise operations in five cities. In 2012, Juma's social enterprises earned $1.96 million in revenue.*
- *Juma's core insight is that the world's greatest social service program is a job. At a job, you learn to show up on time, take personal responsibility and*

become a leader. Juma youth work year-round at major sporting venues, each earning an average of $1,000 per year.

- *In 2012, Juma employed 360 students at its social enterprises. These youth worked 5,550 shifts, earning more than $357,000 in wages and saving more than $94,000 for college while learning valuable, hands-on lessons in money management, sales techniques, and communication.*

I spoke at particular length with Caroline Pappajohn, Strategic Initiatives Director of New Avenues for Youth, who has worked at senior level in several of these organisations. She helped me gain a good understanding of the underlying dynamics, opportunities and challenges they face in seeking to use social enterprise principles to move young people in need through into positive work and lives.

As stated, they therefore begin with enterprise and use it is a vehicle for dynamism and social change. And they work with the inescapable logic of capitalism, competition and business rather than attempting to swim against it. By that I mean that they acknowledge that any business seeking to integrate and support young people with significant needs on an ongoing basis is likely to have lower productivity, higher labour costs and a lower overall skill level than a similar competitor business. This is because these are often run by a highly efficient, focussed and determined 'mom and pop' team who will work long hours without drawing a salary from their business whilst it becomes established, and do all they can to meet customer needs along the way.

In addition to higher labour costs, there will also be management and workforce challenges: extra training and development required; the need for additional 'mentor' figures in the workforce to support the young people, often at quite a high ratio; and, linked to this, the business units often employing or needing to integrate staff who are more committed to the social purpose of the organisation and less single minded or skilled in relation to running the business itself and looking after external customers (i.e. in it primarily for the social rather than the enterprise.)

These social enterprises respond to these challenges in a range of clever ways:

- They choose business areas and types of work that intrinsically suit: that are often low skill but of some interest to their client group (such as hotdog and ice cream vending, general maintenance, or bike repair).
- They seek a scale, size and type of contract that will create enough profit margin overall to offset their lower productivity and higher labour costs, and also to ensure a significant volume of work for young people or their particular client group.
- They source these contracts from amenable partners, such as sports stadia, public authorities, universities and business improvement districts, who in turn are keen to procure the social and PR value and impact that the social enterprise is creating as well as the service or product itself.
- They position the work as 'stepping stones' for young people and seek to move them through and into other businesses after 6 months to a year. They are not aiming to create jobs for life, just a vehicle for positive development and momentum.

The organisations then account for and communicate about this activity in a very specific and sharp way: not as 'badly run' businesses, which a cursory glance at their

accounts might suggest if compared with a non-social enterprise competitor - with higher productivity and lower labour costs; but as very clear about the additional benefits they create, the cost of this, and the value of it to their customers and wider society. In essence, they therefore also sell carefully measured and quantified social impact and value to business, philanthropists and the public on top of the printed shirts, hotdogs and ice cream they are selling direct to customers. They are businesses operating very smartly in two fields at once: social impact businesses. I therefore learnt a massive amount, at every level, from all these organisations.

5.2 Incubation and support for creative social enterprise start-up and growth

Though the UK economy is beginning to grow again, youth unemployment continues to run at record high levels and, in certain parts of the country, such as Cornwall where we do a lot of work, there simply aren't stable and interesting jobs for young people. Work is often seasonal, temporary, part-time and low skilled – and young people are often forced to move away in order to secure better quality work.

We are therefore keen to work together with other social enterprises to build and grow a different type of economy, and were recently successful in designating Cornwall a rural social enterprise zone; the first of its kind in Europe.

From a young person's perspective, work and a job is often presented as something you slot into or take, or that someone else gives to you – with this the dominant mode of 'careers education' and work experience at school. Whereas work (and a business or enterprise) can be something you create for yourself, linked to passions you may have or changes you want to make in the world, and the desire to build a balanced, imaginative and self-determining life well-lived. There is emerging evidence that young people in particular are more interested in starting new types of businesses in this way (social enterprises and businesses that also focus to a greater extent on positive social change).

So I travelled to the US and Canada keen to find new ways to support and enable young people to grow their own social enterprises and endeavours – therefore building a different type of economy and making new work and lives, rather than simply expecting young people to slot into existing structures. I encountered four particular, but very different, approaches to incubation and social enterprise support in Canada and the US – each with much to teach me in this area.

5.2.1 Fledge and the Impact Hub, Seattle

In Seattle I visited the Impact Hub: a 'co-working space, event venue and innovation lab for inspiring people' and their 'purpose-driven ventures'. The Hub is based in a historic downtown building in a regenerating part of the city, and now houses one of the largest concentrations of social entrepreneurs in the country; it had a real buzz to it, there was tons

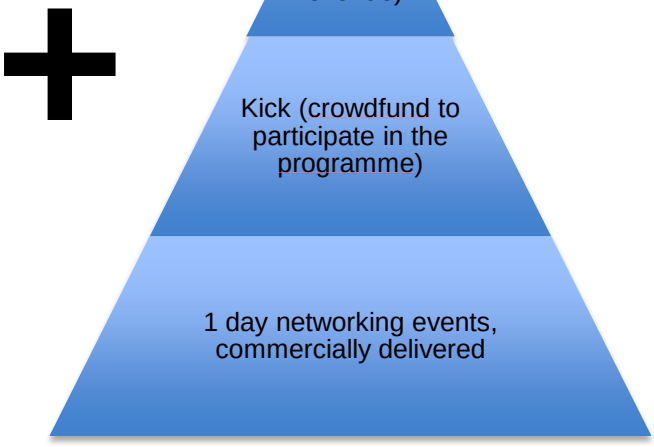
going on, and most of the desks and offices were occupied.

I met Michael 'Luni' Libes, a highly engaging serial entrepreneur who is running Fledge, a 'conscious company accelerator' operating out of the Hub. Luni doesn't find social enterprise to be a particularly useful term, given the breadth of organisations included in this massive middle space between pure 'financial' drive and 'non-profit/mission' drive, and the introverted hair splitting it can then create around definitions – rather than focussing externally on impact, good business and purpose. He aims to work inclusively with entrepreneurs who are bringing products and services to the growing number of consumers, who in their consumption are conscious of the environment, their health, of community, sustainability, and even conscious of consumption itself!

Fledge is aiming to incubate and grow new 'conscious companies' in a highly commercial and very sharp way, and I aim to present the relationship between the Hub and Fledge, as well as the Fledge incubation model, in the diagram below.

Impact Hub Seattle is a co-working space, events space, and launch pad for purpose-driven ventures that create more value than they capture.

A 'conscious' company accelerator



First, and it seems so obvious, but the coupling together of hot desk and incubation space (the Hub) with a dynamic and multi-faceted incubator (Fledge) is so sensible – and yet this linkage isn't always the case. The main business challenge with flexible office space is keeping the desks full, but if the space is coupled with a mechanism to bring in and support budding entrepreneurs you then have a ready made way to fill your space. You've built a conveyor belt that runs in your direction! You grow your own high quality and dependable tenants, and then provide an holistic and energised

set of services and networks for them. At RIO we are now going to think more clearly about how we better couple these different functions of our business together, around the Devonport Guildhall.

I was also impressed by the sheer commercial 'savviness' and dynamism with which Fledge goes about its incubation task. At the base of the pyramid, Luni runs weekend events, competitions and one-day sessions that individuals can pay for and come along and learn start-up basics, as well as meet and share learning with others in a similar position, network with mentors and get new ideas and stimulus.

This generates a revenue stream for Fledge and activity at the Hub, and also acts as useful marketing for the other services offered by each (in a way, filtering in people likely to be interested in going further with each).

At the next level, Fledge run an incubation programme called Kick: 'an inclusive business incubator' aimed at helping all types of entrepreneur – whether for-profit, non-profit, or hybrid; lifestyle, social or tech - through the difficult path from idea to working startup. Participants apply for the program, then, if successful, (and this is the clever part), create a crowdfunding campaign to pay for their tuition, with this including space rental at the Hub, mentoring, course materials and so on.

In the UK this type of programme would more often be funded or subsidised by the public sector and take place in a theoretical space one-step removed from 'real enterprise' (a classroom somewhere!) With Kick, participants are learning and demonstrating enterprising drive right from the point of admission.

Finally, each year Luni recruits a small group of Fledglings (7-8 people) onto a 10-week program:

- Each team is paid $15,000 to participate, and invited to come to work together at the Hub.
- For those 10 weeks, they receive education, advice, mentorship, and more.
- At the end of the program they share their visions and emerging businesses at a Demo Day (large networking event).
- In exchange for the cash and help, each company shares a small percentage of equity, plus a small percentage of future revenues going forward.

Participants receive considerable assistance to get their companies up and running, and they pay nothing back until they begin to succeed. Fledge is therefore an emotionally and financially committed, involved and hands-on investor in these ventures, with a significant stake in their success; not a detached educator, or remote consultant or advisor. I think this subject position produces a very interesting and engaged dynamic and, again, it is not one I have come across in the UK.

For example, business support services are often provided on contract to the government, through universities or by local quangos, and however professional they are, they have no real stake in whether the ventures they work with succeed or not. I will touch more on the fundamental differences I encountered between genuine 'investment' and provision of 'funding' later in this section.

At each of the levels provided by Fledge the offer is very clear for customers. The overall model will also begin to build a highly efficient flow of people between levels,

with each generating different types of revenue back for Fledge itself (event fees, course fees, return on investment), as well as tenants, activity and energy for the Hub.

Having spoken to Luni, and other social enterprise incubators at the Universities of Portland and British Columbia, there was much common agreement as to what people want and need from these support services, however they are provided:

- Starting a social venture, particularly when you are young, can be a lonely exercise. People want to belong. They enjoy working with and learning from a cohort of people tackling similar problems and challenges.
- They need rapid access to a wide range of quality-assured practical help (particularly financial, HR, legal, accountancy, marketing, web etc.) – and by working with others you can the source the right help very quickly.
- Advice and support from people who have done the same thing successfully themselves, i.e. access to networks of mentors as and when required.
- Leverage and institutional capital. For example, if you are a member of a formal programme, part of the Hub, or linked to a University you can use this to your advantage. It opens doors.
- Visibility and celebration. These types of programs place you on real and virtual platforms that benefit your growing business, and also give you people to celebrate with when things go well.
- Markers and milestones – you can be pushed on and held to account by a group, mentor or supporter in a positive way – which is made easier if you are part of some form of wider structure, like Fledge.

Overall, my encounter with Fledge left me with the sense that incubation and acceleration is best provided from a committed, engaged, commercial and business space – rather than a detached academic or essentially public sector one (even if sub-contracted). The commercial model and engagement places everyone on the same side – with a firm stake in the success of the ventures involved, and also avoids any sense of 'do as I say and not as I do'!

5.2.2 Ashoka Youth Venture, Seattle

Whilst at the Hub in Seattle, I also met up with Ashoka and spent some time with Chris Kosednar who runs their Youth Venture programme - one of the leading programmes of its type in the country. Ashoka develop and invest in networks of social entrepreneurs (their Fellows): 'pattern-changing social innovators' who they support to 'creatively solve some of the world's biggest social challenges'.

Through Youth Venture they also inspire, mentor, and invest in teams of young people launching and leading their own social ventures – and this is the work that Chris leads on; supporting groups of young people to develop a business solution to an issue that they care about, and then taking action on it.

The programme is based on research that Ashoka carried out amongst their Fellows, which showed that many of them had the opportunity to carry out some social action activity between the ages of 12 and 18 – and this influenced their ideas, views and

career pathways later in life. However, this activity was very rarely what they finally went on to do, or their final social enterprise business or venture.

For me it was helpful to know that there is other research that underpins our own development of the Social Enterprise Qualification. Through this qualification, which frames, encourages and accredits young people to carry out real and consequential social enterprise, we aim to scale and spread similar activity through the educational system.

But more importantly, it made me realise that at this age it is therefore more about sowing seeds really well and effectively - not necessarily about growing plants/businesses to fruition. Chris was also thoughtful about the ages at which young people are most receptive to these seeds: he argues that 12-14 years old is a key time – with young people becoming increasingly independent and self-directed at this age, but before exams and wider life pressures kick in, and this chimes with my experience doing similar work in the UK.

In turn, therefore, that our measures of success for social enterprise work with young people at this age should be 'evidence of well sown seeds'; we don't necessarily have to see longer term social enterprise businesses emerging at that early stage, and it may be naïve to expect this to be the case given the reality of young people's lives through their teens and early 20s, which ideally will involve travel, fluidity, living in different places, different work, periods of study and so on. But if the social enterprise seeds have been sown well they will return to this way of making a life and growing a business and livelihood in their mid-20s.

This was a striking lesson for me; taking some of the pressure and emphasis off 'progression' and the perceived need to see lots of real businesses emerging from activity with young people, and more onto thinking through exactly what 'sowing seeds well' involves and entails. I think this argument applies to youth and educational work across the board.

5.2.3 Vancity, Vancouver

There were then a couple of organisations I visited where I was encouraged to step back a bit and think more widely about the type of environment and infrastructure that social enterprise needs in order to flourish – because we can do all we can to sow seeds well with young people, but they need good soil and warm sun to grow effectively.

In Vancouver I met with Elizabeth Lougheed Green of Vancity and was blown away by the range of work they do and their level of involvement in and commitment to social and community enterprise in the city. Vancity are a large, well-run and member-owned bank, a supporter of communities, and an incredibly active and hands-on investor and supporter of social enterprises and good community-minded businesses…all at once and under one roof. I found my way to them as they were the banker of choice, investor in and supporter of most of the social enterprises I visited in the city.

So, if you are an individual needing to bank or save you can do this with them and your funds will be well-managed, safe and put to good and visible local use. And if you need financial support, either as an individual, local business or emerging social enterprise, they offer many different services and facilities – from straightforward grants via their community foundation, through mortgages and loans, to a whole range of tailored investments to support business growth (e.g. patient capital, growth capital, support for cashflow etc.)

Alongside their investments they provide hands-on specialist support and expertise to ensure maximum chance of success (e.g. marketing, business planning, financial modelling, training and development, support to attend events and conferences, leveraging their supply chains, and so on). They invest a third of their net profits a year back into the community via these routes, circa $20m per annum.

I found myself contrasting their work with the situation in the UK in two key areas. First, I think the work of Vancity puts the UK to shame in terms of social investment – particularly the role of the UK banking sector. The level of noise around 'social investment' in the UK compared with the reality on the ground is extreme; and it felt like quite the opposite in Vancouver.

Within the social enterprise and investment sector in the UK, and echoed by government rhetoric, there is a rather self-satisfied presentation of the country as a global leader in social investment thinking, infrastructure, vehicles and approaches – not yet borne out by the level of support or deals that have gone through on the ground. Vancity have, in contrast, gone about their work quietly and diligently and yet I think they deserve global recognition for the holistic and far-sighted way in which they are approaching the challenges and opportunities.

It also feels like they are approaching the same task in a very different way. Their role is clear; their support and services are joined up; they have ready access to their own capital; they are from and connected to the community they serve and want to support; and they have a large membership which gives them the mandate to work in this way and are, in turn, investing their own money in these initiatives as a result.

In the UK, in contrast, the social investment 'sector' is highly fragmented; the capital is often sat off to one side and owned by wealthy investors, remote banks or philanthropists – with no sense that we are all in it together, as well as creating a need for brokers and intermediaries to join the pipeline; the average person in the street is disconnected from the activity, and could not invest in it even if they wanted to; and the vehicles being constructed are highly complex – involving significant transaction costs, much consultancy, and many intermediaries in order to stitch together what may even be a set of mutually exclusive and elusive aims and

ambitions[3], even before anyone in difficulty sees any benefit at all. The whole thing feels inefficient and has an overly 'tricksy' and city-feel to it.

As a result, I think a local area like Cornwall needs its own 'Vancity' to cut through this complexity and pull it all together with integrity: growing the ability of local people to use their own money for good in their community; and to help grow a sustainable economy that better fits local circumstance and desire – a double benefit.

Second, through encountering the work of Vancity I saw for myself the striking difference between 'funding' and 'investment'. Charities and social enterprises tend to rely on 'funding' more in the UK, including delivering social programmes on behalf of government or the wider public sector.

I realised that in these situations a funder tends to stand back from the work, attempts to observe it 'objectively' and their main role is ensuring that certain rules are followed. Their prime aim is, ultimately, accountability back to Ministers - not to the customers or beneficiaries of the programme - and because the public sector tends to be risk averse, an underlying driver is the urge, above all, to 'cover the back' of the funding body. If the project or programme works, the funder gets joint credit. If the intervention is less successful, it is usually 'the fault' of the deliverer! There is power without responsibility in the hands of the funder.

These bodies are often the designers of the programmes in the first place, and they tend to have a poor track record in this area for many reasons, including the fact that they are dislocated or too remote from the context or people who are to be affected or 'changed' as a result. They are less focussed on what works, and more on what will play well politically.

They are also the writers of the rulebooks that then have to be applied – even if the rules lead to activity that is not likely to produce the required outcomes. On publicly-funded programmes the metrics put in place via this process often end up driving perverse behaviour, but they can't be renegotiated because it is 'not possible' to do so (the change would be too big, or the power to enable this to happen is remote). And often, new metrics simply get ladled in on top of the old ones as the programme unfolds and the funder decides they need new information from the work.

A good investor, in contrast, rolls their sleeves up and does all they can to help, because they have a genuine vested stake in the organisation and its delivery. Basically, they stand to gain if it works, including financially. Which, if you think about it, is what the taxpayer would want above all in the funder's case too. And if the metrics in place are beginning to lead to perverse behaviour or drive erroneous activity, then they can be changed through negotiation between the partners.

We need a fundamental realignment in this area in the UK. Many of our programmes and policies are insidiously pointing the wrong way and being designed and

[3] A solid organisation, with a good track record and management team in place, with a decent business model, a sound and evidenced approach to deliver social change/outcomes, and investors aiming to maximise their return in all areas (significant financial reward, low risk, tax efficiency, and social impact), public sector officials who may be asked to underwrite these arrangements and will similarly act to minimise risk to their organisation from a position of inexperience, and in so doing introduce another complex overlying perspective, plus of course contract lawyers…good luck with the stitching on this lot!

implemented from the wrong subject spaces. I did not travel to the US to find this out, but it has been a stark realisation for me.

5.2.4 Springboard Innovation, Portland

I encountered a similarly radical and holistic, though very different, model of social innovation in Portland, Oregon. I met Amy Pearl, Executive Director and CEO of Springboard Innovation – Amy has a long track record of driving through social change.

She had previously worked for Intel on their global education programme and through that had been involved in curriculum design and the development of learning programmes that teach social entrepreneurship skills and strategies to young people. She described the challenge of designing curricula for young people that work at scale and yet still develop leaders, as oppose to followers. This is a common issue with much youth engagement activity, in and out of school. Amy had been working with the Girl Guides of America and with them was aiming to develop 'girls who fix the world', particularly in poorer and more rural parts of the US. Her resulting learning programme focussed specifically on leadership, as oppose to teams – and we are going to use and credit some of Amy's material and ideas in future iterations of our Social Enterprise Qualification.

Large-scale programmes deal with big numbers, classes and cohorts. They therefore tend to use models that over-emphasise group and teamwork when actually we need to be consciously growing young leaders, not just good followers – and Amy's skill was in identifying this and finding clever ways to deal with the development of youth leadership at scale!

Amy's work has since taken her 'upstream', and towards bigger and bigger (and more systemic) challenges – as she realised that if young people are to flourish as socially enterprising leaders, they need a more conducive environment. She is now involved in a range of developments including:

- Setting up Hatch, a community innovation lab and incubation space in Portland.
- Establishing ChangeXChangeNW, a platform and approach to bolster local economies by connecting the dots between socially-minded investors, and locally-owned businesses, therefore (much like Vancity, but in a different way) enabling communities to invest in themselves. As she rightly pointed out, it is a bit of myth that our funds and savings are safe in the global stock and bond markets, so she is working with local communities, citizens, businesses, accountants, and lawyers to put alternative investment mechanisms and vehicles in place.

Again, her work resonated for me with the context in Cornwall where there is a need to keep money local and build an explicitly different type of economy, with very different flows of capital.

I did not go looking for or expecting to find this big picture, but I was naturally taken there by some impressive people asking big questions and then pursuing through the system the question of how young people can be truly supported to develop different types of business, endeavour and organisation. It made me realise that we need to be working at a range of levels and that direct work with young people (sowing seeds) needs to go hand in hand with action to improve the context and environment in order to enable these seeds to flourish when they sprout.

5.3 Encouragement of and scope for 'micro-enterprise'

In all of the cities I visited, I was struck by the high and very visible levels of homelessness, and the apparent overlap between homelessness and extremely poor levels of physical and mental health. I met some brilliant people and organisations working to address these issues, with extreme commitment and diligence, though they face a massive structural task.

In Vancouver in particular I noticed that when I was sat in a public space for any length of time, individuals would be regularly combing through the nearby bins and they would often have bikes or trolleys laden with bags of stuff. They were mostly gathering discarded plastic and glass bottles. I talked to several of the 'collectors', who were either homeless or living in rented and hostel accommodation.

There is a wholesale market for recycled glass and plastic in the city, and as a result they work with charitable or social enterprise intermediaries (such as United We Can) to take monetary value out of this material and activity. They take the bottles and waste they have collected to the intermediary every day or so and in turn are paid cash in hand for the amount they have collected, and may receive other forms of help and support at the same time (e.g. clothing, training, food).

This is not pleasant work at all: it is dirty, tiring, often lonely and tough. But looked at from a pragmatic point of view, it also produces a range of positive outcomes:

- People in difficulty are kept active and enterprising.
- They are given a legal means to get additional cash, which can help them very much – buying necessary items or contributing to housing and hostel costs.
- Several 'collectors' reported that this was better for their self-esteem than begging or 'ducking and diving'.
- The work brings them into regular and structured contact with intermediary social enterprises, who offer further help and support.
- The overall network generates a significant amount of environmental and financial value – removing a large amount of plastic and glass from the waste system and landfill, and recycling it back into the economy.

I came across a similar social enterprise 'project' in Vancouver – Street Youth Job Action - with businesses, individuals and public sector bodies able to commission short term work from teams of 'street youth', who are then paid cash in hand. This

project works on very similar pragmatic principles to United We Can – enabling those in extreme difficulty and hardship to carry out flexible short-term work, often low or un-skilled, with this giving them a legal means to get some reward for their labour relatively quickly (usually at the end of that day). The work is typically along the lines of basic maintenance, graffiti removal, rubbish clearance and cleaning.

'Micro-enterprise' endeavour of this kind was enabled by policy and practice in Vancouver:

- First, by creating a market for recycled glass and plastic, and allowing businesses and individuals to 'commission' basic work from the street; both of which bring potential work and return to the table.
- And second, by creating a tax and benefits system that is flexible enough to either turn a blind eye to, or accommodate work and reward of this kind and level. So people were able to work cash in hand and allowed to do so because it is believed to be better for them than simply receiving benefits alone. No one is going to get rich from this – it is very hard work; but it helps some people who really need it.

I am still working through my feelings here. The work created is very poor quality and not particularly well-remunerated, and it feels intrinsically uncomfortable to see people in a position whereby this becomes their 'next step' or possibly even their only option, often out of desperation. But is it better – mentally, physically and spiritually - to be doing something active and enterprising when you are in a difficult position, and have the option of securing some limited income via this type of mechanism? And also, by keeping active and engaged in positive activity, are you 'seen' and treated differently by other people, and more likely to receive further help from them?

I am also interested in how shifts, tilts and changes in policies and public frameworks (e.g. in relation to the monetisation of environmental value, and in the benefit and tax system) can enable socially enterprising behaviour (or not), and whether the overall balance against a triple-bottom line (social outcomes, environmental value created, financial value generated) is positive.

5.4 'Real and Purposeful Education'

As outlined in the introduction, one of the main motivations for my visit to the US and Canada was to connect with schools, projects and organisations that are supporting children and young people to carry out (and as a result learn deeply from) purposeful activity that has a wider social or community benefit. There is a rich seam of this type of work in North America.

The schools and universities I visited were all practising forms of what is termed 'community service learning'; or sometimes 'service learning' and similar variants of language. This type of and approach to learning is part of a longstanding tradition, though one that is much less well developed in the UK. The closest analogy here would be 'citizenship', but taught and developed with a greater depth, commitment and desire for action and authentic community outcomes. There are service-learning institutes and associations, conferences, dedicated roles and departments, significant programmes of teacher training available in many states, and most schools or universities practice some aspect of service learning, even if only in a limited way.

Service learning is a form of experiential learning. It combines classroom instruction with meaningful community service (fitting with the ethos of a generous and community-minded individualistic society I outlined earlier) – and aims to produce a balance between learning goals and authentic service outcomes, of real value in the wider community. Students learn in a hands-on manner and the intention is to connect their thoughts or ideas with action. It encourages students to use their talents, ideas, and gifts to serve, and, while performing the service, to learn in depth.

5.4.1 Community engaged learning in a university context

I spent several days at the University of British Columbia (UBC, my post-graduate university and first experience of Canadian warmth and integrity), Vancouver, hosted by Susan Grossman, Director of the Centre for Community Engaged Learning, and with her colleagues who are embedded in other departments across the university. UBC has a strong and multi-faceted programme of community engaged learning. The Centre's programs place students in community settings, such as non-profits and inner city schools, either as a required part of an academic course, or through voluntary co-curricular placements.

They also provide resources and support to instructors, departments, and faculties, to enhance teaching and learning processes - connecting University resources to the

community in ways that support lasting relationships and generate positive social and environmental outcomes.

The ambition and scale of the work carried out by the University and Centre in this space is massive: 4300 students a year engage in some form of community engaged learning program, with 3300 receiving forms of course credit for this activity. In addition 30% of students at the university take part in 'Co-op' programs – which involve work placements in business and the community - and these prove to be the most in-demand courses offered. I'll come back to this point, but I think it suggests that students intrinsically want and value 'real' because of what it brings to them, means to them, and where it leads once the program is complete.

There are many transferable lessons from the quality work carried out at UBC around service learning, and I think all of these would apply to schools too:

- The need for high level and strategic commitment to service learning from the institution; which means it can therefore be embedded in and supported by various facets of the organisation (e.g. accreditation; course content; leadership), which all acts to increase its value.
- The need for and importance of a specialist unit or Centre to drive the practice from within. I doubt it would happen with the same energy and structure without this.
- The importance of building win-win partnerships between the university and its community partners: both sides need to gain in concrete ways from the relationship and these type of partnerships take time, expertise and care to build.
- Diversity of approaches to service learning, and a wide range of ways that service learning manifests across the institution and its teaching and learning (e.g. placements, research projects, voluntary work, social enterprise start-up support etc). There is not just a single program available, and there are also ways that students can become engaged and then progress: for example, grants are available for students wanting to take their social action further and build some form of non-profit or social enterprise emerging from their initial service learning experiences.

5.4.2 Authentic, place-based learning in a primary context

In Portland I visited the SW Public Charter School - an innovative, relatively new primary school (opened in 2007) with a particular focus on service learning, and the following mission, vision and values.

- 'Mission: To provide a creative learning environment where students develop a sense of place and become stewards of the natural world and active citizens within our community.
- Vision: Our vision is to look beyond classroom walls. We believe that healthy communities are created by engaged, informed and compassionate citizens. Through service, integrated curriculum and experiential learning, we provide opportunities for our students to actively build relationships locally, inspiring them to become catalysts of change in a global community.
- Value - Small Size: Our small size benefits each child by allowing us the

flexibility to explore methods and techniques not logistically possible in more traditional settings. This flexibility allows us to provide all children with the tools necessary to be successful in their education.

- Value - Community Involvement: We believe community and parental involvement, as well as classroom volunteerism, is critical to our success. We view parents, families and the broader community as true partners in learning. Southwest Charter School actively fosters a culture that promotes parental and community involvement.
- Value - Authentic, Place-based Learning: Children learn best when participating in authentic, hands-on learning experiences that are closely tied to the community. Our place-based approach improves student achievement, help students develop a closer connection with the community in which they live, creates an appreciation for the natural world, and cultivates a desire to serve as active and committed citizens.'

I think these are very eloquently expressed and provide a great summary of the ethos and practical rationale for community service and experiential learning. It was a privilege to meet Anne Gurnee, the Education Director of the school, and her staff, and see and hear how they put this vision and these values into practice day-to-day. All aspects of the school were animated by these principles in very practical and clear ways, and it certainly did not feel like being inside a Tupperware container!

For example, the school runs over 100 trips a year into the surrounding community – all for real purpose and involving study and wider engagement (and Anne described how it was important for both teachers and students to learn the range of skills to undertake these trips safely and effectively – and that this ability builds over time). The school also uses the local library rather than having one of its own, which saves money, avoids duplication, and means the school community integrates more widely.

Similarly, there was no school food or canteen service – with students bringing or being provided with sandwich lunches. This saves the school money and time - with no canteen operation to run - and avoids the environmental impact and wastage that results from a mass meals operation. Though Anne did not describe her school as a social enterprise, the way she was making these type of strategic decisions based on balances across a triple bottom line certainly made it feel like one - weighing economic, social and environmental impact.

However, the most significant learning point I took away from the school related to the quality of teaching. Service and place-based learning demands a significantly high level of skilfulness and confidence from the teaching staff, but in some senses it liberates them too by bringing learning to life and making it more relevant:

- They need care and thoughtfulness in terms of initial choice of topic, issue or starting point for the service learning or piece of authentic inquiry - from here all else follows: the engagement of and learning for the children, and any social or environmental outcomes for the community.
- In turn, this means they need good contacts, on-going connections, and ideas from their local community – as this is usually the source of learning, need or stimulus (e.g. SW Public Charter School had recently begun an investigation into transportation to and from their area, linked with the transit authority as

this was a real ‘hot’ issue for the community). To get this they have to get out and about, and network.
- They then need to be able to skilfully steer the children or young people through the learning and service process - providing facilitation rather than simply delivering content - but adding this in a light and responsive way as and when necessary, based on need and relevance.
- They need to be able to balance and achieve learning outcomes and service or community outcomes (social and environmental) at the same time.

5.4.3 Community service in a secondary school context

In order gain a full picture of the educational journey (primary through to university), I also visited a secondary charter school with a strong commitment to community service. Gateway High School is a college preparatory, public charter school in San Francisco, working on the principles that all students can learn at high levels but that all students learn differently. On average, since opening in 1998 more than 96% of the school’s graduates have gone on to college (double the statewide rate).

Gateway High School is a relatively small school, serving approximately 450 economically, racially, ethnically, and intellectually diverse high school students (grades 9-12) from the San Francisco community and the surrounding Bay Area. Gateway is very strongly value-driven, with the expectation that the development of personal integrity, responsibility, and respect for others will inspire and enable students to contribute to their communities however and whenever they can.

The school had some beautifully simple and straightforward ways of linking its values with concrete action in the school, and in turn tying this in with impact on and inter-relationship with its community. These include:

- Focusing on four clear core values and embedding these across the school (serving the community; respecting difference; moral purpose; and taking responsibility for your learning). This contrasts with my experience with many English schools where the overall mission and values tend to sit off to one side and therefore don’t become practically embodied and reinforced on a day-to-day basis with students.
- Building very clear and explicit links between these stated values and the school’s reward systems. So the top student prize each year is not based on purely academic grounds. The prize that is most esteemed and valued is the one for service to the community. And day-to-day class rewards are also linked to the four values above.
- Assigning teaching staff to the four values in order to ensure that a decent proportion of teaching and learning centres on them.
- Bringing in local business and community partners for ‘pizza and possibility’ sessions at lunchtime and after school: encouraging easy, relaxed but often inspiring interchange of ideas and dialogue between students and adults from the surrounding area; broadening horizons; and discussing different career and life paths.
- Making space within the timetable to do community service and action, as

oppose to bolting it on around the edges. Students do at least 25 hours of community service a year within 'vertical tutor groups' (groups drawn from across all school years, to ensure an age mix and connection through the school): working together to focus on 'what do we care about?' and then making plans to do something positive about that issue.

- Senior students also complete a social justice action research project - choosing what they would like to change in their society, and what they propose to do about it. The results from this project are presented back to parents at an evening event; ensuring students have an external and authentic audience for their work. This work often leads on to positive action, or triggers investment or support in the wider community.

There were many more examples too, all typified by clarity of purpose, structure and execution: simple things done well and with integrity, and ensuring alignment (as opposed to contradiction) between the stated values of the institution and the way it then behaves and carries out its business - from its reward systems, to its teaching, timetable, and the content of its learning. As with the SW Public Charter School, it also requires clear leadership, and committed and engaged teaching, with teachers connected to the local community and keen to make a wider difference in it, and supporting their students to do likewise.

5.4.4 Community service learning: reflections and transferability

I was impressed with all of the service learning I encountered in North America – and it has been good to link our own work in schools with a significant body of practice overseas. It brings us ideas, context, and connections. Some of the work I saw was very similar in practice and outcome – though in the US it exists within a labeled tradition and framework, whereas here we have to find our own ways to describe what we do (e.g. real and purposeful learning, real social enterprise learning…) And though it was often termed community service learning (or similar variants) there was often an aspect of enterprise in there too; simply because that seemed to be innate to the solutions often proposed in America – though it was never formally called 'social enterprise'.

My first instinct in the US was that it would be great to have a similar label or concept more widely known in the UK. A label then brings resources, time, structure, respect and attention. Would our label be 'real and purposeful socially enterprising learning and schools'? Probably not, far too much of a mouthful. But something along those lines and that captures a similar essence…

But conversely a label also creates a constraining box, with the practice then put tidily in it and, perhaps, limited by the constraints of a resulting definition and its sharp edges too? Perhaps it would be better if all learning were real and purposeful, or community-based and experiential? Not just some of it, or one department or programme's worth? The best work I saw in the US had escaped the box in this way.

So I am not sure anymore that I want a singular label for the practice. But I do think it would be good to have schools that are more socially enterprising in all that they do (teaching, learning, mission or vision, and operations), and I return to this theme in the conclusion to this section.

5.4.5 Other interesting organisations and practice connected to real and purposeful education

In the course of my research I came across some other interesting practice in the North American educational sector, of relevance in a UK context and for our work at RIO:

I heard Juliette LaMontagne from Project Breaker speak in Portland. Breaker's mission is to drive social innovation and alternative learning by creating interdisciplinary teams of young people to help solve the world's most pressing problems. Breaker connects these young people with global thought leaders and industry experts to answer challenges like literacy, urban agriculture, and technology for civic engagement. They facilitate a creative problem-solving design process and teach the entrepreneurial skills necessary to transform ideas into businesses.

Each unique Breaker project involves collaboration between the Breaker team, the visionaries who pose their challenge, and the industry experts who support their process. They work with multiple partner organisations to originate, build, and test solutions with real market value, and hence there was a big crossover with our social enterprise work with young people. I like the way that Breaker began with significant problems and challenges, brought to the table by partners, thus securing their involvement and engagement - and then allowed young people to tackle these in imaginative and collaborative ways within a supported structure.

A challenge often faced when introducing social enterprise ideas to young people and teachers is that they don't always know where and how to start, as the concepts and ideas are so new in an educational context. Breaker provides this starting point and focus – I think we could do likewise in certain situations, in order to provide easy ways in to the notions and practice.

In discussions with teachers around the importance of 'real and authentic' learning I was also signposted to Roots of Empathy. The organisation works to build empathy in children and young people, arguing that without this there is no kindred feeling, society or community, and that empathy is a root driver of positive social action. As such, there is resonance with the emotional depth to the language of social change that I encountered across the US and outlined earlier (in contrast to the English talk of emotionally distanced 'issues' and 'problems', and solutions in a similar dispassionate and political vein!)

It would be hard to develop or teach empathy in an abstract vacuum, so the programme - again with brilliant simplicity - links a school class with an expectant mother, and then her and the baby once born, who visit regularly within a structured programme and curriculum. How else to teach and learn about connection, humanity, and empathy (as well as much, much more) than via a developing relationship with a real mother and a baby? It would be hard to learn this through a book or whiteboard and yet this is how it would often be taught. It is heartening to see that this programme is spreading to the UK.

In Seattle I met up with Luke Justice from Equal Opportunity Schools (EOS).

Their work and practice is very different to ours at RIO – but I learnt a massive amount from them in terms of how they manage their relationships with schools and in the ways they are seeking to scale their work across the country.

EOS has formed a formidable relationship with Google and has been awarded a Google Global Impact Award to roll out their support for schools in 11 states around the US. They work in a highly targeted way with schools to identify the data profile of the students missing from the most rigorous classes run by the school. These are either International Baccalaureate classes or 'Advanced Placement' classes – run by the school to enhance the chances of its highest performing students accessing good college places: perhaps the main measure of success for US high schools, and one of the most significant factors affecting life chances after school for young people).

And then EOS work with the school to identify 'missing' students from these courses (i.e. students who have fallen through the net because of the way the school may have gone about its data and assessment processes, but who actually have the aptitude for the classes concerned); then bring them on board and in so doing boost their academic motivation and achievement, and their likelihood of going to and graduating from college, ultimately altering their life trajectory significantly.

So EOS brings extreme data and assessment rigour and expertise into this identification process, as well as ensuring that the additional classes are high quality too. The school therefore benefits significantly - as do the students involved – and as a result are willing to pay a decent partnership fee for the EOS program.

EOS now sustains a national cohort of over 70 (and counting) EOS schools, with expertise shared across the network. In order to broaden their work in this way, EOS has become highly efficient and adept at leveraging relationships with schools at scale, via networks and school districts, so they don't have to bring on board individual schools – which would be costly and time consuming - and at managing the school engagement process in a very professional and structured way.

Schools are moved through a series of 'expression of interest' and application steps, through to full involvement in and sign up to the program, plus payment of their fee. EOS manages this process clearly, it takes most of a school year, and at each step they create value and kudos for the school as part of the journey, e.g. providing some limited consultancy and data analysis during this phase, in a structured report-back format, to help them with their engagement and focus.

The structured process also ensures that schools are properly committed to the program, and will therefore be good partners during the next phase, which saves EOS time and money down the line. I guess too, from a school perspective it provides clarity: you know what will happen and when through the process and where you are heading overall, and there is a reasonable but not overwhelming pace to the move towards participation in the program. And there is also value and desire, since you receive some very useful consultancy and feedback along the way, before you are fully accepted on the program, and not every school ends up on board. This is analogous with an application to a top quality university – given that 'the customer' pays for this experience but is keen to do so, and prepared to apply for the privilege, and the process itself enhances the sense of desire and value for what comes at the end!

For me, this was a great example of a highly crisp and commercial business or customer management process applied within a social enterprise context. It will be extremely useful for us to think about this type of approach as we seek to broaden out our work to more schools in England over the next couple of years. We could not hope to do this one-by-one.

Finally, in San Francisco I met with Melissa Rich, founder and President of Interschola. Interschola have a straightforward social enterprise operating model, and a productive partnership with ebay. They enable schools and other public institutions to sell surplus assets (such as furniture, vehicles, and equipment) via an online marketplace, and then they return these funds, minus operating costs, to the school and its children. It is a great idea.

I think this model would work even more successfully in England, given that each school is now an individual budget-holder, experiencing financial pressure because of public sector cuts, and would have significant incentive to release any assets or equipment not well used, and maximise their income as a result. The person who would need to take action – by finding and releasing the item for sale - is the person who would benefit from the proceeds. This is not always directly the case in the US, where individual school budgets are embedded within a wider school district, and nor would it have been in England, prior to current reforms.

5.4.6 Reflections on policy and practice in the UK

So, I saw some brilliant practice in North America, particularly relating to teaching and learning, and day-to-day operations in schools, and picked up some great ideas for use in RIO and in a UK context.

But interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, my main reflection was that there is currently less innovation overall in the North American context than in the English educational system. The US system is relatively stable. A stripped down national curriculum is being introduced next year, though it is far less detailed than the one we operate here and there will still be considerable freedom for schools in local areas to follow their own path.

The main measure of success for US secondary schools has, for a long time, been college entrance and SAT results (the singular test taken by all students seeking entry to college, administered nationally by the College Board), compared with a myriad of levelled and layered assessment metrics and exam results for the equivalent English school, with these driving and underpinning a massive amount of activity, teaching and learning here. Furthermore there is no OfSTED equivalent in the US, with schools more accountable to their local community via their board and the local school district

This relative stability contrasts markedly with the wholesale changes and reforms taking place in practically every aspect of school life in the last few years in the UK (e.g. curriculum content and structure; qualifications; school leaving age; teacher training; pay and rewards; school organisation, operations and governance; inspection regimes etc.) And, in turn, this vast volume of change seems to me to be giving rise to a degree of chaos (how much change can a single system take at once, and will it lead to quality of outcome?), but also triggering significant innovation, and

creating opportunities for schools to be run and structured very differently going forward. I have ambivalent feelings about this volume and array of changes, and what it signifies about the link between politics and the education of the young.

In particular, considerable political power resides in the ability to determine the content of a curriculum in a society, given that it frames what children will learn and what ideas they will be exposed to. In England this sits nationally, and in the US it sits largely at the level of the elected board of the local school district (equivalent to a Local Authority area here), with some limited local flexibility for individual schools. I travelled through some districts where elections for these boards were soon to commence; and private citizens would spend considerable amounts of their own money campaigning for a place on a board because of the power and responsibility it brings, and also some control over content and policy.

Following my visit, I feel strongly that in both the UK and US this aspect of education needs to be insulated to a greater extent from the political process – otherwise our children simply end up learning whatever content and knowledge the current political leaders, at district or national level, deem to be valuable, and in whatever way they feel is most appropriate.

And in this country especially this leads to all-too-regular changes in the system as politicians come and go. Perhaps it would be better to have a curriculum set by a broad-based panel, containing some elected members but also balanced by industry, teaching professionals, third sector, universities and other involved groups – underpinned by sound research and with significant changes only permitted every 10 years or so, to avoid constant retraining of teachers, but with tweaks permitted in subjects like science, engineering and IT to keep pace with rapidly changing technological development? Politics similarly creeps in to debates on pedagogy too (i.e. how the curriculum should be taught); and again, I think the debate should be taken away from the political sphere so it can be informed by evidence and not by ideology.

5.4.7 Next steps and implications

In terms of school operations and governance the UK seems to have 'leapfrogged' the US in terms of diversity of model and market approaches in the education sector and, from our perspective at RIO, there is now scope for some very interesting work and innovation around how schools run and go about their day-to-day business - with just a few caveats.

Overall and in contrast, there seemed to be more homogeneity and less diversity in the school sector in the US, which surprised me; with most US 'public schools' (i.e. not private ones) still run by a local school board, equivalent to our local authorities. In addition, each board area usually has a number of charter schools, which are independently run, and controlled, often by community, non-profit organisations, and/or interested and committed groups of parents. These schools draw their money down from the school board, but run on a stand-alone budget.

Charter schools in the US were a precursor to 'Free Schools' in England and there is similar sensitivity about their formation and role in the US. Citizens can establish a new charter school in a school district if they can evidence demand, or justify a need for more choice of provision in that local area. They then need to put solid plans in

place, and demonstrate innovation in how the school and its teaching and learning will operate. At this point the school is given its charter and it sits outside local school district control - often a sore point, leading to some local political resentment. There is also some sensitivity because charter schools do not always recognise the teaching unions, and can employ staff on more flexible bases.

As above, I saw some great practice in charter schools, particularly around community involvement, and experiential and service learning, which suggests that their innovation brief is being fulfilled to some extent. But it felt like the system had settled down again in the US, with fewer new charter schools now opening, and existing charter schools settling into their rhythm, particularly when compared with the explosion in new school types, operating models, and governance arrangements in England (e.g. from academy chains through to free and studio schools) – all of which acts to drive innovation and opportunity for new ways of working, whether one's overall view of these reforms is positive or negative.

Before focussing on these opportunities and this space for innovation, a caveat from my experience in the US. An issue that cropped up regularly in each area I visited was the fact that some charter schools have now come and gone. They have been around for a longer period of time than in England and there are plenty of examples of schools securing approval, opening, and then closing within a few years. From informal questioning, they seem to have gone for range of reasons including:

- Not getting the numbers of students they predicted or needed to be viable (since this drives the budget for the school).
- Financial mismanagement, and the difficulties of running a school well year in and year out.

Given that the US has had charter schools for much longer, there is therefore a bigger issue for us to get our heads round here. If we introduce market approaches into education, healthcare, job support and all other areas of public service delivery - as we are doing - then there will of course be resulting market failures (of schools, care homes and prisons for example). It is the natural order of things!

We will therefore need to recalibrate our sense of what is 'normal' and acceptable in these sectors and institutions as a result. Though that is easy to say if you are not a parent, patient or resident of a care home subject to market failure. Basically, however, we will need to accept and get used to it because it is going to happen far more regularly – or change the system.

At the same time, and this is where it can get a bit uncomfortable for those who like things black and white, there is also a moment to seize here. As discussed, current reforms create opportunities to innovate – to make the most of new freedoms in terms of what schools look like, how they work, how they are organised, and how they deliver their learning.

For example, it would now be possible to introduce best practice in real and purposeful service learning and teaching, and place it within a radical organisational framing that supports and amplifies its impact – for children and young people and the wider community: in essence, establishing genuine social enterprise schools. This also carries ethical advantages in an increasingly free market context,

channelling any profits or financial gain back into work with children and young people.

So what might this look like, in more detail, and what is the underlying rationale?

- Children and young people are highly creative and socially enterprising. As recent research from Demos demonstrates, this generation of young people is more willing to get involved in community activity than their predecessors; they value bottom-up social enterprise over top-down politics, and need support from policy makers to be enabled to engage in high quality social action[4]. As UBC demonstrate too, they are keen to choose courses and programs of study that involve real work and community interaction.
- If we can provide more support for them to be so, not only will they be more fulfilled, we also release their full potential to bring about positive change in their lives, schools and communities.
- For many reasons, schools and the educational systems that hold and surround them are often not as effective as they could be at building this set of capacities and, indeed, they can often undermine, channel or limit creative and social potential unnecessarily.
- This is because 'success' in education involves a high degree of artifice[5] and abstraction, certain narrow modes of behaviour, and effective regurgitation of pre-determined 'knowledge'. It is arguably more about learning to fit in, absorb content and pass exams than about discovering what you are truly good at, maximising unique gifts, and then learning how these can bring change in your life and the world around you.
- There is enough evidence and models – here and in the US – to show that this is possible and can be done rigorously, at scale and to a high quality.

So if we want resilient and innovative young people leaving education able to play a full part in building a better and more equitable world, we need some fundamental shifts and changes in schools, and we need to find more effective ways to nurture their creative and socially enterprising potential along the way.

In particular, we need children and young people learning in ways that matter to them, that are real and purposeful, and that carry meaningful consequences.

Now, we encounter a philosophical conundrum here, because schools are 'real' (they have tables, chairs, people and are usually made of bricks!) But many of us carry an innate sense of them and our own schoolwork as 'not real', with this reinforced deeply but subtly through language and frameworks of thought that, maybe, you could chase back to ancient Greece. So what do I mean by real and purposeful in this sense?

First, that people tend to learn 'more' and 'better' if the substance of learning matters and is valued by them and their peers and community – if it feels authentic - rather than appearing hypothetical, theoretical, abstract or remote.

Second, if we are learning for real, and our practice carries consequence, we gain useful feedback loops that can help teach us too (because, for example, we present

[4] http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/generationcitizen
[5] As captured in 'performance' tables – a revealing choice of language indeed; how are young people 'performing'?

out work to audiences and markets, who will then react as they see fit – and in turn we will find out if our ideas, products, services, presentations and performances were valued, and how.) We therefore get authentic, engaged and committed learners – who can also apply this learning in the world beyond school. This contrasts markedly with the normal, but inauthentic, form of in-school learning, where the sole feedback loop and outcome for the learner is the exam result, mark, grade or opinion of the teacher. What we are really teaching and honing here, subconsciously, is how to pass exams, arrive at a pre-determined 'right' answer, and to please.

Third, real and purposeful learning that draws more deeply on the world beyond the school tends to require more diverse abilities and requirements – not just the relatively singular set of skills required to learn and do well academically (though it is about balance of course – we need to learn abstraction and theoretical thought too, as a tool, but not necessarily as the prime and dominant form.) We therefore avoid a situation where a small number of people feel 'successful' and a much larger number (the majority) feel they have 'failed' or not done so well through the system; and we cater more effectively and positively for broad and inclusive dispositions and abilities.

Fourth, and as my experience in the US demonstrates, delivering learning of this type and texture demands high level and challenging skills from teachers, but it liberates them too to some extent.

Reflecting on the US practice I saw, and dovetailing it with current radical educational reforms in England, I think the benefits of learning in these types of ways would be maximised and amplified in a socially innovative or enterprising school, as oppose to one run on conventional lines. It is surely better if the school or institution, its ethos and operations are congruent with the type of learning, behaviours and outcomes that it is seeking for students, otherwise a psychic chasm opens up between 'what I say' and 'what I do'. It all needs to line up.

The school also has to create the appropriate opportunities for students to learn for real too – and this would be made much easier and more significant through its own social enterprise, purpose and innovation. In essence, it would need to be a practising social enterprise to do so.

A wide range of other benefits could then also accrue. Schools could use their significant levels of investment in a more socially enterprising way in their communities, creating much wider value and impact against a triple bottom line (economic, environmental and social). They would also be operating within a sound and clear ethical framework, within an increasingly free market context in England, valued by parents and the public for this reason: enterprising, effective, efficient and 'customer focussed', but without profit leaking from the system, away from children and young people.

I believe that the scope and potential is massive here if narrative, policy, finance, operations and practice could be lined up more effectively in this area: with 24,000 state schools in England embedded in communities; a schools budget of circa £53 billion reconfigured as investment in socially enterprising approaches; a workforce of 438,000 fte teachers and many more in ancillary positions in this space working in a more socially enterprising way; and 8.2 million children and young people in schools at any given time – both then benefiting from and creating social value and

innovation themselves[6]. And just imagine what these young people would then go on to do when they leave school.

Within RIO we are therefore presented with new and powerful ways to support the development of young people as creative social entrepreneurs, by working with and supporting the development of schools that are socially enterprising in every fibre and aspect of their role.

[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/number-of-schools-teachers-and-students-in-england

5.5 Art, culture, innovation and creativity

Over the years our work at RIO has encompassed many different aspects of art, culture, creativity and heritage. We are also interested in social innovation, particularly in how new and positive ideas and policies can become reality on the ground.

We began our life involved in the set-up and delivery of a major UK government programme called Creative Partnerships (CP). CP focussed on creative learning in schools and how to build positive and constructive links between schools and the creative sector in order to produce positive outcomes for all sides of the partnership: children, the creative organisation, schools and their staff.

CP arrived as a recommendation in the All Our Futures report (1999), prepared for Ministers by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, chaired by Sir Ken Robinson; and one of its key influences is his particularly sharp and savvy critique of the UK educational system, best summarised in this brilliant RSA animated lecture (we can debate about how much has actually changed in this system since, despite much good work done at the time!)

This interest in creative and innovative approaches to learning still permeates our work in schools, and we continue to work closely with the Arts Council for England on a range of initiatives. Much of our direct work with young people also draws on aspects of art, culture and creativity too, placed within a real, purposeful, and enterprising framework. We have always chosen to start with and focus on young people's interests, passions and potential and build from there - rather than 'lacks', issues, problems or deficits – and art and culture offer a great platform for positive engagement and progression, developing skills, communication of powerful ideas, and pathways on to interesting and fulfilling work and lives.

Similarly, the work we have done to help bring the Devonport Guildhall and Column back into use has relied upon an active and creative approach to heritage, art and culture. These are animating forces for community engagement, and have helped bring back life, vitality and activity to these special spaces and places.

To an extent we see social enterprise as manifest and applied creativity: in terms of finding out what you are good at, what your unique capacities and abilities are, then bringing these to bear on your life and the world around you, within an ethical framework and with real and positives consequences in mind.

I was therefore keen to link with projects and organisations working on similar themes in the US, and particularly excited to visit, and try to understand, cities and regions where art, culture, innovation and creativity have been significant engines behind the invention and continuous re-invention of their place in the world. I also wanted to meet people who are innovating and breaking new ground to see what I could learn from them, both in terms of what they were doing, but also how.

5.5.1 Hospitality in Oregon

In Portland I met up with Brian and Mike McMenamin, two brothers who founded and now run an extraordinary chain of pubs, bars, theatres, cinemas, breweries, spas, gardens, wineries, hotels and restaurants – McMenamins - many of which are based in beautiful old community and heritage buildings across Oregon and Washington. The current company began by opening and running a local pub in Portland in 1983 (though the brothers had been involved in the hospitality trade long before this), a further brewpub in 1985, and have since rolled out and on. They now run more than 60 establishments.

I visited several of their venues and think it is actually better to think of them as a network rather than a chain. Chain is too cold and formulaic a word to describe what they do. McMenamins run a far warmer and more organic set of related businesses, underpinned by art, history, culture, entertainment, good food, sustainability, and what feels like authentic, as opposed to manufactured, 'quirkiness'.

They are unlike any other chain (network!) of businesses I have ever come across anywhere. Their food and hospitality offer is excellent and diverse, they are exceptionally good value, warm and welcoming, and though you can tell you are in a 'McMenamins' establishment, they each also have an individual feel that is responsive to and respectful of the local community and context.

Art, culture and history is a key part of the feel and offer at each site and – indeed – what allows them to strike a great balance between 'same' and 'different'. Indeed, they deliberately take on interesting and challenging properties with a rich and significant past, in areas and places that aren't always obvious; including, for example, a poor farm, a farmhouse, a tabernacle, a ballroom, school, and theatre. They employ two historians who, before they redevelop or take on any property, delve back into the history of the building and its related community in order to bring this to dynamic life within the development in a range of engaged, diverse and respectful ways (e.g. art, web, supporting local history groups and lectures, exhibitions…), and this in turn helps keep them rooted and connected to their local community.

They also employ a team of artists (including 'artistic' plumbers – who bring craft and inventiveness to their piping!), who are involved in the restoration of each building; with their work resonating with and often inspired by the histories that have surfaced in each building. This leads to some amazing murals and narratives through each venue, but also tiny details that you only begin to notice after a while (such as the painted sprinkler heads in the photograph – taken in my room at Edgefield).

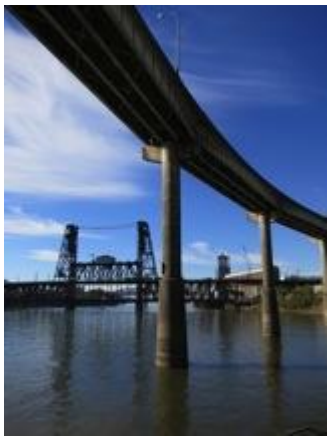
And art, craft and culture are a key part of the customer offer, adding value to the whole experience in a very natural way, and part of what makes each site special too (e.g. the venues I stayed in had working studios where you could watch glassblowers create; art is on display everywhere; you can see winemakers and craft brewers at work; and visit a great movie theatre). They are wonderful, fun and relaxing places.

I felt that Brian and Mike have managed to strike a perfect balance: they have achieved growth and scale with their business; but managed to root each new building they take on in both its specific community and heritage, and ensure it is a lightly held part of their overall family too. I learnt a lot from the way they ride similar animating forces to RIO (art, culture, craft, heritage) and hold them within an enterprising framework, but without selling out or over-commodifying. They were lovely people too, quietly passionate about their work and hospitality, and driven by a warm, quiet determination for what they do and the customers they serve and want to make happy.

This last point – the notion of warm hospitality, and the fact that this is the core service being sold - stays with me in particular. US service is legendary of course (especially compared with the English version), and having spent several weeks in North America, I have to say that it deserves its reputation. In the areas of our business that depend on service and hospitality we have to aim for this type of benchmark, with our own flavour. Customers often connect with the fact that we are a social enterprise, but this is not enough to make them buy or return. Our service, at bottom, has to be at least as special as they would receive from any other similar company; and then the additional social value we are able to create or leverage through their custom is a bonus.

5.5.2 Access to the arts in Portland

Also in Portland, I met with Jessica Jarratt Miller, the Executive Director of the Creative Advocacy Network (CAN): one of the main architects and drivers behind the Portland Arts Education and Access Fund. It sounds rather nondescript, but the name is deceptive because, in its own way, it is actually one of the most radical policy developments I have ever come across in this area – of global significance I think – and the actions and approaches taken by Jessica, CAN and its partner organisations contain some very powerful lessons for the arts and cultural sector in the UK, in terms of how this policy came about, how it was enacted, and the things it tells us about what people value in this area.



These are the facts: on November 6, 2012, Portland residents approved a citywide $35 income tax specifically to restore arts education to every elementary school in the city's six school districts, and to increase more general arts access for children and young people via the network of key arts organisations in the city. The Arts Education and Access Fund will provide stable, long-term funding for certified arts and music teachers and grants for arts programs, supplies and field trips. The Fund will also support non-profit arts organizations to increase access to the arts.

The background behind this highly unusual development, policy and approach is set out well by Jessica here. I would also recommend this paper, which outlines some of the narrative behind the development of the Fund, and a browse through CAN's website above.

The roots of the Fund lie in Portland's regeneration and reinvention as a 'creative city' in the early 2000s. The then Mayor was keen to find ways to support arts, culture and creativity, and a range of the key city arts organisations came together to form CAN to lobby and devise ways to respond to this developing agenda. The main challenge they faced was a lack of stable public funding (in contrast with similar organisations in the UK, they often receive only around 5% from the public purse, with the rest sourced through commercial activity and philanthropy). Equality of access to this arts and cultural infrastructure, and to high quality arts activity, was also a significant issue too, particularly for children and young people in the strapped public school system and in certain parts of the city.

In terms of formulating a response, CAN approached the challenge very differently. Rather than working within their existing box and paradigm, they chose to jump outside and build a new one – establishing, through the law and tax system, an hypothecated arts education funding stream backed by a public mandate!

What Jessica and her colleagues, partners, arts organisations, activists and public supporters have achieved is absolutely staggering. They have managed to secure millions of dollars of additional funding for arts education by, first, convincing the powers that be to hold an open ballot on this topic; they then campaigned on and won this citywide public ballot (with over 62% in favour), and finally they persuaded the wider public in the city to pay an additional $35 a year on top of their existing taxes to fund this initiative. I think this is an incredible achievement, particularly in difficult financial times.

The funds are then used to provide additional arts teachers throughout the public school system in Portland, and additional funding for arts organisations to work with children and young people too.

We may well instinctively feel that 'it would never happen here' (and to me it seems close to an arts education poll tax, even if judges in the US don't agree because not

quite everyone pays it, and we don't have a good history of response to this type of approach in the UK!), but I think there are still some very important lessons to be pulled out.

First, it illustrates the importance, some times, of just going for things that on the surface 'can't be done' and doing this with enough 'oomph', positivity and steely ambition that they actually happen. For me Jessica demonstrated this 'can do' approach in a very calm, clear, professional and determined way. That's how big changes and shifts happen.

Then, in terms of starting points, Jessica and CAN began by building direct connections with people in the street in order to understand what they really value in relation to art, culture and creativity; and it turned out to be good quality art and music for children and young people, especially in schools, where provision was found to be weak and particularly underfunded compared with national averages. In contrast, in the UK these debates are often held within the sector itself, in an insular way. We can and should do more to reach out and connect with the wider public – and may end up being pleasantly surprised by what comes back!

So the CAN campaign worked massively hard to connect with people, to listen to them, to value and understand the implications of what they said, and then reflect back what was important to them as suggested ways forward. They did this through focus groups, polling, and many public meetings, but by going to places where people were already, rather than setting up new structures and expecting people to slot in with them. They were constantly reaching out and truly in touch, and as a result they won the ballot and opened up a whole new dimension of support, ideas and funding.

In listening hard to people they realised that most people 'got' the importance of art and music in general, and its intrinsic value to the city and the lives of citizens, but that they saw particular value in relation to its importance to children and young people. This is what pushed the button. Not organisations and their existence and funding, not instrumental benefits per se, and not economics.

And finally, they heard and realised that art and music in schools was key if issues of quality and access for children and young people were to be addressed in a meaningful way, not arts projects or arts organisations. In turn, in order to have maximum impact on all children and young people, this meant that the shortage of qualified teachers and improved quality of teaching needed to be rectified as a first priority, and only then would the focus shift to the arts organisations and their work.

Faced with a funding crisis and challenge, CAN and its partners chose to make a new cake rather than fight over the pieces of an existing one. I think this contrasts markedly with the dominant tone of debate in the arts and cultural sector in the UK, where there tends to be overt sensitivity and competition between sub-sectors (e.g. music vs visual art vs dance vs museums vs libraries vs art for arts sake vs art for young people, and so on), and, at best, an overall defensiveness as a sector, rather than the type of truly bold and ground-breaking approach exemplified in Portland.

Linked to this, the work of CAN demonstrates the power of organisations working together to achieve a goal over and above their individual survival or development. CAN was formed by a network of the leading arts organisations in the area. By arguing for high quality 'arts education' and access for children and young people – because this was what people in the street really valued, rather than the programmes or survival of any individual institution - the organisations gained more in the long run. This was a particularly brave path to pursue because it involved giving up identity and control. The lesson is that sometimes you need to 'give to get': enlightened self-interest proved a positive way forward for them.

This would be harder in England I think because the funding mechanism in place is a particularly divisive and individualised process (with singular grants and a suite of separate ACE National Portfolio Organisations each delivering to their own agenda, selected through an intrinsically competitive process). These systems and processes could be tweaked to encourage more focus on end outcomes and less on institutions if we wanted to alter the balance and send different signals here.

I have used this word rather a lot in this report – but it was a genuine and rather humbling privilege to meet Jessica and hear about and learn from her truly pioneering work.

5.5.3 Radical and disruptive social impact in Vancouver

Finally, and continuing the theme of people working with quiet determination to make change and innovation happen on the ground and change the overall system at the same time, while researching social enterprise and social impact businesses in Vancouver I came across Tyze Personal Networks, and Founder and CEO Vickie Cammack. Tyze is one of the most impressive, clear and simple – and yet radical and innovative – social impact companies I have ever come across.

Vickie is passionate about building a 'network model of care' around those in real need, and Tyze is a platform and tool (and so much more) that aims to harness the power of social media to enable this to happen in a grounded and practical way.

Traditional, and often medicalised and bureaucratised models of 'care', delivered through state intervention, often prove to be transactional, limited and dehumanising, both for the person experiencing the care and their immediate friends and family. Vickie is seeking to refocus us all on a more holistic, realistic and broader notion of care, delivered and supported through a myriad of people surrounding the individual in need – both friends, family and professionals.

Tyze provide a set of tools and approaches, delivered online and using social media techniques and technologies, to build practical and authentic networks of care around individuals in need. Tyze makes manifest these networks of care and allows those involved (professionals, family, friends, neighbours etc.) to share and exchange information and data on an ongoing basis, in a way which truly focuses on the needs of the person receiving care; and which values the ideas and voices of professionals

and non-professionals more equally[7]. Have a look at the very sharp paper that Vickie has produced for more background. I know, from personal experience with my own family, that the model she is promoting is much closer to the truth, and therefore should be the accepted starting point for all that follows – and not seen as secondary or background to a medical or state system.

On the surface it is a simple idea, but underneath it is a very radical and challenging one. As Vickie pointed out:

- It is highly 'disruptive' to current ways of working and thinking about care, society and government (e.g. who is the expert; who provides care, what do we expect from the state and what from ourselves, our families and community; how do they share meaningful information, what information is meaningful in the first place, and so on?)
- Her model is socially enterprising, as it involves business models and principles deployed to produce a significant social change. And as a result she is juggling a lot of complexity – balancing social impact with the need to settle on a sustainable and durable business model. As a Director of a social enterprise seeking radical change in a 'settled' area like education, I know how challenging and complex this can feel.
- She is involved in a tech start-up in a west coast North American city with all the resulting technological, social and financial challenges that this brings, not least monetising and sustaining her approach in an on-line space. When you do something for the first time, and are genuinely innovating, there is no map or instruction sheet!

Tyze have recently won support from NESTA in the UK and are now aiming to roll out here too – I hope this proves a fruitful development because the model and approach are compelling.

5.5.4 Lessons

Two key lessons emerge for me from this set of organisations. First, innovation and change in a social space needs a driver, and in turn that driver needs determination, persistence and passion to overcome many hurdles and bring about a different future or way of looking at or doing things. But whilst there is some truth and overlap here with the George Bernard Shaw quote –

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the conditions that surround him. The unreasonable man adapts surrounding conditions to himself. All progress depends on the unreasonable man"

– the changes and innovation I observed also involved drivers who were finding new ways to connect with what people authentically value and need in their sphere, and in turn this requires deep listening and connection, high level communication skills and

[7] This is a practical example of the use of a high quality feedback loop to improve public services, releasing invaluable information from 'the patient' and those closest to them to improve delivery of care. As I argued earlier, I think that market-based mechanisms are often introduced dogmatically as a perceived surrogate for this type of more subtle approach. Imagine sensitive, moderated, channelled and appropriate use of this type of feedback mechanism in other areas of healthcare, and in schools (indeed, who knows most about how teaching and learning is working in a school, or could be improved? Pupils and parents.)

considerable humility. So perhaps kind and compassionate social change requires reasonable unreasonable people?

And second (with this applying to my whole period of research), the best organisations and models I saw had all found and tapped into an animating energy or force – whether enterprise, social media, or authentic public value and connection – and this was enabling them to sustain, amplify and grow the positive changes they were seeking to make. This, for me, is the social enterprise sweet spot.

5.6 The power of speech and language in the communication of ideas and in enabling young people to make change happen

I found it very easy to learn about the projects and organisations I was visiting because the people I met were so eloquent, honest and straightforward when explaining their work. Whenever I met young people, too, I was impressed by how articulate and open they were, even when explaining difficult life and personal circumstances or situations to me.

The language used was generally very positive and progressive, and it also had an emotional depth. So there was little talk of 'problems' or 'issues' faced, and less explicit discussion of structures and 'politics', and more emphasis on empathy, emotion and personal connection between people in order to drive the work and practice forward (which I think, in a micro way, links back to the focus on generous individualism rather than society and government). It is easy to learn, understand and be persuaded if the people you meet are keen and able to connect with you at this level, and 'say it like it is', but in a warm, empathetic and direct way.

Some of this, I guess, can be put down to the overall culture of the country and a complex web of factors that 'make it this way'. However, in all of the cities I visited it was also interesting to note that there were a significant number of youth projects and programmes supporting young people in the development of their voice and language – but, and this is key, for an external goal-oriented purpose (making something happen in your life), rather than as a technical skill or ability to be mastered simply for the sake of it. There are very few similar organisations in the UK.

One of the best examples is Youth Speaks, based in San Francisco and Oakland, that run an incredibly diverse and imaginative range of programmes in this area (from poetry slams to youth poet laureate awards). They believe that language is one of the key tools young people need to take control of their lives, and that having knowledge, practice, and confidence in the written and spoken language is essential to the self-empowerment of an individual.

826 Valencia, also based in San Francisco, have perhaps the quirkiest mixed funding and social enterprise business model I came across on my visit. They provide diverse programmes (group and one-to-one) to support students aged six to eighteen with their creative and expository writing skills and helping teachers and local schools inspire their students to write. They also run a real and online pirate shop from their shop front premises (selling a wide range of pirate paraphernalia!) and get a decent return from this to subsidise their non-profit work. Since founding in San Francisco, the 826 Valencia model has spread organically to a number of other locations around the world.

Later that same day I walked into a nearby busy café in the Mission district in San Francisco. On entering I was surprised to be met by complete silence – though there were at least 25 people sat together, occupying most of the seats and tables, all typing away on their laptops. I bought a coffee and sat there in the quiet, and then on the stroke of midday all the people suddenly stopped typing and started talking to each other, which was rather disconcerting. This lasted 20 minutes and then, in unison, silence fell and they began working again!

I discovered that they were part of a Shut up and Write group, which I think is a brilliant and clever idea and, again, tangentially related to language, writing, and its power for individuals in terms of building a life, making money, spreading ideas and making wider change happen. The group was a mix of freelancers, academics, writers, poets and performers and they were busy producing a diverse array of reports, scripts, and books in that cafe – as well as networking to learn, make connections and further their work and careers.

In each of the schools I visited there were many subtle and, sometimes, significant differences in the way that literacy, rhetoric and language were being taught and used in the classroom. My experience in English schools is that ‘literacy’ can be often be seen as an end in itself, due to the pre-eminence put on this area through government standards and assessment, and as a set of rules, skills, and techniques to learn or master (monitored by levels that need to be reached and tests that need to be passed), almost as an end in itself.

Overall, and in contrast, I found the US emphasis to be more on language as a tool to enable the individual to get their ideas and personality out into the world, to persuade, to establish and build emotional connections with other people, and to make positive things happen in your life.

There is therefore a direct link here between young people’s power over and through language, and their ability to make change happen through social enterprise and endeavour (i.e. how can they do the latter without the former? If you want change to happen, you need to persuade, get people on board, write clearly and with a real point, convey ideas with passion and action in mind…) And I think, for many young people, having this grounded, centred and pointed sense of the importance and utility of written and spoken language would provide a much greater motivation for them to learn and develop their skills here.

I think there is a very significant gap in this area in the UK – both in how all facets of language are taught in and out of school, in how we conceive of it in the first place in

relation to young people and their life development, and in the extremely limited range of additional support projects and programmes that are available to them in this area. From a RIO perspective, we need to think hard about how we begin to address these gaps and emphases in our own work, and the connections we need to make between developing power over and through language and real and purposeful learning in the work we do in school. The two need to go hand in hand.

6. Conclusions

I have attempted to pull out practical and policy ideas and lessons within each section. The overall experience was so enriching and stimulating that, in some senses, the whole report represents a conclusion of sorts!

So, rather than summarise detail, I will instead take a step back and outline some of the main overarching reflections and conclusions to take away from the research as a whole.

For many reasons already outlined, the west coast of Canada and the US was a brilliant place to investigate enterprise-driven social change and impact – and this is fundamentally different in nature, starting point and process when compared to work of a similar substance in my own country. The radically different context, and the highly commercial, sharp and enterprising focus of many of the organisations I visited has therefore thrown up some very rich and powerful learning.

In particular, these organisations set extremely high benchmarks for those working in similar areas in the UK (including us all here at RIO) in relation to:

- The clarity, effectiveness and efficiency of their business and commercial processes (i.e. how they go about doing what they do, at scale, to high quality, with replicability and extreme focus, in order to produce significant, sustainable and balanced economic and social outcomes). For example, the way that Equal Opportunity Schools engage with schools and then support them to change their practice; or the manner in which Fledge sets out to grow social impact businesses and entrepreneurs.
- In turn, and linked to this, the clean, professional and systematic ways they move people in need along to a better position, provide diverse support and opportunities for them, and build momentum in their lives – striking an excellent balance between providing the right amount of holistic scaffolding and support for their beneficiaries, and yet also requiring them to take some responsibility and positive action too. For example, the ways that organisations like New Avenues for Youth and Juma meet the multiple needs of young people in difficulty.
- The partnerships they form and leverage ‘for good’ in many diverse ways with the wider business community.

- ‘Customer’ and beneficiary relationships, expectations and standards of service.
- The beautifully clear, but human, captivating and committed way they communicate – both orally and in writing or via the web – particularly around their mission and purpose, but also around the hard impact and value they create for their communities, beneficiaries, investors and partners. Which in turn allows them to secure further investment and make more change happen.

In order to produce maximum social impact for children and young people I think anyone working in this area needs to aspire to these levels of quality, service, process, partnership and operation.

Additionally, I don’t think there is an automatic and dogmatic read across between improved social outcomes and intrinsically market-based, commercial and private sector solutions. The energy outlined above derives not from the fact of profit to be made, but from passion, commitment, creativity and enterprise deployed in its broadest sense, and ‘customer’ focus, which in turn provides a constant and positive feedback loop that allows any service to get better and better (and imagine if that could be unleashed in schools and hospitals!) The market is too often used as a clumsy surrogate for these forces.

The best social enterprises, educational organisations and social impact businesses I visited had all managed to align and then tap into this energy, and were using it to make dynamic change happen, with increasing momentum, and sustainability at heart.

In terms of education and schools in particular – and their crucial role in helping grow and develop future ‘citizens’ – it would be great to see far more of the type of practice underpinned by community service learning and all its variant forms take place here in the UK. As things currently stand this type of approach is not well or widely supported by existing curricula or institutions, and yet there are enough signs that it would:

- Build on what many children and young people both want and need, in terms of what they learn and how, but also for wider social benefit as their learning then connects with their communities.
- Release and develop more human potential, and bring about positive change – as these young ‘social entrepreneurs’ begin to shape our world once they leave school.
- Create a wider and more energising connected community context for the work and professionalism of teachers.
- Unlock, to a much greater extent, the full potential of schools in their local area.

Furthermore, current radical reforms and freedoms in the English education system actually create significant opportunities to embed, amplify and deepen this type of practice.

This is because community service or social enterprise learning would take place best within a social enterprise school, where pedagogy, practice and operations could become aligned and congruent, and related opportunities (for investment, community development, business creation, business partnerships, supply chain leverage, governance and employment practices etc.) could be realised and

sustained within an ethical and grounded framework. Schools could do social enterprise for real and across the board, creating far more social, economic and environmental value, and opening up many new opportunities for young people and their communities as a result.

Finally, having seen so much brilliant practice in the US and Canada, I am more convinced than ever before as to the creative and socially enterprising potential of children and young people and the requirement to do more to support this. There is solid need and demand, as well as evidence of impact and models of practice. We need to work harder to sow seeds well, ensure the right climate for growth, and therefore release this potential more effectively.

I think much of the challenge here lies in the systems and structures that surround young people. I mean schools and education in particular, but also, more generally, in the approaches and ways of working in the (often partially hidden) next ring out too (e.g. policymakers, quangos, commissioners etc.): those who can either add value and enable more effective working at the grassroots by working to create an enabling climate and culture, or hinder it and crumble value through factors such as obfuscation, politics, over-intervention, over-complexity, poor quality policy, unnecessary and ineffective metrics, or risk aversion.

We need to find a better balance here, and identify ways to re-orientate systems so that they create space and a climate for enterprise in its broadest and most ethical sense, and so they point and run towards the people who matter (children and young people), rather than a current and overly politicised tendency to focus and run towards Ministers and senior officials.

Similarly – and drawing particularly from the lessons taught by Vancity – we need to be wary of over-complex market-based or financial solutions too, particularly in the social investment sector. I am not sure we can have it all here (profits, tax breaks, solid returns on investment, significant social outcomes, double figure growth, good services…all tied neatly together). Nor that the answer to entrenched social problems is finding clever ways to make some money out of them. Though, as above, we do need to find ways to release forces of creativity and enterprise in order to help bring about positive change.

Indeed, this desire, the 'wanting it all', may in subtle ways help create the issues that we are all trying to solve in the first place. Simply having ‘enough’, and balance in one's life, may be more important, more sustainable and less damaging to others. And, therefore, perhaps the creative and socially enterprising work we do in this space needs to come from this rather more low key place: of balance and having enough, and wanting others to have this too.

I saw extreme need and travail during my visit, and there were times that were deeply upsetting, but my research actually leaves me optimistic for the future – with children and young people wanting to make a difference, and people and organisations helping them do so in energised, authentic and passionate ways; with humanity, warmth, integrity, enterprise, creativity, and reasonable unreasonableness. Not least, as I learnt from CAN and felt in the air in America, it is important to go for it anyway. It might just happen.

Personal postscript and reflection

In 1911 a friend of Churchill's claimed to have been cured of depression by a doctor. Churchill wrote about this with some excitement in a letter to his wife, Clementine:

"*[My black dog] seems quite away from me now - it is such a relief. All the colours come back into the picture*."

I similarly found my time in North America to be of vibrant technicolour. I was surprised and delighted at the extent to which a country, particularly the US, and its people could impact so positively upon personal wellbeing – the openness, generosity and warmth with which I was met acted to draw me out completely and placed me in a world that was bright, colourful, warm and full of the best of life. I would like to thank the people I met and the WCMT from the bottom of my heart. I visited a special place and was given a wonderful opportunity.

Through my experience, I also learnt a lot about learning. I realised that how we really learn most is by going out into the world with an open heart, a positive sense of adventure, and inquisitiveness. And linked to this, that true learning is a dynamic that involves giving and receiving (not just the latter): you have to give of yourself to people and open up to them in order to create the conditions for connection, and then welcome in what comes back.

I think both Winston Churchill (I thanked him many times on my journey!) and my children can be proud of me: I learnt a lot and my life is changed as a result.

Contacts and links

I received great advice from the WCMT prior to my visit, which was not to schedule in too many visits in advance – leaving some time free to follow up leads and local recommendations. I would strongly suggest that other Fellows follow the same advice, as once you are on the ground you very quickly and easily get referred onto new organisations and people. I found that most new people were able to meet at short notice, appreciated the interest in their organisation and wanted to make international links too.

The Fellowship also provided me with the spur to carry out a significant amount of research on the whole North American social enterprise/impact sector – which I had to do in order to then narrow down on my specific visits. As a result, it has enabled me to build significant expertise in a new area, and this wider research is already coming in useful across my organisation and beyond (so the benefit does not just accrue from the visits themselves; this is just a small part of it).

I have provided links to all the main organisations I visited or researched in my report. I particularly want to thank the following individuals and organisations for their generosity, time, ideas, and hospitality during my visit – they each provided me with in-depth information and support. I was, without fail, massively impressed by their drive, passion, intelligence, eloquence and determination and I wish them all the best in their continued efforts to generate positive change in their communities:

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- The staff of 826 Valencia, San Francisco
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