



Day 3

## United Kingdom

### PROMOTING YOUTH-ADULT CO-MANAGEMENT

**- Wake up England! Youth have arrived!**

#### Discussion with Professor Bryan Merton

(Expert in Youth Psychology and Emotional Literacy at the Leicester City Council / ENVIRON 'Eco-House')

**Peace Child (PCI):** So what do you think about Co-Management? Have you heard of it?

**Bryan Merton (BM):** Yes I've heard of it. I don't use the term very much - it is not much used here in the UK.



**PCI:** Do you think co-management could be used in Schools?

**BM:** It could be, of course, but I wouldn't be too hopeful! Teachers are very nervous creatures and they are afraid of giving students too much power. And that is what co-management is really about. It's about POWER! At the core, it is about adults surrendering their power to young people - and no one likes to surrender anything ever if they can avoid it. Teachers say that too much youth power would lead to organisational problems, discipline problems but my view is that this under-estimates the responsibility of young people considerably. Schools should be democratic institutions - they should be much more democratic than they are! It is surely the silliest thing in the world to have a teacher standing in front of a class, controlling them like a dictator, teaching them citizenship and democracy! Students would learn much more about

democracy from the experience of living in a democratic school.

**PCI:** What do you think is the best approach to getting co-management practices adopted across the UK?

**BM:** Invest in training - training both for the youth, and especially for the adults. Training needs to be done together and separately - adults need to be trained to share power, to work openly with young people and not make secret deals with each other behind their backs. And of course young people need to be trained in the exercise of power - and invited to explore the experience of responsibility.



**PCI:** Have you come across any examples of co-management efforts in the Health Service:

**BM:** I have actually. It was a peer-to-peer sex education programme with young people delivering messages about safe and responsible sexual relationships, handing out condoms etc. The young people were much less embarrassed listening to each other.

**PCI:** How do you extend such practices nationwide - create the infrastructure to make such consultations permanent?

**BM:** I think that you promote the results - when it works, tell people as you are now! I'm not sure that infrastructure is the answer. Bureaucracies are very boring for young people! Youth are generally intimidated by formality and you do not get the best ideas that way. The best way is to create a series of regular meetings to get both sides talking to each other.



**PCI:** Would you rephrase co-management and how?

**BM:** I think Equal partnership is what you mean by co-management, and that is a more common phrase in the youth work field than co-management. Some would find the idea of co-management threatening, where the idea of equal partnership in decision-making is slightly more acceptable.

