RE-THINKING THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING:
CURRICULUM AND COLLABORATION IN AN ERA OF LOCALISM

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SUMMARY

Current education policy devolves more control over curriculum to state schools, and renews emphasis on 'teacher quality'. At the same time, there are moves towards increasing localism across public services, and the idea of civic activism is influencing the ways in which public services relate to the communities they operate within. These policies speak directly to the RSA agendas of democratisation of schooling and citizen participation in public services. They also present an opportunity for the development of a form of teacher professionalism that meets the complex and multiple needs of contemporary society, and a more localised and engaged education system.

The RSA's Area Based Curriculum requires teachers to be curriculum designers as well as work with local stakeholders to elicit the knowledge resources held in local communities. It therefore draws on ideas of localism and co-production being advocated by the Coalition government, but goes further than current central education policy in terms of how the relationship between schools and communities is configured. Drawing on experiences from the Area Based Curriculum, this pamphlet highlights some of the challenges concerning teacher identities and capacities raised by both Coalition government ambitions for schools and teachers, and the RSA's work. It argues that a) accountability driven by attainment outcomes, coupled with an absence of support for teachers as curriculum developers may mitigate against real creative autonomy in the profession, and that b) there is a danger that overly narrow definitions of 'teacher quality' could undermine the possibilities for engagement between schools and communities. Taken together, these challenges mean that the opportunity presented by structural reform for the development of a new model of teacher professionalism that supports a more collaborative relationship between schools and communities may be missed.

BACKGROUND

LOCALISM IN EDUCATION

In education, the decentralisation being advocated across public services is embodied in the expansion of the Academies programme (which establishes schools independently from Local Authority control), and the facilitation of the creation of state-funded Free Schools by parents, local groups, teachers, businesses or faith groups. Alongside public service reform and devolution, the coalition government also aspires to empower individuals and communities: "giving local councils and neighbourhoods more power to take decisions and shape their area" (Cabinet Office, 2011a). David Cameron states he wants government to stop "treating everyone like children who are incapable of taking their own decisions. Instead, let's treat adults like adults and give them more responsibility over their lives." (Cameron, 2011). In order to make this a reality, he acknowledges that direct government intervention will be necessary: initiatives such as the national citizenship service and community organisers will, it is argued, increase the capacity of citizens to become involved in civic life. "We are not naively hoping the seeds will grow everywhere of their own accord; we are helping to nurture them." (Cameron, 2011). In education, this reassertion of autonomy from central government is best exemplified by the emphasis on trusting teachers to know how to teach and policies which seek to develop the teaching profession's academic credentials and status in society (DfE, 2010).

The twin moves towards more autonomy for institutions and professionals in education speak well to the decentralisation agenda of the Coalition government, and the RSA supports the creation of space for democratisation of schooling and professional freedoms for teachers. However, we would argue that by limiting the concomitant development of teachers to discipline, subject specialisation and autonomy over teaching methods, is to miss an opportunity to develop true localism through schooling. As we will show, for schools to become truly embedded in, and accountable to, their communities, teachers will need to be skilled in curriculum development, as well as in community engagement. This in turn requires a different approach to teacher professionalism than is currently evident in the public debate and policy.

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

There is a vast literature on the professionalism of teachers, including debates on: whether teaching is best regarded as a profession or a craft; how it compares to other professions (notably the medical profession); the role of teachers and students in relation to knowledge (Bash 2005, Goodson 2003); how much autonomy teachers should enjoy from the state, and so on. We use the term here not in the common sense of how 'well' teachers behave, but as a descriptor of a combination of teachers' specific capabilities and knowledges, the purpose and ethical underpinnings of their work, the extent to which they are able to exercise independent and critical judgement, their role in shaping and leading changes in their field, and their relationship to other stakeholders.

These factors can, in different configurations, result in very different kinds of professionalism and teacher identity. A dominant definition of teacher professionalism has been closely related to notions of 'autonomy': from state interference, from employer control, from other professionals and to an extent from the influence of other stakeholders locally (Hargreaves, 2000). In addition to autonomy over teaching methods, the recent White Paper emphasises the importance of academic qualifications to becoming a teacher (Department for Education, 2010). This reveals a view of teaching predicated on strong academic knowledge. However, we now know that an engaging and flexible curriculum, and parental involvement in schools also has a significant impact on

student attainment (Desforges, 2003). These factors, in addition to the demands of localism, require that we think of broader definitions of teacher professionalism that also encompass curriculum development and collaboration with multiple stakeholders.

Teacher professionalism in government policy

The undermining of teacher autonomy during the period 1988 – 2010 is well established among educationalists (Sachs 2003, Hargreaves 2003, Ball 2004, Pring et. al. 2009). During this time, it is argued, an over-specified National Curriculum and punitive inspection regime, coupled in later years with National Strategies specifying the timetabling and teaching methods for 'core' subjects of literacy and numeracy, have reduced the idea of the teacher to someone "whose job is to maintain order, teach to the test and follow standardized curriculum scripts… the drones and clones of policy makers' anaemic ambitions" (Hargreaves, 2003).

The coalition government has responded to this critique, recognising the established evidence that teacher quality is the strongest single factor in successful education systems. Entitling its first schools White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching', and emphasising increased autonomy of the teacher and the school particularly in relation to how to teach, it argues that:

> *Teachers must be free to use their professionalism and expertise to support all children to progress…In outlining what children should expect to know in core subjects, the new curriculum will allow a greater degree of freedom in how that knowledge might be acquired and what other teaching should complement this core.* **– Department for Education, 2010**

The extension of Academies and Free Schools in England and the curriculum freedoms they enjoy offers even more control over the curriculum to these schools, implying further emphasis on curriculum design by teachers:

> *Generally, academies and Free Schools are required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to include English, maths and science and to make provision for the teaching of religious education. Beyond this they have the freedom to design a curriculum which meets their pupils' needs, aspirations and interests.* **– Department for Education website, 2010**

The White Paper emphasises that devolution of curriculum control is no longer something to be reserved for the few, clearly stating that the government "anticipate(s) that in a school system where Academy status is the norm and more and more schools are moving towards greater autonomy, there will be much greater scope for teachers to design courses of work which will inspire young minds." (Department for Education, 2010).

Quite how far such freedom will be taken up by schools is limited in part by the continuing pressure exerted by Ofsted and by the judging of schools on the basis of student assessment at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. "All state schools will be held accountable for their performance in tests and exams which reflect the National Curriculum" states the White Paper (Department for Education, 2010). Research into school based curriculum development in Portugal, England and Scotland has found that such control over outcomes can in fact lead to a system more restrictive of teacher autonomy than the prescriptive curricula of the past (Biesta, 2004). A new National Curriculum is currently being devised, and while it is expected that this will be a pared down version, schools will be held to account for delivering a curriculum that meets its requirements.

However, despite these reservations, and those surrounding the government's insistence on synthetic phonics as the best means to teach literacy to young children, there nevertheless appears to be a genuine commitment to devolution to schools of the processes and judgements about how – and to some extent what – to teach children.

Towards new opportunities for teacher professionalism

The RSA Area Based Curriculum works with schools to include a wider range of stakeholders in a local area in the conversation about what could and should be taught to children in school, and to draw on their diverse expertise and resources to support the learning of children (See box on Area Based Curriculum approach). Keri Facer has identified a twin set of implications in this approach: "first, the devolution of curriculum design from the centre to institutions and professionals; and, second, the opening up of curriculum design to include not only educational institutions and professionals but local communities" (Facer, 2009). Hence, both the government's emphasis on the professional autonomy of teachers (from central government) and the devolution of curriculum powers to schools are important moves towards more locally-oriented curricula being possible.

However, we would argue that there is an opportunity in these structural reforms for ideas of teacher professionalism to develop beyond 'autonomy' and towards more creative and collaborative models. Such models already exist in the education literature, and several are highlighted at the end of this pamphlet. In particular, we would argue that a form of 'reprofessionalisation' that sees teachers as mediators and creators, as well as transmitters, of knowledge, is increasingly important in today's complex and interconnected world (see Facer 2009 and Thomas 2011 for an elaboration of why this is). Additionally, we believe that teachers – and schools – will be better able to achieve their attainment goals and offer a more engaging educational experience by working collaboratively with other professionals and local stakeholders (Bottery and Wright 2000, RSA 2010).

Thus, two questions have emerged from our work in Area Based Curriculum design:

- How well equipped are teachers to lead curriculum design?
- What does increased professional autonomy mean for collaboration with communities and parents?

This pamphlet addresses these questions in light of the experience of the Area Based Curriculum, and asks how well current policy proposals relating to the role and development of teachers support this direction of travel. The final section looks at particular challenges of Coalition policy to the development of a new model of professionalism, and suggests some possible ways forward.

THE RSA'S 'AREA BASED CURRICULUM'

Aims

The RSA's Area Based Curriculum is based on two key ideas:

1 It uses the locality to illustrate the content of the National Curriculum, making the latter more relevant and engaging to young people, and increasing their sense of identity with, and understanding of, the local area.

2 It is owned and created locally, by multiple stakeholders working with schools (including for example parents, pupils, local businesses and organisations, community groups and so on).

The Area Based Curriculum work seeks to challenge dominant views of a top down, hierarchical curriculum based on a limited range of high status knowledge by supporting schools and their local communities to develop their own curriculum. The intention is this will result in curricula that more readily engage students from all backgrounds.

Approach

We have trialled the Area Based Curriculum in a range of schools with a commitment to curriculum innovation, previously in Manchester, and currently in Peterborough as part of the RSA's Citizen Power programme.

Central to the Area Based Curriculum's approach is the aim of involving diverse groups in co-creation of the curriculum with schools. The resultant curriculum projects not only involve the local area as subject matter, but use locations and local expertise to support learning. Importantly, as well as engaging those traditionally well-represented in educational circles (heritage institutions, teachers, certain groups of parents), we have sought to involve community and parent groups whose voices are less frequently heard.

We are currently working with two secondary schools and three primary schools in Peterborough on a series of projects to be completed by July 2012. For more information about Citizen Power see www.thersa.org/projects/citizen-power and www.citizenpower.co.uk. For more information about the RSA's Area Based Curriculum work see www.thersa.org/projects/education/area-based-curriculum.

The work so far

At the time of writing the five schools working with the RSA in Peterborough are beginning to adopt the curriculum projects that they have developed in partnership with other local organisations over the past year. During this time all five schools have made multiple links with a variety of local partners including among others Peterborough United Football Club, the Red Cross in Peterborough, sheltered accommodation providers close to schools and heritage organisations. Three of the schools are beginning to implement projects that have been co-designed by teachers and staff from partner organisations, and two further schools have projects in development.

Our publication *Engaging the Local* (RSA, 2010) argued that policy makers and the formal education sector more broadly too often regard local areas as barriers to children's achievement, leading to a damaging deficit view of children and their families. The schools we are working with, on the other hand, have exhibited a willingness to engage with their local communities in a different way. The following quote is indicative of this different perspective:

Our school site, set in the heart of a massive post-second world war show-case housing estate representing the nation's attempt to rebuild a better future for the surviving families of the war – the builders of the estate still live amongst us, some struggling to come to terms with the change in identity of their locality…We will not know what our community knows, cherishes and aspires to unless we engage with it in a way that we have not done so up to know. Exciting prospects to move into the unknown.
– Headteacher, Primary School in Peterborough, Expression of Interest to become a partner school

There has also been an enthusiastic response from a diverse range of local organisations to becoming more involved with schools. In particular the cultural and heritage sectors have demonstrated both the interest and the capacity to work substantively with schools on curriculum. Local businesses, faith groups and public sector providers have also got involved.

The Area Based Curriculum projects designed so far all involve young people in learning through engagement with real world institutions and activities in their local area. The projects are designed to take the views of young people seriously: already Year 5 students from one junior school have given their opinion on the future of transport in Peterborough to local councillors, and students from another school will be involved in the design of a new education centre in Peterborough Cathedral. As such these projects seek to involve young people not only in learning through their local area, but also in shaping its future.

Initial feedback from schools tells us that the engagement of students with their learning in these topics has been high, and that students value getting to know the staff from partner organisations as they learn about different roles people have in the local area. More data about the impact of the projects on students, schools and partner organisations will be available when the projects are evaluated in the summer and autumn of 2012, but we anticipate improvements in engagement, student social capital and awareness of their local area, and strengthened relations between schools and other local stakeholders.

KEY ISSUES ARISING

HOW WELL EQUIPPED ARE TEACHERS TO LEAD CURRICULUM DESIGN?

A background of teacher deskilling?

Alongside the afore-mentioned erosion of teacher autonomy, it has been well-documented that teachers have been deskilled since the National Curriculum removed the need for teachers to be trained in or practice curriculum design (Hargreaves, 2003, Children, Schools and Families Committee, 2009). Teachers are rarely asked to think about what they teach and why; and consequently many will be ill-prepared to engage with, let alone lead, discussions about what young people should learn (McCulloch et. al., 2000). The authors of *The Framework for the National Curriculum: a report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum review* acknowledge that while they "fully endorse the Government's intention to free teachers from unnecessary centralised prescription", they are "also aware that this will be challenging for many in the profession" (Department for Education 2011b).

At the same time, particularly at secondary level, teacher training, careers and identities remain bound up with the subjects in which teachers specialise. In this context, asking teachers to design multi-disciplinary curricula for their students, and to draw on non-professionals from outside of the school for this purpose, is likely to precipitate challenges of both capacity and professional identity.

Teachers designing the Area Based Curriculum

Teachers we are working with are keen to take up opportunities to develop new curriculum approaches, and clearly see it as within their remit to do so. Our sample of schools is naturally self-selecting, and all have experience of school-based curriculum innovation in a range of policy environments. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm with which classroom teachers have taken up the challenge of rethinking what children learn is notable, and in some instances at least, strongly linked to their identity as teachers.

> *Our ideal curriculum would be one that is constantly evolving and is pertinent to* <u>our</u> *context. Learning which reflects our stakeholders and diversity.*
> **– Teacher, partner primary school**

> *When I work on this [RSA Area Based Curriculum project], I feel like I've got a proper job.* **– Teacher, partner primary school**

Despite this enthusiasm for school-based curriculum design, however, there are significant challenges. In secondary schools, particularly, subject identities are strong, and subject leaders have sometimes been less eager to engage with questioning curricula than teachers with broader responsibilities across the school. As a result, the schools are finding it more difficult to fit new approaches to curriculum into formal curriculum time. Instead space is made elsewhere, for example in collapsed days or extra-curricula time. In reality Area Based Curriculum projects tend to 'add on to' rather than replace core timetabled subject time at secondary level.

> *We talked about constraints: getting staff involved, getting people on board to embed this with schemes of work. Attitude of 'this is something else' all the time.*
> **– Teacher, partner secondary school**

> *At the networking event it felt like we'd walked into sweet shop that serves every single sweet – but we are bound by time – how much we are able to get students out and teachers off timetable.* **– Senior Leader, partner secondary school**

The big barriers are the obvious ones: getting the students to do the projects and balancing the rest of the curriculum impact. **– Senior leader, partner secondary school**

The reference to 'something else', 'off timetable' and 'the rest of the curriculum' belie the challenge in thinking of the Area Based Curriculum work as anything but additional to the 'actual' curriculum embedded throughout the structures of the school, including staffing. The Area Based Curriculum specifically encourages thinking about how locally developed curriculum content could illuminate and support what students already do in their subjects: however, clearly some teachers felt impinged in doing so by existing school structures.

Teachers in primary schools on the other hand seem to find it easier to build a core curriculum around innovative approaches, and have more experience of doing so already through competence and topic-based projects and work with initiatives such as Creative Partnerships. Some teachers speak confidently about how the locally-designed projects support learning that fits with the National Curriculum:

If it's an issue for the local area, it can be an issue for your classroom. We can do our number lines, and persuasive writing and geography within it…the National Curriculum does not need to get in the way **– Primary teacher, presentation at national conference**

However, anxieties have surfaced among staff in one school about how to ensure their 'local curriculum' relates to student progression within the National Curriculum:

We're anxious to cover the curriculum within this project and we have to be a bit clearer about how we're going to do it. **– Teacher, partner primary school**

There is also a lack of confidence in some primary schools about teaching without established resources specifically related to the new local topics being developed as part of the project.

In literacy we need to get more into fiction but there aren't any quality texts on this topic we can draw on. **– Teacher, partner primary school**

These findings indicate that while many teachers approach the idea of curriculum design with enthusiasm and confidence (especially at primary level), some also betray anxiety as to how to simultaneously ensure that their projects meet the outcomes specified in the National Curriculum and by Ofsted. Established curriculum resources are often seen to be valuable, and their absence can provoke anxiety when considering alternative content and ideas. This raises questions about how teachers see themselves in relation to 'delivering' or 'creating' curriculum; and about the meaningfulness of school (or area) based curriculum design in the context of a high stakes National Curriculum and accompanying accountability measures.

A gap in policy?
In the context of teacher deskilling in relation to curriculum design, it follows that teachers might need some support to take up the role of curriculum developers implied by the devolution of curriculum control to schools – especially those who have trained and practiced exclusively in an era of National Curriculum prescription. But, despite talking about curriculum freedom for schools, the White Paper contains no guidance as to how teachers might be supported to take on the role of curriculum developers. The White Paper talks about initial teacher training, promising to "increase the proportion of time trainees spend in the classroom, focusing on core teaching skills, especially in teacher reading and mathematics and in managing behaviour", but says nothing about introducing teachers to questions of what should be taught and why (Department for Education, 2010).

Coalition rhetoric is also notable for the absence of emphasis on whether teachers have a role in determining what to teach as well as how. Michael Gove talks of how teachers are patronised by the current National Curriculum because it tells them how to teach (Gove, 2010, Department for Education website 2010). However, he then extends this critique to the National Curriculum's content by stating "we have a compulsory history curriculum in secondary schools that doesn't mention any historical figures..." (Gove, 2010). There is a contradictory implication here in the suggestion that teachers are perfectly capable of determining everything about how to teach, but that they are entirely incapable of using their discretion to judge what to teach, as if these two processes were separate. This means that debates about curriculum creation: what role the teacher plays in mediating different kinds of knowledge; whether knowledge is transferred or created; whether it is held in common or individually; and what role it plays in constructing and changing culture and society, are simply not recognised.

I have argued elsewhere (Thomas, 2011) that this denial of the potential role of the teacher as a curriculum creator (rather than simple transmitter) may stem from a view of knowledge as a fixed, static, body of content that is so obviously important that the role of the teacher can only ever be to absorb and then to inculcate that knowledge in young people. The absence of any attempt to engage in a conversation about what kind of knowledge is important belies an *a priori* assumption that what it is important to teach is already known, and agreed upon. As such, any genuine recognition that teachers could be curators or creators, rather than merely organisers, of knowledge, is missing from government analysis for what makes a quality teacher. Hence, support for teachers to develop into professionals creating and mediating knowledge is likely to be absent, despite the rhetoric of curriculum freedom.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/REPRESENTATION

Teacher autonomy and social class as a barrier to community engagement?
The imperative for schools to engage with their wider community, including parents, is inherent in the direction of public sector reform and localism. Additionally, research has shown that parental engagement and interest in the schooling of children is an important facilitator of attainment (Feinstein et. al., 2008, DCSF 2009, Desforges 2003). We would also argue that in an era of budgetary constraint for schools and other public services, the resource offered by local stakeholders, including parents and families, but also employers, cultural organisations and so on, is invaluable to, but frequently underutilised by schools (RSA, 2010).

However, teachers and schools are very often unable to engage meaningfully with large numbers of parents, and the problem is particularly acute at secondary level. It is very common for schools (especially those in disadvantaged areas) to feel they are expending a great deal of time and energy to engage parents, often with frustratingly limited results (Francis, 2011). Such efforts largely comprise 'compensatory' classes (for example numeracy classes to better enable parents to understand and engage with their offsprings' learning) and top-down information evenings, whereas parents may be seeking a more democratic involvement, or one that facilitates address of their specific views and concerns. In a recent study of schools judged 'Satisfactory' by Ofsted, an unanticipated finding was the level of frustration expressed by parents at their lack of influence, and a perception that the schools did not listen to their views or keep them closely informed of their children's progress (Francis, 2011). Other research finds that 'collaborative, co-operative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders, identified as a form of 'democratic professionalism',' remains difficult to achieve (Day and Sachs, 2004).

Social and cultural distance between teachers and parents could explain why schools find it so difficult to engage parents. Gill Crozier and Diane Reay have shown that the distance between teachers and the parents and communities they serve in terms of class and educational level can make engagement difficult. They show how some parents can feel intimidated by middle class professional teachers, making interaction with the

1 Participants at the RSA's seminar on Area Based Curriculum issues additionally highlighted the fact that 'local' staff members in schools tend to be low status and low paid teaching assistants and catering staff, while the higher-paid teaching professionals tended not to represent the local community. This, it was argued, sends a message to students about the relative value of the 'local' and the 'not so local' in schools, particularly in deprived urban areas, and that this in turn could contribute to the alienation of certain groups from schooling.

school a difficult and sometime patronising process (Crozier and Reay, 2005). At a recent academic seminar held at the RSA, scholars of localism and schooling agreed that the distance between teachers and the families of students that they teach in terms of class and educational level can mitigate against engagement (although it does not need to! See Maguire, 2005 for an interesting study of a 'class-crossing' teacher).

Distinction and cultural distance may also be reinforced by spatial factors. Academics also observed that teacher salaries enable them to move out of the most deprived areas, and sometimes preclude them from living in especially affluent areas, meaning that they are often not themselves resident in the immediate locality of the school: this inevitably reduces the amount they have in common with the families they serve (RSA, 2011).

Additionally, it has been argued that the very process of protecting teacher professional autonomy against erosion by government has made teacher-community relationships more difficult to achieve. This concept of professionalism tends to accentuate an elite body of knowledge held exclusively by a single group of (qualified) practitioners. As Whitty observes,

> *Teaching had become a bone fide profession in terms of the traditional characteristics of a profession … with the exclusion from membership of other sections of the school workforce and, certainly in England, the limited influence of other stakeholders.* **– Whitty, 2006**

Hence notions of sharing knowledge and practice with other (non-professional) groups may be seen as a dilution and/or threat to professionalism. Such explicit concerns were expressed by the Chief Executive of the General Teaching Council of England, Carol Adams, in 2005 in response to the increasing number of teaching assistants in classrooms. She asked, "could pupils, parents and the wider community become confused about the unique role and contribution of the teacher? Could a child's right to learn be threatened by the new multi-disciplinary agenda?" (in Whitty, 2006). [1]

In light of these twin challenges of: a) a social, economic and residential divide between teachers and the families they teach; and b) the reassertion of a sometimes excluding/defensive form of teacher autonomy, it is perhaps not surprising that teachers often find it challenging to conceive of parents and communities as partners in the educational process, or that parents and communities find it difficult to engage with the professional sphere of the school.

The challenge of 'community'
In this context the RSA Area Based Curriculum provides a means by which teachers and local stakeholders can work together to create curriculum projects. The projects are designed to draw on expertise from outside the school, ideally in support of the core curriculum provided by the schools, (rather than the mere provision of supplementary activities outside of subject areas). In particular the model attempts to support and sustain equal collaborative relationships between the teacher and the outside partner, so that all parties have something to learn and something to offer.

Teachers in the schools we are working with have been enthusiastic about the idea of sourcing expertise and input from the local area and the projects have, anecdotally, had an impact on the way schools are viewed by communities:

> *Many staff are not confident at delivering things in a creative way. I would like additional support from local artists that will not cost a fortune to come in for a day, but can engage with the school in an ongoing way.* **– Teacher, primary partner school**

2 However, this has itself thrown up interesting problems. When asked about the range of expertise that might be available for teachers to work with at a local site, the Education Officer, herself a former science teacher, responded:

We have masses of expertise with conservation officers and rangers, tree specialists, wild flowers – challenge is to free them up – staff are enthusiastic to work with students but have limited time and I was hired so that they wouldn't have to do it any more…

As a school what I want is for the community to know that the school wants to engage as much as possible. We have been approached by a parent with the offer of a French exchange student who is coming for a year… She thinks that not only is the school more approachable because of the work, people are thinking that they have something to offer learning specifically – that the school seeks community contributions to learning. **– Teacher, primary partner school**

On the other hand, there has been occasional concern that the local area will not be able to provide the kind of expertise they are looking for:

No longer thinking this would link…as a whole curriculum thing – want someone to work with and challenge forwards and backwards is what we're looking for and from the local area we won't get that level of challenge.
– Teacher, primary partner school

Clearly, there is a difficult balance to be found between realism and projections of deficit. It would be naive and misguided not to recognise the specific challenges as well as benefits that particular locations bring, and indeed any such blinkered approach could miss opportunities to directly address such challenges through the collaborative work. Some teachers seem aware of such challenges and opportunities in engaging with particular groups of parents.

Our Eastern European families are constantly on the defence – feel very undervalued – if we can change that even just a little bit. **– Teacher, primary partner school**

Teachers nevertheless tended to find it challenging to conceive of parents from more disadvantaged groups as partners, and this was framed primarily in terms of ethnicity and employment status.

Would be great to get the parents involved. Will be very difficult with the students we've got… **– Teacher, primary partner school**

We have around half that are 2nd or 3rd generation out of work parents. It is difficult to know how we could engage them but we want to. **– Teacher, primary partner school**

Pakistani parents have a very traditional view of education – "it's the job of the school" (obviously generalising here!). **– Teacher, primary partner school**

Additionally, there has been a noticeable lack of confidence among teachers in engaging with the diverse faith and ethnic groups that exist in the local area. One argument made was that the student populations were so diverse that it would be impossible to engage with all of the different ethnicities and perhaps unfair to involve just one or two. Another teacher related a past incident where a contribution from a member of a faith group resulted in complaints from parents of that same faith that what their children had been taught was incorrect. There has also been some reticence to bring in parents from certain ethnic backgrounds because there is an assumption that the gulf in educational values will be too wide. Even where there is an evident desire to draw on local expertise to support the teaching of Religious Education, there is a real nervousness among teachers about 'getting it wrong'.

In light of these anxieties (as well as the barriers to involvement for certain groups discussed at length in our previous pamphlet *Lessons for Localism*, (Thomas, 2011b) it is perhaps not surprising that teachers turn to individuals and organisation with whom, culturally and professionally, they have more in common. Education officers at heritage organisations, [2] and groups already working with young people in the local area have engaged in very productive partnerships with teachers with exciting results in terms of the level of engagement that has been achieved with local resources. However, with both

issues of social identity and practical issues working to disincentivise work with genuinely diverse local stakeholders, realising intentions to diversify the voices involved in student learning will be a challenge.

Coalition policy in this context
The schools White Paper accepts that schools should engage positively with their local areas, with a range of local stakeholders supporting schools to create "a healthy, safe and respectful environment in school" (Department for Education 2010, p 29). However, there is little in the way of acknowledgement that parents or communities might have something to offer the learning that children do in school.

This should perhaps not surprise us: education ministers have made clear that they prefer a clear delineation between the educational function of the school and the role of other agencies in children's lives. However, there is an imperative for schools to succeed in engaging parents with children's learning because of the clear impact on attainment this has (Feinstein 2008, Desforges 2003). We have shown that teachers lack confidence in doing this, especially where cultural and professional divides between teachers and parents are greater.

There is therefore a need for both teacher identities and teacher capacity to be developed to work more effectively with the diverse communities they serve. Importantly, we believe that this is even more critical if schools are to move beyond a transactional model of parental involvement (where schools provide educational services, and parents contribute philanthropically towards this endeavour in return) to one where education is seen as a shared endeavour to be undertaken by schools and communities in collaboration. However, there is no mention of or support promised in coalition policies on education for teachers to develop the capacities that would be required to make this move. Teacher quality is defined simply in terms of academic qualifications on entry, and classroom management training once recruited. New schemes involving teacher scholarships for professional development are targeted specifically at subject knowledge, "awarded to teachers who have the potential to make a significant contribution to the country's intellectual heritage through the acquisition of deeper subject knowledge" (Nick Gibb, in Teacher Development Agency, 2011). The new Master Teacher Standard requires that teachers have "Deep and extensive knowledge of their specialism, going beyond the set programmes they teach." (Department for Education, 2011a). Neither of these schemes as currently set out supports the development of intellectuals equipped to debate and critique the assumptions underpinning what children are to be taught.

DISCUSSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHERS AS EXPERT DESIGNERS AND COLLABORATORS

We have seen that teacher professional identity and capacity is stretched by the twin challenges of school-based curriculum design, and the engagement of local stakeholders in support of learning. The teachers with whom we are working are making valiant efforts to work beyond the boundaries of the school and are enthusiastic about the benefits. However, there is little or no support to be found in the policies of central government for teacher development in these areas, despite evident commitment to the idea of developing teachers as professionals. These gaps could impact both on the quality of education within the school, as well as the support for learning available outside of school: both of which we know in turn affect student attainment.

Firstly, the implications of devolving curriculum powers to schools without enhancing the capacity of teachers to engage in a meaningful way with curriculum design could have real consequences for the quality of curriculum offered to students. For example, Stephen Ball has shown the prevalence of 'solutions' now commercially available to schools to support them in their improvement, assessment, curriculum design, data management processes and so on (Ball, 2007). Without a strong professional identity and the capacity to engage critically, teachers may struggle to make good judgements about what is useful, valid and important among these sources. This could mean that the devolution of curriculum powers to schools ends up as little more than an exercise in timetabling and commercial solution delivery; in turn reducing the quality and flexibility of the education that students receive.

Secondly, government attempts to develop teacher professionalism revolve primarily around improving the 'quality' of the intake by incentivising recruits with higher academic qualifications (Department for Education, 2010). This speaks well to a vision of teacher professionalism grounded solely in academic ability and autonomy. But, as we have argued, the requirements of school-based curriculum design, and the demands of community engagement, require more of teachers than just subject knowledge and classroom techniques. With appropriate support, teachers could become skilled at bringing a wide range of perspectives, expertise and resources into the learning children do at school, while at the same time ensuring that schools value and engage with all parents regardless of background. Current government thinking seems to fall short of this aspiration despite evidence on the impact of parental engagement on attainment.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF PROFESSIONALISM

We would argue that in order to be intellectual and civic leaders capable of guiding young people through today's complex and conflicting world, teachers need to be more than just academically qualified and adept at managing classrooms. There are other already developed models of teacher professionalism that could be drawn upon that would serve teachers better to meet the challenges we outline above: including but not limited to 'democratic', 'activist' and 'research' based identities. All of these require collaboration between teachers, and other professionals. As Whitty argues:

> *The capacity to collaborate with others, rather than merely instructing them, must surely be an important competence on the part of contemporary professional teachers…indeed, if the key question is how can teachers maximise children's opportunities to learn, that can only be achieved by working ever more closely with the other stakeholders.* **– Whitty, 2006**

Democratic professionalism
In numerous publications, but quoted here in his paper to the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland, Whitty argues for a form of 'democratic professionalism'. As he explains:

A democratic professionalism would seek to demystify professional work and build alliances between teachers and other members of the school workforce, such as teaching assistants, and external stakeholders, including students, parents and members of the wider community…a democratic professionalism thus encourages the development of collaborative cultures in the broadest sense, rather than exclusive ones. It certainly suggests that the teacher has a responsibility that extends beyond the single classroom – including contributing to the school, other students and the wider educational system, as well as to the collective responsibilities of teachers themselves to a broader social agenda. Indeed, under democratic professionalism, this broader agenda becomes part and parcel of the professional agenda rather than being counterposed to it. **– Whitty, 2006**

This places the core identity of the teacher not in the protection of individual autonomy and the teaching of a specific subject, but as a specialist in knowledge and pedagogy, acting in collaboration with multiple partners. As such, the conversation about what students should learn becomes a broader one that includes multiple legitimate voices, and leads to broad social outcomes.

Activist professionalism

Judyth Sachs, writing in Australia but with an international focus identifies as desirable an 'activist identity':

Redefining teacher professional identity as an activist identity involves two main elements; the effort to shed the shackles of the past, thereby permitting a transformative attitude towards the future; and second, the aim of overcoming the illegitimate domination of some individuals or groups over others. **– Sachs, 1999**

Activist professionalism thus emphasises the role of the teacher in promoting equality and social justice as well as a leading role in the transformation of education itself. Other authors draw on both 'democratic' and 'activist' models in calling for a more socially engaged and collaborative form of teacher professionalism (Gale and Densmore 2003, various in Fielding (ed.) 2005).

Research-based professionalism

Finally, research-based models of teacher development have emphasised the involvement of teachers in creating knowledge about educational processes and curriculum development, in partnership with higher education institutions and others. In these models teachers become leaders of educational thought, not recipients of it. The highly successful Finnish system, for example, requires teachers to be trained in academic research, and to be capable of critiquing new initiatives and ideas as they come about (Kumpulainen, 2011). According to Keri Facer a research identity requires more of teachers than does a subject identity:

A perspective of curriculum making as an ongoing, reflective practice led by teachers in response to local conditions and oriented towards knowledge production rather than abstract acquisition places significant responsibility upon educators as skilled professional practitioners. **– Facer, 2009**

There are significant overlaps between the above versions, and they are not mutually exclusive. There are also challenges inherent in each. At the moment schools are arguably not well placed to act as research active institutions or to engage with research on a regular basis (Levine 2007, in Facer 2009). Nevertheless, each holds more promise than current narrow conceptions of teacher 'quality' and roles, not only for engaging the best and brightest potential teachers from all walks of life in the difficult and important matter of education, but also for means by which teachers can become the highly skilled facilitators of local collaborations in support of learning. For ideas of localism to really transform the way that education is done in the UK, especially in an era of austerity, we need to transform our idea of the role that teachers can play in creating and sustaining that transformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The evolving role of federations and chains
As the role of federations, chains and families of schools evolves, and the involvement of Local Authorities in education diminishes, the question of who determines the curriculum offer provided by schools, and on what basis, will become ever more important. Government will need to monitor the different emergent curriculum offers provided, in relation to effectiveness. We would advocate that such consideration include the curriculum's role in promoting engagement and local cohesion and agency. We recommend that the respective roles of teachers, communities, parents and school leaders are considered in developing curriculum offers, and in their evaluation.

An intermediate layer?
Doubts about teacher capacity to develop curriculum and to engage with communities support the idea that local commissioning or regulatory bodies may be necessary to form an intermediate layer between individual institutions and the centre. We would advocate that such bodies be comprised of teachers, parents and community representatives as a means of ensuring local accountability and engagement.

Initial Teacher Education
The depth of knowledge and understanding required by teachers should be acknowledged by the consistent titling of the education of student teachers as Initial Teacher Education (ITE), not Initial Teacher Training (ITT).

More specifically, to meet the demands of devolved curriculum development, and to support the development of the teaching profession, the following might be included in Initial Teacher Education provision:

- Theory of knowledge and knowledge mediation (as distinct from a concept of curriculum design), to prepare teachers as a profession to navigate policy, commercial and community discourses about what to teach in schools
- Theory and practice of working with diverse communities, including building confidence in working with class, race, faith and ethnicity issues
- Additional training on school-based curriculum design to be made available to all Newly Qualified Teachers through the national scholarships programme

Master Teacher Status – additional criteria
In addition to existing criteria, the top flight of teachers ought to be able to show:

- Engagement with curriculum development within their specialism
- An ability to critique educational research, and modify solutions and packages to meet student needs
- The ability to engage creatively, collaboratively and meaningfully with communities served by the school

Community Professional Development
Funding for Continued Professional Development based in community spaces outside of schools for teachers to develop confidence working in collaboration with and eliciting the views and expertises of parents and diverse communities. This model could transform teacher confidence in working with parents, the range of resources available to schools, as well as develop supportive relationships between schools, parents and other local stakeholders to the benefit of students.

Recruiting ambitiously

Teacher selection should be framed around a more holistic set of criteria than just formal academic qualifications: to include recognition of interpersonal skills, negotiating skills, ability to interact with people from diverse backgrounds.

Collaborative Professionalism

Unions and professional bodies for teachers work towards teacher identities that are not based on distance from other professionals, but collaboration with them.

Parental collaboration

Schools (as well as chains, federations and academy sponsors) should move away from a model of parental engagement which assumes a top down relationship wherein the school supports the parents, and towards a two way process of parents being involved as resources for learning within the school (regardless of parental background). Governing bodies should provide facilitation and challenge to schools to ensure parents are valued and engaged as partners and resources.

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