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TOWARDS AN AREA BASED CURRICULUM:

MANCHESTER CURRICULUM LITERATURE REVIEW

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MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN
UNIVERSITY
2009

RSA
Action and Research Centre

RSA Projects
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Introduction

The aim of an 'area-based curriculum' seems elegant in its simplicity: to enhance the educational experiences of young people "by creating rich connections with the communities, cities and cultures that surround them and by distributing the education effort across the people, organisations and institutions of a local area" (RSA, 2009).

This paper discusses research literature, current projects and selected historical antecedents for an area-based curriculum in order to tease out the possibilities and tensions inherent in such an aspiration. In so doing, it aims to prepare educators and community partners for the obstacles they might face in creating such a curriculum and to describe some of the related initiatives and research that might act as a resource for those embarking on such an endeavour.

The paper draws on research from the multiple and overlapping research fields concerned with the relationship between schools, communities and curriculum: the field of school leadership provides insights into the institutional and governance structures required to create links between diverse organisations; the field of community activism expresses the tensions in community-school relations; the field of informal education articulates the ways in which learning is always already bound up with local communities; the literature from psychology and sociology of childhood expresses the ways in which learning crosses the boundaries between school and community; the field of environmental education makes a case for a distinctive understanding of 'place' and human relations within communities; museum and gallery research begins to map out new relationships between the formal and informal education sectors; and social geography and ecological analyses make visible the ways in which place and community are produced and shaped by people and institutions.

The paper explores three overlapping sets of relationships through which an area-based curriculum might be developed:

- First, it explores the relationship between teachers, students and curriculum making.

- Second, it explores the relationships between schools and institutional partners such as other schools, public services, industry, cultural organisations and creative practitioners.

- Finally, it explores the relationship between schools, parents and local communities.

Through these discussions, the paper argues that there is a dual trajectory inherent in ideas of an area-based curriculum: 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. Both of these moves are necessary to achieve the creation of a truly area-based curriculum.

Before this discussion, however, it is worth stating some basic assumptions about concepts such as curriculum, context and community that underpin discussions of an area-based curriculum.

Curriculum and its contexts

Curriculum design, the creating of educative environments in which students are to dwell, is inherently a political and moral process. It involves competing ideological, political and intensely personal conceptions of valuable educational activity (Michael Apple, 1979).

Any discussion of curriculum is a discussion about what knowledge should be made visible and valued through formal education. Because there is only limited space for the encounter with such knowledge, and because the selection of such knowledge will subsequently influence future knowledge development, any discussion of curriculum is highly political (Hamayer, 2008). There are many different types of knowledge: the 'new basics' of a globalised knowledge economy, the subject-based canon of academic knowledge; the 'citizen knowledge' of a democratic society; the popular, unofficial and unregulated knowledge of media and culture; and the indigenous knowledge of localised cultures, economies and homes (Morgan & Williamson, 2008: 48). Such knowledges are produced within different contexts: 'knowledge contexts', such as the histories and fields of academic disciplines; 'historical and material' contexts, such as the histories of ideology, political economy and social movements; 'psychological' contexts of the teacher and learner; 'cultural' contexts of the practices, rituals and identities of communities; 'technocratic' contexts of student backgrounds, schools and classrooms (Luke, 2008). Not all of these knowledges are compatible, not all of them equally valued, and any process of curriculum design is a process in which selection, combination and recontextualisation of these diverse knowledges from these diverse contexts takes place (Bernstein, 1996).

A shift towards an area-based curriculum implies a re-introduction of local contexts into curriculum making and therefore implies a re-organisation of the relationships between knowledge within the curriculum. As yet, it is far from clear whether such a re-introduction will encompass a profound challenge to other forms of knowledge or simply the addition of new material and insight to the curriculum.

The attempt to re-articulate education with the local, in contrast to the recent UK history of a nationally focused curriculum, has parallels with the attempt to introduce and engage with multi-cultural and gendered knowledge in the 1960s and 1970s. Ladson-Billings, for

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example, argues that attempts to introduce multi-cultural knowledge have often been focused on 'expanding knowledge', a process of 'adding on' diverse narratives and individuals to an unchallenged 'mainstream' curriculum. This process sees different voices being 'included' and represented within dominant curriculum. In contrast to such an additive approach, she advocates for 'deciphering' knowledge, knowledge that attempts to engage with the reasons by which certain voices are not present, the reasons by which norms of the 'mainstream' and hence power relations, are sustained (Ladson-Billings, 2008).

What then, might be the nature of the introduction of locally-based knowledge and resources into a 'national' curriculum? Is it simply to 'add to' the existing curriculum by making more visible the local within the wider national context as a means of enhancing perceptions of relevance? Or might it be concerned with enabling students and communities to challenge 'national' knowledges and national curricula in ways that allow them to harness education for their own purposes and own agendas? This tension will be explored in the final section of this paper.

What counts as 'the area' in an area-based curriculum?

Critical to the idea of an 'area-based' curriculum, is the question of what counts as 'the area'; what counts as the 'cities, communities and cultures' upon which educators might draw? Answering this question is far from straightforward. Pahl and Rowsell (2010, forthcoming), for example, carefully unpick the complexities of the idea of 'community'. They argue that the concept of community needs to be understood 'not as a reified fact, but as something complex, contested and alive with problematics'. Neighbourhoods are not static – they are changing, dynamic, and sites of resistance and colonialism (Lavia and Moore, 2009; Comber, 2009). They are also experienced in different ways by different groups within them. Christiansen and O'Brien (2003), Pink (2008) and Orellana (2000) for example, argue that children may have very different understandings of community and neighbourhood from the adults around them. The history of critiques of 'area-based' educational interventions has foregrounded the ways in which community is far from a neutral concept, but is instead subject to different narratives particularly of ethnicity and class. One dominant narrative of space in education, for example, is the story of the implications of migration and ethnicity for educational practice, standards and values, and these narratives can be used to 'blame' communities themselves for educational problems (Winkley, 1987).

Pahl and Rowsell echo Habermas (1991), Lefebvre, (1991) and Castells, (1998) in seeing public, civic and community space not as a pre-existing phenomenon, but as emerging and created through social actions and interactions. Importantly, they also argue that communities have the capacity to change both their self-representation and the types of space that they produce:

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'by telling different kinds of stories in community contexts, communities themselves can change through the collective representation of these stories' (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, forthcoming).

A curriculum that tells tales of its local communities, then, is not a neutral representation of that environment, but has the capacity to shape, influence and reshape those communities in turn. Who gets to tell the stories about the community, and the types of stories that are told are therefore fundamentally political questions that cannot assume the rights of one group to name and represent the area for all other groups.

The question of what counts as 'the area' is also subject to challenge by the rise of new technologies that have the potential to radically destabilise our understanding of space. As Luke argues, '*longstanding categorical distinctions, between the biological and the artifactual, the bodily and the prosthetic, the micro and the macro, the real and the virtual, and indeed the local and the global, are being reinvented in everyday life'* (146). The capacity for us to define physical boundaries circumscribing the 'area' of an 'area-based curriculum', therefore, is also increasingly elusive and the 'local' may be increasingly considered as deeply embedded within global relationships and practices (Castells, 1992; Massey, 1998).

At the same time, the drive to create an 'area-based' curriculum also, in the UK at least, can conjure up associations with educational interventions and policies targeted at specific areas. In particular, the terminology may be reminiscent of policies such as the Education Priority Areas set up after the Plowden report, in which a policy of positive discrimination through investment in buildings, staff and action research in communities was intended to tackle persistent deprivation. Although not their intention at the outset, such policies came to be associated with a deficit view of communities and a psychological account of educational failure (passed down between families) rather than a structural critique of socio-economic factors leading to disadvantage (Smith, 1987).

The lessons from these initiatives, however, serve further to challenge our understanding of the 'area' in area-based curriculum: they require us to examine our assumptions about whether deprivation should be understood as associated with geographical areas, or with particular social groups; they require us to explore how the identification of factors contributing to disadvantage can be balanced with a recognition of the rights and worth of individuals experiencing such disadvantage. They also make visible the limits of educational institutions in, autonomously, effecting social change. As one of the participants in these initiatives argues about the lessons from the EPA:

'The key words in both Plowden and the EPA reports were 'community' and 'equality'. For realisation they had to be set in a viable theory of community and a realistic appraisal of the role of education in social change. In the early years of EPA and CDP attempts were made to forge a theory and to develop realistic views of the possibilities of social change through education. We learnt painfully that educational reform had not

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in the past and was unlikely in the future ever to bring an egalitarian society unaided. Plowden policies in effect assumed fundamental reforms in the economic and social institutions of the country at large. Given these reforms, which include the devolution of power to localities, democratic control by community members over national and professional purveyors of expertise in planning, health, employment and education, income and capital equalisation, coordinated employment policies and well planned housing and civic amenities, realistic demands can be put on the education system. The schools can be asked, in partnership with the families they serve, to bring up children capable of exercising their political, economic and social rights and duties in such a society. They can be so constituted as to socialise children in anticipation of such a society: but to do so without the wider reforms is to court frustration for individuals if not disaster for the social order.

We learned in other words the complexity of social policy for a rich, fair and educated society. We learned the limitations of unaided school reform. We learned the frailties of the connection between social science knowledge and political action. And we learned the limitations of area policies as distinct from policies targeted on individuals and their needs.' (Halsey and Sylva, 1987)

In developing a new area-based curriculum, therefore, the initial questions educators will need to engage with are, what theory of 'community' are we working with, and what role do we see education as playing in social change? These issues will be returned to later in the paper.

An area-based curriculum in the classroom

This section explores how both teachers and children already play an active role in shaping any 'curriculum' to local contexts.

Teachers as curriculum makers

The idea of an area-based curriculum positions schools rather than the national policy arena as the locus for curriculum design. As such, the idea can be located in the wider context of trends towards decentralisation of education policy and the wider debates over teacher professional identity (Elliot, 1998; Barber 2001). Hargreaves (2009) argues that we are moving towards a 'post-standardisation' era in education in which responsibility for curriculum design is increasingly devolved to more local levels. He argues that this is in evidence not only in the UK (where Key Stage 3 curriculum reforms and diplomas have opened up more opportunities for localised decision making) but in countries such as the Netherlands, China and Finland, where devolved curriculum making to schools has often led to a focus on what local communities think relevant, such as environment and technology (Sahlberg, 2007; Norris et al, 1996).

While such devolution has been heralded as offering greater teacher agency and motivation and increased diversity in curriculum offerings (Sahlberg, 1998/2007) in the UK, the potential consequences of teacher or school-led curriculum design are subject to significant debate and interpretation. There are those who see the pre-National Curriculum era (the last period in which educators had such freedoms) as a wild-west time of 'uninformed professionalism' where there was little rigorous analysis of the consequences of curriculum innovation (Barber, 2001). In contrast, others see this period as a golden age of curriculum design in which educators were able to tailor their teaching to the specific needs of their students and communities (Elliot, 1998). Thomson describes the debate:

> *'The English national curriculum replaced a long period of progressivist education rooted in school-based curriculum development, whose features included active experiential learning approaches, negotiated tasks, project and thematically based programmes, blurred curriculum boundaries, and the use of social realist texts and 'real work' examples (MacDonald and Walker 1976; Cunningham 1988; Evans 2005). These approaches were patchily developed and unevenly used across the country, and they (and their absences) were criticised for their incapacity to change the production and reproduction of educational disadvantage (e.g. Bernstein 1971; Jackson 1972; Corrigan 1977; Rutter et al. 1979).'* (Thomson & Hall, 2008)

The broad consensus today, however, is that a highly centralised standards-driven process of curriculum design is yielding little success in tackling educational inequalities and raising attainment (Hargreaves, 2009; Fullan, 2006) and that there is an urgent need

to explore how to re-engage teachers and schools in the process of curriculum design. The idea of a 'teacher-proof' curriculum is no longer seen as tenable:

> *'Those interested in curriculum matters and working with teachers […] recognise that the conditions teachers addressed were each distinctive. As a result, abstract theory would be of limited value. Each child needed to be known individually…each situation…was unique. It was a grasp of these distinctive features that teachers needed…to make good decisions in the classroom.'* (Eisner, 2002b, p381)

Such a response builds upon research that argues that curriculum design necessarily includes the teacher and is a 'multistoried process' (Olson, 2000). In other words, 'curriculum' cannot be seen as having 'impact' independently of teachers' actions, intentions and beliefs. Instead, curriculum is produced within the specific contexts of the educational encounter. As Goodson argues: the curriculum is always 'remediated into learning' and as such, attention needs to be paid to the role of the classroom itself as *'a powerfully mediating context for the message of curriculum and political economy' (134)*

Teachers' understandings, assumptions and beliefs have to be considered critical contexts in the creation and enactment of curriculum. The design of a new curriculum, then, rather than being an abstract technicist process comprising the 'simple' reorganisation of bodies of knowledge or a matter of institutional relationships, should more usefully be considered a process of professional development and cultural change (Stenhouse, 1975).

Indeed, there is now a substantial body of work that advocates for the centrality of the role of teachers as curriculum makers, supported to redesign education using processes of reflective inquiry, action research and collaborative development of teaching and learning (Craig and Ross, 2008). Strong traditions of teacher inquiry have developed, in which teachers participate in processes of design and reflection with peers and more publicly (see the Lieberman Carnegie project; Goldblatt and Smith, 2005; Lent and Pipkin, 2003). In the UK, the Schools Council, the early Nuffield Foundation projects, the Teachers' Centres (with a community focus) and the longstanding role of the Subject Associations, for example, have all offered precedents for models of teacher inquiry, and teacher collaboration.

These models of teacher-led curriculum design were also historically supported by Mode III assessment practices, which saw educators (and in some cases partners) able to work with exam boards to set and administer their own assessments with moderation provided by other teachers working for the same exam board (Torrance, 1982, 1984, 1986). These strategies of the 1970s and 1980s were reported by teachers to act as important tools to 'provide courses which make the most of local interests and resources' and to 'act as the vehicle for curriculum development in new or rapidly changing subject areas' (Torrance, 1982, 65). Some of the limitations of this approach include concerns that such school-based assessment would not have the same currency and status as other board-based

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examinations, and that, for it to be effective, significant staff resources are required. There is still sufficient evidence that this approach offers opportunities for teachers to craft curriculum around the local context to merit its re-examination in the context of aspirations to create an 'area-based curriculum'.

In parallel with a view that locates curriculum making as intimately connected with teacher development and understanding, is a view of curriculum design as oriented not towards detailed behavioural specification of learning outcomes but as oriented towards responsiveness to local circumstances and student development. Such a 'process model' of curriculum design actively resists the idea that educational outcomes could or should be predetermined, and presents the purpose of education as enabling students to generate meaningful knowledge rather than simply passively 'acquire' it. This model, commonly associated with the emergence of action research movements (Stenhouse, 1975 and Elliot, 1991a), challenges a view of education as transmitting abstract and reified knowledge to pre-determined ends.

This perspective has led to the promotion of educational practices that 'generate concrete knowledge about the local environment for community use'. While such approaches were most commonly associated with the Humanities Curriculum Project in the UK, they retain a legacy in the Environmental Education movement, in particular the ENSI project (Elliot, 1998). Their ideas can also be seen in the field of 'place-based education' (Elder, 1998; Orion 1998) which model a collaborative process of inquiry in which educators, students and communities develop curriculum in response to local needs, issues and concerns. More recently, concepts such as the 'knowledge creating school' (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 2006) premised upon developments in socio-cultural psychology and constructivist models of learning can be seen to be developing complex pedagogical theories to underpin and integrate with these curriculum-oriented interventions. Jaros and Deakin-Crick (2007) describe their 'archaeological model of learning', a programme that begins by an inquiry into a context and a process of researching and implementing projects related to that context in order to both make a difference in the environment and to develop 'values, attitudes and dispositions that interact with the 'living place' under examination'. The Curee review of curriculum reviews argues that, from a pedagogic perspective, such 'context based' learning, dealing with ideas and phenomena in real or simulated practical settings promotes student engagement (CUREE, 2007).

Such 'process' rather than outcome driven models of curriculum design are presented by advocates as fitting closely with the conditions of contemporary societies, the 'liquid modernity' of shifting standpoints, identities and knowledges (Bauman 2001). As Goodson argues:

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'so much of curriculum planning is based on prescriptive definitions of what is to be learnt without any understanding of the situation within the learners' lives. As a result a vast amount of curriculum planning is abortive because the learner simply does not engage'.

Instead, he argues, there should be a new specification for curriculum design that

'will engage with the life missions, passions and purposes which people articulate in their lives. Now that would truly be a curriculum for empowerment. Moving from authoritative prescription and primary learning to narrative empowerment and tertiary learning would transform our educational institutions and make them live out their early promise to help in changing their students social future' (134)

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.

There remain some doubts as to whether such professional identity is currently supported within UK schools and CPD arrangements. Storey (2009) for example, argues that whilst a framework of professional standards and performance management has been established, there remain significant failures in Continuing Professional Development to support such professional identities. Levin (2009), moreover, argues that schools are not well placed to act as research active institutions or to engage with research on a regular basis.

Recognising children's local knowledges

At the heart of discussions of an area-based curriculum is the idea that a focus on the locality of schools and communities will create opportunities to make a curriculum that is 'relevant' to children's lives and experiences and thereby enhance their engagement with learning.

There are a range of research traditions, however, that argue that students already attempt to draw upon their own local knowledges in making meaning and learning in the school setting. Indeed, there is significant consensus that learning is not possible without such connections being made by students between their lifeworlds and the world of schooling. Haas-Dyson's studies of children's literacy practices in schools across the US, for example, clearly express how the development of literacy is a profoundly social practice that is embedded in community and peer interactions. As such, practices of composing and writing are already and always 'hybrid experiences' in which:

'children must translate and transform cultural material across social relations (e.g. from peer play to individual display), across symbolic borders (e.g. from fast-paced movement

or audiovisual media to linear lines of print), and across ideological borders as well (e.g. different notions of what is a worthy text). In this way, development is about differentiating and expanding practices, symbolic tools and social worlds'
(Haas-Dyson, 2009)

Haas-Dyson, along with other researchers of literacy practices, describes the diverse forms of knowledge and literacy that exist outside the school setting (e.g. Barton & Hamilton 2000); and the ways in which schooled learning is always in (more or less productive) dialogue with such social and cultural contexts. Such research implies that the community and contexts of children's lives cannot be understood to stop at the school gates.

The critical issue for educators, however, is that only certain children's local knowledges and experiences tend to be validated in the school setting. As Thomson (2002) argues, all children come to school with 'virtual schoolbags' of experiences, knowledge and resources developed in their lives outside school; but only some children's schoolbags are drawn upon in the curriculum.

The challenge for educators, then, is not to initiate an engagement with local context and culture as if students were divorced from this environment, but to diversify the types of knowledges and sources of knowledges that are considered subject for valid inquiry and exploration in the classroom. In these perspectives, the challenge is not to introduce 'the area' into the curriculum, but to create opportunities to interrogate, compare and draw upon the multiple and overlapping 'areas' that different students inhabit out of school.

Such a perspective is particularly associated with the 'Funds of Knowledge' approach (Gonzales et al 2005; Moll et al 1992) in which educators enrich classroom practice by drawing upon the existing skills, abilities, ideas, practices and bodies of knowledge of minority students' households. This approach sees educators being trained in ethnographic methods of data collection; conducting analysis of knowledge and skills in students' communities and homes; reflecting on and analysing their existing school lessons; collaboratively experimenting with strategies to use community information in classroom instruction; and developing new curriculum that works with both the content and methods of students' homes and communities to inform school learning (Genzuk, 1999). Such an approach is more widely known in South American countries than in the UK, but is beginning to gain advocates here amongst researchers and practitioners.

Thomson & Hall (2008) for example, discuss arts-based projects in schools that can act as a means of creating connections between home and school worlds, and advocate an exploration of 'technologies' that create 'permeability' between the school and the home/neighbourhood worlds of children, technologies such as writers notebooks, sketchbooks, and artefacts from local cultural practices. Such technologies can be used as a focus for families and communities' contribution and additions to children's own work

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– with children drawing their environment, or families and parents contributing their own image, comments or sketches. According to Thomson & Hall, such objects 'offered the means of local knowledges and practices coming into the school [and] can be seen as a means through which funds of knowledge 'leak' into national curriculum space' (98).

The ESRC TLRP 'Home School Knowledge Exchange' project explored similar approaches, using shoeboxes to make visible children's out of school lives in the school setting (Greenhough et al, 2005). Morgan and Williamson (2008) report working closely with teachers across multiple disciplines in two schools over several years to build upon students lives as a basis for curriculum-making as part of the Enquiring Minds project. This process, too, promotes an inquiry cycle in which students are encouraged to develop a focus for collaborative research and investigation based on issues of personal or shared interest drawn from outside the school.

In reflecting on these studies their authors express both the real educational potential and the deep complexities involved in attempting to engage with the diverse knowledges of children's out of school lives and communities. For example, they express the difficulties encountered by some subject centred teachers in developing inquiry based approaches focusing on students' lifeworlds, as well as resistance by students to inquiry into their lives and interests and their understandable concerns about the purposes of such inquiry (Morgan & Williamson, 2008). Such doubts expressed by students require educators to think carefully about whether engagement with students' lived experiences in curriculum design is intended to 'empower them by offering them greater agency in their schools' or to appropriate their interests to 'serve the narrow ends of a grades-obsessed society' (Ruddock, 2000:82). These studies also flag up the risk that an engagement with students' knowledges and lives outside school can, in the context of a performative and individualised school system, come to be translated in practice into highly performative accounts of individualised experience that disconnect students' lives from their social interdependencies and impose false models of individualised 'personal narratives' presented for the purposes of grading and attainment (Thomson, 2008; Haas-Dyson, 2009).

These studies also flag up how much support teachers need to develop strategies for mapping and engaging with community knowledges – the process of engaging with communities and experiences outside the school walls does not happen naturally or easily, but must be supported (Gonzales, 2005). Levine (2007) discusses the difficulties that many educators may face in working with students to create meaningful knowledge and evidence that will enable students not only to develop the personal and social skills that are required by such activities, but also to develop understanding and insights that will enable them to participate in high status academic knowledge-based communities (such views are also echoed by others, such as Michael Young and Johann Muller, 2008).

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RSA Projects
Education

An area based curriculum across institutions

This section explores the research literature relating to schools' partnerships with other institutions, including other schools, local authority services, creative practitioners and local industry, all of which are likely to be necessary for the creation of an area-based curriculum.

Schools in partnership with other schools and public services

Partnership working between schools has been a dominant feature of educational policy discourse for many years now both in the UK and internationally (Higham & Yeomans, 2009). In the UK, partnership working encompasses diverse models: the Leading Edge Partnership Programme of schools mentoring other schools; the Specialist Schools and Academies model of schools working together around specialisms; the development of cross-phase school partnerships to deliver wider programmes of work; the new 14-19 diploma relationships to ensure provision of the different pathways; the development of new hard and soft federations of schools; and the 'families' of schools in the London and Manchester challenges (SSAT/DCSF 2007; Innovation Unit, 2008). Such partnerships lead to a diverse range of activities, including students attending courses across different schools and local colleges; joint post-compulsory provision across institutions; establishment of shared formal governance structures; development of cross-school VLEs; development of teacher groups to share practice across schools; development of mobile facilities and staff for teaching across diverse locations; engagement of employers to provide work placements and engagement in authentic tasks; development of online learning plans and e-portfolios (Higham & Yeomans, 2009).

The Every Child Matters Agenda, the 1999 Schools Plus report and the development of the 'full services school' model both in Scotland and the US, has also started to see schools working with a range of other public services in the provision of education and welfare services, with different services co-located with schools, or teachers and social workers working together to develop shared strategies at local and regional level. Such partnership working is intended to see schools play an increasing role in neighbourhood renewal strategies.

While a range of new partnership models are developing, and while there is significant policy rhetoric promoting the idea of partnership, to date, there is limited evidence and few models of best practice for educators and school leaders to draw upon in shaping new partnerships (Innovation Unit, 2008). As Cummings et al argue, there is 'an absence of agreed models of how such community-oriented schooling should operate'. At the same time, there are also competing directives from central government that can actively militate against partnership working by emphasising a competitive model of inter-school and inter-service relations (Lumby and Morrison, 2006; Cummings et al 2007). Indeed, in these analyses, institutional competitiveness is often seen to dominate 'even where a discourse of partnership prevails'.

The Innovation Unit's recent study of 16 'system leadership' projects makes visible the difficulties faced by educators and institutional leadership in attempting to break out of isolationist and autonomous roles. They argue that:

> *'Participants face big challenges in working beyond their own institutions. Much of the work currently being done is essentially to create the foundations for successful system leadership – putting in place the structures and processes that can make it happen[...] actually getting groups of schools to work closely with other organisations in the joint delivery of services for children and families in their locality is often slow and difficult'.*

Higham and Yeomans (2009) argue that, in the absence of best practice models, and without existing systems to support it, partnership working in local settings is '*highly locally contingent [...] as much the product of happenstance and improvisation as it is of strategy and tactics*' (20). They identify a range of motivations for participation in partnerships: technical collaboration based on contractual and strategic motivations; instrumental collaboration motivated by the need to satisfy external imperatives or to take advantage of funding; and committed collaboration involving the above motivations but also involving commitment by partners to shape partnerships according to their own values, aims and circumstances.

Schools in partnership with other institutions

An area-based curriculum will not only involve collaborations between schools and other providers of public services; instead, it is expected to draw upon the diverse resources of civil society and industry. Such aspirations have historical antecedents. In the early 20th century, for example, new relationships between formal education and communities were envisaged and built into the design of 'Village Colleges'. This approach, most famously associated with Henry Morris in the early 20th century, aimed to bring together all the diverse activities of a village to create 'a new institution'. This institution was intended to be 'organic' and to overcome the duality of education and everyday village life by combining these activities in one location, thereby creating institutions that citizens would participate in from 3 years old until their old age. The colleges were designed, for example, to allocate equal space to village activities and education, with space for workshops for local activities, a public hall, community sports facilities, a common room for local people, classrooms organised into two wings, with adult activities on one site and schooling on the other and the village hall in between. 15 colleges were opened in England before 1970. One is still in existence (Impington in Cambridgeshire). The schools all suffered tensions around governance, which is shared across educators and village representatives; but anecdotal evidence suggests that they succeeded in achieving adult involvement, student enrolment and improving the self-image of the community (www.infed.org).

More recently, the TVEI initiatives in the 1980s were designed to create opportunities for students to gain the skills and attributes of the post-Fordian worker and manager' (Griffith, 2000, p8) by enabling them to participate in authentic activities connected and embedded within local consortia. The skills that the initiative sought to develop are familiar '21st century competencies' such as: computer literacy, time planning, problem solving, ability to plan and communicate, and to construct groups for specific purposes. These initiatives were actively resisted by a tradition of liberal education committed to the 'accumulation of knowledge rather than the development of skills' (Griffith, 2000). The success of these initiatives, as with the success of teacher-led curriculum innovation with which such initiatives were associated at the same period is, again, contested. Some, such as Paul Black (1992) for example, arguing that it represented an 'extraordinary flowering of curriculum thinking and implementation' and others (Hargreaves (1989) and Ruddock (1986)) arguing that these approaches were insular and lacking in engagement with lessons from wider theoretical and historical traditions in education (Yeomans, 2002).

More recently, the principles of industry/school partnerships can be seen to be returning in the form both of ongoing 'work placements', in the work of many enterprise academies, and of more unusual initiatives such as NESTA's 'idiscover' project:

> *'The idiscover programme will work with pupils in five schools across Manchester, supporting and stretching their learning through a range of experiences provided by outside partners, such as Manchester's cultural institutions, the universities, businesses and voluntary organisations. Critically, the pupils will have the power, through a voucher scheme, to purchase these experiences based on their own aspirations, which NESTA will help them develop.'* (NESTA, invitation email to potential partners, 2009)

These approaches demonstrate innovation in the financial and institutional arrangements of education. They do not, however, approach the radicalism of school/industry partnership developed in previous historical periods to enable local or regional communities to better weather the storms and vagaries of international political and economic change. The educational initiatives of Ghandi, for example, were premised upon the idea of the school as a critical element of a village's capacity to counter the influence of colonial power. A curriculum designed around handicrafts indigenous to the locality was designed to favour the child from the lowest stratum of society and to enable the school to develop a financial independence leading to political independence premised upon co-operative principles. Such a curriculum was intended to support the teacher to have freedom to teach in the way he might wish without interference from the centre.

It is not only with industry, however, that schools might develop useful partnerships to enhance education. In the last two decades, partnerships between schools and arts

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educators have been the focus of significant support and investment. In the US, the influential Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) programme has, since 1992, attempted to harness cultural resources to effect significant and long term change in schools. The 'Champions of Change – the impact of Arts on Learning' report in 2002 (which evaluated the impact of the CAPE programme) demonstrated that 'sustained participation in arts-learning activities could be shown to have a major (and lasting) impact on young people's use of language, which in turn impacted on raising performance in other related academic and social areas' (Sefton-Green 2007). In the UK this programme led first to the creation of CAPE UK and subsequently to the development of the Creative Partnerships programme, a network of activities creating partnerships between schools and local artists and creative practitioners across 36 target areas of designated socio-economic need across England. It remains the subject of some debate, however, as to whether such partnerships really effect lasting change in school cultures; some researchers have suggested, for example, that teachers were 'unable to benefit in their own professional development from artists working in school' (Hall and Thomson, 2007; Hall et al, 2007). There is evidence that schools participating in such partnerships report improved attendance and engagement, and that there are some correlations with increases in attainment; a causal relationship from such partnerships, however, is notoriously difficult to demonstrate not least because the measures for the sorts of soft skills and competencies that the projects aim to develop are also notoriously unreliable and, arguably, inappropriate.

At the same time as schools are being encouraged to reach out to other partners, so too are institutions such as museums and galleries being asked to rethink their role and their relationship with local schools and communities. In the UK, the DCMS, for example, continues to promote collaborations between museums and formal educational institutions, with some success in breaking down barriers to participation and deepening relationships between museums and education sectors (RCMG, 2007). In the international arena, museum directors and museum educators are also fundamentally rethinking the role of the museum in contemporary society and some leading thinkers are arguing for a role for museums as agents in supporting communities to address pressing contemporary issues such as climate change and social inequalities (Janes, 2009). Others are responding to developments in digital technologies that enable the creation of a 'virtual museum' online presence by rethinking their understanding of the purpose and role of a physical museum. In some quarters, this is seen as an opportunity to create an emphasis upon the local, '*on what cannot be found or done somewhere else. It must put a premium on local culture, local practices, local experience. It must be firmly rooted in its local conditions, and use them to build a community commitment to the institution. The new media and the internet now allow our institutions to put the emphasis on local circumstance and local culture for the physical site – and global culture and global circumstance for the virtual site' (Bradburne, 2005,)* and innovative new projects

are emerging that begin to map out the features of these practices (Pahl & Rowsell, 2009; http://www.inganniadartefirenze.it/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=38).

Riley (2009/1998) however, cautions against the potential assumption that schools should build links only with the familiar 'educational' institutions of museums, galleries or industry and instead argues that educators need to engage with the complexity of schools' local communities, recognizing that there is not one 'single' local community, but multiple. In Riley's case, working in London schools, there was both *'the wider London context with all its rich resources and opportunities [including]* 'the mime art of Marcel Marceau, experimental music and theatre at the Roundhouse' and 'the school's local community' [including] East Street Market off the Old Kent Road in South London'.*

Projects like the 'urban leaders of tomorrow programme' described by Riley (2009/1998) make steps towards building strategic, embedded and institutional links between schools and communities through encouraging educators to design structured induction programmes that enable new staff to find out more about the school and its community context from the outset. Programmes that have been designed by educators in these initiatives include, for example, guided walks around the locality and interviews with children and young people about their lives. Such an approach begins to offer tools to foster dialogue between schools and their communities and to make visible the resources that communities can bring into their school. As Riley argues, this is a complex process that requires a rethinking of the assumptions that educators may have about their communities:

> *'It is important not to underestimate the difficulties of engaging in a very different dialogue and debate with communities. This goes beyond reaching out to help a community and is about learning from, and making better use of, existing resources in the community […] while the leadership implications of aligning schools and communities are largely unexplored in the literature, there is evidence to suggest that communities – including poor communities- are full of untapped resources that go beyond cohesive social relationships that provide caring support for children […] The assumption that all multi-ethnic cities have low social capital because of divisions and tensions is unwarranted. If communities have untapped resources, school leaders need to find out where and what they are, and encourage relationships that may help schools to gain access to them.'* (Riley, 2009:167)

In this way, Riley's research has resonance with the 'funds of knowledge' approach discussed earlier. Instead of rethinking school to create space for community knowledges, however, her approach implies seeing the everyday locality of the school and its multiple communities as in themselves sites and resources for learning.

An area-based curriculum and the community

Parents and communities as school partners

Apart from children themselves, parents are the most visible representatives of a school's local community. The involvement of parents in children's education takes increasingly diverse forms in today's schools, driven often by an awareness not only that parents are children's first educators, but also that the demands placed on schools are so great that education cannot be seen as the responsibility of schools alone (West-Burnham, 2007). The most well known and long standing partnership between parents, community and schools is probably the Reggio Emilia approach to primary years education, with its focus on a child as a person learning with and through a dynamic community of parents, community, peers and teachers. In this approach

> *'Parents play an active role in the school community, and children are encouraged to develop projects and areas of inquiry in relation to their environment. Children continue projects across home and school settings and are encouraged to express their ideas in diverse ways. Parents are seen as the first educators of children and as important partners in their children's education'* (Edwards, 1993)

West-Burnham, Farrar and Otero (2007) describe a range of projects that promote dialogue between parents and schools about their children's education, which include: a Swedish model of developmental conversations between child, teacher and parent; a project in the UK (Share) that promotes family learning closely linked to everyday life and situations; the 'Very Important Parents' days in east Manchester, in which different parents' roles and achievements are celebrated; the Effective Partnerships with Parents Association in Plymouth, Torbay and Devon in which parents-led teams recruit support and resources from the wider community.

They argue that such partnership approaches between parents and schools are most effective when led by parents' organizations themselves, and when they involve a shift from *'a system characterised by the school having 'power over' the parent, to the school and parent having 'power with' each other'*. This is echoed by Billet et al (2007, cited in Higham and Yeomans, 2009) who argue that community partnerships that emerge *out of* locally identified concerns are likely to lead to greater commitment and support. Grant (2008) also discusses the various ways in which family learning plays a role in children's education and argues that the relationship between parents, children and formal education needs to be responsive to the distinctive function of families as sites of care, rather than formal education:

> *'From the perspective of parents and children, families are primarily relationships of intimacy and love rather than educational institutions and successful family learning starts with and builds on this relationship rather than attempting to adapt it to formal educational purposes' (3).*

West-Burnham et al argue that the relationship between schools and parents should be built around a 'discovery conversation', premised upon the assumptions that:

- *'Wisdom, knowledge, skills and ideas are widely distributed in communities*
- *Everyone can be a student, teacher or leader where learning is concerned*
- *Both structure and space for creativity are required to progress thinking and actions*
- *Worthwhile learning relationships depend on a continuing exchange of ideas (92)'*

Critically, the evidence from existing research and projects does not imply that parents should be tasked with taking on the role of formal educators; instead, the aim of such partnerships should be to work with parents to understand how they might bring their own distinctive expertise and resources to bear in the school setting. As such, the challenge is not to harness parents simply to the existing goals of the school, but to enable educators to understand and engage with the resources that exist outside the school, and to engage with parents in a debate about curriculum design and purposes.

This process, however, may be significantly more difficult and contested for both parents and educators than is often acknowledged in the managerial discourse of 'partnership' and 'dialogue'; as Winkley (1987) argues, there may be fundamental differences in opinion about educational values and aspirations:

'It is not surprising that massive clashes of values can arise, and that radical blacks begin to ask for their own schools, the freedom to run, discipline, and develop them in their own ways. They have a case. The most powerful cultural clash is not between views about the history of colonial nations but a living dispute about how here and now we bring up our children.' (Winkley, 1987)

Riley, however, describes what might act as the basis for a reciprocal relationship of knowledge exchange between schools and parents:

'As a Year Group, we shared our understanding about our students, recognising that our Afro-Caribbean pupils were not a homogeneous group but came from many islands[…] We tried to understand where the culture and values of pupils born in London were at variance with those of their parents. We drew on our own experience of having worked in difference cultures. We also tried to make sense of the views and aspirations of the local white working class community. In response to a pre-Christmas truancy problem, we took ourselves to East Street Market off the Old Kent Road in South London, agreeing with parents that working on the market stall could improve the numeracy skills of their children but arguing, nevertheless, that there was something to be gained from encouraging their offspring to attend school. We worked to take that knowledge about pupils' lives into the curriculum and into our daily encounters and practices' (157-8) Riley 2008.

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Nichols, Nixon and Rowsell (2009) are developing complementary ideas with their 'ecological approach to analyzing neighbourhoods in relation to parents' networks of information about children's literacy and development'. The study uses Google maps to chart out key landmarks and to document where people go with children, to highlight areas with less access to information and materials and so forth. It takes:

- an environmental focus - artifact collection, mapping, visual documentation and observation
- an organisational focus – interviews with information workers, network tracing and artifact collection
- a family focus – ethnographic participant observation, interviews and artifact collection.

The relationship between school and community, in particular between school and parents, is also subject to debates on accountability. The dominant mode of accountability of schools to parents has been for many years a managerial mode of public accountability against uniform standards which often leads to post-hoc rationalisation rather than detailed description of what actually takes place in schools (Halpin, 1981). Alternative models of accountability have been suggested that build upon internal school self-reports, accounts of instructional strategies and the development of negotiated criteria between school and parent groups and partners. Such models are hard to conceive of in our current context of national examinations and national curricula, but Torrance (1984) made the case, drawing both upon the Cambridge Accountability Project (Elliot 1981) and analysis of Mode III examinations, that school-based examining might act as a focus for such negotiated critera and responsive accountability to local communities. Such an approach remains untested to date since the demise of school-based examining.

The community as democratic agent of educational change

So far, this paper has presented the relationship between schools and their communities as inherently beneficial. There are, however, tensions in this relationship. As Cummings et al (2007) point out in relation to their discussion of extended schools, the reality of 'community oriented schooling' is highly complex and politically charged:

'community-oriented schooling in general and extended schools in particular seem like common sense policy solutions to the practical problems of service delivery. However, this is not the whole story. Inventing 'new kinds of institutional responses' raises a whole series of questions: about how needs are defined, who defines them and which needs take precedence; about what sorts of interventions are likely to be effective and whether these are best directed at the level of child, family, or community; and, indeed, about what counts as the school's 'community' given the complex geographies of school

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recruitment (Crowther and others, 2003) and the equally complex nature of the relationship between place and notions of community. (Galster, 2001; Lupton, 2003)'

In their analysis (including interviews with over 350 professionals involved in moves towards extended and full service schooling) Cummings et al identify two competing understandings of the relationship between the school and the community. First, the 'school-oriented understanding' which *'sees the role of schools in relation to the communities they serve largely in terms of how that role can contribute to the schools' core task of teaching children – and, in particular, of driving up levels of educational achievement.' (193).* This sees schools focusing primarily on attainment and often sees the role of the school as necessarily and desirably 'insulating' children from disadvantaged local communities. If there is engagement with communities, it is about raising their aspirations from a position of dysfunction. The aim of schooling in relation to community, in this perspective, is to enable young people to gain qualifications enabling them to leave the community, until these communities are, in effect, no longer viable; *'put crudely, therefore, the role of the school was not to support, nor even transform local communities, but to be an instrument in their destruction'* (195).

Such a perspective, Cummings et al argue, is premised on 'a whole set of social, economic and political assumptions – that educational achievement offers a reliable pathway out of disadvantage; that the effects of family and community background on achievement can be overcome by the sorts of interventions that community-oriented schools can muster and that state institutions led by professionals with little local accountability are justified in making such interventions' (197).

In contrast, the 'community-oriented understanding' of school-community relations was, Cummings et al argue, less frequently articulated and less coherent. This understanding sees the school as *'a resource for local communities'* which should offer diverse services to local people and in which local people were seen to play a part in shaping the role of the school. Decisions, in this perspective, should be taken across schools, partners and communities and the model of the school as autonomous empire should be challenged. This perspective often saw schools as, themselves, a source of problems and an obstacle to truly collaborative work across a locality: *'schools are like a monster, they eat everything in their path, then spit it back out again…Schools are like a secret society. They make plans that involve others but the others are always the last to know. Others are used by schools for their own ends; they're self- interested" (Community worker – quoted p196).*

Community-oriented perspectives can also be seen to have resonance with ideas of a 'vernacular' education which are premised upon an analysis that sees professional education and formal curricula as undermining communities' confidence in their own knowledge and expertise (see, for example, Illich, 1975; Freire 1970). Such an analysis, particularly prevalent in Latin America, leads to attempts to create networks by which

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communities can come together to learn through dialogue or can encounter others offering expertise and education outside the formal educational setting.

A range of alternative educational initiatives are developing today in response to this analysis. They are premised upon the idea that wellbeing is produced not through the institutions of hospitals and schools, but through the individual behavior, social relationships, physical environments and economic status of neighbourhoods (McKnight, 1999). Such a premise has led to an approach described as 'Asset Based Community Development' that begins not by a focus on the deficiencies of a local area leading to the need for more professional intervention, but with a focus on the resources and tools present in the voluntary associations of each community as a basis for creating strategies for wellbeing. McKnight (2003) gives an example of the way in which such a premise might lead to new policy for public services:

Present Policy	Proposed (New) Policy
• Focus on deficiencies	• Focus on "assets"
• Problem response	• Opportunity identification
• Charity orientation	• Investment orientation
• Grants to agencies	• Grants, loans, contracts, investments, leveraging dollars
• More services	• Fewer services
• High emphasis on agencies	• Emphasis on associations, businesses, agencies, churches
• Focus on individuals	• Focus on communities/neighborhoods
• Maintenance	• Development
• See people as "clients"	• See people as "citizens"
• "Fix" people	• Develop potential
• Programs are the answer	• People are the answer

This perspective presents local communities as agents of change when 1. they are able to create their own future visions; 2. they are enabled to act to create those visions; 3. they are able to create connections and build links between their assets; and 4. they are able to care for their communities and individuals within them.

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An alternative although related perspective on local communities as agents of educational change is presented by the Education Justice Collective in the US, a partnership between universities, policy advocates, grassroots groups and local organizations (Oakes et al, 2009). The EJC is described as a 'social design experiment' which aims to '*support these groups' efforts to construct new knowledge about education problems and policy solutions and use research as a tool to inform and legitimise their participation as they increasingly sit at the tables where educational policy is made' (145).* This approach might be considered a 'deciphering' model of area-based curriculum (in Ladson-Billings terms) in that its aim is to challenge the ways in which educational policy and strategy serves to actively reproduce educational inequalities. One example of this, discussed by Oakes (2009), is the Californians for Justice research which '*redefined the problem of students not participating in HE as a problem of educational provision rather than failure of aspiration. Students of colour were systematically not offered the high school courses that they needed'.*

Such approaches, usually led by community organizations rather than from the schools, involves 'the actions of parents and other community residents to change neighbourhood schools through an intentional building of power' (Mediratta et al, 2002). The education research community is also beginning to reassess its roles in such endeavours as Giroux (2001), for example, calls on progressive educators to '*form alliances with parents, community organizers, labour organizations and civil rights groups'* to help democratize wider social structures. Such 'educational organising' (Anyon, 2009) aims to create social capital in communities and give parents a base for advocacy outside of the school to ensure that parents are not dependent on school personnel for approval or legitimacy. Such approaches have led, in certain cities in the US, to the building of new learning centres, the creation of mortgage systems that encourage educators to live in the communities that they teach in, the involvement of parents as reading tutors and mentors. These approaches, however, can suffer from their emphasis on the local without seeing the wider social and economic structures that can inform local education decision making. For them to be effective, it seems that they need to broaden their analysis to wider alliances across sectors and across regions to examine how it is that educational inequalities are structured (ibid, 2009). Working meaningfully at a local level, in this perspective, also involves locating the 'area' and the 'community' within the complex context of global, economic and information spaces.

Notes toward an area based curriculum

Teachers as curriculum makers

The development of an area based curriculum might usefully be conceived of as a process of professional development built upon teacher enquiry into curriculum aims in relation to a re-examination of the relationship between schools and their many local communities. The challenge of an area based curriculum, from this perspective, is to equip educators with the tools to inquire with students into the relationships between teaching and learning, community and curriculum and to explore the development of schools as sites for production of meaningful knowledge about and with their communities. Those wishing to encourage such approaches, however, will need to develop practices of reflection, action research and engagement with research literature that are under-developed in the current education system and institutions.

Building on students funds of knowledge

The inquiry into students' funds of knowledge has a significant prior history from which educators can draw in designing an area-based curriculum. Such prior history emphasises the importance of educators developing strategies to come to know about and build upon the local skills, knowledge and expertise of students. Such prior history also makes visible the extent to which such approaches are profoundly challenging within current institutional, curricular and professional arrangements in schools, as they require a rethinking of the types of knowledge that are valued in the classroom, the teacher identity and the relationship between teachers, students and communities.

Developing partnerships with local schools and public services

If partnership working is to be supported between schools, significant local authority support is required; new governance structures may need to be developed; institutions' and individuals' 'calculated self-interest' need to be taken into account as important motivating factors for partnership; and local contextual factors (geography, history of collaboration, local cultural traditions and labour market) need to be understood to play a role alongside opportunistic responses to funding calls and challenges in creating the conditions for partnership. Moreover, partnership working between institutions needs to be understood as dynamic, with different forms of collaboration emerging over time. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to building partnerships in different places, but there is a need to recognise that there are major obstacles for educators interested in collaboration, not least because of the competing imperative towards competition.

Building on the strengths of civic and community expertise

Despite its long history, the relationship between schools and external organizations is only poorly documented in the research literature. Such literature and practice as exists, however, implies that potential partners such as museums and galleries are also currently rethinking their role and seeking to build greater partnerships with schools, and that

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approaches from schools are therefore likely to be welcomed. It also implies that partnership with external organizations in curriculum design can lead to innovative approaches to educational design and provision, which are able to motivate and engage students. Such approaches can enable cultural change in organizations particularly where supported by bespoke assessment strategies and where educators are also enabled to take time to learn from and reflect upon their own practice in the light of alternative models offered by external partners. There is also significant potential benefit in the mapping of non-traditional sites that can act as educational resources within communities, but which historically might not have been considered as such. Such sites can provide insight both into the context of students' lives, and into new pedagogic and curricular strategies.

Distributed leadership with parents

Parents have an important role to play in developing an area-based curriculum, not only in the role that they play as co-educators with teachers of children, but also as sources of alternative pedagogies, as partners in curriculum design and as informants about the resources of local communities. The relationship between schools and parents is likely to be most successful when parents are not asked to take on the role of formal educators, or simply to transmit schooled practice into the home, but where parents can be seen as partners leading initiatives, sharing their expertise and insight into the local area and setting agendas. If such relationships are to be meaningful and to transcend familiar managerial discourses of 'partnership', however, then both educators and parents will need to create space to identify sources of conflict between parents and schools and to explore divergent opinions about educational aspirations as a basis for respectful and shared development of educational strategies.

Challenging assumptions about the function of schooling

The literature in this area requires a fundamental examination of the locus of decision making in the creation of an area-based curriculum. It requires us to reconsider whether an area-based curriculum is best led by schools or by other institutions in their communities; whether its purpose is to enhance attainment within existing metrics, or to create an understanding of and strategies to tackle the educational inequalities that persist in all areas today. It requires educators to ask how they might form alliances with other groups to inquire into the ways in which education might also *produce* educational and social inequalities – inequalities that are produced not only through curriculum but through wider economic and social practices. In so doing, it makes visible the moral and ethical choices involved in defining the relationship between schools and communities in different ways and asks all of those interested in creating area-based curriculum to address the question – for whose benefit is this curriculum being designed?

Reflections

At its heart, the concept of an area-based curriculum requires a re-examination of the relationship between schools and their local communities. It opens up the possibility of engaging with local communities as a strategy for a significant re-imagination of educational institutions – from governance arrangements to funding, from curriculum to teaching and learning strategies. Taking 'the local' seriously can offer opportunities for new educational resources, for collaborative partnership, for new forms of accountability and responsibility, and for the development of expertise that will both enhance and unsettle the educational practices of schools. Taking 'the local' seriously, however, might lead to the unintended consequence of schools reducing the quality of educational offering to the level of their expectations for groups living in areas that they see as disadvantaged and disempowered.

At the heart of the development of an area based curriculum, then, needs to be a theory of community and a theory of educational change in relation to that community, which is shared through meaningful dialogue and debate between educators and the communities that they serve. Educators and others wishing to embark on such a programme will need to learn to live with both the enrichment and discomfort to current assumptions that such a process will bring.

RSA Projects

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Notes

Context for the paper

This paper forms part of an overarching review of the RSA/Manchester City Council 'Manchester Curriculum' project. This project comprised collaboration between the RSA, Manchester City Council and three secondary schools to explore how an area-based curriculum might be developed in the city. The first pilots for the project were completed in summer 2009 providing new insights into the processes by which educators and schools might build relationships with local organizations.

The basis for the paper

This review of literature and projects was tasked with providing a broader context for the Manchester Curriculum project and was intended to identify evidence relating to other initiatives with similar aspirations. Given modest time and resource allocation, a systematic literature review could not be conducted. Instead, the author drew upon prior experience of research in the field and recommendations and references from educators working in related areas to build the corpus of literature and projects. Searches were also conducted on the ERIC database, the EPPI database, on the contents of the Journal of Curriculum Studies, Journal of Curriculum Inquiry, and the Curriculum Review from 2005-2009. The lack of currency of the term 'area-based curriculum' makes a targeted search problematic, and in many cases the inquiry needed to be revised to the correspondence of terms 'local' and 'curriculum' in paper keywords and titles.