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Published version

TRICKEY, S., HOLLAND, M. R., COLDWELL, M. R. and RYBINSKI, D. (2004). Evaluating teachers' and trainers' development in a large scale curriculum development project in South Yorkshire. In: Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, UMIST, Manchester, 16-18 September 2004.

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Evaluating teachers' and trainers' development in a large scale curriculum development project in South Yorkshire

Paper presented to the Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, UMIST, Manchester, 16-18 September 2004

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Introduction

The evaluative research upon which the paper is based focuses on the first three years of a six-year project "Pathways to Success" (PW) currently taking place in South Yorkshire and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the Objective 1 programme from 2001-2007. Matched funding has been provided by schools, colleges and LEAs. The PW project is concerned with developing innovative curricula to raise achievement and improve youngsters' employability skills. The project is set in the context of regional regeneration in an area where unemployment is higher than the European (and national) average, due to the decline of traditional steel and coal industries and where the gross domestic product is less than 75% of the European average. South Yorkshire is also an area where overall achievement in schools at all stages is lower than the national average and participation in post-16 education and higher education is persistently below national figures. Although employment is slowly rising due to reorientation from manufacturing towards a service and knowledge-based economy, pockets of severe unemployment and deprivation remain and are among the ten worst in the country.

Pathways to Success is a partnership programme across four Local Education Authorities - Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. It is also a partnership between the LEAs and a wide range of providers: 76 secondary schools, 15 special schools, six local colleges, over 30 training providers, several voluntary and community organisations, employers and examination boards. It is significant that this is the first time the four LEAs have worked together on a project of this scale (about £56m, drawing on £28m from ESF through the Objective 1 programme).

The first 3 years of the project 2001-2004 contained 3 strands - Key Skills, Enhanced Curriculum, and Re-engagement with Learning.

Key Skills funding has supported initiatives in schools to offer curricula leading to KS awards at entry level and levels 1, 2 and 3 in the six KS areas (communication, application of number, ICT improving own learning and performance, problem solving and working with others). Disadvantaged and

disaffected pupils have been supported to undertake Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards: Bronze, Silver and Gold which involve undertaking challenges (often on visits or residential out of school) and programmes of study where key skills are identified and targeted. For some youngsters, including many in special schools, Key Skills certificates or ASDAN awards are their only accredited achievement, so are particularly important.

Enhanced Curriculum is about supporting and developing vocational provision post-14, which includes supporting the new range of specialist (vocational) and hybrid GCSE courses, new NVQ programmes at levels 1 and 2, link or taster courses between schools and colleges and existing GNVQ programmes. Initiatives have also been supported by the Increased Flexibility (IF) Programme, funded by the Learning and Skills Council. The Programme has been recently evaluated by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2004). PW and IF funding have helped to reshape many schools' curriculum provision post-14 and some of the delivery of vocational courses, e.g. catering, engineering, construction, leisure and tourism takes place in local colleges or in a training provider venue offsite.

Re-engagement with Learning funding has supported the development of flexible curricula and learning experiences at KS 4 for pupils who are unlikely to benefit from the full national curriculum. Many schools have identified a discrete group who spend 1-3 days, or longer, per week at a training provider, a company or college. Generally such pupils have an individual learning plan (ILP). During these placement days pupils meet others from other schools and gain a mixture of training and vocational experience. Many are working towards appropriate qualifications e.g. a foundation certificate or an NVQ level 1. These pupils typically undertake core national curriculum work in English, mathematics, science, ICT and other compulsory subjects back at school, though occasionally this is delivered in a college, for example, in the Workstart scheme in Sheffield. They cannot always be integrated into other classes so teaching may take place in a dedicated Learning Centre which can provide individual support with the help of classroom assistants or learning mentors when necessary. There are over 30 local training providers, employers or agencies providing curriculum experiences offsite, ranging from horticulture to beauty therapy.

Overall, funding has been used in each strand for specific staff training to meet new curriculum challenges, accreditation and the development of active teaching methods to motivate and engage learners. Related to that is support for meetings and conferences in each of the 3 strands and the setting up of curriculum interest groups (such as in Health and Social Care and Leisure and Tourism) across the region. Funding has also supported pupils on offsite visits and courses, the production of resources and provided coordination and management posts.

In other parts of Britain there are similar 'Pathfinders' projects using short-term funding streams which also support flexible curricula at 14-19 which have been evaluated (DfES, 2004), but South Yorkshire has been particularly

fortunate in gaining substantial funding over 6 years. This is the first time European Social Funding has been used to support education in schools anywhere in Europe.

Pathways to Success is timely as it coincides with and reflects the Government's Green Paper *14-19: Extending opportunities, raising standards* (DfES, 2002) and the subsequent consultation paper *14-19: Opportunity and excellence* (DfES, 2003a). The curriculum for young people at Key Stage 4 is developing in ways that will, potentially, offer more flexibility and be more responsive to pupils' individual needs. Delivery of this new, flexible curriculum has meant increased collaboration among schools, colleges, training providers and employers so that a wide range of education, training and accreditation opportunities are available to the full range of young people 14-19.

Evaluation

A team from Sheffield Hallam University has been responsible for evaluating the success of the programme and our findings reported here regarding teachers and trainers' development refer to the data collected during 2002-2004. The evaluation is based on the evidence gained from

- interviews
- visits to schools
- observation of meetings, training events and conferences
- observation of pupils' learning experiences in school and offsite
- analysis of quantitative outcome measures.

About 65 staff have been interviewed which include LEA coordinators, school vocational coordinators, classroom assistants, learning mentors, administrative staff, college 14-19 curriculum managers and training providers. Six visits have been made to 15 case study schools where a group of 9 representative pupils, 3 from each strand, were tracked over a period of 2 years. About 20 training and staff development events such as meetings, whole or half-day training sessions and conferences have been observed in each of the three strands, and pupils' experiences observed both in lessons and offsite with training providers and employers.

During the first year of research we reported on the implementation phase of the project, considering management issues and teachers' perspectives (Holland et al 2003). We have extended our work to include a consideration of the pupils' voice (Holland et al 2003) and barriers to providing effective vocational education (Coldwell et al 2004) and are now investigating the impact of the project on the professional development of teachers and trainers. The data presented in this paper are drawn predominantly from interviews conducted around issues of staff development with staff in the case study schools and LEA coordinators, and from observation of training events.

The extent of training

As explained earlier, regular events have been arranged across the region by LEA coordinators and sometimes locally in each of the strands. These have taken the form of training sessions on planning new curricula, developing active teaching methods to motivate pupils and sharing good practice. Curriculum interest groups have been established in all the eight 'new' vocational areas to discuss curriculum schemes or develop resources such as videos and CD ROMs. The eight 'new' vocational areas (corresponding to the new specialist GCSEs) are art and design, business, engineering, health and social care, ICT, leisure and tourism, manufacturing and science. For example, one group has produced a CD ROM on a local interactive science centre. There are also specific interest groups such as an ASDAN networking group. Regular regional meetings have reported on progress in the implementation of new ideas and finance. Well-attended conferences in each strand, and sometimes across strands, have enabled teachers and support staff to discuss government policy, disseminate good practice and be made aware of other agencies which could help in curriculum development. In addition, sessions have been organised in conjunction with the major examination boards to discuss moderation and new assessment schemes. Training has also been conducted within some schools in small groups, working with individual departments.

Table 1 shows the number of teachers who have attended regional events, attendance by teachers being one of the targets specified by the funding agency. The number of teachers involved in training has approximately reached the ambitious targets set.

Table 1: Outputs and targets in South Yorkshire

Strands 2000 - 2003	Target set for Dec 03	Total Dec 03
Key Skills		
Teachers and other professionals trained	1,500	1101
Enhanced Curriculum		
Teachers and other professionals trained	400	413
Re-engagement with Learning		
Teachers and other professionals trained	150	450

Reaction to training

Training has generally been welcomed and well received; it proved essential for schools without a long association with vocational pathways. One senior

teacher noted that *'the additional training has expanded the understanding and skill level of staff in relation to new vocational qualifications and assessment regimes'*. Another commented that *'staff training has been central to the successful delivery of all components of this project'* and one reported that *'key staff have been trained in strategic planning'*.

A personal comment from a teacher who had attended a training session on key skills was *'I am not experienced in key skills, hence it as good to see how they could complement work experience'*. Another teacher found it was helpful *'to see examples of level 1 and 2 portfolios and [get] suggestions for portfolio management.'*

Impact of the project on teachers and trainers

We note from our interviews and observations four main effects on teachers and trainers as a result of project funding:

- 1. Greater involvement of teachers in collaborative activities**, partnerships and networking, both with like-minded professionals in other schools, or the LEA, or with trainers in training organisations
- 2. Changes in the subject orientation of teachers** to meet new vocational opportunities
- 3. Changes in the professional role of teachers** given their newly-found ability to manage and deliver flexible curricula, free from the constraints of the national curriculum
- 4. New ways of involving support staff**, whether classroom assistants, learning mentors, staff from other agencies such as the Youth Service or administrators, in helping to manage and deliver new learning experiences.

1. Collaborative activities

Many teachers have discussed with us the 'new' ways in which they are collaborating with other teachers in a similar curriculum area, or with college staff, training providers or other organisations or agencies such as the Youth Service or Connexions. Collaboration takes time and effort yet many see the need very clearly. It seems that teachers are starting to develop professional learning communities, one of the aspects of the 'new professionalism' advocated by Andy Hargreaves, where teachers work together in collegial teams (in this case across the region and with other professionals) on improving teaching and learning, using evidence and data as a basis for informing classroom improvement (Hargreaves, A., 2003). For example, in one area, a consortium of schools and a college are working with a partly shared 14-16 curriculum. One school works with a local music business to run an ambitious popular dance event. Pupils gain communication skills in taking roles in marketing and planning.

Again, according to Sachs (2003), the framework of new or '*transformative*' professionalism involves (among other attributes) cooperation to '*break down individualism and isolationism*' both internally, where collegiality and

conversation provide a means for professional learning and development, and externally, where collaboration provides an opportunity to learn from and with others outside the school (Sachs, 2003: 30). These comments reflect the ones made by David Hargreaves (1994) almost a decade earlier who wrote that '*the new professionalism involves a movement away from the teachers' traditional professional authority and autonomy towards new forms of relationships with colleagues, with students and with parents*' (Hargreaves, D., 1994, p.424). Writing more recently, Hargreaves has gone on to argue powerfully for a sharing of *intellectual capital* by schools to improve school effectiveness - *knowledge, skills, capabilities, competences, talents, expertise, practices and routines* - and mobilising a school's *social capital* - the extent and quality of its networks both within the school and with external partners (Hargreaves, D. 2003, p 25). Again, this seem to be taking place in South Yorkshire as teachers are considering and planning vocational alternatives to the curriculum and coherent vocational routes 14-19 with partners. But without additional funding this process would have been much slower.

This discussion adds another dimension to the debate around whether teaching is in fact a profession. This is not the place to rehearse the arguments in detail, but it is appropriate to mention that although teaching as a profession is non-problematic for The General Teaching Council (GTCE) who have drawn up, among many other documents, a Code of Professional Values and Practice (GTCE), not all educational writers and thinkers regard the occupation that teachers belong to as truly 'professional' as not all criteria are met in extant definitions of a 'profession'.¹

2. Changes in subject orientation

Some teachers have effectively been retrained to meet the demands of delivering a vocational subject with which they are not completely familiar. Among our case studies is one teacher who taught history and geography to GCSE and is now preparing to teach the specialist GCSE Leisure and Tourism. Another teaching GCSE Design and Technology is taking on specialist GCSE Engineering from September 2004 when the college input ends. An English teacher is moving to Performing Arts and a PE teacher to Health and Social Care. Some teachers have adapted their skills to meet new challenges, for example, language teachers now offer language learning in real and simulated business contexts, such that over 150 students in Sheffield are currently studying to gain a minimum NVQ level 1 in reading, listening and speaking in French, German and Spanish.

This is not a new phenomenon; teachers have had to adapt their roles in this way since the introduction of GNVQs in schools in the early 1990s. However, the vocational slant is now becoming more widespread and systematic, and is impacting on many more teachers as the range and uptake of vocational qualifications increases.

¹ For definitions of a 'profession', see, for example, Moore (1970) and Freidson (1986) and for discussions of teaching as a profession, see Hoyle (1974, 1980), Carr (2003) and, more recently Winch (2004).

Schools have decided to retrain their own staff on the grounds of efficiency (easier to operate entirely within the school staff than liaise with someone outside the school), effectiveness (some schools feel staff learn better from colleagues rather than from outsiders) and cost (the charges for delivery of curriculum inputs by colleges and training providers has doubled over the last 2 years). Is this willingness of teachers to be retrained and the personal effort involved further evidence of teacher professionalism within continuing professional development (CPD)? Many would agree claiming that this is an example of individuals responding positively and 'professionally' to support the school in changing circumstances. After all, the GTCE states that *'teaching is a learning profession and teachers are committed to continuing professional development (CPD) throughout their careers'* (GTCE). This is an attractive notion, but we should note that technicians, para-professionals and vocational employees (all terms which are sometimes used for teachers) are also often retrained and often retraining is similarly undertaken in response to changing needs.

3. Changes in teachers' role in delivering flexible curricula

Much has been written about the loss of teachers' professional freedom and identity and deskilling since the Education Reform Act of 1988 and the implementation of the prescribed national curriculum. But the professional role of teachers is changing once again as the introduction of a flexible curriculum has provided more opportunities for teachers to claim back some of the autonomy lost by following the national curriculum, widely perceived as not meeting the needs of a significant proportion of learners. We have noted that some teachers are gaining or regaining entrepreneurial skills in arranging interesting alternative experiences for disaffected youngsters to keep them on track. In some schools we have visited up to 20% of the pupils in Y10 and Y11 are not following the national curriculum for up to 3 days of the week. Instead, they are engaging in vocational activities outside the prescribed subjects, attending courses or training at colleges and training provider venues, or undertaking work-based learning with employers. This practice once needed a formal request for 'disapplication' by schools from teaching some national curriculum subjects other than statutory core subjects to provide alternative curricula. But from 2004 disapplication is no longer required and schools are encouraged by the DfES Consultation Paper, *14-19 :Opportunity and excellence* (2003a), to *'tailor programmes to individual needs and aptitudes'* within a more flexible 14-16 curriculum. Full implementation of the proposals will be possible by legislation by 2005 (DfES, 2003b).

4. Working in collaboration with support staff

Para -professionals, other agencies and administrators play a large part in many schools in the delivery of the curriculum. Learning mentors and classroom assistants support individuals or small group of pupils in Learning Centres. Consequently they develop strong personal relationships with learners and are sometimes the first point of contact for a pupil when problems arise. They often accompany pupils on trips to offsite providers,

engage with other agencies such as the Youth Service in organising activities and visits and relate to some learners almost every day .

Some administrators are fully engaged in the management of alternative curriculum arrangements which go far beyond record keeping and financial management. They may participate in visit planning meetings; they may contact parents to gain permission for offsite visits and taster days; they ensure that forms are filled in accurately; they ensure that pupils are informed of their examination timetables and check that they turn up to the right tests at the right time. Flexible curriculum arrangements have engendered a huge growth in administrative work; on any one day there could be 20 or more different programmes for individuals and groups operating, with consequent extra demands on monitoring and record keeping, apart from managing the financial arrangements with providers.

All this has meant a release by the teacher of many jobs which were once the teacher's prerogative. Again this is an example of a change in professional role. The teacher has to accommodate and manage the activities of a wide range of para-professionals. Sometimes a school has up to 20 learning mentors or other support workers.

There is perhaps a note of caution with respect to this new requirement for teachers to work alongside a range of staff from a variety of backgrounds. Some teachers may feel distanced from or even threatened by these new 'para-professionals', who are highly skilled at developing strong personal relationships with pupils, are on first name terms, and who take a different stance in relation to the children compared with teachers. They may, for example, sometimes act as a confidant or advocate.

This brings us to a final issue. In the future teachers may well be working more closely with another range of public, private and voluntary organisations, e.g. social services, family policy, teenage pregnancy, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services , to support children in a 'joined-up' way when the proposals in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003c) are implemented. It is becoming apparent that a key area of professional development is learning to work more closely with other support workers in a community much wider than the closed 9 to 4 world of the traditional school.

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