

PREMATURE EVALUATION? MEASURING THE IMPACT OF NEW COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the development of the New Community Schools (NCS) Initiative in Scotland and reports on attempts to evaluate the early stages of NCS in partnership with one local authority. We then consider the issues and tensions which have arisen for integration managers across Scotland, the individuals charged with operationalising this initiative in most local authorities, and who are under considerable pressure to demonstrate progress against outcome measures within a very short time frame. We argue that, at a local level at least, conventional evaluation frameworks are unlikely to work because they cannot account for the changing patterns of practice, knowledge and relationships required by this radical initiative. We outline the new kinds of thinking required to enable this radical initiative to be evaluated and consider the usefulness of the framework of social capital to evaluate the new networks, norms and knowledge created through NCS.

INTRODUCTION

The New Community Schools Initiative (NCS) in Scotland was launched in 1998 as part of a Governmental strategy for promoting social inclusion, raising achievement, encouraging collaboration among professionals and increasing civic engagement. Attempts to evaluate progress so far have been constrained by the narrow outcome measures against which judgements require to be made and by the pressure to do this within a short period of time. In this paper we report on our efforts to evaluate the initiative within one local authority and compare our own experiences with those involved in the national evaluation and with local authority integration managers charged with 'delivering' the outcomes. We explore an alternative framework for evaluating NCS as sites for the production of social capital (Coleman, 1997; Szretzer, 2000; Field, *et al.*, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Althusser (1994) reminds us that the future lasts a long time; the reworking of evaluation which we propose here could, we suggest, open up a space to identify the kinds of consequences of NCS which are meaningful to those most directly involved.

THE NOVELTY OF 'NEW' COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The emphasis in Scotland on promoting social inclusion rather than tackling exclusion was a deliberate feature of Scottish policy and is reflected in the creation of a Scottish Social Inclusion Network, in contrast with Social Exclusion Unit within the Whitehall Cabinet Office. The key feature of NCS is the focus on the child and his or her family, addressing needs 'in the round' (SOEID, 1998) through integrated service provision. Local authorities across Scotland were invited to bid for funding to support projects which met the criteria outlined in the Scottish Executive *Prospectus* and specified the outcomes which would be achieved. The response of one local authority was to generate sustainable ways of working which support children, their families and community to achieve their full potential, consolidating its existing policy and practice.

In Phase One of the initiative (which began in April 1999), local authorities across Scotland focused on developing New Community Schools within a single school or in clusters, with 37 projects being undertaken within 30 local authorities. A further eight projects began as Part of Phase Two in October 2000. Phase Three has involved the roll-out of the initiative to schools and services across Scotland.

Investment by the Scottish Executive in the New Community Schools Initiative has totalled over £57 million.

EVALUATING THE INITIATIVE: HOW DO WE MEASURE OR HOW WE KNOW?

The outcomes identified by the Scottish Executive, against which the success of all New Community Schools will be judged, relate to:

- Raised attainment
- Attendance and exclusion
- Improved service integration
- Improved learning
- Improved social welfare
- Improved health.

These measures are important, but, within time scale of the pilot phases of this initiative, it is difficult to find evidence of progress in these areas. There may be evidence of improved service integration, based on reports from the professionals concerned and by examining initiatives which involve inter-agency working. However the measures do not enable us to say much about how this integrated provision is experienced by children, families or locals or about the impact of closer working practices on, for example, learning or health. The detailed guidance which the Scottish Executive has provided on the kind of evidence relating to particular outcome measures is seriously off the mark in many cases. For example, one indicator of inclusion, it is suggested, is a reduction in the numbers of children with Records of Needs. This is clearly of little use, since it is likely to reflect the policy of recording of a particular authority and in no way provides evidence of the existence of inclusive practices. Concern with measurement emphasises proving rather than improving and these performative frameworks create an imperative for fabrication by those under scrutiny (Ball, 2000). Perhaps more importantly, it detracts from the question which needs to be asked order to make a judgement about the impact of NCS: how do we know if it is working?

The current climate of funded research has seen a series of compromises, for example in relation to methodology, theory and connections with policy, which have been forced by structural changes in the research economy, through for example shortened research contracts and narrowing of focus in line with current policy concerns (Stronach, *et al.*, 1996). The outcome-led nature of educational initiatives has shaped evaluation research into a narrow focus on short-term impact, with pressure to establish indicators which will produce evidence, however tenuous, of an initiative's effect. This has left researchers frustrated by having to conduct research which is uninteresting and which has to be done under increasingly restrictive conditions. Pole (1995) notes how this constrains researchers to function as technicians, merely fulfilling the sponsors' agenda, yet Stenhouse's (1994) approach to funded research of working with double aims, the researchers' and the sponsors', seems unlikely to engender trust or develop mutual understanding. The radical nature of NCS allows for a reframing of the evaluative process which is acceptable to both the sponsors and the researchers. This involves rethinking the kinds of knowledge to be obtained, the nature of the research relations and the forms of analysis to be developed.

A national evaluation of NCS, commissioned by the Scottish Executive and carried out by researchers at the London Institute of Education (Sammons, *et al.*, 2003), has attempted to measure progress within the Pilot phase against the Scottish Executive outcomes. There is a great deal of informative evidence, such as the finding that increased support and closer interagency working for vulnerable children

helped to keep them in school, and the outcome of progression to further education for some youngsters experiencing vocationally based educational opportunities. Nevertheless, the evaluators were acutely aware of the constraints under which they were functioning and commented ruefully that improved attainment, attributed in both their survey and case studies to NCS, was evident in schools across Scotland and for schools in later phases of NCS. The research team also made the observation that it was simply not possible to evaluate some aspects of NCS:

Engaging all parents, including those of the most vulnerable pupils, was seen as a long-term task by NCS participants and did not sit easily with the three-year timescale of the NCS pilot (p. i).

The evaluators made use of Kendall, *et al.*'s (2002) framework to distinguish between levels of impact. Consequently, they were able to report significant first level impact on resources; some second level changes, such as involvement in other initiatives and progress towards health promoting schools; and the beginnings of third level changes to outcomes for the target population through Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) and initiatives aimed at fostering the engagement of pupils, parents and the community (Elliot, *et al.*, 2002).

Within one local authority, a series of local evaluations has taken place which has taken account of the NCS outcomes, but which has also sought to probe some more complex questions about this initiative and to explore alternative forms of analysis. The phases of the local evaluation are outlined below.

THE PURPOSES OF NCS: PHASE ONE OF THE LOCAL EVALUATION

Phase One of the New Community Schools initiative within one particular authority established a 'brand new' New Community School from three existing primary schools and their services. Initially, this was a 'virtual' new school, with a new name, but with the physical building to follow some time later. An evaluation of Phase One was completed in January 2001 (Mannion, *et al.*, 2001; Nixon, *et al.*). This research focused on the purposes of the initiative (from the perspectives of locals and frontline professionals), the nature of integrated working practices and the impact of these on those involved. The research also sought to identify the distinctive features of the authority's approach and how this had affected participation. A range of service users and providers — children and young people, parents, other adults, managers and other professionals — were interviewed individually or in groups.

The evaluation of Phase One highlighted some common understandings among professionals and locals about the purposes, but different emphases on what was most important. Professionals emphasised that:

- NCS should provide an integrated service that places the child's needs first
- All professionals should develop shared values and integrated practices but should respect the distinct responsibilities for children's needs of different professionals
- NCS services should address the needs of all children but also respond to those in greatest need
- There should be a local response to the government imperative to improve attainment in literacy, numeracy, information technology, and social inclusion.

Locals emphasised that NCS should address the issues of social exclusion and community development directly, by:

- Dealing with the drug culture, vandalism, unemployment
- Improving the local infrastructure, including housing, child care, play areas

- Meeting teenagers' and children's needs for leisure and learning activities
- Addressing tensions between the schools and residential areas and the threatening environment experienced by children.

We viewed our role as evaluators as bringing these contrasting purposes to the attention of the authority and trying, in subsequent discussions, to prevent closure or the subjugation of the locals' voices by the more voluble professional discourses. The Council was presented with a series of binary 'tensions', not for resolution as either one or the other, but as openings for discussions about the kinds of decisions they might make, and the consequences for all concerned.

Tension 1: Prevention <—> Cure

While service providers may aim for more universal provision or take on a more preventative approach, the needs of those most 'at risk' will continue to require attention. The professionals' comments raise questions about how priorities should be established – a problem echoed in health and education as well. Given limited resources, what will professionals do more or less of: prevention or cure?

[We] have a role whereby I want to support and empower people, but I also have a role whereby I have to protect children (welfare professional).

[We need to] get back onto issues of prevention (inter-agency professional).

Whilst some professionals saw these tensions as pulling them in opposite directions, others envisaged multi-agency working as enabling both strands of activity to be tackled more effectively:

There is a core of business that we will continue to have to do... there's also the scope for us to become part of a, to become involved at an earlier stage as part of a consultation, a multi-professional consultation (welfare professional).

Tension 2: Traditional Schooling <—> Community-based Lifelong Learning

'Traditional' views of what a school can offer construct learning as an activity that is 'located' in school buildings and is structured by teacher inputs and a timetabled day. The lifelong, community-based, approach sees learning as a holistic practice for all that takes place in a variety of locations and times. Professionals and locals alike emphasised the importance of NCS in stretching traditional boundaries and looking beyond the school, to the wider community:

Well, it shouldn't be just about education for the children. It should be the heart of the village and there should be education for adults, everybody involved, you know? (local).

The lifelong learning agenda was advanced by professionals, but the emphasis on basic skills for school pupils was also given a high profile:

We're not just equipping people with education, qualifications. Lifelong learning would entail parenting skills, teaching people to manage money, preparing them for day to day [living] (professional – education).

I also think that the emphasis that the government has put on numeracy and literacy is appropriate. I have no problem with that, these are *sine qua non*'s for youngsters in terms of life chances... I think having clear targets for core skills matters (professional – education).

The school's role as provider of basic life skills for young people and as an organisational centre of learning within the community need not be incompatible. However, teachers appeared to voice this tension in role direction most clearly. Their

position meant they often experienced the pressure to ‘deliver’ higher attainment levels while also realising they could, in collaboration with others, help respond to children and families’ needs and a wider community development agenda.

Tension 3: Providing a Service <—> Encouraging Independence

The language and ideology of service provision and service use gave rise to mixed messages about user autonomy:

We do have a strong independent group of elderly people living [in the area].

They’re so independent that they’ll not take up help from benefits agencies or anything like that, ... a lot of them are just ‘no, I’m not having the means test’ (local).

[Some people] don’t have a sense of independence ... if they don’t have to go out and take a pride in what they want to do and somebody else is just laying it on a plate to them, you become a kind of just a zombie type (local).

Because services are ‘provided’ in certain ways, people may be required to adopt a dependent role. Instead of engendering independence in a person or community, the process of service provision may reduce people’s capacity for self-help and self-belief. These comments explore the possibility of shifting the responsibility for the flourishing of a community away from professional-user dependency relationships:

It would be nice for us to make ourselves [the professionals] redundant through encouraging people to take on and work towards improving their lot in the areas where that is possible (professional – community development).

I see the community schools empowering communities to actually set up their own groups and their own facilities... You know, you can get families that stay in the system for so long that they expect [the professionals] to do everything for them (professional).

Some individuals, however, saw the notion of empowerment as complex and portrayed themselves as creating the circumstances for enabling people to exercise their professional and community responsibilities:

I cannot empower anybody... I want to create the circumstances in which people can exercise their professional or community responsibilities by seeking empowerment (professional – education).

These tensions point to a wider policy disjunction in which NCS, whilst located within Scotland’s social inclusion strategy, is caught somewhere between the divergent tasks of promoting *inclusion* and tackling exclusion. It has been increasingly recognised in order to address inclusion, it is necessary to simultaneously tackle exclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 1995) and that the relation between the two elements is a highly complex form of cultural politics (Slee, 2003). It appears, however, that the divergence and complexity of the two processes has not been accommodated within policy frameworks and practices; as a consequence, professionals also find themselves caught somewhere in the ‘in-between’ forced to perform activities aimed at promoting inclusion against markers concerned with reducing or removing aspects of exclusion. The Council officials recognised that these tensions may not be capable of resolution and sought to keep the space for debate open by revisiting the purposes of NCS.

EXTENDING NCS: PHASE 2 OF THE LOCAL EVALUATION

Two evaluations were carried out over the Phase 2 period. The first of these (Duffield and Allan, 2001) addressed the extension of the New Community Schools to the complexities of the secondary schools, and because this involved a significant

devolving of responsibilities to a local level, we examined the effectiveness of the local management and of the strategic management within the authority. Data were collected in this phase through interviews with headteachers of six primaries, three secondaries, one nursery school and four nursery classes; with professionals in health, social work and community services; and by participant observation of management meetings at Council and 'cluster' level and of staff development activities. Phase 2 was extended to include two clusters of secondary schools and their associated primaries, nurseries and services; a third secondary cluster was brought in for the purposes of staff development following a decision by Elected Members. The second evaluation of Phase 2 (Duffield and Allan, 2003) set out to investigate specific examples of changing practice and also focused on strategic and local management of NCS. Data were collected via interviews with members of management groups, observation of meetings and specific initiatives, and analysis of documentary evidence.

Both evaluations of Phase 2 contained some hard messages for the local authority about what amounted to a lack of confidence on their part. Having devolved responsibilities, together with a substantial budget, to local Executive Groups, attempts by the local authority to retain some control or to overrule certain decisions were, in our view, 'problematic' and we invited senior local authority personnel to consider the mixed messages they were sending to professionals and locals. We also highlighted the limited engagement of the community in this initiative thus far, whilst acknowledging the progress made with professionals and in relation to addressing the needs of children and families holistically.

In making these criticisms, we have stressed the long-term nature of the initiative and the need to use the evaluation formatively: to know how to go on. In this regard, we have encouraged the findings to be read tentatively as in the early stages of the formation of social capital and this is explored at a later point in this paper. Dialogue about the findings continues, with both parties seeking to find a balance within the evaluation process between developing understanding, responding to the very real pressures of performativity, and ensuring the dissemination of findings did not discourage the further development of this initiative.

INTEGRATION MANAGERS: 'RULED BY THE MADNESS'

In all but one of the local authorities across Scotland, integration managers were appointed to oversee the establishment and operation of NCS. These individuals have mostly been seconded from posts in education, community education or health. The authority whose initiative we have been evaluating took the decision not to appoint an integration manager, opting instead for a more sustainable form of support from an existing consultant. This individual's role, however, has many similarities with that of the integration managers.

Detailed discussion of approaches to the local evaluation of NCS took place in three workshop sessions at a day conference organised by the Scottish Executive Education Department and led by us. The event was addressed to integration managers, but the 44 local authority delegates representing 32 of the 37 NCS projects in Phase 1 included a number of headteachers and other professionals associated with NCS, such as a community development officer and an educational psychologist. Six members of the Scottish Executive were also present. The workshop discussions focused upon existing local evaluations associated with NCS projects; methodologies for effective evaluation; the problem of understanding the extent of NCS success; and the role of multi-agency working in achieving and assembling evidence of that success.

Evaluations of component activities, although 'patchy', were being widely carried out, using a variety of agencies and approaches. Some integration managers used general terms ('staff complete evaluation and outcome sheets on all activities'), but specific examples included:

- a local social audit in progress under a ‘rural challenge’ initiative
- using a company to evaluate breakfast clubs from the pupils’ perspective, by collecting responses to 20 positive statements
- pilot work with some families: what contacts they have had in relation to NCS, what impact an NCS information leaflet has had
- consultation with children, parents, teachers, and the local multi-agency team, using an approach based on a video, *Planning for real: involving local people*, which was lent out to families
- data from health visitors, school nurses, looked after children and other sources
- a questionnaire to all P3s and P6s about health education aspects such as tooth brushing and smoking
- a Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) questionnaire, run by youth workers visiting schools, collecting evidence about young people’s lifestyles.

While one manager considered evaluation to be ‘the weakest part of the programme’, the workshops revealed some careful attention to data collection methodologies. The use of youth workers in the SIP questionnaire was seen as important; non-school personnel familiar to the pupils were thought to be effective at eliciting full and candid answers. Another survey was carried out by community education students while on placement. Response to the health education survey was low, and officers regretted they had not piloted the questionnaire. Elsewhere, video evidence of a play co-ordinator at work would provide some of the soft data that workshop members reported as necessary. ‘Peer data collection’, ‘collective diaries’ and ‘feedback case studies’ were briefly mentioned as data sources. Focus groups of ‘kids on the street’, approached by theatre group members, were used to try to assemble indicators of self-esteem.

A small number of authorities had made approaches to academic researchers to support the design of an evaluation or to act as consultants and others welcomed the notion of a ‘critical friend’. However, analysis and interpretation of data to arrive at overall understandings of the success of NCS were seen as problematic. Integration managers acknowledged that they were ‘struggling’ to collate data from interagency sources. One issue raised by the managers in two different workshop groups was the three-year timescale, seen as too short a time to see and assemble evidence of the kinds of change indicated by the broad aims of NCS. More than one referred to periods of years for full service schools in the United States of America to be linked with an impact on local crime or drugs figures. One manager ‘felt wrong footed by stories about the national evaluation – it felt like a headlong rush [with] no baseline data’. Managers were concerned at ‘the speed of the project’ when realistically, they were ‘talking about change over a generation’. Another person claimed that NCS seemed to be:

ruled by the madness of the end of the financial year; key factors for achieving target results were the performance of clerks of works or plumbers (integration manager).

Anxiety was expressed about the pressure to collect baseline figures. Integration managers argued that ‘rich information’, which might be more ‘significant and useful’ was what evaluations needed: ‘not just numbers’ but something designed to produce ‘95 percent understanding and 5 percent judgement’ unlike school inspections which were seen as the reverse:

I am worried about looking for figures especially at this [early] stage;... the crux is understanding what is going on. It might take a long time, but there

are outside factors, for instance when 5–6 particular teachers retire there could be a dramatic drop in exclusion rate (integration manager).

It was acknowledged, however, that progress towards measurable targets was part of the current imperative. A headteacher attending the event commented that:

we try not to be obsessed by targets but we are put on the spot (headteacher).

Another speaker suggested that raising attainment was the overriding purpose of the NCS initiative, a stance at odds with the headteacher who saw raising self-esteem as crucial. The problem was identifying appropriate benchmarks.

In one authority, some referral times for particular services had fallen from months to just four weeks over the first year of NCS and this was judged to be important evidence of success. Another authority found that a new procedure for special needs support made no difference to the families concerned but was significant for therapists and a range of other professionals. Another authority was drawing up a matrix of target criteria from the complex areas involved in NCS, and identifying them as of high, medium and low urgency so that priorities would not be distorted. A manager expressed the aim of developing ‘sustainable post-NCS indicators’ so that experience during a three-year initiative would be taken forward towards ‘generational change’ in persistent social problems.

The contribution of the integration manager was one aspect that was difficult to evaluate:

The role of the integration manager is complex: they are generally invisible and happy to act as a catalyst, but then they are not seen as instrumental... They are in a relatively powerless position, especially with the headteachers. Relationships up [to senior local authority and health staff] are less problematic, they can exert influence, but they are still placed under considerable pressure to demonstrate effectiveness (integration manager).

There were territorial and cultural issues that had to be resolved:

Part of the task is to tackle a lack of respect for other people’s professional background. The culture in schools regarding how teachers treat each other, never mind other professionals, has room for improvements. We were speaking about these issues thirty years ago but it has not been resolved (integration manager).

NCS professionals must all value each other, that is common sense. We’ve started recording everything, including relationships between a headteacher and community worker. The headteacher now values everything she does, through working together. It is not inter-agency for its own sake; joint working is essential to the purpose of NCS (integration manager).

Members spoke of ‘getting teachers on board’ with the NCS approach; this would take time, but the problems could not be solved by schools alone. The question was raised of seconded NCS development workers in schools; SEED found the dependence on temporary social work or community development staff ‘worryingly large’. One authority had tried out joint student placements of social work and education and, while not wholly successful, it had been a valuable way of working through problems. The general view of the purpose of evaluation was to deepen understanding of the complexity of the NCS process, avoiding blame among participants. Establishing a clear focus about what was being evaluated would, it was argued, be more worthwhile than piling up evidence about a long list of outcomes.

Estimating the overall extent of NCS achievement, establishing the ‘bigger picture’, would depend on untangling the NCS contribution among a raft of on-going changes and initiatives. Some individuals thought that such analysis would be a waste

of effort as long as progress towards broad objectives could be demonstrated, while others emphasised the importance of finding out why change occurred. One problem would be communicating and reporting the extent of success or failure to different audiences. A key aspect of NCS success was 'changed working to develop a real integrated service' (integration manager). There was agreement that it was important to be able to demonstrate progress in NCS, and evaluating ways of working rather than outcomes alone would be one way of doing this.

The integration managers experienced the same pressures of undertaking short-term evaluation as the national evaluators and we, at a local level, did. The integration managers, however, appeared to be the individuals most manifestly trapped in the space in between promoting inclusion and preventing exclusion and caught in a web of surveillance (Foucault, 1977) which forced them to audit rather than evaluate. In Elliot's (2001b) terms 'colonisation through audit fosters pathologies of creative compliance in the form of gamesmanship around an indicator culture' (p202) and create substantial mistrust. We turn now to an alternative way of evaluating and knowing which may be more appropriate for NCS.

NCS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

NCS are intended to have a positive impact on learning, achievement and inclusion, through a series of complex processes, such as changing the way professionals work together or the ways in which children learn. Sophisticated forms of analysis are needed to try to account for these changes and to examine the impact on individuals and communities. The framework of social capital (Coleman, 1997; Szreter, 2000; Field, *et al.*, 2000; Putnam, 2000) may be of value in helping to specify the new relationships and knowledge formed through this initiative. Here we offer some tentative thoughts on the relevance of social capital to the analysis of NCS.

Social capital is distinguished from physical capital by Putnam (2000):

By analogy with notions of physical capital — tools and training that enhance individual productivity — the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value... Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals — social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (pp18–19).

Coleman (1994) points out that whereas physical and human capital are a private good, social capital is a public good, benefiting all those who are part of a structure. Field (2000) indicates social capital may come from a wide range of sources, including home, school, workplace and voluntary associations, and a key sign of extensive social capital is an abundance of relatively weak ties, rather than a few embedded and strong ties which differentiate among individuals and groups (Szreter, 2000). The balance between 'embeddedness' and 'autonomy' in social relations (Woolcock, 1998) is also a significant factor in the development of 'good' social capital. Education is viewed both as a key factor in the creation of social capital and one of its important outcomes (Halpern, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

There are, however, some negative aspects of social capital which limit its usefulness as an analytical tool. The most significant of these concerns the empirical measures which attempt to aggregate individuals' involvement in a range of civic and political activities and which are then used to infer levels of community engagement. As Harper (2001) contends, collective social capital cannot be identified merely by adding together the social capital acquired by individuals. A second problem with social capital is that, as a neo-Liberalist perspective, it ignores power and the structural inequalities created by it (Woolcock, 2001). Other criticisms levelled at social capital include a failure to recognise the significance of its 'downside' as an exclusionary mechanism (Field, 2000; Elliot, 2001; Harper, 2001) and a lack of theoretical specificity about

the links between social capital and better government (Harper, 2001). Whilst these amount to substantial limitations, they do not negate the value of social capital for helping to understand and document community growth or decline.

NCS can be viewed as sites for the production of social capital. The integration of professionals' work can be made possible through quite particular types of networks based on reciprocity and trust. But NCS should not only focus on networks of professionals but on the possible contributions family and communities can make. Evaluations must be wary that different forms of social capital can include or exclude:

You can build the most sophisticated network of services you like in a community school but unless the people that are having to use them understand how they get services from it, you're still wasting your time and just creating a different bureaucracy, albeit another well-meaning one, it's still a bureaucracy that's very difficult to get through (Local, speaking during pilot phase 1).

'Good' social capital, in NCS's terms will maximise communicative equality (Szreter, *ibid*); promote networks between professionals and community members, enhance communication and learning and minimise social exclusion. Empirical evidence of social capital would specify the extent to which NCS activity supports and enhances social capital in terms specified by all stakeholders. One example of this might be the extent to which staff development opportunities, such as work shadowing and action research, create new professional networks, new solutions to problems or new knowledge about being a professional. Another example relates to children's engagement in personal learning plans and other forms of decision-making and its impact on the learning process. The kinds of outcomes sought extend beyond empirical evidence of 'progress' (which imply deficit thinking) and seek to obtain evidence of the nature of the engagement (for example in the ways the pupils talk about, and participate in, learning) and the teachers' responses to this engagement.

The analysis of NCS within the framework of social capital is still in its very early stages, but points to growth in relation to three key aspects of the initiative.

Enhanced networking by professionals from different services and, most importantly, a strong commitment to the norm of multi-agency working. It is too early to say whether the professionals have acquired new knowledge about service provision, but understanding the perspectives of others is likely to take professionals towards a more holistic conceptualisation of the health, education and social care needs of children and their families. Even early on in the development of NCS, commitment to work shadowing was bearing fruit in terms of reciprocity, trust and connectivity:

My feedback from the work shadowing is that generally people did not have a lot of knowledge about what other professionals did – where they were coming from, what their responsibilities were, where the limits to their responsibilities were. And the trust thing – I think there has been a fairly low level of trust across certain services like teaching, social work, health visiting to some extent and there have been huge gaps like with, with clinical psychology and child psychiatry where the knowledge base has been almost non-existent. People have been shocked to find out what social workers actually do. They had no idea of the complexity (welfare professional speaking after year one of the pilot phase).

One of the limitations to multi-agency working, identified in the evaluation, has been the ways in which health and social work professionals are assigned to particular 'cases' of individual children. They may have some contact with teachers and other

professionals in relation to a 'case', but little more general contact. The concept of 'children in need' has been criticised as emphasising weakness and deficit (Tunstall, 1995; Moss, 2001).

Improved learning: NCS has sought to change how children learn and a number of initiatives have given children greater control over their own learning, including pupil consultation within Pupil Councils and Personal Learning Plans. There is a danger that these are merely tokenistic and more concerned with practical and material matters, rather than with pedagogy. Providing opportunities for children to shape their own learning experiences will be an important source of social capital, but it is a lengthy process which requires a full commitment to listening to, and acting upon, what they say. Social capital offers a heuristic tool for exploring the role of parents and communities in children's learning. When viewed through the social capital lens, NCS offers the potential for new learning spaces to emerge and to be 'networked' into school curricula and vice versa. Informal, inter-generational, inter-school, out-of- and after-school, work-related learning initiatives are examples of what could be evaluated in terms of social capital generation. These are, however, the very spaces wherein the tension between lifelong learning and the more time tabled school-based approaches (see Tension 2, above) is created and potentially resolved.

Social Inclusion: This is perhaps the most complex area in which to find evidence which might count as progress, but social inclusion should be concerned with the engagement of members of NCS and their sense of belonging and connectedness to other people. The evidence from local and national evaluations points to considerable success in involving a range of professionals in NCS but there has been a limited engagement so far by members of the community in this work. This is not intended to be seen in a negative light, but merely as the 'next step' for NCS to take in the long journey towards civic engagement. Evidence from other studies suggests that the generation of more numerous weak ties can be significant (Field, *et al.*, 2000). The emergence of weak ties between and among professionals needs to be complemented by opportunities for connections between professionals and service users as well as among different sectors within communities. Working through the tensions between 'providing a service and encouraging independence' and 'prevention versus cure' (see Tensions 1 and 3, above) will be critical here.

And really difficult children in need, and in complex need, cases are [ideally] being worked, not by one caseworker separately — not by the health visitor separately and the social worker separately and the community worker separately — but that that child has a team and the team of people are working together with mum and dad and big sister and granny and whoever, over a short period of time to identify the problem, resolve the problem and then back off (Professional, NCS management).

Social capital has been dismissed as the latest fad (Harper, 2001) or as a limited theory with popular appeal. Its usefulness here has been to begin to articulate an alternative commentary, by identifying areas of growth and important changes in how individuals live, work and learn together. The outcomes still have to be met, but social capital may help to identify what these measures might mean in practice to various stakeholders and to enable them to look to the long-term consequences. The collection of data on emerging forms of networking, norms and trust will enable different kinds of narratives and insights to be generated from those provided from audit-oriented evaluation.

LOOKING FORWARD: WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR NCS TO SUCCEED?

As local authorities have entered into the roll out phase of NCS, there has been clear commitment to the sustainability of this initiative, or at least to the principles of

promoting social inclusion, raising achievement, improving collaboration among professionals and increasing civic engagement. In this final section drawing on our own evaluation experiences and those we have reported on here, we offer some conjecture on what might be required for NCS to succeed.

The community

It may be a truism that New Community Schools should have the community at the centre, but this cannot be taken for granted and there needs to be a willingness to engage the community at all levels of the decision-making process, rather than as a luxury to be achieved once the professional structures and mechanisms are in place. 'Putting the community into New Community Schools' was identified by the local authority as a new slogan as it attempted to take this initiative forward; the evaluations suggest that this aspect will have to be worked at assiduously. The data suggest that we need to be watchful of the generation of more abundant weak ties within and among professionals and locals if true inter-agency working — inclusive of the agency of locals — is to bear fruit.

Support for professionals to change practice and thinking

Secondly, there needs to be an effective system for ensuring staff can undertake the radical changes in their practices and their thinking, that take them out of their immediate professional boxes, to enable them to see the bigger picture, the perspective of other professionals and of 'service users'. Staff development programmes which require inter-agency working and which facilitate networking will inevitably help, but these professionals have to be supported in ways which enable changes in thinking and practice to emerge.

Responsibility and accountability

The New Community Schools initiative involves devolving responsibility for certain decisions to individuals and groups and, of course, there has to be some accountability. It is, nevertheless, important to see this devolution of responsibility as a learning experience for all concerned and to recognise that the inevitable mistakes are part of the material to be considered instructive, rather than as evidence of where blame might lie.

Trust

Central to this is trust; it is difficult to relinquish control, particularly of something as tenuous as NCS, but which also has such high stakes associated with it. An ethos of trust, which assumes that people, professionals and service users alike, will make well-intentioned decisions, even if these are not always the best ones, will be essential.

Openness to children and young people

The foregrounding of children and young people in legislation and policy has created an imperative that their voices are heard. But this has to go beyond symbolic representation of children and young people on local authority committees and pupil councils, where they may have little more than a physical presence. There has to be a commitment to acting upon what the children say, however discomfiting or disruptive that might be.

'Joined up' working from Government

Despite the directives coming from the Scottish Executive about collaboration among professionals and integrated service provision, they have yet to achieve this

themselves. There are many examples of the fragmentation of policy and practice which act as a barrier to the development of the New Community Schools. These include the separatist mentality of departments looking after health, education and social care, disjunctures between policies of social inclusion and inclusion (of a narrowly defined SEN population). There is also dissonance between policies which emphasise inclusion, and the target setting imperative which acts as a disincentive to include more challenging pupils. And there is the presence of an inspection process which seems rigidly inflexible and which is administered by individuals who do not seem to have time to notice the bigger picture in their haste to tick all their boxes.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE LASTS A LONG TIME

The New Community Schools Initiative has the potential to provide a localised solution to the global ideal of communitarianism. Alternatively, it could be just another half-baked plan which only compounds the ‘policy hysteria’ (Stronach and Morris, 1994:4) of several already beleaguered professions. Returning to Althusser’s reminder that the future lasts a long time, perhaps the crucial ingredient for the success of NCS will be patience.

As evaluators, we have been positioned in a relationship which a local authority which has been, at times awkward, but always reciprocally instructive. While the SEED indicators have forced attention on outcome measures and have enforced an audit-oriented approach to evaluations, we have also been able to explore processes. Neither audit nor our approach is sufficient in itself; rather we need a much more imbricated relationship between process and outcomes and between approaches to promoting inclusion and tackling exclusion. We also need to find new ways of speaking about inclusion and exclusion that acknowledges the *in-betweenness* or movement between the two states and allows for fragmentation and contest. Throughout the evaluative period, we have become increasingly aware that NCS does not necessarily have an end point and share the conclusion of the national evaluators that it has thrown up fundamental questions about the nature of inequalities and how they should be addressed. It has also generated a context for futuring which will be in the hands of professionals, community members and children and it is the impossibility of knowing what they will decide which makes this more than simply one more initiative.

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