The Educational Priority Area Project forty years on. ‘If at first you don’t succeed, you [still] don’t succeed’

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Historical context

The Educational Priority Area (EPA) project 1968-71 was an attempt to apply positive discrimination strategies to areas suffering from multiple, social deprivation in order to identify strategies that could impact on the causes of educational underachievement. This paper will apply a historical lens to the two projects in the north of England, Liverpool and the West Riding mining villages of Conisborough and Denaby Main, to consider their legacy for contemporary attempts to develop the educative relationship between home, school and community.

When the Plowden report (CACE 1967) offered its findings at the beginning of 1967, the call for EPAs was its number one recommendation (CACE op cit 436). Chapter five, penned by Michael Young, called for the use of positive discrimination to overcome the persistent underachievement of pupils living in the poorest urban areas. Although the use of this policy approach never completely disappeared the election of a Labour government in 1997 once again placed area-based social and educational policy centre stage, initially in the shape of Education Action Zones and more recently in Children’s Centres. This re-emergence offers an opportunity to consider the continuities and discontinuities between policy and whether an ideological tradition exists in this field.

The poverty index used to measure deprivation and underachievement today is far more sophisticated than it was in the 1960s but the rationale used by the Plowden Committee is ostensibly the same and if one looks at current statistics many of the communities targeted as priority areas in 1968, remain amongst England’s most deprived (Noble, Wright et al. 2004). So, forty years on the existence of educational underachievement remains and as Halsey pointed out, ‘the problem at all stages is [and remains] to integrate school and life’ (Halsey 1972). The sociological studies of the 1960s identified the fact that as an educative influence, the immediate home environment carried a far greater weighting than the school (Floud and Halsey 1961; Douglas 1964) in determining a child’s likely educational attainment. What Plowden recognised was that the school formed a focal point for the community and, provided radical change in the structure of home-school relations could be achieved, the life chances of children could be improved. The present government, without any mention of the pioneering work of the 1960s, has returned to this goal, though as will be discussed below, in a very different context. In his foreword to the recent Children’s Plan, Secretary of State Ed Balls stated,
More than ever before families will be at the centre of excellent integrated services that put their needs first, regardless of traditional institutional and professional structures. This means a new role for schools at the centre of their communities.

(DCFS 2007)

It is for this reason that the focus of this paper will fall on the pioneering work in home-school relations of the EPA teams. The reason for investigating only the two northern EPA projects\(^1\) is that they were the only two projects to make real progress in this aspect of the projects aims\(^2\). A cursory reading of the Halsey report (Halsey op cit 1972)\(^3\) indicates the extent to which the innovative work of these two teams dominated the EPA project as a whole. In outlining their progressive approach to the home-school dynamic the two other distinctive and interrelated features of the EPA project will be illuminated. First, the extent to which they were able to generate links built not on a deficit model of working class families but on a real sense of partnership. Second, the important part played by the personal qualities of key individuals and their pedagogical and political philosophy in achieving these partnerships. A philosophy based on the belief that a child-centred approach to learning was essential as was the pursuit of fraternity, liberty and equality. This historical account of the EPA project, based on the recollections of those taking part and the evidence they left behind and indeed took with them to future projects, presents the teams in a very positive light when compared to contemporary policy. EPA strategies will be analysed in order to consider their impact, the impact on their authors and the continuities and discontinuities with the policy repertoire of today. The EPAs can be seen as innovative since aspects of their work were genuinely ‘novel’. It is uncertain whether the same be said of recent area-based initiatives (ABIs) such as Education Action Zones (EAZs) and Excellence in Cities (EiCs) or the Neighbourhood Nurseries initiative (DFEE 1997; DFEE 1999; Smith 2007b).

The EPA project was born into a markedly different political context than that which has helped to frame Labour’s ‘Third Way’ and it is this broad picture that allowed the EPA teams, albeit over a generation, to have such a profound impact on practice. Franklin and McCulloch direct us back to the nineteenth century and the nature of professionalism that developed amongst English schoolteachers. The laissez-faire and voluntarist attitude of government during the century led to a tradition of teacher professionalism, ‘rooted in their [teachers] acknowledged freedom to develop and manage their own curriculum’ (Franklin, Bloch et al. 2004) So when the Blair administration chose EAZs as part of their policy strategy they failed to recognize that, ‘partnerships cannot challenge the grammar of schooling’. They, ‘underestimate [d] the accepted managerial and pedagogical practices of educational settings…’and could not, ‘escape from inherited attitudes and structure’ (Franklin et al op cit 102).

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\(^1\) Michael Young, author of the chapter on EPAs had hoped for a national policy but had to accept action-research projects in Dundee, Liverpool, West Riding, Birmingham (Balsall Heath) and London (Deptford)

\(^2\) The four objectives of the project, agreed nationally were, to raise educational performance, improve the morale of the schools, increase home involvement and generate a sense of community responsibility.

\(^3\) Halsey had given strict orders that nothing should be brought into the public domain by individual teams until volume one was published. The deadline was tight and George Smith wrote the vast majority of the WREPA report in 30 days, writing 3000 words per day, every day. No mean feat in the days before the word processor and pocket calculator.
Partnerships need to be assessed in their historical context - i.e. the social, cultural and political history of the country involved. In this case there was a different attitude to funding during the 1960s. EPAs were based on public funds but, ‘EAZs promoted a mix of private and public and whereas the LEA were a key player within the EPA they were excluded from the equation altogether in EAZs’ (ibid 100). This contextual difference was highly significant and allowed EPAs the ability to manoeuvre themselves into a very strong position in order to meet their objectives. Therefore, an assessment of the EPAs should start with the national and international context, politically, economically and pedagogically. From here we must consider the local context as an ‘enabler or impediment’ of change (Kerckhoff, Fogelman et al. 1996). The Liverpool and West Riding areas were chosen partly because they met the criteria for classification as multiply deprived but also because their LEAs were receptive and willing to offer the teams a secure berth. Finally, we must consider the extent to which the right people were in the right position at the right time. For example, how important was it that George Smith (following completion of his MPhil under Halsey and six month stint with the OECD preparing a review of compensatory project work in the USA, prior to the EPA launch) was probably the most knowledgeable person in the country regarding strategies for combating educational underachievement? Before any assessment is attempted a brief overview of some of the project’s home-school innovations is presented.

Breaking new ground in the LEPA and WREPA

Schools in Colour

In Liverpool Midwinter decided on a strategy whereby a ‘package’ of support was presented to the seven linked primary schools. Each school would work with the team on a curricular, parental and communal or outgoing experiment. To engage parents and to raise their awareness of what schools were doing the team developed different publications with pupils and teachers, including school magazines, prospectuses and newsletters. The intention was to publish materials to a professional standard and they achieved this. One mother was so taken with the first edition of ‘Solly’ the school magazine of Salisbury Primary School in Everton, that she took it on holiday to show people she met. Gerry Bailey, the young teacher responsible for editing Solly recalled the enthusiasm it engendered amongst staff and children. Liverpool started not from the question of how best you could start up parental participation but whether you could start it up at all. In Liverpool the EPA heads were battle weary and receptive to the EPA team, if not to the research side of things thanks to their experience with J B Mays (see below). But this was something that had not been done before and in schools who felt their work was overlooked it was welcomed. Some teachers were of the view that school was an opportunity to get the children away from their feckless parents but the quality of the magazines presented schools in a very positive light and were valued by heads and teachers.

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4 After the ford Foundation awarded the OECD’s CERI (chaired by Halsey) $1,000,000 to investigate compensatory educational strategies a young George Smith, still studying for his M Phil at Oxford and with little money, was dispatched to New York at very short notice. The eventual outcome was a transatlantic conference and a review of Compensatory education projects in the USA (Little, A. and G. Smith (1971). Strategies of Compensation A Review of Educational Projects For the Disadvantaged in the United States. France, OECD.
Outgoing Schools

A detailed account of the experiments aiming to bring the school out into the community is provided in the subsequent reports of each EPA project (Halsey 1972; Midwinter 1972b; Smith 1975). In Liverpool the strategy was to take everyday features of schools and project them in community focal points such as shops and leisure facilities. The ‘Solly’ magazine mentioned above listed a dozen or so local establishments displaying children’s work on their walls ranging from pubs to butchers shops. Displays were changed on a weekly basis and the experiment ran for several years thanks to the support of teams of undergraduates linked to each school to each school from local colleges of education. These students also played a major role in the success of the fortnight long ‘schools in our city’ exhibition. An exhibition space was secured in a Liverpool high street landmark store, TJ Hughes, and displays and presentation of children’s work drew 10,000 visitors. Students helped to marshal the crowds attending demonstration lessons with classes of children brought along by their teachers. The students also carried out a survey of public attitudes to the concept of bringing the school into the community. The results suggested a positive attitude to the idea and to the work of schools in general. This data was quickly shared with the teachers.

The Home Visiting Experiment

George Smith, WREPA Research Officer, was very well informed regarding compensatory initiatives following his US visit in 1968. The idea to set up an experiment using an educational home visitor was drawn directly from this experience (Smith 2008). This was primarily an experiment to see if parents with 2-3 year olds could be encouraged to adopt more educationally productive interactions and supply them with educational ‘know how’. The final WREPA report sent to Halsey in 1971 stressed the importance of having the right person in the role. This supports the assertion that the EPA teams were exceptional because of their genuine novel strategies, which succeeded because of the supportive local and national context and, the qualities of those occupying roles as ‘action resources’. Gina Armstrong was the country’s first educational home visitor and her qualities are highlighted in the report:

The home visitor must be…‘unbiased, non-judgmental, able to work in any conditions, knowledgeable without being dictatorial, helpful without being patronising, able to listen, sensitive to needs without probing into peoples affairs’

It is not always a social scientist or a highly qualified teacher who makes a good home visitor. A real interest in people and a desire to listen and help is more important than a degree, and respect for mothers who have already achieved a great deal is worth more than criticism based on a theory of what mothers ought to do’.

(Smith 1971)

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5 Eleanor Connor (who was funded by a donation from the John Moores Foundation and became Pre school Fellow) provided child free classes for parents of pre school children. This was an opportunity for parents to experience the typical activities of the nursery; experiences denied them in childhood.

6 The home visiting work focussed on activities that would develop fine motor skills as well as ability to persevere with activities for longer. This approach recognised that the children due to the nature of the housing stock and family size, had advanced gross motor skills and social skills. It was hoped the multiplier effect would see children arriving in nursery having a more seamless transition from home.
At the time of writing the home visiting concept is being deployed with young parents via Children’s Centres using the model developed by Professor David Olds over the last 25 years in the USA\textsuperscript{7}.

\textit{The Red House}

Originally envisaged as a place of respite for children in distress the Red House grew organically into a basic prototype for the Children’s Centre\textsuperscript{8}. However, the WREPA team ensured that the activities they planned involved all stages of education from pre-school groups to college of education students working with local schools and involving parents wherever possible. The idea was that children would see education as a social process with collaboration between adults. The families would see all aspects of the educational establishment in one base as equal partners building the parental confidence and awareness of their role as foremost educator. The team felt that the school has an individualizing effect on a child and they can quickly come to see themselves as lacking the qualities needed to succeed since the onus in the classroom was, and is, on individual tasks with individual assessments. There is no space here to discuss the enormous variety of work undertaken by wardens Geoff and Lynn Poulton and the rest of the team but to all families in the villages Red House became a genuine community resource. Everyone recognized Red House as another place of education available to their children. The community involvement became more about the use of multi-agency work in one base (the Children’s Centre), as time went by and it seemed natural to support families who did need help from a single base.

Despite the fact that such strategies met the criteria as multipliers and the high profile response to the Halsey Report a national EPA policy never materialised. Though the response from minister Margaret Thatcher was supportive, the only tangible change EPA was responsible for was the government White Paper, ‘Education: A framework for Expansion’ (DES 1972), which committed the government, albeit over a decade, to expanded nursery provision\textsuperscript{9}. To see the real impact one needs to look to the work that mirrored the EPAs in pockets of innovation around the country. The continuity and development of EPA work occurred where the LEA, and especially the CEO, was receptive to the ideas and held a belief that there was a moral obligation and a political possibility connected to positive discrimination. The most enduring example

\textsuperscript{7} Smith and Olds were influenced by the early US home visiting type projects developed in various Universities and similar to the work of Headstart. See, Olds, D. L., J. Eckenrode, et al. (1986).


\textsuperscript{8} Alec Clegg, the CEO of the West Riding was seeking funding from a variety of sources to create a centre for children needing to take a break from their families, long before the WREPA. However, the WREPA team felt strongly that to have a lasting impact the centre needed to be seen as valuable by all elements of the educational community. When a local doctors surgery was bought and converted they made sure that the activities in Red House linked to all groups and not just to those with special needs.

\textsuperscript{9} Despite a series of meetings in 1972 Halsey was never able to persuade Thatcher to publicly commit to adopting a policy that took as its model the ‘hybrid’ form of nursery that would have combined the playgroups voluntary, parent based nature with the professional nursery led by a trained teacher.
is to be found in Coventry where CEO Robert Aitken\textsuperscript{10} made the inspired decision to recruit John Rennie, following his work on social education in Nottingham, to lead the educational arm of the city’s CDP (Rennie 1972). The result was, eventually, the Community Education Development Centre, which is still with us today though in a different form\textsuperscript{11}. Aitken sanctioned the construction of two purpose built community nurseries with the community school in mind. Many other LEAs adopted EPA ideas; most frequently the home visitor programme but as Franklin and McCulloch have already shown us this scattergun effect is very fragile. When the ideas of the new right turned Thatcher away from her sympathetic approach to compensatory interventions from the mid 1970s, it left locally based innovation vulnerable\textsuperscript{12}. 

*The importance of having the right person for the right role*

The last ten years have seen a determined effort to challenge poverty albeit within the constraints of the third way, and EPA members have made a significant contribution. In particular, the role of George and Teresa Smith in the field in an advisory and participatory capacity. For example, in June 2008, Teresa Smith was part of the evaluation team working on the DCSF sponsored research into the effects of promoting parental involvement in early learning. The findings make interesting reading to the historian of EPAs, 

It is now accepted that the link between disadvantage and achievement is cumulative: when poorer children enter primary school, despite early indications of potential, they tend to fall behind. Consequently, the chances of breaking cycles of poverty and deprivation are considerably reduced as children get older. However, a range of protective factors has been identified which can help children overcome their initial disadvantage and ultimately prevent social exclusion. These include:

- Strong relationships with parents, family members and other significant adults;
- Parental interest and involvement in education with clear and high expectations;
- Positive role models;
- Active involvement in family, school and community life;
- Recognition, praise and feeling valued.

(Evangelou, Sylva et al. 2008)

This project was part of ongoing work aiming to lift children out of poverty, ‘through the provision of integrated services for children; support for parents as first educators; funding initiatives for interventions across education and health care’ (Evangelou et al op cit i). Such recommendations represent a continuation of EPA community work. In

\textsuperscript{10}When names such as Aitken are mentioned it is important to remember that he along with a number of others who reached executive power in LEAs were powerfully influenced early in their careers by Henry Morris; Gordon Bessey of Cumberland, Stewart Mason of Leicestershire and Peter Swain of Nottinghamshire for example Ree, H. (1971). Henry Morris and the idea of the Village College Today. Bassingbourn Village College.

\textsuperscript{11}CEDC became a national advisory centre in the form Halsey had envisaged and Midwinter had briefly achieved in Priority. Today it continues as ContinYou.

1998 Smith evaluated (with a contribution from husband George) the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative before this experiment was rolled out into the Children’s Centres of today (Smith 2007b). In the 1990s the publication of Access and Achievement in Urban Education (Ofsted 1993) and Michael Barber’s edited volume on urban education (Barber and Dann 1996) represent significant shifts back toward the policies explored in the 1960s. Both drew on the findings of EPA and the Urban Programme and George Smith hugely influenced both. There were other influences of course, for example the international move towards the use of performance indicators in education was a parallel development and the fact that policy makers (in the civil service) tend to be around for twenty years or so meant a new audience was receptive to the ‘re-cycled’ idea of ABIs. So although it was in the mid-1990s that momentum swung back to the ABI and poverty returned to the educational agenda there has been an almost continuous influence in policy making circles by both George and Teresa Smith over the last 40 years and this is very much what Halsey envisaged as head of the Department of Social and Administrative Studies at Oxford. In the Halsey Report he pointed out that,

Some of the staff, and especially the younger research workers, are now highly valuable resources. They are the first generation of what I hope will become an important branch of the social sciences with its great potential utility for government, administration and constructive social criticism’ (Halsey 1972 op cit X).

Government can draw on a large support network of economists and statisticians today so in a sense much of the expertise Halsey spoke of has been incorporated into the agencies of educational policy making and perhaps at a cost of some creativity. The EPA directors were crucial as facilitators for creativity and the broad canvas painted by Midwinter and the confidence he drew from the enthusiasm of Halsey at the centre allowed the talents of the team members to flourish. Terry Powley, formerly Director of the Southwark Education Action Zone, provides us with an excellent framework through which to assess the EPA director (Powley 2001) and the similarity in aims of the EAZ and EPA meant there was a continuity in the roles required of the project director in both cases. Midwinter and Mike Harvey (WREPA

Smith’s chapter, very much at the cutting edge, was developed from a paper presented at a conference organised by Ofsted in 1994. The conference followed the publication of a report instigated by HMI and particularly Tom Wylie. Michael Barber, then at the IOE in London, included it in his book without Smith’s consent. The significance of the book is the influence on policy strategy Barber was already having on Tony Blair and his inner circle. The reason for Barber’s involvement is unclear though some would argue that civil servants look to engage with those likely to be influential on the formation of a future government.

See the OECD’s Education at a Glance’ which stemmed from Norberto Bottani’s project on educational statistics OECD and CERI (1992). Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators, Paris, OECD.

Halsey was a frequent visitor to all projects and was always willing to attend as a speaker at local events. However, it was his personal philosophy in relation to appointments that really allowed the local teams to achieve so much. Halsey can be regarded as a Christian socialist and he believed that you appointed the person you felt was best equipped for the job in hand then left it to their conscience as to whether they did all they possibly could to fulfil the criteria for success.

The three main aims of EAZ were to raise educational achievement, promote social inclusion and search for new forms of educational governance and accountability.
Director), according to their peers, succeeded in acting as strategist, implementer, entrepreneur, broker, ambassador, diplomat and bureaucrat. The public profiles of the respective projects required different approaches by the directors. In Liverpool Midwinter acknowledges the role he adopted was something of the ringmaster but feels it was the appropriate response to such a receptive audience. It paid dividends,

*Headteachers who at first were cautious somehow went on to suggest they invented it [the strategy]. I took Brian Jackson to Chatsworth and Mrs Hughes [Head] is saying ‘When Eric Midwinter asked us what we wanted to do I said I know lets have a wall mural’ I thought, I’m winning here.* (Midwinter op cit 2008)

However, though the individuals concerned were a neat fit for the project aims, equally important was the broad political context. Contemporary policies have to constantly demonstrate their accountability and effectiveness in terms of improved attainment. As Powley points out the pressures of accountability mean there is barely enough time left for the project to carry out its plans (Powley 2001 op cit). In 1968, there was still a feeling that targeting public funds carefully would provide solutions to social problems. EPAs were part of the solution. Today, the ‘third way’ has built on 1980s neo-liberal policies, which require the incorporation of entrepreneurial and managerial practices to overcome the inefficiencies of a public sector that is itself part of the problem.

*The critique of area-based intervention policy*

Establishing contextual differences and continuities allows analysis of the EPAs to address some of the criticisms directed at area-based, experimental action research both today and in the 1960s. It allows us to consider whether contemporary assessments of area based policy have given a fair or accurate assessment of the EPA and whether it is justifiable to claim EPAs as more significant or more successful than recent policy. It will be argued here that the EPA projects in the north of England have a historical significance that has not yet been fully acknowledged. Forty years on and with the national roll out of the multi-agency Children’s Centre and a multitude of local home school initiatives it is an appropriate time to review the pioneering work of EPAs and the significance of the individuals involved in changing the ‘grammar of schooling’ as it relates to the educational chances of children in deprived communities.

Before such an analysis can be undertaken it is first necessary to outline contemporary academic questioning of the potential of area-based policies. Two of the core strands underpinning the EAZ and EiC initiatives ambitions to deliver greater equity and diversity (DFEE 1997; DFEE 1999) relate to improved networks – with pupils seeing themselves as part of a wider learning community, and, extended opportunity for children in the area. These aims are closely aligned to the EPA ambitions to create community schools that would produce citizens who shaped their world and were active rather than passive democrats.\(^{19}\)

\(^{19}\)There was never a consensus of opinion as to what defined a community school but see Eric Midwinter’s work for the clearest description of what the community school might look like particularly Midwinter, E. (1972b). *Priority Education: An account of the Liverpool project.* London, Penguin. and, Midwinter, E. (1972). *Social environment and the urban school.* London, Ward Lock.
Gamarnikow and Green cite Newham EAZ to exemplify one of the strategic aims of all EAZs, i.e. ‘to turn parents and local communities into good consumers of education services, with positive attitudes towards schools and education, and to engage them actively in children’s and community learning’ (Gamarnikow and Green 1999). They identify a, ‘potentially repressive agenda of social and cultural deficit thinking which is unlikely to make a significant contribution to strengthening inclusive democracy and social justice’ (Gamarnikow and Green op cit 18). In 1969 Professor J B Mays of Liverpool University made the same accusation (Mays 1969). Small scale, experimental action research projects delivered by part time academics and government was an example of a *trahison des clercs* and was unlikely to solve an endemic disease. Not only that, this approach was akin to treating the deprived as ‘zoological specimens’. It was not so much that no one participating would benefit but it was not a realistic answer to the problem. The real solution was to raise the standards of teaching in the schools and this required a political commitment on a national scale.

Following the 1988 Education Reform Act the ‘standards agenda’ as we now know it became one arm of the ‘third way’. The use of area-based projects was the other; focusing on empowering individuals, families and communities, ‘to enable them to move out of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion by a combination of individual responsibility, education, social support and welfare to work initiatives’ (Gamarnikow and Green op cit 6). The state was to be reconfigured, ‘as partner, enabler and provider of frameworks for opportunities for improved outcomes by regenerating social capital’ (ibid 6). But it can be argued that ABIs are related to the cyclical nature of poverty and their return suggests policy operates cyclically. They are a reformist response to the symptoms of poverty, in this case educational, and their real message is to urge us to look at the bigger picture. As the economic crisis unfolded in 1973 the urban programme was one of the first to suffer. Despite the billions invested since 1997 it may be that the current economic slowdown has the same impact on current ABIs.

The process by which social capital is acquired lies at the heart of criticisms of EPAs and EAZs. It represents a, ‘return to classical sociological preoccupations with the foundations of social solidarity and social cohesion’ (ibid 7). Mays was far from a dominant voice and generally the sociological explanations of the 1960s tended to, Incorporate, to varying degrees, the articulation of economic considerations with social structures and relations. By contrast, contemporary social capital theories tend to view society as pre-existing economy and being causally implicated in its production (ibid 7).

Significantly, the shift in emphasis from explanations for poverty and educational failure rooted in sociological and economic arguments, to a focus on social capital as the key concept, have overlooked the contribution of Bourdieu to this field. Gamarnikow and Green (ibid 7) outline Bourdieu’s concept of social capital as an overlooked problematic of third way theory (Bourdieu 1986).

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20 Mays had originally been invited to sit on the local steering committee for the EPA as part of the expected research link to the local university. However, this would have been a disaster for the project as Mays was despised by the local schools following his highly critical analysis of their work in Mays, J. (1962). *Education and the Urban Child*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press.
Unlike cultural and economic capitals which are distributed unequally, social capital is ubiquitous, but subject to hierarchical valorisations of particular social capitals manifested in class-specific forms of sociability and networks. The universality of sociability and networks obscures their intrinsic differential performativity: lower class networks are as plentiful and varied as middle class ones, but less productive of socially and economically successful outcomes. Current orthodoxies of social capital literature, in line with Third Way thinking, abstract society from economy and assume a universal and undifferentiated form for social capital, potentially available to all. The effect is to link outcomes to presence or absence of social capital, rather than to the unequal productiveness of different social capitals.

(Bourdieu 1986 248 in Gamarnikow and Green op cit 7)

What the historian can offer to this discussion is evidence that either confirms or refutes this accusation when the EPAs are categorized as part of a tradition of area-based strategy for increasing social capital. It is argued here that despite official EPA publications indicating their intentions to develop social capital, by developing educational ‘know how’ in the parents, the supportive local context, the genuine novelty of the ideas and the skills of those involved, created genuine partnerships. However, while partnerships focusing on the raising of awareness can be considered universally beneficial the question remains as to what the effect on attainment will be in the long term and what happens to the participants whose awareness and perhaps expectations have been raised. That aside, these partnerships were, at least for the life of the projects, organic and based as much on a premise of fraternity as equality of opportunity. They represented a view that schools could, if driven in the right way, and as part of a broader social and economic reform, be agents for social change. The EPA approach to communications and pedagogy created a democratic space where parents began to move themselves forward.

We learned not to make assumptions about what is good for people. The professional role is as energizer – allowing people to articulate their own problems and resolve them within their own cultural terms21

The EPA teams recognized that they were part of the action in their action research projects; they were a resource for the community to tap into. This can be clearly seen from the following recollection of a meeting between Liverpool EPA director and a colleague from the Community Development Project nearby,

We’d had 2 or 3 meetings with local mums and playgroup leaders down in the university settlement. He suggested we had a drink after the meeting but I really needed to be getting home. Then he tells me he thinks things are moving much too quickly. I had a drink! They needed to establish a constitution and Doran felt we needed to allow them to come to it in their own time and of course in a way that was part of what we were trying to do. But I realised that we were part of the action. ‘Who were the 2 people with ties on in there? Us!’ We were part of the group and they were looking to us but true to his liberal principles he was trying to back off and wished he wasn’t there hoping these ‘Joan of arks’ would emerge. I argued that there was a role for us, to encourage and give them confidence. It really threw me that.’

(Midwinter 2006-2008)

Nevertheless, Bourdieu’s broad theory of cultural and social reproduction is one that the EPA teams would have recognised since Marxist critiques of the reproductive role of schools were present before his work\(^\text{22}\). Paolo Freire and Louis Althusser for example saw schools as key ideological state apparatuses to ensure reproduction of the existing relations of production and also as a battleground of resistance for the workers (Freire 1970; Althusser 1971). In Liverpool, and elsewhere, a Free School movement formed a radical opposition to the existing conception of schooling. The Scotland Road Free School lasted only twelve months but was an indication that the reformist approach of the EPA teams, very much in the Fabian tradition, was not wholly supported (Barrow 1978).

‘Bigwigs’ (Midwinter 2006-2008) like Freire were not key ideological influences on the EPA teams. Their philosophy was drawn from the ‘social arithmetic’ of those interested in showing the inherent failings and unfairness of the 1944 settlement and claims that it had delivered equality of opportunity (Floud and Halsey 1961; Douglas 1964). This had not been the case and they recognised that without equality of conditions there would not be equality of opportunity. Michael Young had brilliantly satirised the whole concept of meritocracy long before Plowden and when Basil Bernstein criticised the potential of EPAs and the broader Urban Programme’s ability to compensate for society\(^\text{23}\), the teams saw this as something of a gauntlet to pick up. Their view was that schools could be re-positioned so that they offered the community an opportunity to develop as active participants in re-shaped democratic processes and institutions. More immediately, they wanted to support local families and their schools in a climate where nobody seemed to care. In 1968, primarily to get the NUT on-board with the Liverpool EPA, Midwinter wrote a pamphlet describing in deliberately dramatic language, the conditions within the EPA. The response of the national press demonstrates the shock factor this had and the lack of awareness about the social conditions many schools had to engage with. The headlines remind one of the moral outrage used to describe third world poverty today\(^\text{24}\). However, after twelve months there were at least four reasons for calling the ABI approach into question. Anne Corbett expertly summarised these in a New Society article (Corbett 1969).

First, asking school to change attitudes in the home was over-ambitious. Second, other problems needed tackling first. The need to restructure job opportunities (as Mays had demanded; schools would not prepare children for jobs that were not there) and the fact that in some cases families could not or would not change (as Clegg had outlined in Children in Distress). Third, the discouraging evidence emerging from

\(^{22}\) George Smith presented a paper at the World Congress of the International Sociological Society in Varna, Hungary in 1971 and Bourdieu was present but not impressed.


\(^{24}\) Midwinter, E. (1968). Education-A Priority Area. London, National Union of Teachers. The booklet was published on October 15\(^\text{th}\) and made several national dailies on the 16th. The reports read consistently with moral outrage and focused on the more extreme examples of family dysfunction and social distress, ‘Tragedy of the Slum Children’ wrote Robert Titman in the Daily Mirror, ‘Tragic Backcloth to the classroom’ Ernest Dewhurst in The Guardian.
America’s Headstart (and related) projects\textsuperscript{25} raising the question, does intervention work? Fourth, there were political complications. Positive discrimination requires the diverting of resources and this can make national and local authorities uncomfortable. It can also make the proposed beneficiaries uncomfortable: ‘who wants to be labelled bottom of the heap?’ (Corbett 1969 op cit). In her final assessment however, Corbett saw the EPAs as a beginning, ‘a serious attempt to culture a vaccine’ to the problems in the EPA.

The third way policy sidesteps the argument that policies like EAZ and more recently the Children’s Centres, operate on a deficit model of working class families. But the assault on low standards, using the school improvement agenda (the type of response Mays called for in 1968 and later reiterated by the authors of the Black Papers) which focussed on the professionalisation of the whole school workforce, measurement of prescribed standards, Ofsted and published league tables, as a lever for accountability; and area-based targeting of resources pitched to the poorest communities\textsuperscript{26}, has not enhanced parental participation in a democratic sense. Indeed, as Power et al have pointed out,

\begin{quote}
‘Policies targeted at disadvantaged communities have the potential to both include and exclude. Inclusion can be increased though recognition of injustices and redistributive elements. However, exclusionary processes can be compounded when the nature and cause of disadvantage is inadequately grasped

(Power, Whitty et al. 2004 462)
\end{quote}

Their point, and the one that spans EAZs and EPAs is that, ‘strategies attempting to regenerate through augmenting social capital alone are likely to leave significant sources of exclusion untouched’ (Power et al 2004 op cit 463). The root cause of educational underachievement remains poverty and its symptoms of racism and sexual domination.

A further criticism of attempts to create new partnerships is the extent to which this threatens teacher professionalism and is therefore likely to undermine the impact of strategies adopted by the project. There is evidence that EAZs have intensified a general trend towards fragmentation within the profession (Dickson, Gerwitz et al. 2004). The Children’s Plan suggests the need to reconceptualise the school workforce and in 1968 Midwinter had highlighted the need for a reinvention of the teacher’s role if community education was to be achieved (Midwinter 1972 op cit).\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} In their defence George Smith’s tour of America meant the EPA teams were well aware of these limitations and took American evidence into account when choosing strategies. For example, Home visiting was chosen because the research showed it did achieve the sought after ‘multiplier effect’.
\textsuperscript{26} The identification of the modern equivalent of EPA schools involves on the one hand attainment based league tables from Key stage testing and on the other the Indices of multiple deprivation (Noble, M., G. Wright, et al. (2004). The English Indices of Deprivation, 2004. N. R. U. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004.) use Super Output Areas (SOAs) of 1500 people to identify the poorest communities.
\textsuperscript{27} In fact, he saw the role of the EPA and the Liverpool Teacher Centre he eventually led as one as much about professionalising the parents as deprofessionalising the teachers. His view was that teachers needed to control their professional development and the Liverpool Teachers center had a management Committee that sought to lever control from the LEA Inspectors
\end{flushright}
Emerging findings

The idea that parents are equally important with school as an educative force, that all elements of the community should be involved in the management of the school and that teachers require radically different training for roles as organisers, planners and facilitators of learning, were all changes at the structural level. Without these changes there could be no socially relevant curriculum arising from the child’s needs and the local environment. Without a host of other social and political changes the progressive community school could not flourish. These changes did not take place. The immediate achievements of the northern EPAs, structurally and pedagogically, were limited and localised. When ABIs returned in 1998 it was to a much changed educational landscape and the EAZs operated within the constraints of a school system bound by measurable outputs based on a narrow measurement friendly conception of schools as the transmitters of knowledge. Power and colleagues called the influence of EAZs, ‘limited and patchy’ (Power et al 2004 op cit 469). As Mays had predicted in 1968 there would be some benefits to individual families and teachers (Mays 1968 op cit) but embedded changes in classroom practice are harder to come by as are new and more, ‘democratic modes of educational governance,’ (Power et al op cit 469). However, there is little doubt that the pioneering aspects of home-school work introduced by EPAs and the pockets of imitators that followed, had diffused into normal practice by the 1980s.

Teresa Smith has argued that we remain a long way from developing a true understanding of the nature of our poorest communities (Smith 2007a). We must continue to ask how accurate are our definitions of community compared to the way community’s function in reality? Furthermore, have inaccurate or incomplete definitions of community led to inappropriate policy options and can we ever really know how a community functions comprehensively enough to solve social problems within present democratic structures and their constraints. These questions sit alongside the criticism that EPAs mask a problem whose symptoms are the educational underachievement and social alienation displayed in our classrooms. A problem with structural roots based on economic deprivation and an educational system that has enhanced this problem through its differentiation and entrepreneurial values. When the government introduced EAZs in 1998 (DFEE 1997) they were, according to Power, based on a more sophisticated rationale than the urban programme and the EPAs. However, although the economic injustices faced by the community were recognised and some redistribution of resources supports the educational initiatives, ‘cultural and associational injustices are insufficiently acknowledged’28. In addition, there is a mismatch between the remedies proposed in the applications [of the zones] and the problems they were designed to address (Power 2001).

The fact that teachers hold subordinate positions in the school hierarchy (and, as increased central government control since the mid-1980s excludes even headteachers from key decisions about the aims, content and methods of schooling) may not be the core of the problem since, as outlined below, teacher professionalism presents a

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28 Associational injustice occurs where patterns of association amongst individuals and amongst social groups prevent some people from participating fully in decisions which affect the conditions within which they live and act (Power op cit 41)
powerful barrier to the concept of the community school. Post 1997 policy does, ‘locate the source of poverty within the changing structure of employment opportunities,’ (the Mays’ argument) and does not depict EPA/EAZ parents as feckless or work-shy (Power op cit 44). However, recent research into emotional geographies confirms the continued barriers presented by teacher professionalism and the dominance of the subject-based curriculum (Hargreaves and Lasky 2004).

Contemporary criticisms of ABIs correctly identifies that they, ‘leave intact the deep structures that generate class disadvantage’ (Power 2001 op cit 50). The constant need from one decade to the next, from EPAs to CDPs to EAZs to Surestart, to allocate extra resources on the Plowden principle of positive discrimination, though aimed at, ‘redressing injustices of distribution can end up creating injustices of recognition’. Thus the failure of zones might be dangerous inasmuch as it may signal the hopelessness of effecting any positive change for the most disadvantaged urban populations (ibid 50). EPA teams were aware of this from the start. Today, when we see the ministerial foreword to the Children’s Plan we should adopt their [EPA] positivity and see the development of 3500 Children’s Centres as an opportunity for educationists committed to social justice and a more equal society, to work with what we have,

This means…a new role for schools at the centre of their communities, and more effective links between schools, the NHS and other children’s services so that together they can engage parents and tackle all the barriers to the learning, health and happiness of every child.’

(Ed Balls December 2007 The Children’s Plan Foreword)

After all, it can be argued that parents have always been positive about the educational institutions their children frequent. The baseline data collected in Liverpool showed that parents were almost bemused by the fact that special treatment was required since the school was the only thing in their community that worked. When the team shared this data with the teachers they created a very receptive base. Unfortunately, the willingness of teachers to acknowledge the importance of the parental role does not necessarily reflect in their micro practices. Martin Hughes summarizing the relationship between parents and schools in a rather unchanged and gloomy picture described them as living in, ‘two very different worlds’ (Hughes 1996). In a review of Barbara Tizard’s research in the home-school field he cites their view that the main stumbling block to parental involvement in children’s learning is teachers’ professionalism. Tizard found that because teachers felt they had skills and expertise that parents did not (and presumably could not gain without teacher training) they were reluctant to engage in, ‘genuine two-way dialogue with parents’ (Hughes op cit 98). While teachers do have special skills, this defensiveness, compounded since the judgment of their effectiveness by SATs results began, results in a failure to recognize the special skills and knowledge (of their children) that parents offer. EPAs always acknowledged that the home environment is a much bigger influence on children’s learning than the school. Tizard's work in the 1970s and 1980s confirmed what the EPA teams already knew (Tizard, Mortimore et al. 1981).

Times and broad contexts change thus we can never revisit the past. But the most depressing view of the EPA project and all its imitators is revealed by Foucauldian
analysis; that is, the technologies of power existing in all professions, institutions and their discourses. Since these technologies are dynamic and never static, policy can be replicated but contexts never. Consequently, the use of experimental action-research, whether small or large scale will be unable to alter power balances despite specific targeting of the home-school dynamic.

The EPA project was a platform that launched the teams into the field and the parallel urban programme allowed their valuable experience to be utilized. A consideration of the careers of those involved is deserved and necessary to ensure informed future policy direction. They championed ideas that were not widely recognised at school level. The progressive pedagogical element to their work was part of a much wider ambition to create a more just educational settlement and a more participatory democracy. A settlement based on equality but also on liberty and fraternity. While the final reports of the Community Development Projects in 1975 might have been more radically critical of social policy and its limitations, the child centred pedagogy of EPA and the rationale behind it (that equality and social justice were something to strive for) mark the work of Liverpool and the West Riding as of special value, then and indeed today.

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