A study of the development of the 21st century school. The quiet revolution

Doug Martin PhD Student Contact details : d.j.martin@leedsmet.ac.uk
Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education tel : 0113 256 0837
Leeds Met University


Policy Background.

New Labour came into power in 1997 with the declared priority to improve education (Bancho, 2003). Rafts of initiatives were developed in their first term of office that impacted upon schools and broader children’s services. These included the launch of new preventative services linked to aspects of health in the form of Sure Start Local Programmes and responses to deal with specific educational areas of concern such as improving levels of literacy and numeracy. The broad aim of these measures was to improve opportunities for all children and to narrow the gap in attainment (Hayton and Hodgson, 1999).

Every Child Matters (ECM) emerged in their second term of office in response to the recommendations of the Laming Report (2003). ECM commenced the move to unify previously separate policy strands and introduce the notion of integration into children and young people’s services (Williams, 2004). Alongside ECM government launched the piloting of Full Service Schools (FSS), an initiative developed within inner city communities in the United States (Wilkin et al, 2003). These FSS seek to bring a host of agencies into the school to provide a comprehensive range of services in response to community need. Whilst this piloting was being undertaken across selected schools in England, a new universal policy Extended Schools was launched in 2005. The Core Offer for Extended Services, as it later became known, emerged from the Childcare Act 2006, which requires all schools by 2010 to extend their day and provide childcare and activities for children over the extended year.

The Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), a new government department, was established in Labour’s third term, alongside the publishing of the first national plan for children, “Building Brighter Futures” (DCSF, 2007). The plan (p1) claimed to be “a new way of working covering schools, children’s services, the voluntary sector and government”. This plan promotes the “vision for 21st century children’s services” and states (DCSF, 2007, p 13) “we expect every school to be uncompromising in its ambitions for achievement, sitting at the heart of the community it serves”.

The Children’s Workforce Strategy was published in 2008 (DCSF, 2008) with the theme of developing a single children’s workforce. This plan was followed by the coining of the phrase “21st century school” (Balls, 2008) identifying the school as the focus for family service provision and confirming the new role of the school as the hub of the community. A white paper “The 21st century school”, is presently being consulted upon which emphasises this role of the school as the hub of the community

The research focus.

This piece of research has drawn substantially on the work of Cummings et al (2004) and Dyson (2008) on Full Service Extended Schools by gaining an understanding of how schools are responding to this new challenge of developing the 21st century school. This research asks the following questions:
• in what ways are schools, their partners and communities developing and responding to this reform of children’s services towards the 21st century school?

• what are the experiences of parents as the recipients of these changing services and the extent to which their experiences reflect that of the aims set out locally and nationally?

• why has government moved towards this implementation route for ECM, through Extended Services, to the 21st century school?

The research methodology.

The research took the form of an ethnographic study within four Extended Services consortia. The researcher engaged alongside those working in Extended Services across the spectrum of children and young people’s services throughout the academic year 2008/9 in order to gain an understanding of how change is being implemented to progress their ambitions for the 21st century school.

Research sites were selected which reflected the diversity of schools involved in developing Extended Services and the broad age range of ECM that is birth to 19 years of age. These sites included:

• an inner city cluster of schools that formed a through school via confederation and had recently moved out of special measures.
• a cluster of schools in a suburb of a large city that had formed through Trust School status into a School’s Partnership
• a cluster of schools in a market town
• a rural cluster of schools sited in villages

The participants involved in the research include national policy makers, local leadership of consortia, those working on the frontline from services working within schools and in the communities around these schools, and families who are experiencing change. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with the leadership of schools and their partners and with those working on the frontline, focus groups with parents and observing meetings throughout the academic year 2008/9.

Alongside this immersion in the field, an analysis of both national and local documents took place to help gain an understanding of the development of the 21st century school.

Theoretical Frameworks supporting the research.

Moss and Haydon (2008) suggest that ECM represents a shift from traditional thinking of education in a narrow sense (ENS) to one of education in its broadest sense (EBS). The historical role of the school has been based upon the premiss of their purpose as educators of children as one focused upon a the narrowest sense. Whereas the advent of ECM and the influence of this more holistic approach to children has moved schools towards broader thinking, that is EBS. In policy terms schools move from their role in the market place of ENS to one as hubs for broader services, central to government’s aim for the 21st century school. Suggesting policy has moved from the 1988 Education Reform Act and the rigidness of the National Curriculum, through ECM, to Extended Services and to their new ambition for schools laid out in the recent white paper for education.

The move towards this new role for schools represents a significant shift from that of their present role (Chapman, 2008) (Broadhead and Martin, 2009). This move towards EBS
involves schools focusing upon far broader holistic outcomes for children by adopting ECM principles as opposed to ENS which confines itself to ways in which education is traditionally understood akin to measures such as SATs.

The range of professionals involved in this new way of working decide need based upon their own professional perspective and assessments of need (Anning et al, 2006). But to derive a new way of determining need must accompany this shift in thinking. From ENS, where needs are based upon educational assessment to new ways of determining holistic need. On what basis will needs be assessed in future to respond to the new role of the school? Perhaps more relevant are constructs of individual or collective need around social capital developed by Putman(1993) who describes this as a measure of community beyond the individual a collective resource, whilst Kilpatrick et al (2003) attributes social capital as ascribed to an individual, a resource within that community.

The 21st century school is joining services to form a new community of joint enterprise. Data suggests these professionals bring differing perspectives and understandings to schools, reflecting Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice, and perhaps a new shared repertoire.

Schools are being asked to form new relationships with their communities through this process of integrating services (Wilkin et al, 2003). Dyson and Raffo (2007) reflect upon this community orientation of schools and the how they view their relationship with their communities. Ball (2005) states schools work within a quasi-market system but these schools are now expected to work with other schools and broader providers to develop holistic responses to need (Balls,2008). The leadership of schools are searching for a rationale that makes sense of new measures in response to EBS and how this shift in role influences parental choice, the market and the tradition of league tables.

**The Early Research findings.**

The fieldwork concluded in July 2009 providing the first opportunity to commence the first full comprehensive analysis of the data in August. The wealth of data collected reflects the diversity and complexity of the dynamics involved in schools moving from their traditional role of providers of teaching and learning to one of EBS. This complexity is also reflected within the data collected from broader services based within these schools’ communities and through the conversations with parents. These broader services varied by research site, however they normally included health services, early years both private and publicly run, young people’s services and the voluntary sector.

The following themes emerged through the first stage of data analysis :

- Culture
- Change
- Parental perspectives
- The relationship of the school to the community

These themes are currently being analysed through a series of sub divisions within each theme and case studies are being developed along these lines.

**Early analysis has drawn out the following areas :**

**Culture**
• Schools and broader services learning about each other’s professional practice
• At this stage a “schools plus” context. That is core school business, such as teaching and learning continue, and activities such as the development of the Core Offer develop separately to this core business.
• Schools moving from narrow measures (ENS) to broader needs (EBS)
• Existing community based services – concerned about schools as organisations
• Issues of conceptualisation

Change

• Leaders - a new type of leadership
• Individuals-from headteachers to play workers – interpersonal relations are important
• Territory – whose territory is it? Multiple use of resources.
• Personalisation – perspectives shifting towards child and family and tailored responses including the curriculum offer
• Learning – from each other and demonstrating cross professional and organisational respect
• Approaches to change vary by consortia – space to develop local solutions

Parents’ perspectives

• Influence and ownership reduced as children move from early years through to highschool
• Parents regain their role and guide children through the maze as they leave school
• Parents own experiences of school shape their views of their child’s experience
• Confusion of roles, parents consumers of education – bringing together other cultures

Schools and community relationships

• Needs are conceptualised from professional and organisational perspectives
• Disconnect – parental choice – school and local community
• Spectrum of school orientation towards the community
• Schools buying in staff with community knowledge and experience to broaden their skills base
• Mutual learning across agencies about their community

The study aims to be complete in April 2010.

References


Balls, E., Supporting the 21st century school. DCSF article : 3rd July, 2008.


Putman, R. The Prosperous Community: social capital and public life. The American Perspective 13 (Spring) 1993 34-42.


This document was added to the Education-line collection on 26 January 2010