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MANCHESTER CURRICULUM:

A REPORT AND
REFLECTIONS FOR
FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

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2009

Preamble: the brief for the review

I was approached by the RSA in April 2009 to develop an evaluation of the RSA/Manchester Curriculum. As the project had been in planning since at least 2008, and as some of the pilots had already been completed, rather than attempting a formal evaluation of the impact of the programme on student attainment or aspiration we agreed that the aim of this research should be to capture participants' experiences of designing this new curriculum, their views of the successes and failures of the endeavour and the lessons they feel might be learned for others embarking on the same process.

The research comprised interviews, observations, and documentary analysis conducted from May – September 2009. My colleague Dr Jonathan Savage and I visited the three participating schools, made limited observation of the project activities as a basis for further discussion with staff and interviewed the coordinating teachers and selected teaching staff in each school. Our case studies were returned to the schools for comments in September/October. Over this period, I also talked with those figures who had been involved in the project's development from its earliest stages who could still be contacted: Kathryn Burns (co-ordinator for the project for the RSA); Marilyn Eccles (Manchester City Council & Centre for Urban Education); Dr John Robinson (Centre for Urban Education and co-ordinator for the Learner Action Teams). The interview and observation data is complemented by documentary analysis of project proposals, meeting minutes, update reports and proceedings of residential workshops throughout the course of the project. These were provided by John Robinson and Marilyn Eccles from their personal files, and by Kathryn Burns and Ian McGimpsey of the RSA. At its outset, the project had also established Learner Action Teams for the purposes of evaluation. Their report is separate from this, but discussions with the project lead for that work have also informed the reflections and recommendations in this report. A review of related research literature and initiatives has also been conducted as part of this process and is available separately.

The aim of this review is to articulate the tensions and challenges involved in the process of building new relationships between schools and communities and to provide insights into potential future directions for ideas of an 'area-based curriculum'.

My thanks to all of the teachers and interviewees for their time and their honesty in reflecting upon the programme and to Dr Jonathan Savage for conducting the case study with NMHSB. Thanks also to the teachers who took time to read and comment on an early version of this report; any errors or omissions, however, must be considered my own.

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November 2009

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Executive Summary

The Manchester Curriculum Project was inspired by the idea that by drawing on the resources of the city it would be possible to enhance student engagement, aspiration and attainment.

A pilot project exploring this idea ran in three schools from September 2008 - July 2009, with a view to longer term development both in Manchester and, potentially, in other cities in the UK. The project was funded by Manchester City Council and managed by the RSA.

The project process was designed by the RSA in the summer term of 2008 in the light of advice from the project steering group. The project was not driven by a single 'vision' of what a Manchester Curriculum might be, but was informed by a set of imperatives to 1) open up the curriculum through competency oriented approaches, 2) increase student engagement through connections to authentic activities and 3) build bridges with the wider resources of the city. The curriculum design was conceived as being the responsibility of the individual schools, with the RSA providing conceptual inputs, practical assistance in creating links with external partners, and venues/support with team-planning. Each school received £2000 to support costs associated with the programme, to be spent as the school saw appropriate.

Four schools were invited by the project team to participate on the basis of: their prior involvement in Opening Minds and similar curriculum innovations; their geographical location in the city; and their intake (one boys' school, one girls' school, two mixed schools). Two of the schools were in the process of becoming Academies over the course of the 2008/2009 year, which presented both extra pressures on the staff and constraints on the project. One school subsequently withdrew part way through the project. Three schools completed pilots in the 08/09 academic year.

The process of developing the curriculum was supported by three 24 hour residential sessions, running from Friday to Saturday lunchtime in November, February and April when up to seven staff from each of the schools and RSA staff would work to develop the idea of the Manchester Curriculum. The principal authors of the Manchester curriculum were, therefore, the teachers participating in the project in each school.

Schools elected to participate because the project offered an opportunity to innovate that was sanctioned by the City Council and supported by the RSA, because they expected to learn from other schools, because they were keen to develop their approaches to competency-focused curricula, and because they were seeking support with assessment and evaluation of competencies. These reasons for participation shaped the types of teachers who decided to participate in the project, the majority of whom were concerned with competency-focused approaches to teaching and learning.

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While the early residential offered important opportunities for ‘thinking big’, the pressures on teachers meant that in most cases they were forced rapidly to set aside the wider discussions and move quickly to design of the delivery of the curriculum. The planning process often involved teachers getting together after work, working on their own late at night, and snatched conversations in corridors. Friendships as much as subject disciplines played a role in shaping the curriculum design. The design of the residential also structured the project: because only teachers were involved in the design process, and because the schools were encouraged to use that time to plan in school groups, there was no cross-school planning, and no collaborative curriculum design with out of school partners. The Manchester Curriculum, as a result, came to be not a ‘city-wide’ approach, but a schools-focused activity. A critical factor in shaping the curriculum in the schools was also the existing timetabling and staffing arrangements in the school that had already been set in advance for the year.

The pilot projects also brought to light the fact that the ‘area’ in the ‘area-based curriculum’ is a contested concept. In two of the schools, students were perceived to have little knowledge or understanding of the wider city. In these schools, a central aim of the project was therefore not only to draw on the resources of the city, but to introduce students to the city centre, and its cultural resources in particular. In none of the schools did the teachers consider drawing on the immediate funds of knowledge or resources of the parents or the immediate local community.

Schools’ attempts to partner with external organisations were subject to significant frustration including: teachers’ lack of time and support for administration and networking; lack of clear contacts in external organisations; no shared or central point for sharing contacts with external partners; the logistical challenges of transporting hundreds of children to different locations, including the associated demands for risk assessment, staff support and transport costs; the costs of visiting external organisations. Schools adopted different approaches to building external links: some were confident enough to ask for access and resources at no cost, others were less confident and paid for all activities.

Schools who did take the risk and tried to develop partnerships rather than simply commission organisations, found that their approaches were welcomed. Their surprise at this meant that they often did not brief organisations well enough in advance or work carefully with them to develop activities, often for fear of seeming ungrateful. Teachers’ concerns to develop curriculum and activities that could be repeated in subsequent years also meant that many were concerned about possible risks of working with external partners on a collaborative basis in case this meant that they would have to develop new partners in subsequent years. This, combined with the typically fluid processes of curriculum design, meant that schools didn’t work with partners to design curriculum and instead tended to build a partnership characterised by ‘commissioning’ or ‘visiting’ arrangements – buying-in expertise or finding locations to visit.

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The projects that were developed were all, for the schools, seen as significant successes and all were characterised by the creation of new partnerships with external organisations that the participating staff are now developing further.

Parklands School ran a project called 'Undressing Manchester: the Urban World' as their part of the Manchester curriculum. This programme ran for half a term in the summer term with all year 7 pupils. It formed one unit of the Year 7 Competency Curriculum which focuses on developing students' Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills. The curriculum ran over 3 weeks and involved 6 x 50 minute sessions for an introduction to Manchester, comprising students' research into different aspects of Manchester history and culture; a full one day trip to the city by the whole year group, including museum visits, city walks and a trip on the Manchester Wheel; a full day of master classes from Manchester artists working with the students to develop creative responses to their experiences in the city; and eight 50 minute sessions in classes to develop further independent and group projects in response to their experiences in the city and with the artists. The project has stimulated significant debate amongst staff about pedagogy and curriculum, very positive responses from students, and was the first occasion that external artists had played such a visible role in this school's activities. The school has now become an academy and while the same schemes of work will not be repeated next year, the teachers involved in the project have embedded elements of the programme in curriculum planning for 2009/2010.

Whalley Range School ran a project called 'Our Manchester: Our Whalley Range' with a full year 7 group for one day a week (split over two groups) for the first half term in 2009. The project began with a stimulus DVD made by the head of history based on a 'time travelling teacher' shown to all the students in the school hall. This was then followed by a challenge to the students to create a DVD about Manchester's history. Students working in class groups used poetry, drama and research skills to create a documentary about a particular period of the history of Whalley Range and Manchester. They visited the city on bus tours and walking tours designed to open up their awareness of the city's resources. Students used still and video cameras to capture footage. Some students scripted dramas and filmed re-enactments, another invited in a local actor to talk to them, others returned to museums to research further information. The students then spent time at the local City Learning Centre designing and editing their films. The students were supported by detailed handbooks encouraging reflection upon the competencies and skills they were developing in the process of completing the projects. The project was part of the school's transformed Year 7 curriculum and the project will run again in 2009/2010 with the same staff and a commitment to further development.

NMHSB developed a cross year group (years 7&8) project that ran for three full weeks in the summer term 2009. The project challenge set to students was to create a series of films on 'What Makes Manchester Great' to be shown on the BBC big screens in the city. Early in the project, the school gained the support of the BBC. This project

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involved approximately 90 students in a diverse range of visits to organisations including Urbis, Quarry Bank Mill, Old Trafford, the Velodrome, the Imperial War Museum, the Arndale Centre and the Library Theatre. Students were given presentations and tours in each location, and had time to conduct their own research. Their visits were structured by a handbook supporting the three weeks work and encouraging reflection upon their development of the Opening Minds competencies. Student visits were interspersed with time in school reflecting upon their experiences and planning their next stages. The students created storyboards, and their own films, and presented them in a major event at Urbis. The school has now become an academy and while it is not planning to repeat the activity in 2009/2010, the working relationships amongst staff and the partnerships built with external organisations are seen to be important developments that will be taken forward and built upon within the new academy structures.

The following aspects of the project were seen to generate benefits for the schools, teachers and students:

- The big idea of a 'Manchester Curriculum' challenged schools to build bridges with their city and also to reorganise time, space and teaching roles in the schools.
- The emphasis on competencies encouraged a re-examination of teacher identity and pedagogy.
- The project offered support for risk taking and innovation.
- Time for collaborative work amongst teachers for curriculum development was seen as critical in creating opportunities for staff to reflect upon their practice, challenge assumptions, develop new ideas and personal relationships.
- The opportunities for teachers to spend significant and sustained time with participating students was reported to make a major difference to staff-student relationships, and to the capacity of staff to develop appropriate and effective teaching strategies.
- Visits to the city were seen to provide authentic and informal opportunities for learning conversations.
- The diversity of teaching strategies encouraged were reported to motivate many students, and to provide opportunities for different students to demonstrate achievement.

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- The visible investment in students through trips and activities was considered to be a particularly important message to children who often came from disadvantaged areas within the city.

There were a range of areas that can be identified as important opportunities for further development of an area based curriculum:

- There is a need for a more critical and inclusive understanding of what counts as the 'area' in an area-based curriculum
- There is an untapped opportunity to build on students' and parents' own funds of knowledge in the design of an area-based curriculum
- There are a range of ways in which the city can play a role as educational partner, beyond 'commissioning' expertise and 'visiting' institutions, that are currently untapped
- New forms of partnership are needed to draw on schools' expertise in pedagogy and external partners' specialist expertise and resources – these partnerships will take time to develop
- An area based curriculum could also be initiated in locations outside the school with a range of local actors and institutions
- There are existing initiatives and research that need to be drawn upon to ensure that existing expertise and relationships can be harnessed.
- Schools are currently having to operate independently, they need support to overcome structural issues (such as transport and logistics) and to build collaborative partnerships with other schools (such as through new governance or federation relationships)
- Further research is required to fully explore the relationship between a more 'localised' curriculum and the development of competencies
- Further research is required to develop appropriate strategies for evaluation of student understanding and development of skills and competencies in an area-based curriculum

A number of practical next steps are recommended for Manchester to build on these pilots:

- Find ways to provide low cost or free transport for schoolchildren

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- Establish a collective database of potential partners and contacts
- Develop guidance/advice for external organisations wanting to work with schools
- Map existing school-community initiatives
- Develop annual home-school agreements for external visits
- Create local community ‘funds of knowledge’ resources
- Promote new forms of professional development partnerships with local organisations
- Provide continued funding for dissemination and development of the pilots

Other local authorities wishing to develop area-based curricula are encouraged to recognise that such approaches will require examination of:

- Transport issues
- School governance and competition issues
- Knowledge sharing and communications
- Local health and safety procedures
- Professional development strategies and resources
- The relationship between education policy and community regeneration funding

These practical next steps, however, need to be located in a much wider context, namely the recognition that an area based curriculum flies in the face of many of the recent currents in educational policy and practice. It implies localised decision-making and curriculum design in the context of two decades of centralised decision-making; it implies teachers having agency in the context of a decade of centralised prescription. What’s more, it potentially implies challenges to schools’ monopoly over educational provision, in the context of over a century of mass education. As such, it cannot be expected to happen quickly or without some discomfort. At its heart has to be a reimagining of the role of the school, the teacher and their relationship with the community.

Such a curriculum cannot be seen as independent, therefore, of a process of professional development. The creation of an area-based curriculum needs necessarily to be seen less

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as a sprint than a marathon, less a quick fix for student disengagement than a longer-term strategy for sustained change and development. Its process will necessarily be one in which time for 'unlearning' assumptions, and time for building relationships across traditional divides are understood as equally as important as the more familiar processes, today, of planning and delivering new schemes of work.

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Introduction: the aims of the Manchester Curriculum Project

The Manchester Curriculum Project was born of the desire by Manchester City Council to more effectively build bridges between the disadvantaged communities of Manchester, the city's social and industrial history and its new renaissance in creative and media industries. It was premised upon the idea that, by drawing on the resources of the city it would be possible to enhance student engagement, aspiration and attainment. As the two project partners argued, in the early stages of the project design:

A localised curriculum [would] increase engagement in learning, raise standards and contribute to citizenship and social cohesion (RSA, early project documentation)

What we wanted to see was that young people who were disengaging from the curriculum would be motivated to want to learn by a curriculum that was linked to their locality, that they could actually get involved with and do things that were real, that they felt had a purpose and made a difference to them, and that they could think about their future in that community and the jobs that they might access in the future in that community (Manchester City Council, early project documentation)

These different perspectives were combined in the design of a pilot project that was to run from September 2008 - July 2009, with a view to longer term development both in Manchester and, potentially, in other cities in the UK. The project was funded by Manchester City Council and managed by the RSA.

This report provides an account of how the project developed in the participating schools over that period and the early lessons emerging from the project for the re-imagination of the relationship between schools and communities that is so central to current policy concerns. It is an attempt to explore the realities of making such aspirations a reality, getting such a project off the ground, the complexities involved in concepts such as an 'area-based' or 'localised' curriculum.

Project Development

This section of the report discusses two critical elements that shaped the development of the Manchester Curriculum: first, the processes and expectations established by the project team; second, the existing cultures, aspirations and structures of the participating schools that shaped staff participation and expectations of the project.

Project management and timeline

The project was led, in the first instance, by Lesley James of the RSA and then by Kathryn Burns, a Deputy Head Teacher with significant experience in developing Opening Minds approaches, who was seconded from one of the participating schools. The early advocate for the project at Manchester City Council was Wayne Shand, who had conceived of the project in collaboration with Lesley James as part of aspirations to create what was, initially, intended to be a new Manchester Baccalaureate. He left the Council a third of the way through the project and from this point on there was no consistent involvement from the City Council.

The project process was designed by the RSA in the summer term of 2008 in the light of advice from the project steering group, involving City Council and Local Authority participants, as well as head teachers. In these discussions, it was decided to focus the project on Opening Minds approaches drawing on the resources of the city, to prioritise the early secondary years and to move away from previous discussions to develop a formal assessment mechanism for the project. It was in these discussions that the principle was established that the project should support schools to develop this core idea in ways that matched their own circumstances, resources and aspirations. The project was not driven by a single 'vision' of what a Manchester Curriculum might be, but was informed by a set of imperatives to open up the curriculum through competency oriented approaches, to increase student engagement through connections to authentic activities and to build bridges with the wider resources of the city. The relationship between these imperatives is not straightforward and, as shall be discussed later, they came to be reconciled by participating schools and teachers in a range of different ways.

As a result, the curriculum design was conceived as being the responsibility of the individual schools, with the RSA providing conceptual inputs, practical assistance in creating links with external partners, and venues/support with team-planning. Each school received £2000 to support costs associated with the programme, to be spent as the school saw appropriate.

Four schools were invited by the project team to participate on the basis of: their prior involvement in Opening Minds and similar curriculum innovation; their geographical location in the city; and their intake (one boys' school, one girls' school, two mixed schools). Two of the schools were in the process of becoming academies over the course

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of the 2008/2009 year, which presented both extra pressures on the staff (most of whom were in the process of re-applying for their jobs and preparing for major change in terms of organisational structure) and constraints on the project in terms of the capacity to build long term sustainability. Four schools initially joined the project, with one leaving mid way through the project due to external pressures limiting their capacity to participate. This document reports only on the experiences of the three schools who continued to participate.

The development of the curriculum was structured around three 24 hour residential sessions, running from Friday to Saturday lunchtime in November, February and April when up to seven staff from each of the schools and RSA staff developed the idea of the Manchester Curriculum. External speakers providing insight into Opening Minds activities elsewhere in the country, into potential technology developments to support the project and into the potential resources in the community, were also brought in to the first residential. The bulk of time at these residential was set aside for schools to work individually in their groups to design their activities. The Learner Action teams were also invited on two occasions to update on their progress and the schools were encouraged to reflect upon their aims and evaluation methods in the final residential in April. Kate Cody, at the city council, continued to play a role in assisting with links between the schools and local organisations. The RSA fellowship team also played their part in identifying partnership opportunities. The Centre for Urban Education was commissioned to lead on developing Learner Action Teams to conduct research around the initiative in each school.

The principal authors of the Manchester curriculum were, therefore, the teachers participating in the project in each school.

Reasons for school participation

The school leadership teams agreed to participate in the project for a wide variety of reasons, many of which subsequently informed the selection of staff for participation in the project in each school and the institutional perception of the 'location' of the project within school subject/disciplinary structures. In many cases, this led to the project being staffed by teachers who were either expecting to embark upon, or who had in many cases already been involved with, cross-curricular competency based approaches.

Sanctioned Innovation

One school that had previously been adopting a competency based approach to year 7 were keen to be involved in the project precisely because it was sanctioned and supported by the city council who had previously been understood to be critical of competency based approaches:

I think we'd always felt a bit isolated with it because we got criticised by the local authority for the first couple of years.

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I think that was quite important because there was also a very big mention that the local authority were on board with the Manchester curriculum, [...] the opportunity to get involved with them onside was worth pursuing as well.

Learning from other schools and teachers

The same school, who were suffering severe financial restrictions that meant they had no access to external training or development, were also keen to be involved because of the opportunities the Manchester Curriculum offered to learn from and collaborate with other schools attempting similar innovations. A second school was equally keen on this element, as they were starting on a new curriculum design and wanted both to learn from others about their approaches and to work with others on the thorny issue of how to assess competency based approaches. For these schools, then, the opportunity to participate in the project was, from the outset, about the opportunity to develop staff and develop understanding within the school.

I think that I'd hoped we would work [...] with other schools, who had a similar approach to this curriculum.

I think there was a possibility of getting some links with the other schools that were involved in it and maybe finding out a bit more about how the competencies are being embedded into the curriculum. Certainly, at the time, we were quite concerned about how competencies should be assessed and various other things.

[...] mentioned the other schools that were going to be involved and I knew bits about people who work in those schools, doing different things, and I thought that might be quite interesting.

Refreshing and reflecting upon competency curriculum innovation

The two schools who had previously been involved in Opening Minds projects saw this project as an opportunity to 'refresh' their competency curriculum

I think with the competence curriculum, that's run for four years, and we definitely hit a stage, this year, where we needed to change it. That cycle of it had come to its natural end and, actually, what this enabled us to do is to think about the competence curriculum again and, as a result of the planning of this, I know that [...] and I, in our unit of work, had trialled lots of other things this year.

I thought it was something that was going to be quite exciting, something different, an alternative curriculum. I'd already been involved teaching the competency curriculum for the past two years so this was obviously going to be an extension into Opening Minds and I looked forward to doing something that would be a bit different from what I usually do in school.

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We're very excited about the whole competency idea, and we're lacking in direction a bit at the moment. If we could just be re-focused by people that had time to think about it – which these hurley burly schools just aren't set up to do.

Support with assessment and evaluation of competency based approaches

Two of the schools explicitly mentioned that they wanted to ask more challenging questions about the assessment and evaluation of competency based approaches and that they hoped the project would provide insights into these difficult questions:

Certainly, at the time, we were quite concerned about how competencies should be assessed and various other things [...] those were the issues we were dealing with at the time and we thought possibly there may be some steer, or something, whereby working with other people you start to unpick those problems and things.

She (Kathryn) talked about the fact that [...] there would be an evaluation and that there would be training for people who were going to help students who were going to help evaluate the projects, so I thought, well, we've got to evaluate our project anyway so it might be good if we had some assistance in that.

All of these reasons for participation were related primarily to innovation in school with pedagogy and competency curricula rather than to the development of new relationships between schools and community organisations. They also played a role in shaping the development of the project because of the different groups of teachers who came to be involved

Teachers' subject identities

In one school, the staffing of the project with a combination of highly enthusiastic competency focused teachers and highly committed subject specialists, led to significant tensions and disagreements about the underpinning principles of the project which delayed the design of activity for several weeks. There were passionate and heated disagreements about how the relationship between competencies and subject content and skills might be managed. The school also had a legacy of a divide between competency staff and 'other staff' which led to tensions in the school around the implementation of the curriculum.

Teacher 1 - It was seen as a competency trip and a competency day, off timetable, and anyone who didn't teach competency...

Teacher 2 - But it was planned as that because we were nervous, we were nervous of doing anything else.

Teacher 1 - The same people who don't get involved in competency teaching sat there and listened and went, that's got nothing to do with me; I don't teach competency.

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Teacher 2 - But in all the planning, you know, we were very aware of that, the competencies divided people. Some people hate it and loathe it and can't see the point of it.

In another school, which equally included an 'elite' of competency staff and others, the highly motivated group leading the project, confident of their aspirations, and operating in an environment in which they were encouraged to take responsibility, suffered from operating without clear co-ordination in the early stages, and found that they were setting up relationships and activities without building a shared understanding of the overarching programme. An assumed shared understanding needed, throughout the course of the project, to be made into an explicit set of aims and activities.

I just think this school is quite good at experimenting, at piloting new things all the time, so I think it fitted in to that kind of ethos. The team we had, or was asked, are quite experimental in their approaches and quite open to new things as well. I think that had a major, major impact on that.

But also we've learned about communications. That, I think, is what's made this successful. At the start the communication was dreadful. Although we're pretending it wasn't, it was dreadful.

In the third school, the existing commitment to project days that would integrate humanities and IT subjects meant that the staff involved saw themselves not as competency teachers but as subject teachers first. The challenge for these staff was the development of a curriculum that enabled the teaching both of their subjects, and of the skills and competencies they wished to develop and which engaged with the local community. In this case, a strategy of dividing up responsibility for different elements of curriculum activities was adopted.

Teachers' time

While the staff selection was shaped by school reasons for participation, the structure of the three residentials also played a significant role in structuring the design of the Manchester Curriculum. The first residential was presented as an opportunity to 'think big' and explore the possibilities that the idea of a 'Manchester Curriculum' might offer. Many of the schools took this as an opportunity to step back and reflect upon their activities and to examine the 'bigger picture' of educational purposes and goals (rather than, as one teacher currently going through the shift to an Academy structure wryly observed, just talking about school uniforms):

I think it's about thinking time. I think it's that chance just to discuss the whole philosophy of education, what you want to deliver, how you want to deliver it, and quite often you can't do that in school because other things come up ... we do get back together and discuss about education and what we're doing and how we deliver and I think that was really good.

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On that residential, the phrase Opening Minds had a kind of impact on thinking. Right. OK. This is about trying to do things differently.

This 'opening up' generated divergent responses from staff. For some, it actively encouraged innovation and risk taking:

I'd been kind of thinking, 'people are struggling a bit with this project and maybe we've had enough wow factor'. But they're kind of coming back [from the residential] saying 'maybe we could have done something that was even a bit bigger' and those were people who I wouldn't have necessarily have thought would have thought like that, so I think that's probably the best thing that we got out of it.

For others, it left a feeling of anxiety and lack of anchors:

The fact that you could do anything. At the beginning I think that we all sat there stumped and not knowing – because it was so broad.

There are so many fantastic ideas, but I'm the head of department and my brain is – which staff, and which classroom, with how many kids – because that's how I've always been and it's really hard to think about – from a concept, from an idea – to something that you can actually deliver to a group of kids with all the challenges that that entails.

Time pressures also meant that schools rapidly moved from these bigger picture explorations of fundamental educational philosophies into a process of planning for delivery:

'Time. I think we were really difficult, planning time. One of the difficulties we had is we did a lot of work in our own time, gave up a lot of time to plan it, and I think, when we started off, we started off too big and I think we ended up looking and thinking, hold on, we can't manage that so we cut it down to this Manchester topic, which I think was one of the best things we delivered in school, but at the start, we were looking at it as a bigger scheme of work but we just didn't have the time planning.'

A major curriculum innovation cannot, however, be achieved in three 24 hour sessions. The project was therefore reliant upon the commitment and time of individual teachers leading the project in schools and was shaped by the opportunities and time that individual staff were able to dedicate to it.

In one school, a group of teachers who had strong working relationships and friendships and who regularly saw each other at the end of the day and in breaktimes, would come together informally after work to develop the ideas and sketch out plans through passionate arguments. In another school, one teacher took on a strong leadership role, devolving responsibility to sub-groups of specialists for specific areas of work and taking on other elements on her own, working late at night to produce

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materials. Often, individual teachers were contributing their own time to attending the residential and to working in the evenings and at weekends to prepare for the implementation of their plans.

We did most of the work at home. I worked for about three weeks solid every single evening, every weekend on this, in the end. The residential was great and we did need that time but, in hindsight [...]

The hours that I spent in the three weeks before it started and the three weeks it was on and for that six-week period I was working 52 hours on average and that was doing stuff on Sundays, going to meet people on Saturdays.

What the project came to be in each school was therefore highly dependent upon these different cultures and working practices, and upon the time, effort and dedication of individual staff.

In all schools, however, the limited time available for planning led to an emphasis on the question ‘how can we do something really different, really challenging?’, rather than ‘how can we question our ideas about the relationships between schools and communities?’ Several fundamental assumptions about how schools and community organisations work together therefore went unchallenged as will be discussed in the next section.

Residential design

The residential design also shaped the project in another important way: because the invitation to participate was extended only to teachers, and because the structure of these sessions encouraged participants to work primarily in school groups, the Manchester curriculum was conceived by the participating schools as essentially a teacher-led curriculum innovation, centred around individual schools, in which external partners were seen as resources rather than as potential partners in the curriculum design. An early attempt to bring the teachers together to collaborate on the design of an IT system that would underpin a collective activity was greeted with enthusiasm by participating schools, but foundered due to lack of funding. The Manchester curriculum, as a result, came to be, not a ‘city-wide’ approach, but a schools-focused activity.

It was clear that we weren’t going to work with the other schools and everyone else, obviously, was creating a curriculum that was appropriate for their schools so why didn’t we? And then we started to look at what we can do to raise the aspirations of the kids at this school about the community that they’ve got, about the city centre, and that’s when we started to look at more purposeful ways of doing it.

The ways in which schools planned the curriculum also actively militated against the involvement of external partners in the design of curriculum and interventions:

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We should have had one specific person working with us, from business or somewhere, one of the fellows working with us all the way through, and then it would have become unrivalled, wouldn't it, it would have become clear [...] I mean, because the minute you become part of the planning then it becomes clearer what you're doing. And it was a bit of lecturing us and that's fine; I like being lectured, I like people throwing stuff at me, but then you need to take it somewhere and, in a lot of ways, its impossible because we're all constrained and do a lot of our planning between 5pm and 6pm at night, in my room, and its planning on corridors and its planning in classrooms, and its like – I had a really good idea – and its planning by text, you know, and all those things, and unless you've got a really tight knit group – otherwise, it becomes very rigid and people fall back to that comfort zone of how many children are in the classroom and what am I delivering and you always fall back to that.

One consequence of both the school-focused planning and the limited time available, was that the schools often drew on a range of prior experiences and existing plans for the school year to create their Manchester Curriculum.

School timetables

At the heart of the planning was also the question of how the schools might 'create space' in the school timetable. This is a fundamental question for any curriculum innovation as the school timetable, often set in stone several months before the start of the new year, acts as a fundamental brake on spontaneous activity and actively militates against the creation of new staff-student relationships through sustained interactions.

The timetabling issue is particularly important in the attempt to create an area-based/local curriculum, as new relationships between students, schools and communities are unlikely to be achieved in 45 minute windows, particularly when the logistics of moving large numbers of children between different locations are taken into account. A critical factor that shaped the design of the projects in all three schools, then, was the capacity to mobilise support to create new timetabling arrangements.

In Whalley Range, the school had already committed to transforming its Year 7 timetable to create two full 'project' days per week (Mondays and Fridays) in which half the year group would come together in the hall for a shared activity and introduction followed by students staying in the same groups with one teacher for the rest of the day. This reorganisation of the timetable had implications for their Manchester Curriculum design as the time for this activity was 'taken' from ICT, RE, History and Geography. As a result, the staff involved were drawn from those disciplines and the design of the projects was intended to support students' understanding and knowledge in those areas as well as the development of personal, learning and thinking skills. This previous commitment placed this school on a different schedule from the others participating in the project, as they were required to implement the Manchester activities in January-February.

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At North Manchester High School for Boys (NMHSB), the teacher group decided to take an ambitious and spectacular approach to their Curriculum design by taking the whole year group ‘off timetable’ for 3 weeks. This was not without its tensions and could only be achieved thanks to the support of a persuasive and senior member of staff, and the commitment of other staff to reorganise their activities around them:

Q: How on earth did you manage to collapse the curriculum for three weeks and get approval of that?

Teacher: First of all, when I started with this, they said the same. What they said to me was, [...], it's alright us doing this, but you go and tell the rest of the staff. I thought, fair enough, so I went to the rest of the staff and said, look folks, this is what we're going to do so how's about we look at it and say we'll celebrate the end of the term, the end of the year and we'll celebrate the school closing and we'll do this project right across Key Stage 3. So I got the rest of the staff to commit to that and they actually ran their own – there were three other separate projects that ran at – four other separate projects that ran across Key Stage 3, that involved all pupils.

At Parklands, the project was seen as part of the competency curriculum. As a result, much of the time for the project (run over half a term) was already allocated for competency activities in double sessions. The challenge, however, was to create two full ‘off timetable’ days which they did with the support of the senior member of staff responsible for timetabling:

We realised that we could have these people in, set their own timetable and fortunately had [...] who has got a lot of sway with the timetable and said, we'll have them all off for a day. So the Monday became the trip, the Wednesday became the big master class of workshops.

Arranging this was not without its tensions with other members of staff who were seen as either actively hostile or simply unaware of the major challenges that the Manchester Curriculum teams had had to overcome to create the initiative:

It created a lot of cover that day and, at certain times, [...] you have those who are rigid and stick to the comfort zones of their classroom and don't want to give up their free periods and don't want to be taken for their gain time or the PPA and those are the people that once they see the cover list are not too happy. They claimed it was over-staffed. They kind of weren't on board with it and some of these were SMT. I think it didn't help there was another trip out that day as well. I'm not sure what it was. I think there was a secondary trip which doubled the amount of cover – or was it examinations? – something else happened that day and the cover list was about six pages long.

Some of the staff don't even know what we've been through. Some of the staff just know about the Manchester Curriculum.

A critical consequence of these features of the project design, the expectations of the participating schools, and the inevitable contexts of school timetables and cultures means that these first pilots for the Manchester Curriculum, while being highly challenging for the schools in terms of the commitment, resources and persistence required to establish them, can be seen more as an evolution of many of the working practices of these schools than a radical break with traditional patterns of school-community relations.

Building partnerships with the city

This section of the report discusses the ways in which the ‘area’ in the ‘area-based curriculum’ was mobilised in the project, both through the *ideas* of the city and relationships between schools and communities that underpinned the design of the pilots and through the *practical challenges* of building partnerships between schools and local institutions.

What counts as ‘Manchester’ in the ‘Manchester Curriculum’?

It seems self-evidently useful to explore how to harness the resources and expertise of cities to create meaningful educational experiences that build bridges for children between education and their real lives and environment: we can create ‘relevant’ education by allowing children to engage in activities that make a difference to their lives and communities; we can enhance the resources of schools by enabling businesses, third sector organisations and individuals to take on some of the responsibility for education; and in so doing, we should improve children’s lives and raise aspirations. Such was the general pitch to the schools at the outset of the project.

In practice, however, the idea of an ‘area-based curriculum’ has proven more complex. Not least because the understanding of what counts as a school’s ‘community’ and what counts as the ‘city’ are far from clear.

For two of the schools, Parklands and Whalley Range, for example, there was a view that the relationship between students and their city might be problematic. That, in essence, the idea of Manchester as ‘their city’, while taken for granted by policy makers and think tanks, was something that might be far from familiar to the students in these schools:

Teacher 1: This is one of the most deprived wards in Europe. There is huge, huge – its quite shocking, the level of poverty, because you don’t see it because it’s not totally in your face... but go in the doors and there’s no furniture and no wallpaper and there’s no food in the cupboards and there’s a huge amount of neglect and domestic violence.

Teacher 2: And alcohol abuse, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy [...] So getting £2.50 for the bus into town.

Teacher 1: They can’t find £2.50 to feed their kids.

Teacher 2: They do go to Manchester and go to Primark ... but they don’t go to the Museum of Science and Industry, they don’t go to Albert Square or St Anne’s Square, or The Royal Exchange or the Library Theatre.

Teacher 1: I’m not sure that I do either. You have to have a reason for wanting to do it.

Teacher 2: Yes, but you would and you wouldn’t feel intimidated by it. I think the parents and the kids here probably would. Wouldn’t they?

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I was at the City Stadium on a bus and a girl said ‘oh, I go to Asda, I’ve driven past here, I never knew what that was’ – She never knew that that was the B of the Bang or that’s the City Stadium. She’s in a car where nobody mentions what it is.

Teachers in these schools repeatedly pointed out that their students simply didn’t know and definitely didn’t feel any ownership of the city in which they were growing up; and in the case of Parklands, there was some doubt as to whether children were even growing up in Manchester, or whether they saw themselves as being in a different place.

Teacher 2: They don’t think we belong to Manchester. It’s Wythenshawe before Manchester. [...]

Q: What do they see Manchester is?

Teacher 2: A city over there with lots of buildings, lots of businesses, lots of rich people, lots of footballers living there, lots of multicultural stuff that they don’t really have anything to do with and they don’t understand, and lots of shops, Primark, and that’s it.

The idea of a ‘local curriculum’ or an ‘area-based curriculum’ in these schools was interpreted as being, in the first instance, about opening up a particular part of ‘the city’ to their students (the economically successful and historically significant elements). The aim of this opening up of the city was, for these teachers, not only to make visible to students the resources of that city but, more importantly, to give students the confidence to explore it, occupy it and participate in that space. While some may read such aspirations as comprising a deficit view of students and their immediate local communities, others would see this as an attempt to empower students to occupy spaces that they are currently excluded from culturally and economically. This tension surrounding what ‘counts’ as a local community, and what should be drawn upon and valorized in an ‘area based curriculum’ remains unexamined in the project to date.

The third school, who had already been familiar with the use of the city as part of their teaching, saw central Manchester locations and significant Manchester institutions as a means of creating a more relevant and authentic learning experience and as a resource for extending and enriching the curriculum, but did not see students’ exclusion from certain areas/practices in the city as itself an issue to be addressed. ‘Manchester’ would not, then, be ‘taught’ in this school, instead, it would be mobilised as a context for students’ development of core competencies:

The goals, as far as I was concerned, were to use Manchester, [as] a place that whatever we chose to do, as long as we were wise about it, we would get them buying in, and the first thing is, for the kids, was for them to enjoy it and, in using Manchester as a model, we could then, if you like, overtly get across the competencies and the skills.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging that one of the schools explicitly challenged the idea that education should encourage children to focus on a purely local curriculum and

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instead, emphasised the interconnected and global nature of identity and ‘community’ in today’s world:

I think we want to get students to feel that they’re part of our school community; they’re part of their wider community and they’re part of a global community. So we had one project that focused on fair trade and social enterprise kind of issues and I think if we hadn’t had any world view, you know, that wouldn’t have been good, and I suppose, on the identity one we were thinking about, well, we’re in Manchester but we’ve got all these links with other countries that people have come from, so that’s kind of what’s made Manchester what it is, the links its got with other places.

These different perspectives led to slightly divergent aspirations for the ‘role’ of Manchester in each school’s ‘Manchester Curriculum’:

‘deliver competency skills and engage pupils in activities which would ignite a passion and pride for the city in which they live and a clear understanding of the contribution of the culture and the arts in this process’ (Parklands – project outline documentation).

‘understanding community context, make learning more engaging and relevant, and guarantee that all students are familiar with their city and area and feel a sense of participation and ownership’ (Whalley Range – project outline documentation).

‘use Manchester as our key driver [...] for developing the competencies and skills that enhance a pupils abilities to be able to learn’ (NMHSB).

It was to achieve these ends that the organisations and businesses of Manchester would be harnessed in supporting the project.

While the schools had previously run Manchester based curricula in the past this project provided an impetus to really attempt to use the resources of the city:

I suppose the only real different thing was the staff had a frame of mind that they had to make links with other people, whereas, in the competency, it was always a desire to make links with other people but you didn’t have to do it and so it was probably easier not to do it, whereas, because there was a message that part of this project was about making these links, I think people went out there and did it.

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Building partnerships with local organisations

From a practical and logistical perspective, building relationships with external organisations also required schools to overcome a range of significant obstacles, all of which shaped the way in which the curriculum pilots developed.

Communications and Contacts

Teachers have little or no administrative support and limited opportunity to communicate during the school day with the outside world. The process of attempting to arrange appointments, activities and visits with external partners is often conducted by individual teachers, using their own mobile phones, in gaps between lessons or in planning periods. External partners, unaware of these time constraints, were found to rarely return calls at specified times and were even known to turn up to a school half an hour late and expect to be able to continue the meeting for the previously agreed duration.

The problem with schools is that we have such rigid days and we have a bell that goes every hour or every 50 minutes and you work within those parameters. Now that people that you get from the community, or even social workers, anybody that comes in, they have a different clock, apparently, and they don't work to the same thing. So because you've got a free period for 50 minutes you set up a meeting for dead on such and such a time but they don't turn up until 9.30 and then you've only got 20 minutes left so there has to be a comprehension between the two because we don't understand them and they don't understand us.

If schools are attempting to identify the appropriate person to speak with in an organisation to negotiate a partnership or contribution from that organisation, this can take several phone calls on different occasions. Simply finding the right person to speak to is a huge challenge within the current structures of the school day and in the absence of any visible network of contacts who could be approached for support:

you splash around and get really grumpy trying to work out who can say 'yes' to things and, in the end, we found out that [...] are the decision makers based in the [...]. Nobody in the [...] knew that and this is what I mean about connections and somebody facilitating that. It's exhausting and one thing we found out is that there are pockets of brilliance going on everywhere and there are pockets of opportunity and people that would just say 'Yes, you only needed to ask' but nobody knows who to ask, how to get in touch with them, and how they can actually do it.

Most of the barriers we had was organising the day. It took so long [...] we rang around and emailed and spoke to and booked and it does take a huge amount of time and chasing the money for it.

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Phoned them up on a number of occasions but the message never really got through to who it needed to, so I went down and asked to speak to a certain person who's fantastic and, basically.....did something quite similar with the Imperial War Museum. The issue with these events is getting in touch with the right people. I actually believe that so much of Manchester commerce, industry, the infrastructure of Manchester, they want to work with schools and they'll do it as long as you get through to the right person.

One school found that the early involvement of the BBC in the project seemed to open a lot of doors to other partners, while other schools were provided some support by individuals in the city council, who were able to informally identify expertise and advice in the local community.

Schools also did not have access to a system to share contacts and resources between them and so were having to act autonomously in building relationships:

The idea of sharing contacts might have helped. I mean, they've been making contacts at the BBC and Manchester United and things like that, but we have our contacts through our artists and things like that. Those are people that could have benefited both schools. Some of the planning work may have been more effective had it been done together.

Risk assessment and transport

The simple logistics of enabling children to access the resources of a city are far from trivial. Risk assessments need to be completed for all venues many of which do not have previous examples that can easily be shared and used by schools or, in the case of museums, which can be completed by the education officer on site. Each visit for each site therefore requires a lengthy risk assessment to be completed.

Then there is the issue of transport. One school simply had to pay for coaches (a huge cost from their budget), another was offered free transport from their Academy sponsor, and a third managed to get free travel passes from the Manchester Transport Authority, a process that required significant negotiation and time commitment:

The last really big hurdle was GMPTE to say, yes, we can have the bus passes; without that it's not possible, but they were fantastic. GMPTE said at a very early stage we could but they kept saying it's got to go through this panel; it has to go through this panel.

And on top of this, there is the simple question of how to staff both the trips and the provision of education for the children in the school:

Everybody talks about schools but they don't consider the sort of operational constraints of, you know, it's alright taking out ten kids or can you meet me for an hour? There are still 1000 plus children that have to be dealt with, managed, organised, taught even – and I think that's taken for granted and people don't understand so, [...] I would say that we started off with great big dreams about partnerships, making links, making connections, and

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I'll be honest that the school sort of operational stuff took over, the management of schools has subsumed a lot of that because it's just – you know, tough schools, big schools, challenging schools.

Funding

The schools were also confronted with costs from unexpected quarters. One school, for example, wanted to take the students on a tour of the city hall. On inquiring, they discovered that it had been privatised and students would be required to pay for the honour of visiting their civic institutions. This situation was only remedied when the Deputy Mayor (one of the school's governors) intervened.

Schools had different approaches to the issue of cost in drawing on the city's resources. One school audaciously attempted to gain access and materials for nothing, and were frequently met with open arms.

I wanted to keep costs down as much as possible. I made this clear to the staff. It doesn't matter if the RSA has given us £2,000; if we can spend 2p, that would be good and they went about it with that in mind.

This approach relied on individual teachers visiting potential partners and seeking out the right individuals in order to get their commitment of support and funding:

You had to eyeball people.

You had to eyeball them.

Other schools were less confident about making such requests and, as a result, paid for nearly all of the activities that their children participated in.

Some activities, that are part and parcel of many people's taken for granted participation in the cultural life of the city were, unlike museum access, simply seen as too far out of reach for schools in financial terms:

We had a grandiose idea. We wanted all the kids to sit down in a restaurant for a meal at lunchtime, as the cultural aspect of it, but that just became too expensive. It was all those kinds of things.

School self-confidence and expectations of external partners

Schools themselves often had very low expectations of the response of the local community to their requests. This manifested itself in some schools simply not asking potential partners for support as they expected to be knocked back. Other schools were simply grateful to have their request accepted, which resulted at times in them not considering carefully how these city venues might be used:

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At first we were quite excited to get anywhere that was going to take the pupils like the Velodrome and places like that. We allowed the venues to lead on that which we shouldn't have done and I think, in hindsight, we should have been a bit more – It was just a case of yes, we've the Velodrome, yes, we've got United. It wasn't, right, well what can we do there? We weren't thinking like that at that moment in time. We were just happy they had accepted us.

Need to build mutual understanding with partners

Some teachers identified the need for a longer term relationship between schools and external partners, in order to begin to work out how the external partners might contribute to the school and better support the partners to have an understanding of children's needs.

Some of the guides on the walks couldn't speak to children, not in a patronising way, but in an accessible way – they didn't pitch it right for their level of understanding.

This need for a longer discussion prior to setting up a partnership seemed to also get in the way of the school taking up some offers of help:

The people that they had, the fellows and stuff, who desperately want to get in to schools and work with children, they're too removed. You're all too far away; you don't realise what the day to day running is like of a school [...] and I thought that, yes, you have brilliant ideas and yes, you're really inspiring me, but how can I get you to come in and what would you do? [...] It was these sort of far out people, like in business, they work in various other places, that I think have a genuine interest in wanting to mould children's education and help influence education and I think those discussions need to keep on going so that... so that we can get to the threads that will pull it together [...] we would need to have a discussion around philosophy and ethos and culture initially, and then take it down, start very big. It takes time, that, doesn't it? You take it big and its almost going down a funnel [...]

Another teacher argued that, in fact, schools had little difficulty in finding external organisations that were willing to contribute to the school. The critical problem, from her perspective, was in these organisations developing activities that were amenable to the school timetable and to the demands of the existing curriculum.

Sustainability and responsibility

All of the schools wanted to design a curriculum that could be repeated and developed over subsequent years. In two of the schools, this resulted in a resistance to using external partners who could not necessarily be relied on to be available year after year. While they could envisage how they could successfully work with the city to create a 'splash', these teachers were operating on different timescales and looking for long-lasting and substantial change to their working practices. As a result, they designed

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curricula that they had ownership of, that they could repeat in a reliable manner over subsequent years, and which weren't dependent upon individual 'contributions'. These schools, perhaps with good reason, are sceptical about the longer term commitment of external partners to schools.

One of our biggest priorities from the beginning was sustainability and being able to roll it out each year. We didn't want to do something that was going to be miraculous, big but wham bam, a one-off. We were trying to, at the time, create consistent schemes of work that could be rolled out each year. You could have a different approach or different outcomes but the framework would be the same

This one consideration alone shaped what the schools would consider doing. They scaled down some significant large scale early thinking and focused on activities that they could conceivably 'deliver' without external support in future years. At the heart of such an approach is the assumption that children's education is the responsibility of schools rather than external partners, and that, as a result, external partners cannot be relied upon to take children's experiences as seriously as staff in the school.

As a result, in none of the schools was there an involvement of external partners in curriculum design. Instead, the dominant relationship was a supply relationship in which the schools specified the activity and brought in the external organisation to fulfil their objectives. In and of themselves, however, these relationships were seen to be novel and powerful for many of the schools.

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The Manchester Curriculum pilots summary

In its first pilot in 2009, the Manchester Curriculum came to comprise the following activities run in the three schools (the full case studies for each school are available in the Appendices).

Parklands School

Parklands School ran a project called 'Undressing Manchester: the Urban World' as their part of the Manchester Curriculum. This programme was run for half a term in the summer term with all year 7 pupils. It formed one unit of the Year 7 Competency Curriculum which focuses on developing students personal, learning and thinking skills. The curriculum ran over 3 weeks and involved 6 x 50 minute sessions for an introduction to Manchester, comprising students research into different aspects of Manchester history and culture; a full one day trip to the city by the whole year group, including museum visits, city walks and a trip on the Manchester Wheel; a full day of master classes from Manchester artists working with the students to develop creative responses to their experiences in the city; and 8 x 50 minute sessions in classes to develop further independent and group projects in response to their experiences in the city and with the artists. The project has stimulated significant debate amongst staff about pedagogy and curriculum, and was the first occasion that external artists had played such a visible role in school activities. The school has now become an academy and while the same schemes of work will not be repeated next year, the teachers involved in the project have embedded elements of the programme in curriculum planning for 2009/2010.

Whalley Range School

Whalley Range School ran a project called 'Our Manchester: Our Whalley Range' with a full year 7 group for one day a week (split over two groups) for the first half term in 2009. The project began with a stimulus DVD made by the head of history based on a 'time travelling teacher' shown to all the students in the school hall. This was then followed by a challenge to the students to create a DVD about Manchester's history. Students working in class groups used poetry, drama and research skills to create a documentary about a particular period of the history of Whalley Range and Manchester. They visited the city on bus tours and walking tours designed to open up their awareness of the city's resources. Students used still and video cameras to capture footage. Some students scripted dramas and filmed re-enactments, another invited a local actor in to talk to them, others returned to museums to research further information. The students then spent time at the local City Learning Centre designing and editing their films. The students were supported by detailed handbooks encouraging reflection upon the competencies and skills they were developing in the process of completing the projects. The project was part of the school's transformed year 7 curriculum and the project will run again in 2009/2010 with the same staff and a commitment to further development.

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North Manchester High School for Boys

NMHSB developed a cross year group (years 7&8) project that ran for three full weeks in the summer term 2009. The project challenge set to students was to create a series of films on 'What Makes Manchester Great' to be shown on the BBC big screens in the city. Early in the project, the school gained the support of the BBC. This project involved approximately 90 students in a diverse range of visits to organisations including Urbis, Quarry Bank Mill, Old Trafford, the Velodrome, the Imperial War Museum, the Arndale Centre, and the Library Theatre. Students were given presentations and tours in each location, and had time to conduct their own research. Their visits were structured by a handbook supporting the three weeks work and encouraging reflection upon their development of the Opening Minds competencies. Student visits were interspersed with time in school reflecting upon their experiences and planning their next stages. The students created storyboards and their own films, and presented them in a major event at Urbis. The school has now become an academy and while it is not planning to repeat the activity in 2009/2010, the working relationships amongst staff and the partnerships built with external organisations are seen to be important developments that will be taken forward and built upon within the new academy structures.

The 'Manchester Curriculum' may have begun with the idea of developing a scalable template for a 'local curriculum'. It has resulted in highly situated and complex initiatives dependent upon the cultures and commitment of individuals. As previous research would suggest, this may be the only way that such initiatives are going to be considered meaningful to the participants in those schools. At its heart, this project is a story of professional and personal development. The challenge is to create the structures within which such development can flourish and be sustained; this means dealing not only with the practical challenges of time, logistics and funding, but also creating space to dismantle the 'mental shackles' of invisible walls between schools and their communities.

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Reflections

The Manchester Curriculum Project was set up by the RSA and Manchester City Council as a pilot for a localised curriculum, aimed at raising student engagement and aspiration by drawing on the resources of the city. This section reflects on the elements of the project – its ideas, its design and its delivery - that were seen by staff to have generated significant benefits for participating schools, teachers and students. It then draws upon teachers' interviews, and upon the wider review of literature and related projects, to reflect upon those areas where further development might be needed to take the project to its next stage in fulfilling the more ambitious aspirations for an 'area-based curriculum' held by the city and the RSA at the outset of the project.

What enabled teachers to create their curriculum?

The 'big idea' of building bridges with the city

The Manchester Curriculum project, although vaguely specified, was at its heart a 'big idea' that encouraged educators to develop their thinking about how teaching and learning might be organised. The demand to create links with external organisations required educators to question their current practice and to challenge some fundamental assumptions about schooling. Participating teachers were required, for example, 1) to challenge the temporal organisation of the school – to explore how to get beyond the individual lesson time, to open up more sustained periods of activity over days or even weeks to enable interactions outside the classroom; 2) to challenge the spatial organisation of the school – to see the wider city as a learning space; and 3) to challenge the assumption of 'who teaches', by seeking out expertise from diverse external partners. These challenges were welcomed by the participating teachers as an opportunity to discuss educational aims and aspirations and, in all schools, this opportunity generated enthusiasm, excitement and professional development and models of teaching and learning that were very different from those previously seen in these schools.

The value placed on the development of personal and social competencies

The Manchester Curriculum was, at its heart, a project concerned with developing new teaching strategies to promote the development of a range of personal skills and competencies; whether the familiar RSA 'Opening Minds' competencies, or the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills more recently promoted by the QCA. This emphasis on cross-cutting competencies provided a rationale for teachers to ask how the environments in which children learn might need to be restructured. This required a re-examination of the role of the teacher and a renewed attention to the ways in which student activity might be organised to facilitate students taking more responsibility for their learning.

The importance of support for risk taking and innovation

The project was supported by Manchester City Council, managed by the RSA, and initiated by senior staff in each school. As a result, the individual teachers and teacher groups involved in developing their ideas were offered support that enabled them to take risks and push boundaries in ways that would not have been possible without both the

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in-principle ‘sanction’ for innovation and the practical leverage that such senior-level involvement provided in creating space for the activities in the school. The City’s involvement as well as the RSA’s national reputation and experience with Opening Minds, also provided an important source of confidence for those senior managers who might otherwise not have felt confidence in taking these risks under normal circumstances.

Time for teacher collaboration and reflection

The Manchester Curriculum project offered teachers the opportunity to work together to reflect upon their practice, to collaborate in the design of new approaches to teaching and learning, and to work collaboratively through team teaching, through shared responsibility for planning or organising the project. This opportunity was seen both as intellectually and practically challenging – some teachers commented that they had never been taught or supported to learn how to plan and design curriculum collaboratively – and as immensely rewarding in building confidence in risky situations, in providing teachers with access to more diverse ideas and practices, and in generating more creative ideas.

What elements of the pilot seemed to make a difference to students?

Sustained staff-student relationships

The challenge to existing structures of school timetabling and staffing that emerged from the project led to very different relationships between staff and students, as they often spent significantly more time together over sustained periods. The new temporal organisation (where students worked with one teacher for a full day or for a full project) seemed to allow staff and students to get to know each other better, improving relationships and understanding, increasing the capacity of staff to design activities to benefit all students, requiring staff to act early to take responsibility for potential problems. The new spatial organisation (where staff and students spent time together outside classrooms) also allowed staff and students to develop new relationships based on an understanding, it could be said, of their more rounded identities outside the school. Such relationships were seen to be sustained beyond the bounds of the project.

The Pedagogy of the City

One of the benefits of challenging the spatial boundaries of the school was the opportunity offered for learning that was seemingly ‘incidental’ to staff initial intentions. Simply ‘being in the city’ and responding to real life situations provoked opportunities for conversation, exploration and discussion that are impossible to generate within a typical classroom situation. Being ‘in the city’ also allowed some students to explore new identities from those they often demonstrated within the school and was seen to increase student confidence in and understanding of their city environment.

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One of the great things was, in terms of teaching the kids the competencies, we were so explicit in what was going on and being open about what was going on. We would say to the kids, you know, this is relating to people, - how do you handle success and disappointment? - because buses didn't turn up or something had gone wrong so we were able in a real-life setting to say to the kids this is the competency in action; this is how we deal with it and the kids really appreciated that.

Diversity of teaching strategies

The wide range of activities involved in these projects, and the varied forms of organisation of student groupings, relationships and responsibilities allowed students to demonstrate aptitudes and talents that were seen to be often overlooked in conventional teaching strategies that locate the teacher as the primary locus of knowledge and management in the classroom. The different teaching strategies demonstrated by external practitioners also acted as a source of inspiration for some teachers in their own work. The diversity of teaching strategies, combined with the greater understanding of individual students through the more sustained relationships was also said by some teachers to influence their relationships and understanding of students in other lessons.

Just to be in that session with the Manchester poet. He sort of unlocked the potential in these kids who were, in terms of literacy levels, well below average – whatever that means – but they were learning how to write a haiku in five minutes because they had something to say because they'd been to Manchester; they thought it was fantastic; he kept telling them it was fantastic, and so they wanted to tell everyone what they thought of it in their haiku and it was breathtaking. For a cynical old bird like me to be in that session, that man unlocked something in those kids and the experience of going into Manchester did.

The importance of visible investment in students

A critical element of the Manchester Curriculum was that, through the organisation of trips, transport, access to city institutions and participation of external experts and artists, the investment that was being made in the participating students was highly visible. It was clear that something 'special' was happening, and that students were being offered the chance to do something different that was not available to the students in the wider school as a whole. Although this was not explicitly articulated by the teachers, it is clear that the project offered the opportunity for educators to demonstrate publicly their views that students should be invested in and that they should be valued. The participation in trips and other activities, then, irrespective of the content experience, was giving out a very clear message to many of these children, some of whom come from very disadvantaged communities, that both schools and the wider city, saw them as important and worthy of investment.

Areas for further development?

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These pilots were intended to be a first step towards the more ambitious aspiration of creating an ‘area-based curriculum’. The perspectives of the participating teachers and schools, along with a review of related literature and initiatives (reported separately), suggests the following areas for further development to achieve this aspiration.

What counts as the ‘area’ in the area-based curriculum?

At present, the types of institutions and experiences conceived as potential partners and resources for schools in the Manchester Curriculum are familiar cultural, artistic and commercial organisations. The development of a truly ‘area-based’ curriculum, however, would require a much more careful exploration of ‘what counts’ as the area upon which the school might draw. Importantly, in the current pilots, the communities (parents, community organisations, local civic leaders) from which the schools drew their students were not seen as potential partners. Instead, the focus was almost entirely centred on a particular set of organisations and institutions in central Manchester that were seen as a ‘corrective’ to the students’ own immediate locale. While the aim to enable students to navigate these spaces confidently can be seen as potentially empowering, a negative consequence of this exclusive focus upon these sites is that it does not build respect for and confidence in the students’ own immediate communities, and may undermine the potential of such a project to build social capital within these communities. Further development of an area-based curriculum should involve the creation of opportunities to critically examine the types of ‘mental maps’ of communities and cities that are held by educators and students, and to challenge the current assumptions about these maps and their significance for educational purposes.

Building on students’ and parents’ funds of knowledge

The current approach to developing an area-based curriculum begins by seeing the teacher as the primary mechanism of mediation between the school and the community. Such an approach, however, overlooks the knowledge of local communities held by both parents and students, and the possibility that teachers themselves may have relatively limited or partial understanding of schools’ immediate community contexts. Alternative strategies have been developed in other initiatives that involve educators working with parents and students to ‘map’ the resources, expertise and knowledge that are often invisible in the school environment, and to build upon this expertise in the design of curriculum.

Diversifying understanding of the city as an educational partner and resource

A city can play multiple roles in the educational endeavour. Some of these have been developed within the pilots, but many have been overlooked or could be much more systematically explored. It is possible to develop a broad taxonomy of roles that an ‘area’ can be considered to play in education. This is presented here as basis for further elaboration:

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- The city as a subject of study for the development of disciplinary understanding – for example, studying the literature from the city, the history, the geography.
- The city and its organisations as a real world context and rationale for participating in enterprise activities.
- The city and its organisations as a real world context and rationale for participating in citizenship and social action activities.
- The city and its occupants as a resource for inspiration, aspiration and prompts to the imagination.
- The city and its occupants as a source of expertise, advice and knowledge for teachers and students.
- The city and its spaces as new environments and physical resources for education.
- The city and its communities as stakeholders in education with rights to inform and shape curriculum design.
- The city as a site for children’s day to day lives and experiences; a site in which they experience agency and exclusion, action and oppression and therefore as a site for critical study.

Developing new partnership relationships

The relationships between schools and communities developed in the pilots to date are characterised by ‘commissioning’ or ‘visiting’ relationships, in which schools either bring external partners in to deliver discrete activities, or take students out to encounter a new experience, institution or location. These relationships do not, at present, represent a synthesis of the different skills and resources of the educational and community organisation. External organisations are not always best placed to design educational experiences, having less knowledge of the capabilities of different student groups. Similarly, educators are not always aware of the diverse experiences and expertise on offer in external organisations. In order to create opportunities for such understanding, new relationships have to be built that are not structured around one-off commissioning or visiting events, but that are premised upon sustained relationships and partnership. In the first instance, this involves educators and partners simply getting to know each others’ resources, constraints and aspirations; following this, time is required to enable the partners to begin to explore what shared activities might be created, with an exploration of the different roles that might be played by different organisations, each working with their own strengths.

Where should an ‘area-based’ curriculum start?

The Manchester Curriculum project started with schools. It is worth exploring, however, the different models of an area-based curriculum that might emerge should the design process begin with a community organisation, a cultural institution, a parents association or a local business. It may also be worth exploring the different spaces that might be needed to enable joint construction of curricula across the institutions and resources of a

city – what sorts of institutions and spaces are most congenial to bringing together these different social actors?

Mapping related initiatives and building connections

The aspiration to build relationships between schools and their communities is not unique to the Manchester Curriculum. There is an existing set of initiatives in the Manchester area with similar goals and aspirations such as Creative Partnerships, HigherFutures4You and related enterprise/ business projects. A critical area for development for any area-based curriculum may well, in future, be the development of a capacity to map and integrate with existing initiatives and resources. The systematic design of an area-based curriculum might therefore be characterised in its earliest stages by a commitment to mapping and documenting existing partnerships, relationships and strategies.

Beyond the individual school

The schools and teachers in the Manchester Curriculum were acting relatively autonomously. Each school was attempting to build its own partnerships and overcome its own obstacles. For an ‘area-based curriculum’ to fully develop, such autonomous approaches need to be supported by more systematic structures, including: the development of collective information resources about potential partners; the establishment of city-wide strategies for easing travel difficulties; the establishment of standard ‘permissions’ and ‘risk-management’ procedures to reduce the burden on individual teachers.

Such approaches would also require the development of collaborative partnerships between schools, and the recognition that other schools and education institutions form important parts of an ‘area-based curriculum’. These approaches are militated against by the current imperatives towards competition between schools, suggesting that, if an area-based curriculum is really wanted, issues such as local competition need to be examined and strategies to build partnerships despite this, or instead of it, created. There are models of hard federations, shared governance and so forth that begin to provide an indication of potential steps in that direction.

What is the relationship between the ‘area-based curriculum’ and ‘competencies’?

A particular challenge for the participating teachers in the Manchester Curriculum project, was the negotiation of the relationship between Opening Minds and the impetus to build on the resources of the city. At the start of the project there was no clear articulation of how these two ideas were related to each other, other than some early conjecture that working on locally meaningful issues would provide motivation and engagement. It is not clear, however, that an ‘area-based curriculum’ necessarily requires a move away from a curriculum organised around disciplinary knowledge to one

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organised around the development of competencies. Moreover, the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and personal skills and competencies remains a live issue currently being explored, not only in the evaluations of the Opening Minds programme, but in many of the centres of curriculum research and development in the UK and internationally (see for example, Young, 1998; Biesta, 2006) .

It is worth exploring how teachers in the pilot came to reconcile ideas of an ‘area-based curriculum’ with a curriculum that attempts to promote the development of a set of cognitive and behavioural strategies like Opening Minds. What seemed to happen in the project was that the teachers tied together students’ confidence to inhabit certain city spaces (such as museums, art galleries, the city streets beyond the shopping centres, and the open spaces of the industrial landscape) with the development of the sorts of attributes that they were trying to engender through a competency curriculum. It was as though, in some way, the development of the capacity to identify with certain city spaces, and to navigate confidently such spaces, was seen as commensurate with the development of certain personal skills and competencies.

The underlying theme was really this: be proud of the city you live in and look at these very creative and sort of entrepreneurial people, all the fantastic things that have happened in Manchester.

What this approach does, is to locate the development of certain attributes and aspirations within a spatial frame, which ties it not only to developing a language or set of behaviours, but to ideas of participation in particular spaces and communities. This hunch will need testing and further exploration, but given all of the evidence from the learning sciences over the last decade relating to the socially situated nature of knowledge, this implicit assumption in the project is worthy of further development and exploration.

The ongoing issue of assessment

Finally, we must necessarily return to the question of assessment and evaluation of an area-based curriculum. We need to ask how educators and students might develop an understanding of what has been meaningfully achieved in the creation of these new curricula, and of personal development within such activities. To date, educators and students are still struggling with the question of how to assess the diverse skills and competencies explicitly being addressed by these curriculum developments, and how to value and make visible the personal and social impact of experiences such as students laughing with teachers as they walk down a city street. In this project there was no satisfactory mechanism for students and teachers to really make visible and reflect upon the progress attained in developing these competencies.

If a truly area-based curriculum is to be developed, however, it is worth exploring whether the innovation in this project should not be extended out from the concern with

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curriculum and pedagogy, to a real investment in the creation of new forms of assessment. It may be time to explore whether the exam boards and curriculum authorities should be brought in to the discussion. Not, as was considered at the outset of the project, in order to create a high-status qualification, but as a means of developing an area-based curriculum that is meaningfully owned by the teachers, students, institutions and communities of a city. One of the schools, through projects such as Assessment by Pieces, is beginning to explore this issue.

Recommendations

Next steps for Manchester?

The Manchester Curriculum Pilots have generated significant support and enthusiasm within their schools. They have enabled the development of a cohort of teachers across three schools who have good experiences of building partnerships with local organisations and who have begun to build a network of relationships that could be further harnessed in the future. They have also provided valuable insights into the obstacles to partnership-working between schools and the city's institutions and organisations. In many ways, these pilots should be considered simply the first step in a necessarily longer-term and more challenging process of changing the relationship between schools and their communities.

There are a number of steps that could now be taken by the city to turn these pilots into sustained educational change in order to create a new learning landscape in the city.

- Offer free transport to schools and school children.
- Build a collective resource that allows city institutions and organisations to identify their 'offer' to educational organisations and identifies their key point of contact (this should not be centralised in terms of uploading information, but centralised in terms of providing funding and impetus).
- Work with the Manchester Curriculum Pilot schools and others to develop guidance and information for external organisations wishing to act as partners or offer educational resources either in schools or in their own institutions.
- Map the existing initiatives in the city that are attempting to build links between schools and community organisations and publicise these widely, and encourage schools to participate in them.
- Encourage cultural and civic institutions to create template risk assessment resources for school visits.
- Explore the creation of new annual home-school agreements that will overcome the necessity of schools having to gain written permission for off-site visits.
- Support the development of community tools that enable local communities to map and make visible their 'funds of knowledge'.
- Encourage new forms of professional development that enable teachers and partners to build ongoing relationships to design curriculum – such programmes may be ongoing over several years.
- Encourage new forms of continuing professional development that value learning about schools' immediate vicinities, parental expertise and local organisations.

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- Provide continued seed funding to allow Manchester Curriculum Pilot schools to build on the links they have made with partners.
- Provide funding for Manchester Curriculum Pilot schools to disseminate their schemes of work and to visit other schools to share their experiences.

Next Steps for the RSA and others wishing to explore the possibilities of an area based curriculum

The steps outlined above could equally well be taken by other local authorities wishing to promote the creation of an area-based or localised curriculum. These practical measures can be considered under the following headings, which make visible the complex institutional and systemic relationships that need to be considered when trying to intervene in school-community relationships:

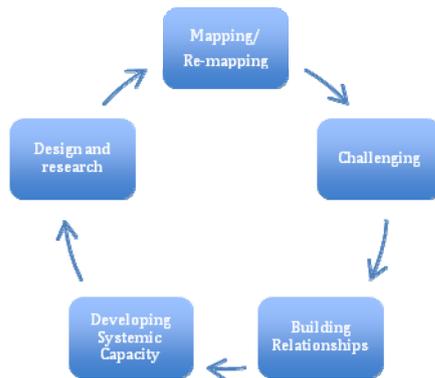
- Transport issues
- School governance and competition issues
- Knowledge sharing and communications
- Local health and safety procedures
- Professional development strategies and resources
- The relationship between education policy and community regeneration funding

These practical measures, however, need to be located in a much wider context, namely, the recognition that an area based curriculum flies in the face of many of the recent currents in educational policy and practice. It implies localised decision-making and curriculum design in the context of two decades of centralised decision-making; it implies teachers having agency in the context of a decade of centralised prescription. What's more, it potentially implies challenges to schools' monopoly over educational provision, in the context of over a century of mass education. As such, it cannot be expected to happen quickly or without some discomfort. At its heart has to be a reimagination of the role of the school, the teacher and their relationship with the community. Such a curriculum cannot be seen as independent, therefore, of a process of professional development.

If there is any template to an area-based curriculum it will inevitably resist standardisation in terms of content or activities. How then, might we begin to characterise it here? Based on the pilots and upon the review of the literature, an area-based curriculum is more likely to be recognisable by its process than by its content. Such a process is likely to include the following (overlapping) stages:

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1. Mapping

- Bringing together educational stakeholders – teachers, parents, students, local authority, local institutions, civic leaders, local businesses, cultural organisations – to ask:
 - i. What are the resources we have in our communities that might support education?
 - ii. What are the existing funds of knowledge within our communities?
 - iii. How are those resources distributed?
 - iv. What are the different types of resources – community, cultural, economic?
 - v. How are these different resources experienced today by different groups?
 - vi. What are the barriers or obstacles to access to these resources?

2. Challenging

- Bringing together educational stakeholders – teachers, parents, students, local authority, local institutions, civic leaders, local businesses, cultural organisations – to ask:
 - i. What are our aspirations for education?
 - ii. What are the educational futures that we are currently building?
 - iii. How do our aspirations differ?
 - iv. What alternatives might we develop?

3. Building relationships

- Bringing together educational stakeholders – teachers, parents, students, local authority, local institutions, civic leaders, local businesses, cultural organisations – to ask:
 - i. What are our different personal and institutional motivations?
 - ii. Where are we in tension and disagreement and why?
 - iii. What are the possibilities for joint action?
 - iv. How might we work together?
 - v. Who else has worked this way before?
 - vi. What is the existing evidence and insight into these sorts of activities?

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4. Developing systematic capacity and overcoming common obstacles
 - Bringing together the critical local decision-makers and actors to examine:
 - i. What are the logistical obstacles to collaboration?
 - ii. What are the communicative and informational obstacles to collaboration?
 - iii. What are the cultural and economic obstacles to collaboration?
 - iv. What can be done at the level of the system to overcome these issues?
5. Design and research
 - Developing partnerships, friendships and groups that can begin to collaboratively design a curriculum. This design should include:
 - i. A justification for the curriculum
 - ii. A basis for planning content, teaching strategies, sequencing, diagnosis of student strengths
 - iii. A basis for studying student progress, teacher development, feasibility of application in different contexts, variability of effects in different contexts
 - Developing and researching the curriculum in different locations.
 - Critical reflection on an ongoing basis against aspirations.
6. Re-Mapping
 - Bringing together educational stakeholders – teachers, parents, students, local authority, local institutions, civic leaders, local businesses, cultural organisations – to ask:
 - i. How far have these new curriculum approaches made available new and better resources to support education?
 - ii. How are those resources distributed?
 - iii. What are the different types of resources – community, cultural, economic?
 - iv. How are these different resources experienced today by different groups?
 - v. What are the barriers or obstacles to access to these resources?

This outline (which owes a debt to Stenhouse) implies a simple linear process; in reality, such activities are messy, complicated by the lived realities of individuals and institutions, and are informed by everything from friendships to international comparative test scores; from the quality of public transport in a region, to the frequency of turnover of staff in the local council.

The purpose of this outline, however, is simply to foreground key features that should inform the development of an area based curriculum if it is to avoid the risk of reinforcing socio-economic inequalities or simply reinventing the wheel.

Finally, the steps outlined here are intended to emphasise that the creation of an area-based curriculum needs necessarily to be seen less as a sprint than a marathon, less a quick fix for student disengagement than a longer-term strategy for sustained change and development. Its process will necessarily be one in which time for ‘unlearning’ assumptions, and time for building relationships across traditional divides, are

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understood as equally as important as the more familiar processes, today, of planning and delivering new schemes of work.

Appendices

The Manchester Curriculum in Parklands School

Case Study written by: Professor Keri Facer, Education and Social Research Institute, MMU

Background Context

Parklands High School is a comprehensive 11-16 secondary school in Wythenshawe that was, at the time of the project, undergoing the process of transition to become the Manchester Enterprise Academy, opening in September 2009 under the sponsorship of the nearby Manchester Airport. During the period of the project, a new leadership team was working off-site from the school, and existing staff were required to re-apply for their posts and were learning about plans for a significant restructuring of departments and curriculum.

Overview of the Manchester Curriculum at Parklands

Parklands School ran a project called 'Undressing Manchester: the Urban World' as their part of the Manchester curriculum. This programme was run for half a term in the summer term with all year 7 pupils. It formed one unit of the Year 7 Competency Curriculum which focuses on developing students' personal, learning and thinking skills. The curriculum ran over 3 weeks and involved 6 x 50 minute sessions for the introduction, 1 full day trip for the whole year group to Manchester, 1 full day of master classes with Manchester artists, and 8 x 50 minute sessions of independent/group work.

The project was facilitated within the school by Assistant Head Teacher Alison Farrow, and the programme of work was designed collaboratively by a number of teachers, the core being a group of 3 teachers and a teaching assistant with expertise in competency approaches, SEN, humanities and behavioural difficulties, in collaboration with 2 teachers from the performing and visual arts faculty. A second Assistant Head, Garry Marshall, was responsible for the Learner Action Team element of the programme in conjunction with the researchers at MMU Centre for Urban Education. The teaching team responsible for 'teaching competency' in year 7 was responsible for teaching the programme of study.

The project was seen primarily as a continuation of the school's previous competency programme. The local element of the curriculum, its focus on Manchester, was viewed in two ways – first, as a simple 'hook', a focus for a programme of activity for developing personal, learning and thinking skills; second, as a means of raising students aspiration and pride both in their city and in their own potential.

The team involved in designing the project overcame significant obstacles, in terms of lack of time and resources, to mount a programme of activities that have, in their view, had a positive influence on: staff perception of student's abilities, staff teaching and

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learning strategies, curriculum design for the new academy and student-staff relationships.

Review methods

During the project, I visited the school on two occasions. First, for an informal interview with the lead member of staff for the school and an informal observation of one of the project sessions with students post-visit. Second, for a series of 5 formal individual and pair interviews with 7 members of staff involved in the project. The RSA lead, Kathryn Burn, also conducted two formal interviews with the teachers in the project. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The school also shared their planning notes and their scheme of work for 'Undressing Manchester'. The plans produced at the residential were also available for review.

Aspirations for the Manchester Curriculum at Parklands

The 'Undressing Manchester: The Urban World' project aimed to achieve the following goals:

An inclusive curriculum providing a high quality, creative and challenging education within a secure, caring and happy environment, where every child experiences a sense of enjoyment and achieves full potential.

We aim:

- *To deliver a curriculum which is broad, balanced and relevant to each individual pupil*
- *To create a happy and positive learning environment, fostering mutual respect, consideration for others and personal responsibility*
- *To be committed to developing positive relationships with parents, promoting education as a partnership between home and school*
- *To establish effective working relationships with other professionals, for the benefit of all at Parklands*
- *To promote Parklands as part of the wider community*

Our objectives will include as appropriate:

- *to offer a range of creative opportunities, including life-skills, visits, community workshops and independent enterprise projects*
- *to re-introduce pupils to the city in which they live, to inspire and motivate pupils to innovate and experiment with their skills to learn*

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- *to provide a learning platform that enables students to re-discover Manchester and the community around them*

The Activities

The Undressing Manchester project involved 4 interlinked activities over a half term period. These activities were delivered by the school's year 7 curriculum team, with additional staff from Performing Arts brought in to provide master classes, and significant numbers of teaching and support staff brought in to provide assistance for the full day trip to Manchester. The project involved the following teachers: Alison Farrow (Assistant Head teacher), David Allbutt, Jo Connor, Mary Howson, Siobhan Egan, Christy Lyons, Sarah Andrew and Veronica McGeorge. The learner action team was led by Garry Marshall.

Activity 1: An 'introduction to Manchester'.

These lessons involved presentations by staff, independent and group research by students and student presentations on key themes, including: Music in Manchester, Architecture, Manchester 'industrial city', Art in Manchester, and Famous Mancunians. The stated learning outcomes from these lessons are all related to the development of personal, learning and thinking skills, in particular, small group working, answering questions, planning and presenting, researching and working collaboratively with others. The implicit aims of these lessons were to enable students to share what they already knew of Manchester and be introduced to different aspects of Manchester, to enthuse and excite students about Manchester's history and culture and to encourage them to see themselves as part of a vibrant city:

Before they went, it was like finding out about Manchester and what's going on. This is your Manchester. This is your city. Find out what's going on in your city music-wise. Find out what's going on in your city, sort of inventions and technology, find out about the history, a bit of the background. What else was there? There were about five topics, all different ones, and what is so interesting for me, is like I really feel like the Manchester music scene is like a part of me and so I'm like, come on, you know Oasis, the Happy Mondays, even Take That, and they're like – what are you talking about? It was really interesting for me because I think I'm modern and cool and down with the kids and I'm really not what they see Manchester as is completely different [...] it's a city over there with lots of buildings, lots of businesses, lots of rich people, lots of footballers living there, lots of multicultural stuff that they don't really have anything to do with and they don't understand, and lots of shops, Primark, and that's it. [...] so that, to me, was like a really interesting part of that Undressing Manchester was that... (Teacher A).

There was quite a lot of discovering what's going on [in Manchester] before, but it was presenting it in a creative way and you are part of it, but I don't think they really felt that until they went on the trip[...] but that trip was really 'you are part of it' (Teacher A).

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Activity 2: A full year group trip to Manchester.

This trip involved all students in the year group, including one who was on exclusion and others who would normally have been barred from participating due to concerns over risks, over bad behaviour, or as punishment for previous misdemeanors. The staff interviewed stated that one purpose for this activity was to demonstrate that even the children with the most ‘challenging’ behaviour could be trusted in these environments. The trip involved 6 groups of 13 students, with 3 staff per group and a guided tour for each group on one of the following themes: Crime and Punishment, Canals, Music of Manchester, Architecture, Green Manchester. Lunch was at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry and the outdoor ‘Roman Fort’ in Castlefield. The different groups then went on different walking tours across the city (with some ‘focusing’ tasks such as scavenger hunts and photograph competitions) until they finished the day at the Manchester ‘Big Wheel’. The explicitly stated aims of this activity were, again, related to students’ personal, learning and thinking skills, with a specific focus upon adaptation to surroundings and environment, anticipating and managing risks, adapting to changing circumstances. A second set of objectives for this activity, from the teachers’ comments in interviews, was to offer the students the chance to become familiar and comfortable with diverse elements of Manchester’s cultural resources and history, and to empower students to feel that they had a right to participate in these spaces¹.

Just take them round and just let them experience Manchester. Let them walk; let them see the buildings; let them see the greenery in Spinningfields; let them look down by the canal and realise there are canals that run right the way through Manchester and we had a camera and a digital camera for each learning group and they loved taking responsibility for taking photos and we’d created a list that said the best photo, the best found object and they had to record all of it. We didn’t say there was going to be any prize and some of the photos, when they came back, were fantastic, and it engaged just by giving that little bit of responsibility to some of those kids. That engaged some of the real behavioural issues at our school. (Teacher C)

It wasn’t meant to be a rigid plan and that was another thing that we fell out about. One of the members of staff said, what are they going to do when they get to here? And I’m going, they’re going to play. They can’t play! That’s why we had postcards. They were meant to write postcards home. (Teacher B)

¹ An early plan to enable all the students in one year group to sit down and have a meal together had to be abandoned for cost purposes. But this aspiration to allow children to stake a claim to the city and to be able to participate in its cultural practices remains, and the creation of space in the day for ‘mucking around’, for being ‘free’ in the city, shows remnants of that thinking.

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[...] and that was nice because not all of them wanted to jump off and roll down the hill. There was a postcard and they put their address on it and they wrote it to their parents, or carers, or to themselves, put a stamp on it and then, on the journey back, find a postbox and post it and taking pictures with posting it, posting a postcard home. (Teacher A)

As will be discussed later, there was some tension around the aims and the purpose of the day. However, this ‘trip’ was intended to be more than simply a ‘day out’; it was intended to create an environment for students and, in some ways, staff to demonstrate different forms of behaviour.

You’ve kind of facilitated this environment where they’ve learned about how to act, and how to adapt their behaviour, and how to be more appropriate to a given situation, and it was never more apparent than seeing some kids who are on the verge of permanent exclusion, who bang off the wall in a mainstream 9 to 3 day, lasting to 2 in the afternoon with every single risk around you, canals, traffic, other people – good as gold and just relishing the day because they’ve finally been invested in; they’ve finally been trusted to experience something new other than the four walls of Parklands. In the afternoon we walked them up to the big wheel and they got to go on the big wheel in turn, of which there were a lot of kids that had a lot of fears and stuff, and it was really nice seeing them overcoming those fears. (Teacher C)

It was a different way of working, wasn’t it? It was having conversations and you can’t underestimate that. (Teacher A)

Everyone just saw it as it was just a trip to Manchester. It really wasn’t. It was proof more than anything [...] They were still kids but they were responsible kids and that was quite nice. (Teacher C)

Activity 3: Master classes

The 6 master classes were each run twice in the course of one day, with 6 groups of students taking two different classes. The students were allocated to these master classes, which included: graffiti workshop (external artist), clay workshop (teacher), print making (external artist), poetry (external artist), drama (teacher), and music (external artist). The facilitators of these workshops drew on the children’s experiences of their visit to Manchester to create a range of cultural artefacts – from group drama pieces to graffiti art. The goals of these master classes were to develop students’ abilities in independent and collaborative learning, experimentation and responsibility within a range of different disciplinary domains. In the interviews, there was little discussion of how these master classes tied in with the Manchester theme, other than to enable the students to draw on their experiences as a basis for cultural production.

It turned out that the hip hop poetry workshop was the most fascinating one going and you had members of staff hearing about its reputation throughout the day and going in and

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visiting the workshops which was fantastic because, on the Monday, you'd had this sort of negative viewpoint of, oh, competency takes over everything... but then, all of a sudden, everyone is like 'who's this [poet] that everyone is talking about?' And then going in and people were coming in on their frees to see the graffiti workshop and sit with the kids, because we'd freed up a lot of staff because we had them off timetable all day, and it was fantastic. (Teacher C)

Activity 4: Independent project.

This interconnected series of lessons allowed the students to develop their own 'response' to their experiences. Students, in groups of two classes at a time, worked to develop an idea of an artefact they wanted to create, either independently or collaboratively, and then worked over several sessions to produce this. The aims of these sessions were related to project management, group work and responsibility². However, the initial plan to showcase the students work publicly and to other staff and students did not come to fruition. The diversity of activities and the overall process is described below:

We were restricted on the amount of time we could allow for it in the curriculum and some of the projects were really good. We had massive 3D sculptures of the Big Wheel because that is what they remembered most and they put little snippets in about what they'd experienced. We had a TV advert drama piece. We had a massive big post card collage of pictures [...] the kids learning and being able to express what they have learned in a method that best suits them is not necessarily standing up and performing, and we had the kid that wanted to create a PowerPoint, we had the kid that wanted to write a letter to the head teacher telling them about their day. We had the kid that wanted to create the Beetham tower just because [one of the teachers] lives in there and they tried doing that and help was brought in from wherever and the thing about it was we had very limited resources so they had to find their own resources, and I felt that was very good, so they had to put a proposal together of what they wanted to do and why. They had to justify why they wanted to do it. They were not allowed to just do something for doing's sake and we were worried that they would all just want to create a piece of Graffiti and they didn't. We had sculptures, we had performances, we had a dance at one point; we had these big postcards, we had little postcards that someone had written to their mum, and it was a shame because [...] there wasn't this celebration at the end, and what we had wanted to do, and it was money that stopped us, we wanted to do a share afternoon where parents and carers in the local community and other staff could come in and we'd have put all of their work on display and Dave Allbutt had created this brilliant PowerPoint of images from the

² These and other aims identified come from the Undressing Manchester Scheme of Work

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day out in Manchester that had been shown in their assembly [...] but time didn't allow it, money didn't allow it and, unfortunately, their products are stuck over in the library which gets bashed because its an unlockable door. (Teacher C)

Making the Project Happen

The process of designing and implementing this programme of work was highly challenging and required significant commitment and support within the school. The following discussion explores the different elements required to enable this activity to take place.

Staff Involvement

The school was approached to participate in the project by Kathryn Burns, the RSA's co-ordinator for the project. Parklands had been introduced to the Opening Minds curriculum three years earlier by Kathryn, who had been an advocate for the approach across Manchester. When Kathryn contacted Alison Farrow, Parklands Assistant Head, who she knew from the previous discussions around Opening Minds, Alison, Garry Marshall (Assistant Head with responsibility for competencies) and the Head were keen for the school to participate for a variety of reasons. These reasons included: the opportunity to learn from other schools who are already working on competency approaches; the opportunity to work on a programme that was supported by the City Council (the school had previously been criticised for their competency work by the Local Authority despite support from Ofsted); the opportunity to access funding to support the initiative (the school has been suffering from financial difficulties and no resource has been available for staff development or additional activities).

Given the previous link with Kathryn around Opening Minds and competency approaches, the project was seen in the school as tied in to their previous work on competencies in the curriculum. Despite this, Alison, Garry and others involved with competencies were keen to invite a wider range of other teachers with no previous experience of these approaches to participate in the project. The aim was to break down a divide that had developed in the school between 'competencies' staff and others.

Kathryn was invited to the school to present on the project. However:

'there wasn't a great response. We had to coerce and cajole a few extras and it wound up with a core team which was part of my core from competency and a few other interested people that then volunteered for it' (Teacher F) .

There were, therefore, a number of different reasons why different teachers participated in the project, from informed enthusiasm, to naïve interest, to reluctant coercion:

They offered the opportunity for us to be involved in a new curriculum that would be working with other schools in Manchester and when they sold it to us I thought it would be a good project to be part of in regard to being my professional development [...] I thought

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you would get the opportunity to work with other schools and share in their practice as well ... I was the eager beaver. (Teacher C)

I had to have my arm twisted to come on it because I was going to back off, I wasn't going to come on it [...] having said that, I love doing these little projects. I love these debates and the educational philosophy that's behind it and I love the time for reflection and discussion about curriculum matters which you don't have time to do in school. (Teacher B)

Teacher C - It's teachers talking about learning and teaching rather than talking about operational minutiae...passionate bickering.

Teacher B - The colour of your bobbles and whether they should be allowed to wear black bobbles or red bobbles in their hair and that is just so irrelevant.

Teacher C - Which is what most staff meetings are dominated by these days.

The project was a little vague; you didn't know about it at the beginning; it was just do you want to put your name down for something and I think, generally, anyone who knew about the RSA or the competencies would straight away put their names down [...]. Other people like [...] and myself didn't have an idea about it but I'm quite young so I volunteer myself for anything before I know what I'm actually getting into. (Teacher G)

We've been involved in the Opening Minds type of structure, the competency curriculum, for about three years now and I've been involved since the very start [...] I'm very interested in inquiry-based learning, interested in Opening Minds, always have been, and so, for myself, professionally, it was just a natural progression for me to get involved with. (Teacher E)

The teaching group that came to take on the project was therefore made up of staff with widely divergent experiences and motivations. Some of the staff had been involved for three years already in competency based approaches and were confident of this approach to curriculum design and pedagogy. Others were new to these approaches and concerned about the implications of competency based approaches for their discipline and for students understanding of key concepts. Moreover, the staff involved in the discussions were 'the good people that always opt into everything', (Teacher C), a highly motivated group of individuals with strong ideas.

The group became known by themselves and other teachers at the residentials, as 'the noisy lot', because they were engaged in passionate debate and discussion about what the plans might be for the Manchester Curriculum. Such debate, however, was at times fraught and led to some teachers becoming less closely involved and the make-up of the group changing:

The group actually changed and evolved several times – it started off with mostly the art and drama and music department. They decided they wanted to do it and then [...], who

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was from PSE joined later, I think, I think she came in later and there was [...], [...] and me and [...] and [...], the maths teacher, all of us who had been right there from the very beginning, and the PVA people wanted to find out what it was about, really, what competency of Opening Minds was [...] I would say [Teacher C], me and [Teacher E] were the core of it and the other staff kind of came in and out, dropped in and out of it'. (Teacher B)

It was quite difficult, I found, the planning, with almost a too talented group of people. It was almost like, a gifted and talented group where you don't have some drivers and some followers and everyone's got their own idea and it was, actually, quite difficult to make decisions and move on those decisions. (Teacher D)

Lots of shouting and lots of stress... we fight but get over it very quickly, you know. We fight because we're passionate about what we want to do...It was very fiery...and then we present a public face you see. [...] I wasn't worried. (Teacher B)

Over time, the competency team familiar with the Opening Minds approach contributed to curriculum innovation, and took the lead; while teachers from Performing and Visual arts contributed to discrete elements of the teaching.

'So it just became a project within the competencies curriculum that's already running in year 7, so it was subsumed into that and those staff members who weren't involved directly in the delivery of year 7 competencies then became involved in the master classes that we ran during the Manchester curriculum time which I think was very successful and did allow other people to become directly involved'. (Teacher D)

Creating time to work out the ideas

The Manchester curriculum was, as discussed in the main report, an ambiguous proposition. Without a clear vision statement, 'the Manchester Curriculum' was, to a large extent, shaped by the teacher groups in each school. This meant that before beginning to plan activities, the teachers had to negotiate their educational objectives and to get to grips with what the project was trying to achieve. There were also significant debates about the scale of ambition that was feasible within the project, both for planning and for delivery of the new scheme of work. With very few parameters, highly divergent opinions and experiences, the Parklands team was faced with a major challenge in designing and developing a curriculum within the time made available at the residential workshops. Moreover, there were real difficulties in making staff available to attend the residentials, with the result that some teachers were only able to join in the evening and on Saturdays, giving them a sense of having missed important experiences:

Freeing up that number of staff was very difficult. (Teacher F)

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We have attended all the residential but the school found it difficult to release people for the whole of Friday so we haven't actually attended a whole day on a Friday because we've been unable to do that but we have attended all the residential. (Teacher D)

The Parklands team was also working to reconcile competing visions of education in this process:

'...the others didn't really understand competency; they didn't know what it was about; they had their own preconceptions about it and they had their own way of planning, so it became a very fiery kind of debate and, because we are all quite fiery people anyway, it became quite.... And people had loads and loads of ideas and it was kind of trying to narrow the ideas down to make them practical and implementable and not just too woolly, so it was quite challenging but, as the year went through, it became easier and, as we took on other people's ideas, and then [...], [...] and I tended to go away and go, right, we can do this. (Teacher B)

'The competency staff have always said that content shouldn't matter at all and that it should be your skills. I think that your content should matter to a certain degree, for me, especially if you are wanting to address certain issues like, for example, the natural world. (Teacher G)

The competency team was driven by a sense that education structured around a formal subject based curriculum was failing their students:

We talked about why schools fail and we went off into groups and why we were failing – because we'd had another dire set of results, below the floor targets, and everything and every group that reported back said it was to do with the curriculum, which I knew they would [...] It wasn't motivating them [...] that it just wasn't engaging them and I think, when it first started, the competency curriculum, it was very – some of it anyway – was quite inspirational. (Teacher D)

While others in the group came from a different perspective:

I was very stringent over we can't lose drama; we can't lose performing arts and I knew all of these measures and I know it's not just in this school, that education's changing, and I was very much, where is my department going to go? What kind of teacher will I be? And I'd always wanted to be involved in competencies but I didn't want it to be at the expense of the department. (Teacher G)

While others resisted participating in the debate at all:

I'm head of department and my brain is 'which staff and which classroom with how many kids' because that's how I've always been and it's really hard to think about, from a concept, from an idea, to something that you can actually deliver to a group of kids, with all

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the challenges that that entails [...] I hate that. I just wanted them to tell me what to do. What do you want me to do? (Teacher A)

The competency team also had positive experiences of shared planning and team teaching to draw on:

There was a lot of them coming together, discussing ideas, coming up with themes and titles, exploring them for a bit and changing them around and that is what we'd seen in the competencies as well, you know, you'd get a group of people together and they'd start sharing ideas and then bouncing ideas off each other and what you end up with is something much more than any individual would have planned and its important to know that that is the big thing with competencies, that, yes, it's good for the students because it allows them to develop skills and develop, but its also good for the staff, providing they get that time to work together. (Teacher G)

While others had had limited prior experience of this approach:

Teacher B – Team teaching is a real skill that people underestimate. Team planning and team teaching takes a long time to learn.

Teacher A – You don't get any training. You don't get any training for it because you do your PGCE and at the beginning of your PGCE you do a joint planning with somebody and teach 10 minutes and you plan for a week and teach 10 minutes and then you don't do it again. From my experience, even with your mentors, you know, when they're helping you its not joint planning, its them sort of helping you and then they'll say, now you do it, it's different and I think it should really be part of teacher training.

Time allocated for 'planning' a curriculum, then, was taken up with complex processes of negotiation about educational aims and working practices, developing not only the underpinning ideas for the programme, but also developing the capabilities amongst staff for such conversations and for such collaboration. These are complex, time-consuming challenges that confronted the teachers in the project.

Because of the scale of the challenge – the need to define aims, the need to work out what the project 'was', the need to determine the scale and feasibility of the project, and because of the difficulties of getting all staff released to attend all of the residentials, the planning time had to expand outside the residential time. Because no funding was made available in the project for teacher planning time other than the residentials, the staff took it on themselves to continue planning in the evenings after other meetings:

Six of us did the planning [...] sometimes if we wanted [Teacher H] or [Teacher D] to come who work in a different department, we had to make a formal meeting, so we said we would meet from 5pm to 6pm after various other meetings had taken place, because

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there are always other meetings, so it always had to be from 5pm to 6pm, and apart from that, [Teacher C], [Teacher E], me and [...] see each other all the time because – we're sort of in the same department and [Teacher C] was trained through me, and [...] works with me, and that was easy because, naturally at the end of the day, we would sit and go, right, what have we got to do. (Teacher B)

Teacher C - It took us hours... and it was after a meeting so it was after – we wouldn't start doing that until 5pm so it would be after a meeting that was already calendared so we'd be here from 5pm to 7pm doing stuff like that.

Teacher B – It was only done because we just give up time. Don't we. We just do it because me, you and [Teacher E] are just always here.

Teacher C - Stay back, thrash it out, we're not leaving until it's done – but it's the working relationship that we've developed over the years.

This core group were responsible for both developing the final plan and for communicating it to the wider group of teachers who would make it happen. For this second group of teachers, the experience of participation in the project was very different:

We went to the meeting and it was like, this is the scheme of work; have a look at it so you know what it's all about and this is the day and these are the workshops and this is what is going to happen and you're doing this and you're doing that, so everybody left knowing what they were doing and could have a look at what was coming next and I think that was quite [...] quick, easy, straightforward, and then everybody knew what they were doing on the day. (Teacher A)

Shaping and Defining the Aims

Early ideas for the project included a plan for an Olympiad, a zone of 5 events focusing on different elements of Manchester to be held at Urbis and a plan to draw on the technical platforms presented at the first workshop. There were aspirations to draw on the possibility of help from RSA fellows, but a lack of certainty about what the fellows could offer and a concern about whether this support would be sustainable year after year, meant that this was not followed up. The technical systems also failed to materialise. By the time of the second workshop, the teachers had come to realise that the project did not represent an opportunity to work across the city in collaboration with other schools and that they needed to create something that was achievable within their existing resources:

Teacher B - I think we could have, if we'd wanted to, [do], you know, much bigger and better things, but my reservation about that was I've done projects like this before and you really start off way too ambitious so I'm really conscious of trying to keep it small and simple'.

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Teacher C - And I think that's where most of the bickering came from. Wasn't it? At the beginning, you had the realists and you had the visionaries and you had the people that wanted to do everything and they're the...

Teacher B - ...that knew that if we tried to do too much that it wouldn't work, that it would collapse.

It's like dropping a pebble into a pool isn't it? You have to start small and you hope the ripples will come out. (Teacher B)

By the second residential, the team had honed the ideas into a core focus for the project, namely:

'we just wanted to show kids Manchester and we recognised that kids in Manchester just – some of them have never been to Manchester. They don't actually understand that they are part of Manchester – and we decided that we are different from the other schools; we do need to focus on our kids'. (Teacher C)

The relationship between the competencies and the Manchester focus is quite a complex one in this school. To some extent, the Manchester focus simply provides a 'hook' for a scheme of work within which students can develop a range of personal, learning and thinking skills. Indeed, none of the learning objectives in the scheme of work finally developed actually refer to the development of understanding about Manchester itself. Some of the teachers also argued that it was no different from other areas of focus in achieving its educational goals – i.e., the development of personal skills. When we examine the discussion of the Manchester curriculum in more detail, however, there is a sense in which the focus on Manchester is more than a simple 'theme', and is tied up to the development of new subjectivities. In many ways, the teachers talked of their students as suffering from limited aspirations and narrow horizons, of lacking pride in their environment, as being unable to make connections between themselves and the wider world

I did feel it would be a good thing to try and find ways to engage students with the city of Manchester because Wythenshawe tends to be like this little place, out on a limb, and they don't even feel that they're from Manchester, so I did feel that was a positive thing for our students, to try to find ways to engage them more in their city. (Teacher D)

The whole thing about students here is that they have low aspirations. They have little knowledge of what the world can offer them and so, anyway, that we could widen their horizons and open up the world to them, I wanted to go with that and I say that that is generally what's in our development plan, you know, the raising of aspirations. (Teacher D)

'We are conscious that many of our young students have a limited vision and understanding of the city in which they live. Throughout this scheme of work we would like to engage

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pupils in activities which would ignite a passion and pride for the city in which they live and a clear understanding of the contribution of culture and the arts in this process³.

'Most of the students in Wythenshawe that come to Parklands in year 7 have not visited Manchester City Centre. They do not know about the history of Manchester or what they city has and can offer. This scheme of work aims to raise aspirations and motivate students to engage them with Manchester, their city!'⁴

The Manchester link, therefore, could be interpreted as developing a new form of subjectivity for the students. By making them aware of the rich possibilities in their environment, it is implied, students will in some ways develop identities that chime with the goals of the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills agenda. By developing pride in their own identity as part of this rich environment and history, they will be helped to develop the sorts of capacities implied by the PLTS. This link was never clearly articulated by the teachers being interviewed, but it can be read off the discussions of the reason for the focus on Manchester and the observations on 'what worked' from the project in terms of its impact on students.

What the Undressing Manchester allowed us to do was just give us a theme and a topic, a local topic, which would slot in, still allowing the competencies, but pushing the creativity element and being proud of Manchester and proud of the city we live in [...] We have to be careful not to cover too much, try to aim not to cover too much, so the underlying theme was really this, be proud of the city you live in and look at these very creative and sort of entrepreneurial people, all the fantastic things that have happened in Manchester.

This, too, is a highly complex idea – that pride in one's environment can play a role in enabling students to develop the confidence and pride that will support the development of other skills. It is a connection that was not made explicit in any of the course materials, but it is something that was implied throughout. In essence, the teachers were making sense of the dual elements of the 'Manchester Curriculum' project that had been presented to them by the RSA and the City Council.

In addition, the leadership of the competency team, with their specialisms in SEN and behavioural difficulties, also meant that the project aims were filtered through a core commitment to inclusion and to ensuring that all students benefited:

Teacher B - Nobody was left out, everybody went.

³ Taken from the Project Brief developed during the second workshop

⁴ Taken from the module outline developed during the third workshop

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Teacher A – That was a big part of it and that they wouldn't have to do any reading or writing. It wasn't like that and it was actually the people who did the best would be the most enthusiastic and they would be the ones who won't be in top sets.

Teacher B – Or who ask lots of questions.

Given the complexity of the challenge, and the diversity of perspectives of teachers involved, there were heated but challenging debates over pedagogy and curriculum content. These tensions are exemplified in the following discussion between two of the competency oriented teachers:

Teacher C - I'll gladly abandon a planned individual lesson if there's a more specific focus that needs to be addressed, whereas some staff cringed yesterday when we were just completely left in the sort of circle time environment, where there was silence and there was thinking and things weren't being dictated to the students and the answers weren't being given, they hadn't been uncovered yet and, obviously, members of staff in the room at times were a bit like – wanted to give the answer, always to ask the closed question, or wanted to spoon-feed them [...] it was too risky. It was too quiet because I made them sit there for two minutes in just, you know, complete silence and let them think, for example, and again, for the kids it doesn't automatically happen straight away.

Teacher B – And that's quite a high level skills isn't it? That as a teacher you have to learn?

Teacher C – When [...] came into the competence curriculum, at first, she didn't know what to expect and it scared the living life out of her and it was all: where are the levels? What's going on? What are they learning? And she has come full circle.

Teacher B – We've had confrontations like we're cowering in the corner.

Teacher C – And it was very painful. It came down to, again – came down to screaming rows.

Teacher B - There were a lot of prickly feelings.

Teacher C - But it's shifting on. It's definitely shifting on. It's also having that trust with colleagues isn't it?

Teacher B - Yes, it is, yes, and professionalism.

Teacher C - You're not judging each other, it's like a judgement level.

These values and aspirations were reconciled within a broad structure for the programme that served as a compromise between competency and disciplinary approaches. The agreed approach balanced the aspirations of 'subject-oriented teachers' to provide key conceptual and disciplinary information and tools, and the aspirations of 'competency-oriented teachers' to offer opportunities for students to take time and responsibility for

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their own learning. A consensus was achieved that balanced competency classes with a Manchester focus, with a whole year group trip, a set of expert master classes and a student directed project.

Sorting out the practicalities

Making these activities happen, however, required significant time, commitment and expertise. The teachers involved in planning the programme, for example, were committed to all students being involved in the trip and the subsequent activities. This required high staff:student ratios, something that caused significant resentment in the staff room as it required high levels of cover for those teachers who were going out for the day at a time (during exams) when there was already high levels of demand for staff:

Teacher C - There were three of us and about 12 kids.

Teacher B - Per group. Yes, heavily staffed. All the support staff, volunteer staff. Decimated the school.

Setting up the year group Manchester visit also required transport, staff, funding for all visits, planning of activities for all visits, and complex logistics, all on a very small budget.:

'We rang around and emailed and spoke to and booked and it does take a huge amount of time and chasing the money for it. We had a grandiose idea. We wanted all the kids to sit down in a restaurant for a meal at lunchtime, as the cultural aspect of it, but that just became too expensive. It was all those kinds of things'.

The team was also inexperienced in identifying external experts or specialists who might visit the school for the master classes. They had to draw on individual knowledge or suggestions from others in the school:

[Teacher C] is fantastic at research, she goes on the internet, and somebody in my department said – oh, [poet], he goes into schools, get him in and somebody else, knew somebody in the art department who knew the artist so it was kind of ad hoc.

The school, perhaps wishing to keep the relationships under their control, or perhaps unaware of what was possible, was unsupported by the RSA in this process of identifying opportunities for participating in the city and for bringing people in. They were, despite 10 years of national initiatives such as Creative Partnerships in this field, effectively starting from scratch:

Teacher C - The school used all local contacts, or connections, through the staff that ran the planning team as well. The kids hadn't worked with them but because the staff knew them and had relationships with them they felt comfortable in bringing them in. With the day in Manchester....

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Teacher B – That was hard work. That was really hard work planning that.

Teacher C – We just researched it... because there was so much you could have done we couldn't make decisions for a while'.

Practical issues also needed addressing – risk assessments needed completion for all locations, transport needed to be found. Here the school was able to draw on support from their existing sponsor (for the academy) Manchester Airport, who provided buses for the day.

They said we can't give you money but we will try and facilitate you in any way we can and one of the biggest costs we have at the school is coaches so they have saved us thousands upon thousands this year. So they gave us a bus and a coach – an actual bus which made the journey so much better. The kids were, I'm on me own bus! It was fantastic. So, yes, we got all the kids on and off we went. [...] had arranged guided tours with the Manchester guides around six key areas in Manchester which was regeneration, green Manchester, canals, crime and punishment, music.

The schools' existing sponsor, Willow Park Housing Association, provided a further £4k funding, which allowed the school to buy in the external artists for the master classes and cover access to some of the venues on the visit.

Finally, however, the team felt confident that they could both justify the events and brief the rest of the staff on their roles:

We'd had so much planning and so much discussion and we had the logistics nailed like this. That was what gave us confidence. (Teacher B)

Despite this planning, however, the teachers on the day were still responsible for crisis management:

We'd booked lunches with MOSI and we'd walked these kids around for an hour and a half. They were absolutely famished and dehydrated and they got this little drink carton and a sandwich that big and some dried fruit... so we were just, we've got to feed these kids! We've still got this afternoon and [Teacher E] went and got Greggs for the whole Year 7. (Teacher C)

Setting up this sort of event, in a high stakes, risk averse environment, with conflicting educational philosophies, with few, if any, pre-existing links to the city and limited support to build new links, with staff resources already stretched to capacity and almost no budget, is a major achievement.

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What came out of the project?

School Culture and Working Practices

The primary outcome from the project, according to those interviewed, has been the contribution it has made to teacher professional development, primarily in terms of allowing teachers with limited experience of competency based approaches and ideas to explore these and develop their understanding. The following long quotation is worth presenting here in full as it provides a detailed insight into the complexities involved in negotiating subject based and competency approaches, and gives insights into the way that these ideas will be taken on and developed further in the next academic year both by this teacher and by the teachers she is responsible for:

It has made me have more of an open mind about things. I am very protective over my department and discipline. I'm not really – well, I was – I was very stringent over we can't lose drama; we can't lose performing arts and I knew all of these measures and I know it's not just in this school, that education's changing, and I was very much, where is my department going to go? What kind of teacher will I be? And I'd always wanted to be involved in competencies but I didn't want it to be at the expense of the department but then, when I saw how it could be facilitated, because I hadn't had that opportunity, and I think it would be the same with many staff, getting to see how you could do master classes and include your discipline, or teaching through your discipline, or even it's interesting just to see what other people do.

[...]because I know it is very difficult to think you're losing everything that you've – not only what you've trained for as a teacher but then everything that you've trained for when you're doing your department, your schemes of work, and everything, and you're looking at letting go of everything and you have to be very, I'm going to freefall and see where we can go with it and looking at how you can work with all the other disciplines and, at first, it seemed like – it think it seems too difficult or you think that it would be unreachable but, as soon as you start talking with other people, within different disciplines who are creative, or who want to express their disciplines or the subjects of their work, then it becomes creative and you feel just as creative as you would do in your own subject and you're suddenly aware of different projects you'd like to be doing rather than just thinking of, for example, we're used to doing bullying and all of the subjects that we might do within PSHE – drugs, truancy – but suddenly I'm looking now next year at doing things like the natural world through drama and music and art and dance, combining those skills together, and I am one to admit that I was stickler for it at the beginning.

The whole experience of seeing kids coming off that day buzzing about the experience or running back to tell the other kids what they've just done, I think the students had that buzz and the teachers then had that buzz. We were all sat there as a group. I felt more of a group that day than I have done. A lot of the time when you're talking to your department because you are so isolated, a lot of the time you don't have time to always come together

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and talk about your experience of the day, in a positive manner, about the lesson you've just had, or something that you've just done, or the kids. You're too busy running around. You don't have time to stop and think. But to be sitting there and thinking and reflecting with all these other teachers, I think that we did grow a lot from it. [...] I loved it. I liked that you all had little roles to play and you were seeing a bigger picture, that they all sort of came together and reflected on everything. (Teacher G)

This teacher, who had been involved in the planning of the curriculum, had been given an opportunity to reflect upon and challenge her educational philosophy and to work with others to explore and model new approaches. This opportunity, as with many other similar curriculum design projects, enabled the teachers to articulate their vision for education. As another teacher put it:

Competency approaches give teachers a justification to have a say, enables them to be involved in discussions, it's given us a voice as well so that you talk about student voice; there is a teacher voice now. (Teacher E)

Such a shift in perspectives was, as another teacher put it, a sustainable long-term impact from the programme:

Teacher B - I think we've changed the minds of some of the staff.

Teacher E - And I think that's had a big impact. I think it really, really has.

Teacher B – Through discussion and debate and through all the rest of it and I think that's probably more crucial than anything, regardless of what the 7's have got out of it, because that's more sustainable. They'll take it away.

And indeed, the curriculum designs in the school for the following year from teachers previously uninvolved in competency work, would suggest that teachers were both incorporating competencies within different subject areas and following a mix of event based, project based and master class activities that owed a significant debt to the Manchester Curriculum. Such an approach is down to a changed relationship between teacher and curriculum, and teacher and colleagues best described by one teacher as, 'You felt worthwhile within it'. (Teacher G)

Staff Student Relationships

Such a change in perspective on both curriculum and pedagogy was also seen to have resulted from the changed staff-student relationships that the programme was felt to have engendered.

Yes, You can see the pictures there, just the closeness really, and the friendship that develops between the staff and students when they're outside and I think, also just giving them confidence that they can be in a city, and they can feel comfortable in that city, and

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that strong message that you heard today that it's your Manchester, it's your city, be proud of it, be part of it (Teacher D)

We took a group out, a large group, who staff wouldn't have taken so we've given those kids an opportunity in school where staff will think, actually, I can take that group out; I can do something with them because it's been shown you can. (Teacher E)

Even for those teachers who had previously been involved in competency work, this was seen as significant progress in enabling students to take responsibility for themselves and their learning:

I think we've made a step. It's a bigger step than we've ever had [towards engaging learners and learners having a say in how they learn]. (Teacher E)

Building Relationships with External partners

Another important contribution that the project was seen to have made in the school, was in opening up the school to greater links with external parties in a way that had previously been unknown in the school:

I've been in the school five years. This is the first time I've known students to have access to these master classes and we've got four artists in the school today. We've got a poet, a graffiti artist, a sculptor and a musician, so that alone I think is an excellent way forward for us [...] I went to the poetry one and intended to visit several but the poetry one was so exciting I just stayed there! It was just how great, how they managed to do. (Teacher D)

The involvement of the external partners also made visible new pedagogies and different ways of designing other areas of school activity and opening up the possibility of involving external partners in curriculum design:

Both days were seen by [...] who hadn't been involved in any of the planning. He was just 'wow! wow!' this is fantastic, what a fantastic two days and it made him think about the transition time that we use when year 6 come up and how that's delivered, so it will have knock on effects because of the people that came and were involved on those days. (Teacher C)

'I mean, one of the key things about that Wednesday was on the lunchtime when you had people who'd never met before sitting in the staff room, discussing Manchester, discussing what they'd seen... and there was a conversation going and we were listening to the conversation and it was fantastic, the enthusiasm, what we're doing, and then they would say, well, we could do this, this afternoon, and you could do that – that would have been great at the beginning'. (Teacher E)

Importantly, this creation of external links was not attributed specifically to support from Manchester City Council or the RSA, but was attributed to the project actively

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encouraging and giving permission for these relationships. In some ways the idea of the 'Manchester Curriculum' created a new notion of a school as connected with a wider environment, an expectation that the school then had to attempt to meet:

I suppose the only real different thing was the staff had a frame of mind that they had to make links with other people, whereas, in the competency, it was always a desire to make links with other people but you didn't have to do it and so it was probably easier not to do it, whereas, because there was a message that part of this project was about making these links, I think people went out there and did it. (Teacher F)

Now that such links have been made, there is a commitment to building upon these, developing and sustaining them:

I think those links with these people that came in to do the workshops is going to be the big sustainable part of the project. That's the bit that, hopefully, will be able to continue and grow and develop. (Teacher F)

We could take that trip out every year, and we could get those artists in constantly, and we could change artists each year. (Teacher C)

Student Aspirations, Engagement and Confidence

Assessing the impact of the Manchester Curriculum on student outcomes and dispositions is impossible as no formal evaluation was set up at the outset of the programme. While the Parklands team did discuss, in the earliest stages, the question of how they might assess student learning, the complexity of the programme and the deadlines they were working towards, necessitated a move away from such issues. Moreover, disentangling the 'impact' of one unit of work within a much wider competency programme is likely to be fraught with difficulties. As such, the following tentative suggestions are offered as a basis for further exploration in subsequent initiatives rather than as definitive evidence of 'impact'.

Many of the staff suggested that the distinctively 'Manchester' element of the unit was secondary to the wider competency programme:

Teacher C - I think they enjoyed going out into Manchester and experiencing Manchester hands-on. I don't know whether the scheme of work has had any more of an impact than any of the other projects that we deliver within the competency.

Teacher B - It's just a nice hook to put it onto.

Teacher C - We've enjoyed having more funding to be able to do more creative workshops, or have a different approach into the way that we deliver it, but in regards to what the kids

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gain from it, they've done just as well in other projects; there's just as much enjoyment, just as much understanding, just as much development of skills.

The visit to Manchester, however, was seen to make a distinctive contribution in raising expectations and confidence of students, particularly of disengaged or disadvantaged students:

But it's also the thing about those students having that experience and thinking, actually, I can – it sounds silly but a lot of kids don't go out because they're punished; you can't go on that trip because you were naughty...at least it's given them the opportunity to say I can go out; I can be responsible; I can be trusted and that is a step for them. (Teacher E)

Confidence, you know, being confident – and that's across the whole group. (Teacher A)

The visit was also felt to have engendered significant student engagement which, given that disengagement was seen as a particular problem for the school, is a non-trivial result:

You can see that. While they were watching those slide shows they sat quietly. They were engaged entirely by watching what they'd done. You could see how much they'd sort of valued that just from their reactions in the hall today. (Teacher F)

While the project itself had focused upon the development of a set of key skills and competencies, a number of teachers observed a wide range of unexpected developments in understanding by students:

The morning was really focused, the afternoon was a bit more 'floozy' and it turns out, when we came back into school, that they learned more in the afternoon from their own experiences and their own observations from the buildings they remember looking at, linked in with bits of chunks of information from the morning. They had the more academic ones in the morning, and the more kinesthetic, practical, getting going with it ones remember things they saw on the journey, like 'that place, Miss, near that big Spinningfields thing where you got me the Calippo' and its what they associate their memory with and, you know, when you say 'what did you enjoy most, what did you learn the most?' the things they come back with weren't always factual information. There was quite a big mix – there were some kids that went 'I learnt that even though I'm afraid of heights I can try, and if I'm with someone who is encouraging me, I'll get up and I'll do it and I'm proud that I did' Very acute, very reflective, very skills-based. There were some that were like giving me the history of the ship canal and remembering the name of the Duke of Bridgewater, so you had a real mix. It was purposeful for all of them. (Teacher C)

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And the experience that they had there, talking about what they saw when they first got off the coach, and some of the children's memories of things, with the smells that they could smell, because they went into the museum where they saw all the old sewers, and they described things that, if you just asked them to write a report about, they wouldn't be able to describe in such a vivid way and they wrote it as a whole group. (Teacher G)

Student Encounters with Difference and Diversity

The major outcome of the project, according to teachers, was in students raised awareness of and pride in the environment in which they lived, and of their sense of its diversity. The following teachers account describes the sort of impact the project was seen to have:

They're not used to seeing lots of different people, from different styles walking down the street, their hair in dreadlocks that are purpose, or different styles of clothing, because it isn't necessarily accepted here or seen here. It's not multicultural – it's growing – but it's not a multicultural town at the moment. So to go in there and see so many different ethnicities or different cultures that are going on – seeing African dancing in Piccadilly Gardens. I think that's really important to them and to be aware it's only down the road for them really and the fact that some of them have never been there before, and if we don't take them, or we don't make them aware of it, what is there for them to want to go? I think it is quite important that they got to see it and then they got to celebrate it because I think a lot of the thing is there's so much negative advertisement of things that are to do with Wythenshawe is that kids don't necessarily feel proud of where they're from. (Teacher G)

What is hard to assess, without talking with the students themselves, is whether this interpretation of impact is an accurate reflection of the implications of the project or an account of the teacher's aspirations for her students. That this teacher, with her professional experience and initial scepticism, was committed to repeating these experiences in subsequent years, however, suggests a significant benefit to this endeavour.

Next Steps for 'Undressing Manchester'

Parklands is going through significant change in governance, leadership, curriculum and school ethos at the present time as a new leadership team take over the academy and as the school moves to a new building in 2010. The whole school is involved in a process of curriculum redesign with a focus on enterprise. The current competency curriculum is being dismantled and competencies are now due to be embedded within clustered subject areas. The staff team responsible for competencies will be reconfigured, although the enthusiasm will remain and the lessons learned from the previous three years work will be embedded in the new arrangements. As such, it is hard to talk specifically about next steps for 'Undressing Manchester' as the conditions within which it was designed

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have changed. What is clear, however, is that the staff have decided to take elements of the project and make them work within the new contexts of the academy:

'It is very like how we did it for this project [...] They went on the day and then they had the master classes and then they carried on working on it to fulfill that within, however they wanted to. So they'll be working on a project but have the chance to do master classes. A bit like, I guess as well, when you're at college and university and you start being able to make those choices early on. So we're informing them of those decisions straightaway and they're having the chance to see lots of different disciplines, both collaboratively and independently, hopefully they'll be able to develop as a learner, develop as a person to be able to make those choices. (Teacher G)

Throughout the interviews, however, a number of suggestions for further development of the ideas have been put forward and these are described here as a basis for further exploration both by the teachers involved and by other schools interested in the same approaches.

One area that the staff identified as needing further work was in following-up the high profile, high-energy, high-resource events of the trip and the Master Classes. Both the core team and others suggested that insufficient attention was paid to designing the subsequent student projects and to ensuring that links were made with the wider curriculum experiences in the school:

It's that follow up that doesn't happen. It just doesn't happen because you come back to school and they go back to maths, PE and history and sit there and nobody in the classroom makes any reference to it. It would be nice to think that maybe people plan their curriculum so that, after the trip to Manchester, every subject is doing something Manchester-based so you can do the history and the geography, just to do a bit of follow-up. (Teacher A)

I would have tweaked it by planning in the follow up more effectively and made it a mini project of our project and what I have is quite a good few lesson plans where you have to put a project proposal together and outline the outcomes of what you want to achieve. That actually staging it in that way and its very sort of skills and enterprise based. (Teacher C)

I think that, on reflection, we needed to tighten up the follow up afterwards, I think. That wasn't tight enough and I think, when we've talked about it before, maybe we ought to have been brave enough and gone for a whole day follow up rather than try and do it in lesson time because it loses its thread and it lost its momentum almost. (Teacher B)

Now that teachers have developed the confidence to run the highly risky and ground-breaking events for their school, these subsequent stages are likely to be the focus for further work and development. Such activities, however, require support not only within the school but externally from research communities and from other schools who are similarly wrestling with the complex challenge of how to manage learner-driven inquiry

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activities, and the equally thorny issue of how that can be meaningfully assessed by students and teachers.

Another area for further development is the role of the students themselves in the design of the learning process. The project gave teachers greater confidence in their students' ability to take responsibility for their learning. It also made visible to teachers some of the gaps between their understanding of Manchester and that of their students. As a result some of the teachers were interested in exploring the possibility of enhancing students' involvement in the design of their educational experience. First, they wanted to give students more choice about their learning opportunities:

They have to be really part of it and we sort of had this idea that we were going to put these workshops on, a whole variety of workshops and kids could decide which ones they wanted to go to but we thought that was maybe a step too far so we put them in them. We made the group. (Teacher B)

Student voice is good but we've sort of done it in reverse. We planned it and we sort of give them a student voice of how they present so the ideal for us would be for them to decide on how they want to present it but also plan and decide what they're going to be taught and I think that's the next step for us... (Teacher E)

One of the teachers also wanted to involve students in the design of the whole programme:

That would have been a fantastic start [having a planning group of the students and whoever is delivering the programme] and that's something we've learned, I think, in the sense that next time we'd start the other way round, get the people on board and then see where we get'. (Teacher E)

This potential openness to student participation in the planning of educational experiences was also extended to an awareness that, rather than simply acting as an object of study, Manchester (or the people within it) might be able to play a role in helping to shape curriculum:

'Get a group of students, some community partners, and staff, and let's shape the curriculum between us. I mean that would be a pretty powerful looking group. (Teacher F)

Involvement of the wider community also extended to parental involvement, with several teachers suggesting that efforts should be made to include parents in the programme.

It would be great to think you could get a next step which is kids inviting their parents to a day in Manchester. They show them round and all those things but it's the time and curriculum because I think that's one thing that wasn't done, follow up with parents. They

would say they enjoyed the day out but the reason the kids don't know about history and music and arts in Manchester is because their parents don't take them. (Teacher A)

The project, then, has stimulated debate within the school about its relationships with its community, with parents, and with students and has generated sufficient enthusiasm and engagement amongst teachers and students to ensure that these areas will continue to be explored within the new academy framework.

The Manchester Curriculum in Whalley Range School

Case Study written by: Keri Facer, Education and Social Research Institute, MMU

Background Context

Whalley Range is an 11-18 specialist college for Business, Enterprise and Sport. A girls' school with a highly diverse student intake, the college was described by Ofsted in 2007 as 'good and improving' and 'well respected in the communities it serves'.

Overview of the Manchester Curriculum at Whalley Range School

Whalley Range ran a project called 'Our Manchester: Our Whalley Range' over half a term at the beginning of 2009 with all Year 7 students. The project involved in the region of 10 days curriculum time and staff from RE, History, Geography, Citizenship and ICT. Each class in the year group was assigned a different period of Manchester's history, and they were then required to plan, film and edit a 'documentary' for their chosen period. It led to the production of a DVD by the whole year group on Manchester's history.

The project was led by Deputy Head Teacher Jane Townsend and was tied in to the school's decision to rethink their year 7 curriculum, which was intended to be organised around project days and around engagement with both SEAL and PLTS as well as humanities subject areas. The project was rich in ICT and digital media use and involved students in activities both in the school, on visits to the city and the resources of the local CLC.

Review methods

The following discussion is based upon the school's written proposal for their project, a visit to the school, including a short observation of a full year group activity and class lesson, and interviews with the school co-ordinator for the project and two of the participating teachers. The RSA lead, Kathryn Burn, also conducted an interview with the school co-ordinator.

Aspirations for the Manchester Curriculum

The 'Our Manchester: Our Whalley Range' activities were located within a wider programme of change to the year 7 curriculum in the school, which involved a shift toward cross-curricular teaching and learning centred around year 7 project days run with half the year group on a Monday and half on a Friday. These were designed as days in which the students would work on projects that required student engagement with the subject knowledge of a range of different humanities disciplines and which promoted a range of ICT skills, and personal skills and competencies. A theme was chosen to structure each half term. These were: Identity, A Museum for Manchester, Our Manchester: Our Whalley Range, Heroes and Heroines, Fit for Life, and 21st Century Learning.

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A significant proportion of the plans for the curriculum were, therefore, already in place before the school agreed to participate in the Manchester Curriculum project:

We already knew that we were going to have year 7 project days. We already knew that we were going to have six topics, one for each half term. We'd already decided that we'd try and have a trip in each half term. We already knew which people were going to be teaching it and that it was going to be a cross-curricular day that involved History, Geography, RE, Citizenship and ICT. [...] we knew that one of the projects was going to be about Manchester. It was going to be making a documentary about the different periods in Manchester's history and that was kind of as far as we knew. We didn't know how it was going to work out [...] we knew we wanted to include, not just the subject disciplines, but that we wanted to use the PLTS or SEAL. (Teacher J)

The teachers were keen to increase student engagement and social skills, and thought that a cross-curricular and competency focused approach might achieve this aim:

At the heart of it is the Every Child Matters agenda, in terms of Enjoy and Achieve, and we wanted to see if, in year 7, we could create real engagement in projects which would give students more time to develop those kinds of team work skills and cross curricular learning, and things that would be motivating, where we have time to go out on visits, or get speakers in, rather than having the subject, RE, one period a week for year 7, or history, one period a week. (Teacher J)

The school was also keen to encourage student aspiration and awareness of their city:

We wanted students to have ownership of Manchester because a lot of students here don't go out at weekends. They don't go out after school. They might be collected, driven home. They don't travel on public transport [...] I think it's partly an ethnicity issue. We've got a very high proportion of Asian students and we've also got students who are poor, you know, in terms of parents having time or money to take their daughters out to see things. It can be very expensive to have a day out in the city, with all the things that involves if you've got a few children [...] we felt that we wanted to make sure that, every half term, there was some kind of trip so the students were getting out and seeing things but we wanted them to feel 'the city belongs to me; I know my city; I know some of the famous buildings in my city; know I can go into some of these things for free, ' that kind of thing'. (Teacher J)

Importantly, however, the lead teacher on this project talked about the potential for a local curriculum to have a parochial focus, and challenged the conception of identity and community as geographically bounded. Indeed, she argued:

I think we want to get students to feel that they're part of our school community; they're part of their wider community and they're part of a global community. So we had one project that focused on fair trade and social enterprise kind of issues and I think if we hadn't had any world view, you know, that wouldn't have been good, and I suppose, on the

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identity one we were thinking about, well, we're in Manchester but we've got all these links with other countries that people have come from so that's kind of what's made Manchester what it is, the links it's got with other places [...] I suppose every term has got aspects of Manchester in, but I also want there to be something that's wider than that as well and that was originally what put me off the Manchester curriculum because I thought are we going to have every half term and its going to be Manchester? I suppose my question was, why do we need a Manchester curriculum? (Teacher J)

Activities

The model for the year 7 project days was a combination of whole year group activities in the hall, in which teachers would present a set of materials and activities intended to inspire and challenge students before setting them a major project to work on. This was followed by a series of activities in classrooms and on visits as a class group in which students worked through a handbook to structure their activities. Each half term led to a different end 'product' created by the students. On the Museum for Manchester, they constructed a physical museum model and made a PowerPoint presentation. On the identity day, they created a class exhibition.

The whole year group activities were designed specifically to challenge traditional pedagogies in many ways. For example:

For 'identity' we had rolls of wallpaper cut up so that each big table had a piece of this wallpaper and they drew round themselves and then they covered the outline of the human being with all the things that they thought were connected with identity, and the sense of engagement and creativity that was in the room during an activity like that, and the space of the hall, there are quite a lot of things you can do. I mean, one time [...] we played 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' with a half year group moving round from place to place for the answers, [...] we've also had a big simulation, in the stadium, a UN conference. (Teacher J)

In the case of the 'Our Manchester: Our Whalley Range' project, which ran over the first half term in January 2009, the lead history teacher invested considerable time and effort in creating a DVD that showed him at different periods of time in Manchester's history.:

We decided that we were going to make a really interesting launch DVD for this documentary project and the Head of History really went for that and organised and took over and we had a really professional video where he was a time-traveller going back to the different periods and forward to the periods that the students would be looking at. (Teacher J)

Following this, the students were challenged with creating a short film about their chosen period:

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Each class is responsible for a different time frame; students plan, and develop materials – images, keywords, sketches, poems, songs, interviews, drama – that reflect their era. Within each class teams of students develop their co-operative learning skills researching and using information retrieved to devise items to be included in the documentary film. (Written summary presented to RSA team)

This challenge having been set to the students, they then went on a tour around Manchester by coach, where they had a map *'with pictures of different things that they had to spot, like an I Spy type thing, so that was to give them a sense of where the main city's spread out and what kind of parts its in, and what kinds of different historical periods there are in the city and can they recognise certain buildings that represent, maybe, different times and we had some map reading activities'*. The Manchester wide coach tour was complemented by a Whalley Range walking tour where students were looking at the different historical periods in evidence in that particular area.

Throughout this process, the students were using still and video cameras to capture footage, and were beginning to explore the different elements that might go into their films of the period. Gradually students took on more responsibility for their films. In some cases, they decided to revisit places like the Museum of Science and Industry to gather more footage; in another they invited an actor in to talk to them about their experience of Manchester. Students and staff were free to take the challenge in a range of different directions. The processes of editing their film took place at the local City Learning Centre, often without class teacher involvement, leaving the children to take on responsibility for major editorial decisions. Finally, the different films were presented back to the whole year group in the hall.

The staff who were interviewed identified a number of challenges that remained unaddressed in this pilot activity and which they were continuing to explore.

First, the difficulty of finding ways to assess student learning remained a live issue, and one that they had hoped to address through the links with other schools in the Manchester Curriculum project.

The challenge of developing cross-curricular and project focused work for staff who have a traditional subject background also remained. In the early stages of the project, the process involved explicit mapping of subject areas into the project activities:

We fully understand that certain projects will be heavier in certain topics than others so when we did Fit For Life, for example, that was nearly all citizenship and a little bit of ICT, very little Geography, very little History, very little Art. Whereas when we did the Museum for Manchester and the documentary on Manchester I was fully aware that there was quite

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a lot of history in there so I know because history benefited a lot from those two projects, got more than a fifth of the time, you sort of give and take a little bit. (Teacher M)

Some of the students, familiar with subject based teaching, were also uncertain about what was being learned, leading staff to consider clearer 'labelling' of activities:

Some girls genuinely feel, well, I'm not doing ICT this year... you just say to the girls well ICT is part of it. You've done PowerPoints; you've done the word-processing; you've made a documentary so you've done film editing. They've actually done loads, you know, they've done about internet safety. Most of the stuff they would have done in lessons but because it's part of a project day they don't always say that they're learning like the lesson. We tried to make it so it didn't feel like you're doing a History lesson; you're doing an ICT lesson. It maybe went too far that way and you need to let the girls know what subjects they are studying when they are studying so this is your ICT part of the day when you're doing this. We're going to focus on history now. (Teacher M)

The fact that non-specialist teachers were being asked to lead work outside their specialist area also influenced planning activities:

The number of students just changes the way you teach the lesson so the fact that you've got non-specialist teachers teaching history so you've got to make sure that everything is clear so you have to give instructions. The plans for the day, obviously, have to be far more precise. Obviously if I'm planning just for myself I don't need to plan everything in the minutest detail because I know what I'm doing. (Teacher M)

Over the course of the year, increasingly, the team was coming to focus on the skills and competencies rather than the subject content. A new approach was developing, which saw the staff increasingly see the need to pay attention to the skills students required to participate in project based work – and at the time of the interview, there were suggestions that there should be a more explicit focus on literacy and on the teaching of collaboration and group skills.

The tension between subject based and competency based approaches also comes out in the challenge of teachers being asked to teach and lead in areas outside their own field of expertise. There were, for example, significant challenges to the educators in the technical and artistic processes of creating a film/DVD as part of the Manchester curriculum:

We had problems with incompatibility between things that had been filmed here and things that were at the CLC. Some footage was lost and so on so, from all of that, lessons learned. We've got a new signing out sheet for camera and equipment, and so on. We've decided that, next year, somebody from the CLC will come and do a training session with the staff before we set off and so we know very clearly about how that bit of it is going to work. He'll come and talk to our Media staff and make sure that they know what's being required of

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them. [...] I'm not an IT specialist. I've never done anything like this before, so it was a real shot in the dark really, because we didn't know what we'd need. (Teacher J)

They got all dressed up – sort of 1800s – and went to the Museum of Science and Industry and they all brought clothes to dress up in and we went round and they found a place where they wanted to film and they wrote their script and filmed it. Brilliant. But when it came to putting it all together they lost all the sound. It was so close to being a really good idea. All of a sudden they got there and they were doing silent movies and all the research was lost because the sound was gone so it just looked like my class had done a silent movie, dressed up in clothes and running in and out of rooms. It kind of lost the sense of – some of them like, when they filmed, pictures broke up and pictures went green at times so it just didn't look as professional as we hoped it would when we filmed it but that wasn't any fault of the girls. That was the fault of the, just the technology. (Teacher M)

The sustained inquiry-based project days also made visible to some of the teachers that certain topics or subjects form more or less amenable subjects for student inquiry:

The research was a big part. [...], for example, people who were doing something about Manchester in the 50s to the 2000s so they got to do about sort of immigration into Manchester... they got to do about the bomb. There was loads of stuff for them to research. Whereas, I was doing about 1800s Manchester and the idea was to focus on Whalley Range. Well, Whalley Range in the early 1800s there was nothing here but fields and what actually happened wasn't all that dramatic. Big houses were built because it was a wealthy area but not enough to warrant a documentary, therefore, we had to wind it to Manchester but, doing that, we open up how do you research Manchester in the 1800s so we had to pinpoint what topics we're were going to have so it was like crime and punishment, so it was about finding out about crime and punishment in Manchester and it was university-level stuff of actually researching such a topic. (Teacher M)

The different timescales of the project days – with students in the same group with a teacher all day – also brought challenges for the teachers who needed to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of their students' and the dynamics between them to ensure a successful experience:

So you've got issues like that with group dynamics [...]. If I thought the group was top heavy and was too heavy or too weak I would possibly move them around but what I tend to do is, every half term, putting a seating plan up that will change so they're all working with different ones each half term and, for that half term, that is there seat and that's where they stay... .a bright student, an average student and everything in between. So the dynamics of the group is important. Some girls are very forceful and push their opinions upon others. Other girls sit back and allow what's to happen to happen so, as a teacher, for us, it was a challenge to make sure that happened and make sure they have all got a fairly equal say in what's going on. (Teacher M)

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Lessons, however, were constantly being learned and embedded into practice throughout the year. On the day of my visit, for example, a Friday project day, half the year group was assembled in the hall to start a new project on 21st century learning. Children organised themselves into groups of 7 or 8 around tables in the hall and the Deputy Head gave a presentation with a series of video clips and ideas about the different approaches to teaching and learning that might come to pass in future. The students then were involved in a mind mapping exercise to explore how they use new technologies and how these could be used to create different approaches to teaching and learning. Following this, the Deputy gave the students their challenge – to create a safety DVD about using the internet for other students. Noticeable in this brief were the lessons learned about the use of ICT in project-based work, exemplified by the high level of structure that was given to the students to support their planning of the film, and the emphasis on using still images rather than grappling with the complexities of video. Such an approach reflected the staff's views that they wanted the children to focus on the substantive issues, to ensure that they were able to achieve their goals, rather than become tied up in the complexities of video editing.

Making the Project Happen

Recruiting staff to participate

The project was led by the Deputy Head Teacher in the school responsible for learning. She was invited to lead the project as she was already heading up the school's curriculum reform at year 7. She was also personally interested in the question of how to enhance learning in the school, and interested in learning from other schools about how they tackled the substantial challenges involved in a shift towards cross-curricular rather than subject focused teaching:

I want to find out about what's going on outside my school, in terms of learning and innovation, and it was an opportunity to get ideas from different people and to look at different frameworks, to think about assessment, to think about delivery, and I suppose I want to be better at what I do every day and so I've got to get my ideas to do that from somewhere, you know, and I also thought that, as I was leading a new team this year on the project, that the opportunities offered by the residential might be good ones for people to get together and share ideas and so on, and it might help to build that team, and I think that, certainly, in terms of the first residential, when more staff from my school went, it helped us to sort of start off in the right way'. (Teacher J)

She was particularly keen to be involved in a project that was attempting to 'do something a bit different' and that was a big project that crossed a number of schools.

There were more staff interested than could be included in the project. In the end the decision was taken to focus the year 7 project days on humanities and ICT, so all staff involved were drawn from those areas. At the same time, subject expertise and interest were not the only factors that shaped involvement:

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It came down to scheduling for timetables, it's kind of a bit about who's available but we certainly wanted to make sure that those people who were involved wanted to do it, and so everybody who is involved had said, yes, I'd like to do the project day. (Teacher J)

Creating time to work out the ideas

The team designing the new curriculum (10 teachers in all), two from each of the humanities disciplines and ICT, had had some time to begin to plan their year 7 project days at the end of the 2007/2008 year and had already begun to implement the curriculum by the time of the first residential for the 'Manchester curriculum'. As such, many of the logistical issues relating to timetabling and staffing, and many of the curricular and pedagogic issues had already been explored by this team in relation to their redesign of year 7.

This residential, however, played an important role not only in giving them time to sit and talk as a group, but also in 'opening up' their ideas about what was possible:

I think the most useful thing for us of all the things we've been involved in to do with the RSA was the first residential. The first residential was useful for us because four of us went [...] and three of us stayed the night and we were there for the night and the morning.[...] it's good for people to mix with other staff to see models of good practice and think, of yes, that's interesting. So I think, on that residential, the phrase Opening Minds had a kind of impact on thinking. Right. OK. This is about trying to do things differently. We saw a couple of DVDs from different schools where they were doing things, including one school where they were using electronic evaluation systems, where the students were kind of evaluating themselves through e-portfolios and using hand-held technology, and we also saw a DVD that had been made for one school [...] where the teachers had dressed up as characters to introduce the project with a launch video [...] and we also had time to sit and talk and thrash around ideas which I don't think would have happened in quite the same way if we had been in school. (Teacher J)

This residential and the second residential served to inspire and challenge the teachers to think differently and acted as a useful impetus in their planning. Outside the residential, teachers split into smaller groups to plan specific areas of activity, often within their subject disciplines. Creating time for this, however, became difficult and involved creating space within the school day:

We had bits of time, as the year's gone on we've had less and less time in school and I've ended up writing quite a bit of it but what we had then was, we probably had a meeting that was a bit after school and maybe a bit in school, and we just kind of thrashed around the ideas and I think, maybe the planning for that one happened pretty much after school. (Teacher J)

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Often, however, because the curriculum was designed as a cross-curricular, project-focused activity, the deputy head responsible for the programme was uncomfortable asking teachers to prepare activities outside their subject discipline, with the result that much of the planning and materials increasingly fell to her as the year progressed, a process that required significant personal commitment:

I mean, I thoroughly enjoyed doing it, but there was many a night when I've been up until 12 or really early in the morning, to make it happen and when you know you've got 150 children going to be in the hall expecting something that's high quality, you've got to make that happen, you know, so it's been demanding... (Teacher J)

Sorting out the practicalities

In practice, the school found the practicalities of organising activities and partnerships with organisations outside the school gates particularly challenging. Risk assessments, cost and transport were all barriers that needed to be overcome:

One of the things about going to the CLC – we're a partnership school – it's a link facility and it is going to cost us over £100 to take the students up there for a day. We're talking £150 to take two classes up, one class up and back, another class up and back. We've got a mini bus there that we've just bought, but nobody is yet qualified to drive it because you've got to have all sorts of things so... I mean the CLC has got a mini bus but the time it takes to split a class in two and go up and back... the other thing is all the side of the permission slips and so on, the donations and things like that [...] your risk assessment [...] but we've persevered with it because we really wanted it and we will do the same next year. (Teacher J)

Similarly, the difficulties of arranging permissions for all students, and for finding venues that would take the number of students involved, were also challenges that need to be confronted:

It's just giving out the letters, people not returning letters ... it can be just a lot of paperwork and I think they're finding it difficult to get certain trips organised for certain days, not every religious building can take them on certain days. It was just things like this because it is a whole year group of nearly 270 students. (Teacher K)

Building relationships with external partners

The school also found it particularly challenging to establish links with new organisations with whom they weren't familiar and had hoped that there would be more systematic support for the schools in building these links:

I suppose, at the beginning, I thought there was going to be some support, a bit more, coming from the RSA which was like, saying 'well, we've actually got this person who can offer this, and that person who can offer that, and we'll make the contact with them, or

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we'll introduce you' so that we haven't got to get on the phone and explain what the project is and go through the whole thing. They're already primed and they're interested in it, and they want to be a partner because there isn't really time for me to go knocking on doors [...] I think it would be helpful to have somebody like that who coordinated for the city and knew that there were all these people in the city who were willing to offer things. (Teacher J)

The teacher made clear that the time required to set up such new relationships did not necessarily sit easily with her own way of working and personal identity:

I mean, one of the other schools, just rang up a load of people and said, you know, I'm doing this project; will you do it for free? Well, I don't find that sort of thing particularly easy so I ended up paying for the things that I wanted [...] We didn't have anything for free. (Teacher J)

Despite these concerns, however, the school's activities did draw upon many of the resources in the city. By the time of completion of the year's activities, the school had made use of a considerable number of Manchester's resources – museums, tour guides, City Learning Centre, bus trips, visits by cultural groups. Critical to the preparation for these activities, however, was the support of an administrative assistant in the school in arranging the logistics and relationships.

It should be noted, as well, that the school already had a set of networks and partnerships connected with their 'Business Citizenship Review/Deep Learning Day' when external organisations would come in and talk with the school. Interestingly, these partnerships were seen as distinct from the Manchester Curriculum.

One of the teachers involved in the project also argued that a major challenge for teachers was not so much the establishment of new partnerships, but the real integration between the skills and activities and motivations of external partners, and the curriculum and timetabling requirements of the school:

I'm linked in with Citizenship. There are people who come in quite a lot and want to do different workshops with different groups of people and I get about two phone calls a day, people asking to come in [...] But I just can't have everybody in. It's kids off timetable; it's letters going home so I have to be quite selective but it's definitely out there for the taking, especially in Citizenship, we don't get any phone calls about Geography. [...] It's police; it's university students; there are even law students who want to come in and teach an element of Citizenship because they have to do it as part of their course. [...] . Literally, I just don't have the time to invite everyone in. [...] The problem is a lot of them only want a select group of 15 students to do a workshop and sometimes I think 'it's more useful for you than

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it is for me' but if there is a group looking to come in and they're willing, every year, to do ... Citizenship class, I'll definitely go for that. (Teacher K)

What came out of the project?

It is not possible to distinguish the implications of the specific 'Our Manchester' half-term scheme of work from the impact of the whole year's changed curriculum and pedagogy. The following, therefore, should be understood to reflect the teachers' perceptions of the implications of that wider experience over the course of a full year.

School Culture and Working Practices

The changed year 7 curriculum has offered participating teachers an opportunity to work with others, to experiment with new models and to encounter new ways of doing things outside their own school. The project seems to have played an important role in raising staff aspirations and excitement about what might be possible in terms of the design and delivery of novel learning experiences:

They came back and said, 'oh! North Manchester is doing this wonderful project and they've got the BBC involved and it's going to be on the screen. The 'wow' factor [...] I've been kind of thinking that people are struggling a bit with this project and maybe we've had enough wow factor. But they're kind of coming back saying 'maybe we could have done something that was even a bit bigger and those were people who I wouldn't have necessarily have thought would have thought like that, so I think that's probably the best thing that we got out of it'. (Teacher J)

All the staff who have delivered it this year have asked to do it again next year because they feel like they want to build on it [...] and some people who, at the beginning of the year, were very nervous about how it was going to function, have had some really enjoyable days. (Teacher J)

Enthusiasm for this new way of working was evident despite the high commitment and stamina required of teachers participating in the project:

It's just constant, the pace, and you're with the same group all day but, at the end of it, you feel as if it went really well and I think, towards the end of the first term, we all agreed that we really liked it [...] Other people in school were like, oh, I feel sorry for you doing a project but I said, yes, it's really not that bad; it's really good. (Teacher K)

It's just constant; the girls are asking questions; it's far more interactive between the students themselves and us because that's the sort of day it's set up us so it's tiring. Year 7s are tiring compared with older students. You can't leave them. They're always hands up asking something so just the fact that it's Year 7s; it's the same class all day; it's intense; there's a lot to get through. It is often a race to get the stuff finished because of the time of day yet every single teacher enjoys teaching it. (Teacher M)

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An important factor in this enthusiasm also seems to be related to the opportunity for staff to work with each other and to develop collaborative group identities:

We all got to know each other really well and how we work. (Teacher K)

The project also clearly gave teachers the flexibility to develop new approaches to teaching and learning and to experiment with a range of different activities often focused on reorganising the temporal practices of the school:

I think the key benefits come about from the flexibility [...] Some activities can last ten minutes, others can last two hours, so the big one is the flexibility over the whole day to do the activities. The fact that they're not moving to and from; they go to the hall. You haven't got that movement; you haven't got that stop and start. (Teacher M)

Changed perception of student achievement

The technical challenges that the school had posed for themselves by setting a film as the major outcome from the 'Our Manchester' unit led to a number of unexpected consequences. The use of digital and media technologies meant that many of the staff developed a range of new technical skills and opened up the possibility of students taking on more responsibility in the classroom:

Well, most of us had never tried to make a DVD before or use the computer equipment to do that. I'd never even got stuff off a camera in school before [...] at the end of it, the people had moved forward in terms of having children responsible for cameras and wandering around with them and making decisions about what was going to be in and out of it and sending children off on their own to make the end product because none of the staff, who were actually responsible for that class, went to the CLC with them, so the children's editorial – all the responsibility was with them for how they linked it together in the end, which, when you felt, maybe, that it's going to be a bit competitive and that all of these are going to be shown in the hall and what if yours isn't very good? – is quite stressful. (Teacher J)

Such an experience, it seems, led to teachers having a greater awareness of and respect for what students might achieve when offered responsibility and leadership opportunities for their learning:

[There is a recognition] that when they work independently [...] they can produce something that's really quite impressive and if you think about all the hiccups and everything we've had, we've still got this DVD and on the whole [...] what a fantastic resource we've got to show the students next year to say, well, this is what was achieved last year, so you can get a sense and you can laugh at these bits that weren't very good. I mean one of the groups even did little outtakes. (Teacher J)

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This experience, combined with a project based approach that intentionally set out to devolve responsibility to the students, was seen to counteract the notorious year 7 dip:

Sadly, when students come up from primary school, they get a bit de-skilled [...] having more student leadership within the classes has been an important part of it, that thing about them making the editorial decisions or the choices, rather than the teachers doing it, so the teachers are relinquishing some of the authority and allowing the students, when they're behaving and they're on task, to be more in control of what they're doing. (Teacher J)

Knowledge of students and personal relationships

An important aspect of the Whalley Range curriculum over the course of the year was that staff worked with the same group of students for a full day and with that same group over the course of a year. This approach has built meaningful relationships between staff and students:

Working with one class all the time [...] people got quite attached to the students that they were working with [...] and feeling that, I'm getting to know these students and their strengths and weaknesses and who works well with who and everything and I'd like to keep that class so I can help students to develop and so on, so relationships, I think, have been an important part of it. (Teacher J)

It's turned out that I've been with one group now for the whole year, one day a week, and the quality of the relationships that you can take from that is really great, and when we're looking back and seeing how the students have developed, we can really see changes. (Teacher J)

Such an approach also seems to have led to different staff attitudes in managing children's behaviour and difficulties:

If you've got somebody in your group who's being a bit tricky and it's period 1 for the day and you know that they're going to be with you all day, I think you've got to do more to manage that behaviour, otherwise you're going to end up with that child being C3 or C4'd every day of the year, you know; you are going to be creating a really difficult situation for yourself and that child. (Teacher J)

This knowledge of students and ongoing relationship with them also enabled one of the teachers to use this knowledge to enhance all students' development by tailoring activities to them personally:

I think it just meant I knew the pupils really, really well and I knew that, after Christmas, I knew the people who were always wanting to do the presentations and to try and mix it up a bit and change it a bit and to give everybody really a chance because it was the same people wanting to do the high-profile things so, by the end of it, I think everybody was – I

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don't think there was anybody who was really quiet....so I think that has had an impact. (Teacher K)

Such close relationships in different environments also enabled students to demonstrate capabilities that otherwise might have been overlooked:

I knew those 20 students better than I knew my GCSE classes. Although they were a little bit fed up of it by the end of the year they're the same girls that now – on the whole, most of them will always speak to you in the corridor and when I see them in the corridor there is a familiarity, still teacher-student, but definitely an openness and we can talk about a lot of stuff and you just get to know the girls really, really well and you know their strengths and you know all their weaknesses. A lot of those strengths are things that when you're teaching an academic subject like History you don't notice that they're really good at organising other students or that, you know, sometimes, there was one girl who usually spoke very, very little yet, at times, she just came out of herself. It sounds quite childish but, for her, it was massive. Like, say, when we were putting stuff together she'd make sure she'd got all the equipment and she'd lay it out and she'd make sure that everybody had things. She just loved taking a responsibility, ordering people about for a bit. She certainly felt that she was giving students certain jobs, that she was delegating. In a History classroom, a weak student wouldn't often get to delegate things. So just the fact that the girls were able to show other different skills, regardless of their ability, was a positive. (Teacher M)

Improvements in behaviour

Over the course of the year, the school reports a substantial decrease in student detentions and exclusions:

It's had a massive impact on year 7. I mean, I know every cohort is different, but in terms of our consequence system and the number of C3s (which is a detention) or C4s (which is a removal), that happened on a project day, are absolutely minimal, and also, in terms of the overall Year 7 consequences, they're very, very low compared with Year 8 [...]last year there were 167 C4s and this year there's been 27. I think, whatever the cohort are like, that's pretty dramatic. (Teacher J)

Whether this is a consequence of a more engaging curriculum and creative pedagogy, increased responsibility being demanded of students or improved staff-student relationships is not clear. Indeed, one of the teachers commented that not all of the students enjoyed the different approaches to teaching and learning that the project days required:

One of the things we learnt was that the girls just enjoy completely different things. We had ideas about what we thought had been the most successful and the trips were certainly very popular and that was the thing that makes it unique and that's the things that makes the girls in the older, the other year groups, jealous is the fact that they get to go out on all

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these trips. So trips is a big one, so apart from the trips, some girls prefer their lessons and some girls genuinely said to me, oh, I wish I had History or oh I wish I had two History lessons and two Geography lessons. So it's not universally...the majority of girls liked it because it was different but some don't like it at all; some find sometimes its really boring; some find, being in the hall, they hate. Even when we're playing games, they're like we don't like being in the hall. It's like when they're playing bingo and when we're doing like running round and 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?'. No, I don't really like any of that. So it's just things that we thought were real fun things for the girls to do, the girls didn't always find fun. At the same time, things that we thought they wouldn't enjoy as much but they had to do, some girls really enjoyed it. Kids are different and that's the one thing that really came out. It certainly didn't make us want to jack it all in and give it all up because we thought the majority of it was positive and the majority of the girls saw what they were doing and saw the value of it. (Teacher M)

This comment makes visible not only the diversity of activities involved in the project, and the diversity of responses by the students, but also the way in which this project required the teachers involved to actively challenge their own perceptions of student interests, and get beyond commonly held expectations.

Understanding of the city

The project, in particular the bus tours, was reported to have helped students to get a much better understanding and knowledge of their own city, and made visible to students elements of their environment with which they had previously been unfamiliar: *There was a buzz. On the day, I'll never forget it. On the day that I took the children on the tour, we went to the Lowry and we got out there and walked onto the bridge and a ship came to go through and we had to wait at the side while the bridge was up. Well, the students were just screaming with delight. They didn't even know there was a bridge there like that. They didn't know. The whole panorama there is really impressive so, personally, it was very fulfilling for me to know we'd facilitated this sort of opportunity for the students and for them to be there with their cameras and everything, kind of clicking stuff, was really good. (Teacher J)*

I was at the City Stadium on a bus and a girl said 'oh, I go to Asda, I've driven past here, I never knew what that was' – She never knew that that was the B of the Bang or that's the City Stadium. She's in a car where nobody mentions what it is. (Teacher J)

This, felt the teacher, was particularly important in challenging social and cultural inequalities and in enabling children to create a sense of belonging and ownership over the cultural resources of their city. This view was echoed by another teacher:

Where we focused on that the documentary for Manchester, My Manchester Documentary was the working title. By the end of it the vast majority of the girls felt more part of Manchester because of that and they felt proud of Manchester and they felt proud of what

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they'd produced about Manchester so from the girls feeling part of the community, yes, I think it had a fairly sizeable impact. (Teacher M)

Competencies and Understanding

The Manchester Curriculum in Whalley Range was challenging, attempting to combine both subject understanding and the development of a range of personal and interpersonal skills and competencies. The Deputy Head believes that there has been evidence of development of students' capacities for self-organisation, responsibility and collaboration:

I've seen the difference in my class [...] I couldn't believe the creativity and quality of what they were doing and I didn't even show them [...] when it came to it, the way they just got on with it and worked with it in the groups and everything [...] it isn't given the opportunity to blossom in the same way [in other lessons]. (Teacher J)

Another thing is that we put the SEN students into one year half so that they were on one particular project day so that all the TA support would be focused on one day and those students have integrated really, really well into the activities, and that's been remarkable. Anecdotally, a lot of staff say students are much better at working in teams; they're much better at organising themselves; they're more independent. (Teacher J)

I think the skills are just interacting with each other and I think the lesson is more based on them interacting. It's more based on them... just getting to know each other. By the end of last year my class all knew each other really well. There was no animosity between anybody. They all worked in teams, different teams, throughout the year. There were loads of different skills that they were learning whereas they might not have necessarily have got that sitting in a lesson and doing an activity for 20 minutes... (Teacher K)

I think that the skills they gained are going to benefit them in later school years. So the team work and the confidence is, possibly, for me, the biggest. The last year 7s, the current year 8s, are the most confident year group we've got in the school [...] So if you said to the girls go and stand on the stage there and speak to 120 students – try and get a year 11 to do that you've got no chance. Obviously, in any school, you've got a small number who are happy to do that, you know, drama queens who want to sing and dance and do whatever, but your average student you won't get on stage to talk about stuff. Whereas, the majority of year 8s, probably quite easily the majority – I mean, most of them will have been on the stage and will have spoken to 120 students. The mic is forever going 'round and the students have to give answers to 125 students, or whatever, so the levels of confidence, the skills. (Teacher M)

At the same time, there was evidence of at least some of the students being able to reflect upon and articulate the competencies that they were developing:

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A visitor came and we had about eight girls [...] they just said, oh we've learned this kind of thing and we've learned that kind of thing [...] the sort of thing they said was that they didn't like working with different people, you know, that they'd prefer to work with friends... (Teacher J)

One of the teachers also observed that while the students were able to articulate the different skills they were developing through the project days, they also seemed to be able to understand when and where different approaches to learning and different relationships were appropriate:

The funny thing was I had them for the project and I had them first thing on the Monday for Geography. They were different in the Geography lesson than what they were on the project day... When they worked they were quiet, it was just as they should be in a lesson. I don't know. They were just different. They knew that they Geography had a different way of working than the project lesson..(Teacher K)

These early and still anecdotal observations underpin the school's commitment to continue the project in subsequent years and to begin, now, to rigorously explore the tools that teachers and students might use to further develop, reflect upon and assess this learning.

This commitment was also supported by the positive feedback from parents about the activity: feedback that was gained through the school's Learner Action Team survey of parents' understanding about the project:

One of the things that the girls, themselves, highlighted was that they didn't feel that the parents knew, necessarily, what it was all about so we came to an agreement that until the parents understood it, and supported it fully, with what we're doing, then the girls wouldn't necessarily put value on it. So we wanted to at least find out if parents are on board [...] It was incredibly positive, the feedback we got off parents. Most of the parents were really, really pleased that the girls were involved in something that was different. They liked the idea of it being quite skills-based rather than sort of content leading it so that was really positive. (Teacher M)

Next Steps and lessons learned

This school had a very clear set of activities planned to further develop the programme in subsequent years.

The lead teacher had been involved in a range of information gathering activities about related initiatives (including visiting John Cabot in Bristol, and in seeking out new assessment methods). The school was continuing to explore how a year 7 project-based approach could successfully balance the tensions between competencies and subjects, and alterations were planned to the initial introduction to the programme. At one point,

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for example, the teachers were considering more explicit teaching of skills and competencies at the outset, although this was later rejected:

Build more time in earlier on to build up skills, we'd have more introductory weeks before we even start any of the projects, where we go through some of the basics about why we're doing it, what we're doing, going through the kind of philosophy of that, and helping the students to develop some of the core skills that they're going to need to apply in the project, that they can kind of refer back to, and that would help with assessment so they've got a clearer idea about what we're looking at before we start out. So I think those things would be quite important. (Teacher J)

At the same time, the ongoing issue of assessment was a subject of concern. The school now intended to develop this further, both by building in assessment/reflection opportunities for students...

One of the things that we discussed at the beginning that didn't end up happening, and possibly could work going into next year, was that we thought that we would have [...] the final period of the day which would be kind of reflection and we thought that might be an opportunity where all the students would be in the hall with one or two staff leading that – but it didn't happen because 1) we were ambitious about what we wanted to get in the project and 2) in order to have a quality of reflection it's quite good to have the staff who've actually been experiencing that with the children there, to help them reflect and prompt ideas and so on. So still, going into next year, I think we need to build in more reflection time for the students. (Teacher J)

...and by testing out new peer-review assessment tools, using handheld devices.

Going into next year, we've now got what I believe are six really good modules of work that can be built on and we can really focus on the assessment, and we are going to try using the 'assessment by pieces' software as a way of getting students involved in reflecting on their learning and evidencing what they're learning against the in-house criteria. (Teacher J)

Finally, the school is looking to explore how the project days can be linked in to a range of other initiatives focused on learning, including linking with the Learning to Learn modules also being developed in the school, and the strategy for building student leadership across the school:

Drawing on the learning to lead initiative from the [...] school - you do a whole survey with the school about what all their priorities are and then you create teams and the teams don't change from year to year [...] and you become expert in that area and that follows you through. Well, what we wanted was Learning to Lead teams for subjects where you have got students who are contributing to the development of the curriculum, so that's the idea for next year, if that can be taken further. (Teacher J)

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Alongside the commitment to a continuity of staff-student relationships, and to the importance of creating exciting and challenging experiences for students; alongside the commitment to collaborative working amongst staff, and to the critical reflection upon the relationship between subjects and competencies; the focus on assessment and student involvement promises to offer a powerful development to the project next year.

The Manchester Curriculum in North Manchester High School for Boys Case Study written by: Dr Jonathan Savage, Institute of Education, MMU

Background Context

North Manchester High School for Boys (NMHSB) is an 11 – 16 comprehensive school which specialises in the visual arts and media. This academic year is a watershed one for the school, with it closing in its current form and reopening in September 2009 as an Academy. The OFSTED monitoring letter about the school's progression towards becoming an Academy makes reference to the demanding timetable for transition although, as the final paragraphs of the letter make clear, in July 2009 'there still remained much to do in a short space of time before it opens' (Ofsted 2009).

It was against this backdrop of considerable change and, as will become apparent, uncertainty, that the school agreed to participate in the RSA project. One senior manager at the school took responsibility for organising the project. Early on, this is what he wrote about it:

Relevance and recognition are key motivators and drivers for learning. Too often we ask our students to study without the meaning or context that they can appreciate. Using Manchester as our key driver we know from experience that this localised curriculum will be an ideal vehicle for developing the competencies and skills that enhance a students abilities to be able to learn. The immediacy of the locality is of interest and value and stimulates students to further their involvement. (Written statement by a Deputy Head-teacher at NMHSB)

Project Description

The project was called 'What makes Manchester great'. During a three week period, students visited key areas of significance within Manchester. They collected a range of audio and visual material, including still digital photos and digital video, during these visits. At the end of the project they were asked to work together to produce a film that presented their discoveries on their journeys with the people and places in Manchester. Approximately ninety students were involved in the three week project. A composite film of the best of the students' works will be displayed on the large screen in Exchange Square during the next few months.

From the perspective of the school, the location of Manchester is the vehicle for the delivery of the Opening Minds competencies and skills. In documentation about the project, including the comprehensive handbook that was given to each student, these fifteen competencies are overtly stated and regularly visited. As will become apparent below, in conversations with the senior manager and other staff, these competencies drove the learning opportunities within the project and became appreciated by students as they progressed. The five key competence areas are:

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- Managing Information;
- Managing Situations;
- Relating to People;
- Managing Learning;
- Citizenship.

Each area has three competence statements. I will not list them all here, but, for example, the Managing Situations competence area is broken down into:

- Show initiative, creativity and entrepreneurial skills;
- Manage your time and unexpected changes in your project well;
- Know how to handle both success and disappointment, reacting to uncertainty.

The point needs to be made here that the focus for learning within the project is clearly not with what one might call a subject orientated approach to curriculum design. By this, we mean an approach to curriculum design which flows from the inclusion of individual subjects within a curriculum framework and any collaboration on curriculum projects within that design is initiated and sustained by individual subjects and their teaching staff.

As part of the project, the school brokered relationships with a number of key venues across Manchester. The school noted how willing these organisations were in working with the school. Venues included Quarry Bank Mill, the Imperial War Museum, Manchester United Football Club, the BBC, URBIS, the Manchester Velodrome, Manchester Transport, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester Fayre, Manchester Town Hall, Manchester Library and the Arndale Shopping Centre. All these partners showed enthusiasm and willingness to help develop ideas and flexibility in when and how they supported the school. Their support and encouragement was highly appreciated by the school.

The project had a clear structure. During the first two weeks students undertook a range of visits. These visits were interspersed by a planning and evaluation day, i.e. evaluating the previous visit and planning the subsequent one. In the third week, students worked in small groups to create short films (2 minutes long) about their work. These films drew on the interview footage, digital photographs and digital video material that the students had collected. These short films were then combined together by staff to make a longer 8 minute film which was presented to the whole cohort of students working on the project at a final event held at Manchester College.

Review Methods

During the project I visited the school twice to observe students working and presenting their work and took fieldnotes during these visits. During the second visit, I spent time interviewing the senior manager with responsibility for the project and a group of

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teachers who had worked on the project. Kathryn Burns, the RSA lead for the project and a former teacher at the school, also conducted interviews with the staff involved in the project. The following text presents an analysis of these interview materials in the context of the two visits made. We also received a copy of a substantial, and most helpful, student handbook that had been put together specifically for the project. Although the school did issue a pupil, staff and partner questionnaire, this data was not available in time for this case study.

Key Learning Points from the Perspective of the Senior Manager

1. Curriculum Design and Ownership

One of the key points to emerge from this interview relates to the process of curriculum design, innovation and the perceived sense of ownership. First of all, this piece of curriculum design had its roots in the experience, or existing practice, of the senior manager:

Originally my first thoughts were based on a model I used from years ago which was a project within my previous school, combining various departments, looking at, if you like, transferable skills within departments themselves.

On top of this level of existing curriculum design experience, the perceived requirements of the model being presented by the RSA were considered:

The competencies and the skills of the RSA took over in terms of this particular model but the key was to get a model, as far as goals were concerned. There must be a visible progression; there must be something about the experience that these students have had that will be notable and something that they can take forward with them, otherwise, again, it's a wasted experience.

It is interesting to note here that the manager is keen to synthesise these elements to a certain extent, and also project these into students' future learning experiences ('something they can take forward with them'). He was also keen to tie this into previous work that the school had done with the Opening Minds curriculum and the broadly titled 'competency' curriculum:

*The school development, in terms of the curriculum, has always been one of looking to a model that best suited our pupils and, therefore, as we've developed along the road of competencies and skills, data proven valid and appropriate to the school is built into the school development plan, that we're looking to extend this through Years 8 and 9.
(Interview with Ms K. Burns)*

Having considered the framework within which this might occur, the manager was keen to allow the teachers involved in the project planning a certain degree of autonomy:

I might actually make suggestions but it really was, and I wanted it to be, their [i.e. the teachers] model of what they developed, of what they come up with. I also said, whatever

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they come up with, it doesn't really matter what the end result is, in terms of the learning that the students have had, because the knowledge base is secondary. What we're really looking to – back to the competency skills and driving them forward, so everything is around about driving these.

2. Subject Knowledge and Competencies

This interesting reference to the 'knowledge base being secondary' moves us into a second consideration which was raised during our conversations with the staff, relating to the balance between subject skills and the broader goals of attaining the competencies. Was there any problem with the balance between these aspirations from the perspective of the school?

The experience the students have and 'support' may not be the experience you want those students to have and I take your point that they could better have used cameras, or have better have used whatever skills, or better have prepared themselves, but my point is, what I wanted was the competencies and skills of working together. Now if that's what I wanted then they may lose out having honed to perfection, but we've got here, are a group of lads who will now willingly will take on more work of this nature, willingly want to learn more, and those opportunities will exist in the Academy. You're right in that they should be able to take them further and they should have the opportunity to make a better end product.

Within this project, it was clear that the main focus of the learning was to be the development of the broader competencies. Such an aspiration raises interesting questions, in the longer term, for schools such as NMHSB with their specialism in the visual arts and media; for example, they encourage us to reflect upon whether or not subject based skills and curricular competencies are distinct or inter-related. Current pieces of curriculum reform in this sector, such as the new National Curriculum for Key Stage 3, for example, contain many components including individual subjects (and a call for a greater degree of cross-curricular working) as well as a range of competency type content (e.g. personal, learning and thinking skills). The precise way in which these elements are combined and delivered within a whole Key Stage is not a straightforward or unproblematic task. This interview presents clear evidence that these balancing acts are an ongoing challenge for senior managers with responsibility for the curriculum at this level.

3. Making Contacts Within the Local Community

One of the key benefits of this project has been the links that the school has made within the local community. Whilst in the early stages this was not the easiest process to manage, the involvement of certain key players (including the RSA point of contact and the BBC) helped get the process started. As the following quote shows, getting through to the right person quickly was key to success:

When they told me that they'd decided they were going to get a film that was going to be shown in Exchange Square, I think I almost walked out of the room. No, you can't do that;

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it's not possible, but then we started contacting people and the BBC bought into it straightaway and that really helped us. Everyone else bought into it, very little convincing needed. Late pushes – Quarry Bank Mill. Phoned them up on a number of occasions but the message never really got through to who it needed to, so I went down and asked to speak to a certain person who's fantastic and, basically... did something quite similar with the Imperial War Museum. The issue with these events is getting in touch with the right people. I actually believe that so much of Manchester commerce, industry, the infrastructure of Manchester, they want to work with schools and they'll do it as long as you get through to the right person.

Perhaps having the luxury of being able to chase up contacts and people is one that many teachers lack? Certainly, the teachers involved in the project often had many competing demands on their time. In these circumstances, finding the right person quickly and being able to sustain that contact for future use is vital. Such links as had been made are now being seen by the school as a basis for further development and maintenance:

That being said, I think our key role is to go back and re-affirm those links. The feedback has been brilliant so far. We've got Quarry Bank Mill saying they're wonderful kids, and so on. We don't normally get things like that said about our kids.

4. Mixed Student Groupings

One of the particularly interesting aspects of the project was the way that the school was able to mix up the student groupings across the two year groups. This is not easy to achieve and meant that the whole Key Stage 3 timetable had to be collapsed for three weeks. The benefits of mixing students across the year group boundary were noted by the senior manager in an early interview:

To put them in cross-year groups, immediately you have challenged their social strata and therefore they are having to associate and work successfully with other pupils and they'll want to work successfully because the outcomes for them are important so it immediately challenged them in that way. It challenged also the normal sort of assumption that year X are much better than year Y because they are older, and so forth, and so they must be. All of this, as the project moved on, was very successfully incorporated in terms of pupils working together disregarding age, disregarding ability. They worked as teams. That was absolutely at the core of the different purpose. (Interview with Ms K. Burns)

This point was picked up during interview at the end of the project too:

The difference it should make is that the kids have learned different relationships and I deliberately mixed up year 7 and 8s. I wanted to see the interchange between two different year groups. I wanted to see how these students would work together and they have worked together. I wanted to see if they could develop relationships in a short space of time that needed to work, otherwise they couldn't work, and that worked.

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5. Senior Management Support and Staff Commitment

The following quotation is possibly the most telling comment in the interview as it makes clear the personal and organisational challenges involved in developing projects such as this:

You've got to have someone, or people in it, who commit. That's the one thing I would say, that you can't do this without commitment because there are times when the easiest thing is to walk away and then you've got to have someone like me who doesn't listen to anyone and says they're going to do it anyway because I could move the hurdles out of the way... you can't do it if you're not in that position to do it and I believe that has been the problem at one or two places.

Commitment is obviously a key element of making a major piece of curriculum development of this type work. But commitment is not enough. You need power and authority to provoke change (to 'move the hurdles out of the way') in order for this to occur. Significant pieces of curriculum development that involve the collapsing of timetables, the movement of students around a city, the reassignment of staff, etc. all indicate that the support of a senior manager is essential. But I think it is important too, to acknowledge that the commitment and enthusiasm of individual members of staff is also vital. It is to their story that the case study will now turn.

Key Learning Points from the Perspective of the Teachers Involved

It was great to have the opportunity to interview the group of teachers involved in designing and delivering the project. We met on a Friday afternoon shortly after they had returned from the final presentation morning held at Manchester College. There was a definite 'buzz' in the air about the project and the work that the students had achieved. Despite having to rush around and resubmit applications for their own jobs (as part of the school's re-designation as an academy), staff were keen to share their experiences with me in a small office belonging to the drama teacher. The transcript of the resulting interview presented some interesting data.

1. Linking In With Existing Curriculum Priorities

In a similar comment to that of the senior manager, the teachers stressed the importance of linking new pieces of curriculum development with existing practice. The idea of a competence curriculum provided the link here. It was something that the teachers were familiar with:

Well we run the competence curriculum here and the whole idea of the project, wasn't we're making a film, or we're making whatever, it was competence-driven. I think we need to develop the competencies more but that was the initial idea behind it.

But it was pleasing to note that these teachers were not complacent. There was a considerable amount of comment about how the existing competence curriculum in the school needed to be revitalised:

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I think with the competence curriculum, that's run for four years, and we definitely hit a stage, this year, where we needed to change it. That cycle of it had come to its natural end and, actually, what this enabled us to do is to think about the competence curriculum again and, as a result of the planning of this, I know that [...] and I, in our unit of work, had trialled lots of other things this year.

To that end, this project was a timely intervention and a useful way for the school to re-imagine what a new approach to the delivery of a competence curriculum might be.

2. Collaborative Approaches to Curriculum Design

The second major focus of the interview dwelt on how these teachers had worked together. The first point to make is these teachers really enjoyed the challenge of being able to work together:

I think the first – our initial ideas – I can remember at a residential and sitting, you remember, round the table, and we were literally just brainstorming ideas and something clicked between us because I'd always said about this group, the way that we've been working, is we've always been problem-solvers. It's never been dwelling on things that have not worked, or anything. We sat down there and we were bouncing ideas off each other and we came up with tons that day. We could have gone in loads of different directions.

There was obviously no shortage of ideas here! The dynamics of the group were lively and the ability of each member to initiate and respond to the thoughts and ideas of others was noteworthy. This was evident in the conversational interplay of the interview itself. But communication and co-ordination between willing members of staff in a busy school is something they all commented needed constant work and support.

At times, the school felt surprised at the willingness expressed by some external organisations to work with them, and this surprise resulted in the school perhaps not making full demands of these organisations in terms of educational outcomes or goals. This was an important learning process for the participating teachers in terms of coming to understand how relationships between the school and external partners could be initiated, developed and nurtured. In particular, staff felt at the end of the project that they could have created more opportunities to work more collaboratively with partners to develop curriculum:

Teacher 1: We allocated trip visits and, say, you design some activities for Man Utd; you design some activities and, actually, these members of staff hadn't been involved in the project all the way through so, as a result of that, they were quite cold to it and, you know, we talked them through the project and it was fine but, actually, just thinking about it now, that was a massive mistake; it should have been done earlier on.

Teacher 2: In our school, though, that was bound to happen because I think, part of it, for me, is that sense of, oh, my God, they actually do want to work with us! Whereas, now we know it's very easy to get partners to work with you, next time we will be far more clear and demanding of our partners.

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Teacher 1: But can I say that, that time between September and Christmas, we didn't use very well because we could have gone out to those places. Couldn't we?

Teacher 3: We could have met a lot more.

Teacher 1: Yes but had more useful –

Teacher 2: But we always knew we were doing something very new and, therefore, we were quite tentative. Next time round it will be [clapping sounds] and we will have much more confidence in doing that.

The staff expressed joy at the idea of having the opportunity to repeat and develop a project of this type, and expressed new confidence in their own understanding of what they could bring to the table as a school in terms of expertise in teaching and learning.

3. Recognising the challenges of the task

The project involved the highly ambitious task of students developing their own film, a task that requires all the competencies the staff were hoping to develop, as well as a set of technical and artistic skills. Many of the teachers were aware on completion of the project that students might need more support in certain aspects of their film-making, in particular around artistic understandings:

We have underestimated the task. We haven't had enough technical staff with us. We haven't had enough teachers who have been there. So, all those issues have been that the kids have not been led as well as they might have been.

Despite this, however, the teachers were confident that the project had achieved its goals in terms of students learning and inter-personal relationships:

... so, on a very superficial level, you get, 'we went to the Velodrome, it was brilliant'; 'we went to Man Utd, it was fantastic'. But what actually came from my group was, I pulled my group out, and did little interviews, and the thing that came out was, that they were given choices in the way that they learned; they were not told off for talking; we can talk to each other. We worked really well together.

Whilst I have not been able to observe the students learning in 'normal' class situations, the fact that this teacher was able to comment on this and raise it as unusual in its frequency is noteworthy.

4. The Centrality of the Learning Process: Learning beyond the end product

Whilst it might be easy to criticise the end products (the films) that came out of this project, it is important to remember that the vast majority of the learning competencies being focussed on here relate to the 'process' of learning. This raises questions about how we value success in terms of curriculum development, but I was delighted to hear these teachers recount stories such as this during their interview:

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It's the stuff that wasn't recorded in the competency or anything else. We were sitting in Quarry Bank Mill with six kids talking about the Manchester slave trade because they were looking at a guy who'd made millions selling cotton that black people were picking, and that isn't recorded in the film, but that learning absolutely happened. We were sat in a café outside Manchester City's ground talking about public art - 12, 13, 14 year old lads talking about public art in Manchester. We hadn't even intended that. The B of the Bang is there and that kind of got the discussion going. They had a treasure hunt where we had walked around all the kind of visible art in Manchester and, you know, lads talking about art in their city!

Another teacher reported the experiences of being in the city offered informal learning opportunities and opportunities for students to build collaborative learning relationships:

I also had – on the treasure hunt – we walked past two women kissing in a bus station and we ended up having a whole conversation about gay people. It was really informal and they were really going, 'is that right?' Well, there isn't anything wrong with it and you think, well, I teach sex education, as you do, and that conversation came out really naturally and really relaxed and we were just walking along, you think, that was priceless. We were walking down to the CLC and we all walked together. These were lads who hadn't worked together, a couple of them knew each other and they'd formed very good working relationships with each other which, in this school, is something that we find difficult – you know, the friends kind of work together – and it was a real moment when I saw them do that.

Another quotation from one of the teachers demonstrates the opportunity that the project afforded for staff and students to develop positive relationships based on understanding of each other as people as well as professionals:

They also saw – and I think it's so valuable – they saw staff having a laugh with other kids, staff having a laugh with each other, staff having businesslike conversations with each other.

The development of these teachers' relationships with their pupils is not something that is easily measurable or accountable. But it is absolutely vital to the future educational exchanges that will occur between them. Finding space within the curriculum to facilitate this type of exchange is something that this project managed to achieve most successfully.

5. Modelling Competencies and Behaviours

Finally, it was instructive to hear teachers talking about the competencies that they were working with (and developing) through the project. Whilst one might presume that the focus for learning these would have been solely on the pupils, the teachers here saw their role in modelling these competencies as being equally valuable:

Teacher 2: What I was saying before about what I really have been aware of, and quite like, is the fact that we, as a group of adults, have been mirroring the competencies and demonstrating them quite openly to kids.[...] How to face disappointment. You know, we've not hidden behind, oh, everything's fine, we've handled disappointment; the kids have been

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aware of that, as we've handled managing information. The kids can see the link. If we're openly working through the competencies, the kids can see that.

Teacher 3: And what I really like and, again, I'm a bit like [Teacher 1], you're kind of shoved in your room all day. You don't kind of see anybody and, if it is, it tends to be problems and it's just really nice to have a network of support. Like I can walk down the corridor now and just look at [Teacher 1] and laugh because we're under so much stress and time limits. We didn't say a word to each other; we just looked at each other and we just knew and I formed a relationship, then, I think and that's what's making me want to do it again.

Teacher 2: And it's appreciating an individual's particular strengths. I have been in awe of you getting that booklet together because it all hinged on one person being willing to take that task on. There's no way I would want to do something like that. [Teacher 1] did. It drove her barmy. [Teacher 3's] organisational skills are just –

Teacher 1: They're unbelievable.

Teacher 2: And I would never have seen that

Teacher 3: I think I've mentioned before what I've really liked about it is, we clicked from the moment we sat down. It's always been a group of 'what can we do?' If an obstacle's come our way, we've not dwelled on it, we've not gone, oh, well, we can't do that; let's change it or let's forget about that; we've just moved on with it and there's been no negative feedback. It's just been such a positive experience.

To this end, I was pleased to see that Stenhouse's belief that there is no curriculum development without teacher development is still as relevant in today's curriculum climate as it was in the 1980s (Stenhouse 1980). Teachers today have a vital role in mediating the requirements of the curriculum to their students. They are not passive communicators. They are dynamic and responsive agents in mediating and illustrating learning objectives or competencies to their students. This point was picked up in an early interview with the senior manager of the project:

To be honest, the best support you can get, in terms of curriculum and innovation, is leeway, these days, for staff to start and develop ... Developing something new and releasing staff to do that, is refreshing. I fell into the trap when they said what they were going to do with this film, believing it to be impossible. They've proved me wrong and that's good and, as long as we can release staff to do that, they'll be innovative. Innovation exists within education as long as staff are free to actually do it and not be challenged. (Interview with Ms K. Burns)

Within this project, teachers found it hard to maintain the ongoing nature of the innovation week by week. But the experience as a whole was very valuable. The element

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of teamwork between the individual teachers should also not be underestimated. This allowed them to go further than they would have done working in isolation. In response to a question about what they felt allowed teachers to experiment and take risks with curriculum innovation they commented on:

Teacher 1: Their surroundings, by far, the support of the others, which has been a major, major impact on me this time.

Teacher 2: I think the relationships between the staff involved have pushed us further than we would normally have gone as individuals.

Teacher 3: Definitely. I think, when we first had an initial meeting, we were trying to play it safe a little bit and the more we discussed and the more ideas were flowing the more they progressed and the more they got a bit more experimental. (Interview with Ms K. Burns)

When done skillfully and reflectively, the results of collaborative innovative curriculum development are of benefit not just to the students themselves, but also become a key component of the teachers' own individual and collaborative professional development.

Notes on the Visits

Visit 1: Students working at the City Learning Centre

The session took place at the CLC attached to St Matthew's High School. Students were split into three main teaching areas, with one teacher and one member of support staff working with each group. Students were split into teams of 8. Each team was then divided into four pairs, each charged with producing a 2 minute film using their collected video and photographic materials.

Students were using state of the art iMac computers for their work. This was the first time that the majority of students had worked on the Macintosh platform. This did not seem to be a problem. They used Comic Life software to storyboard their ideas for the film. This had been done the previous day. During the morning I observed, students used iPhoto to view and manipulate their photographic materials and iMovie to edit their video materials.

At various points throughout the morning, staff referred students to these competencies in a gentle, yet very helpful way. This was often done in the context of conversations with individual or pairs of students.

Students had been given a handbook that contained information relating to each of the trips that they had undertaken and associated worksheets for them to complete. Students have also been asked to evaluate their learning against some predefined questions (contained at the back of the handbook). The responses in the handbook that I looked at had been quite full and were impressive. The final part of the handbook contained some advice for students about how to structure their film and also how to edit their materials. Students had also received a 'master-class' in using the chosen software packages. They were then left to get on with the various tasks and given support on an 'as and when needed' basis. Student handbooks were not seen in the classroom on this visit.

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During my visit I observed the students compiling the static images and video materials into a 2 minute film segment. They did this by searching through collections of materials that they had collected during their visits to particular locations around Manchester. All materials had been collected under the 'What makes Manchester great?' theme for the project. The students that I observed tried to sequence their ideas in response to a storyboard for their film that had been completed the previous day. However, this was done mentally as I did not see any evidence of any students referring back to their storyboard (completed in Comic Life).

Having found appropriate material for their film segment, students manipulated it in a variety of ways. For photographic material, this included using some of the basic tools in iPhoto, including cropping and panning techniques. For video materials, students used iMovie to select the start and end points of particular video clips. They also enjoyed finding transitions to insert between photos or video clips. The majority of students also produced narrative elements such as titles or occasional words and sentences in order to structure their film.

As I was walked around the classroom I took the opportunity to talk to several groups of students about the project. Most seemed happily engaged in the above activities and had obviously enjoyed several components of the project, including having the opportunity to cycle around the Velodrome and have a guided tour of Old Trafford. Some students were keen to participate in activities other students had been involved in.

I asked students whether they had ever done anything like this before. They said no. I wondered whether they had ever done any film-making of any type. Again, most said no. But when pushed, several students commented that they had used their mobile phones to grab images and videos at certain points. Some pupils had used their mobile phones as part of this project, although this was not a key component within the creative process. One student gave an elaborate story of how he had shared this video with his friends. Another student had worked with a friend on his computer in putting together video collected from a mobile phone onto YouTube.

Visit 2: Presentation day at Manchester College

Introduction

The lecture theatre is a lovely venue. It is like a modern cinema with comfortable seats, a large screen, modern decoration etc. Getting students into a modern, FE college is a great opportunity to link together education opportunities for them. It represents a very positive aspect of this project, i.e. connecting together students with Manchester as a location, employers, the public at large, FE college, other schools, etc.

Students have been asked to present their films at a lecture theatre at Manchester College. This has been organised by the senior manager to provide an endpoint for the film making work that has gone on this week. But only three groups of students have completed their films. This stage of the work has taken a lot longer than the school had anticipated.

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Staff encourage the students to rehearse their presentations and to move into spaces to do this. There are no microphones so students are encouraged to project their voices. Students are happy and keen to work through their notes. There is a good buzz of activity but students seem reluctant to move about. The space does not encourage this.

The new principal provides a few words of introduction. She thanks the staff (applause) and comments on the very positive reports that the students have received from the various sites that they have visited. She mentions that the school is going to become a creative and media college and there will be plenty of opportunities for future work. She tells students that their work is going to Penketh High School (for further editing) and then to the BBC (for broadcast in Exchange Square).

Reflections on specific skills and broader competencies

In reflecting on my visit to the school, there were a number of issues that I noted about the artistic dimension of the work students were undertaking. Although these were not the aims of the project, such questions are useful in examining the relationship between specific skills and broader competencies, both amongst students and teachers in the design of projects such as an area-based curriculum: they can be phrased as questions to prompt further reflection in the development of such complex and ambitious projects as these:

1. How might schools effectively manage large amounts of digital footage collected by pupils to aid access and use of such footage?
2. How might students be supported to frame and select their material before shooting rather than relying on the editing process?
3. How might students use found sound or copyright free sound in their film production?
4. How might student ownership of the films be enhanced through the editing process?
5. How might students be provided with access to expert film-making practice as a model for their competency development, exploring how the competencies are enacted in authentic professional settings as a means of exploring the relationship between specialist expertise and broader competencies?

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