

Service Integration in Scottish Schools: Values, Vision and Vital Voices

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Values, Vision and Vital Voices .**

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SERVICE INTEGRATION IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS: VALUES, VISION AND VITAL VOICES

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Introduction

Adding vital voices to the policy debate surrounding service integration was the key task of the one-day conference, *Service Integration in Scottish Schools; Values, Vision and Vital Voices*, held at the University of Aberdeen's King's College Conference Centre in June 2005. The conference, the third in a series, sought to explore concepts such as integration, collaboration, community and social justice with practitioners, academics and policy makers from the fields of education, health and social care.

For Scotland's Children (Scottish Executive, 2001) found that, despite repeated policy interventions, many families remain caught in a cycle of deprivation where 'children are still born to fail' (41). In *New Community Schools: The Prospectus* (SOEID, 1998) it was argued that service integration was necessary to help break this cycle: 'the potential of all children can be realised only by addressing their needs in the round – and this requires an integrated approach by all those involved.'(2) The final evaluation report of the pilot phase of New Community Schools (Sammons, Power, Elliot, Robertson, Campbell and Whitty, 2003), however, suggests that delivering integrated services in schools is problematic.

The *Values, Vision and Vital Voices* conference was organised by NEXUS, a School of Education research group whose members are actively engaged in research concerned with development and change in inter-agency practice and the related concepts of professionalism and schools and social capital. To complement the conference NEXUS chairperson, Dr Joan Forbes, led an additional half-day research seminar during which practitioners and researchers interested in the field were able to share recent research findings and relate these findings to wider policy debates.

Service integration in Scottish schools: Values, vision and vital voices
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Whose values, whose vision, whose voices?
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The conference programme

Professor Steven Logan, Senior Vice-Principal, University of Aberdeen, welcomed delegates to King's College and invited Rowena Arshad, Director of the Centre of Education for Racial Equality in Scotland, to open the conference. In her address Ms Arshad stressed the importance of collaboration, while acknowledging the difficulties involved. As one way of tackling these difficulties she urged practitioners and policy makers to build networks and bridges not only between practitioner groups but also between service providers and service users. Open and active dialogue, delegates were reminded, would be essential for the creation of such networks. Ms Arshad argued that network building would necessitate personal, cultural and structural change and that this change would best be brought by developing and implementing strategies based on power sharing, lowering of traditional territorial boundaries and the acceptance of diverse identities. In closing her address, she drew on the work of Paulo Freire to emphasise that collaboration and dialogue between people and agencies must be approached with humility.

Roy McConkey, Professor of Learning Disability at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, gave the first keynote address. Professor McConkey has worked in the field of intellectual disability for over thirty years, and for his presentation, *Multi-agency working: An excuse for inaction?*, he drew on his own research and on his extensive experience of integrated service planning and delivery. In his presentation Professor McConkey argued that too often collaboration is an illusion of action. It fails because not all the relevant partners are included, the focus of action is on client groups rather than on individuals and because responsibilities are not made clear. Service providers, he told delegates, must take a road 'less travelled', looking for ways to do things differently. Attempts to bring together multi-agency support for individuals and families, he maintained, should be built from the 'bottom-up' focusing on personal contact, continuity, joint decision-making and jointly planned action. He outlined for delegates his vision for a bottom-up approach to multi-agency intervention based on providing individuals and families with a named supporter whose key function would be to give emotional, practical and informational support. Establishing these core partnerships between families and supporters, as the final section of the presentation suggested, would force existing systems to change and open up sites for meaningful collaboration.

Values, Vision and Vital Voices' second keynote speaker was Mrs Margaret Doran, Head of Schools from Stirling Council. In recent years Stirling Council has re-organised its services by integrating education, out of school care and social work into one Children's Services department. The new service places particular emphasis on using an integrated approach to identifying and responding to the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families. Mrs Doran provided a detailed overview of how services were now planned and managed, together with comment on the tensions and dilemmas faced by those leading the new service. She reported on the benefits which the new service had brought, including increases in measures of achievement, improvements in the health and well-being of children and young people and in aspects of social inclusion. Speaking from the point of view of a manager with wide-ranging experience of the practical aspects of delivering integrated services, Mrs Doran was able to outline many of the fundamental issues involved and set the agenda for much of the discussion which took place in the workshops later in the day.

The final keynote speaker, Professor Lyn Tett, joined the conference from Edinburgh University where she is Professor of Community Education and Lifelong Learning. Among other areas, she has a research interest in the relationships between school, communities and professionals in forming partnerships and the factors which make such collaborations effective. Her address, *Inter-agency partnerships and school-family-community links to prevent social exclusion*, reported findings from a research study which aimed to explore the impact of school-family-community collaboration on vulnerable pupils and their families. Professor Tett described the advantages of building and maintaining school-family-community partnerships and outlined some of the stresses involved. It was suggested that these types of partnerships cannot in themselves meet the transformational changes of enhancing social justice or increasing educational attainment but are nevertheless sustaining for schools in that they are able to implement initiatives that lead to improvement in the lives of pupils and parents. Professor Tett ended positively by concluding that the strategy of building collaborative partnerships can be effective in promoting social inclusion for a number of vulnerable families.

A plenary session led by Professor Walter Humes, a NEXUS member, drew the conference to a close. During this session delegates were given the opportunity to reflect on the conference. Professor Humes suggested that the conference had raised a number of key issues: the language of collaboration, he argued, must be interrogated; and the present lack of clarity and definition may act as a barrier to effective practice. The need to build organisational structures which encourage and support collaboration and the possible value of inter-disciplinary training had been highlighted during the course of the day but, he reminded the conference, how best to achieve these continues to be problematic.

Professor Humes concluded his remarks by proposing that the conference had met its aim of allowing vital voices to be heard. He pointed out, however, that some voices, notably those of the non-professional and young people, continue to be marginalised. He finished by asking delegates to bear in mind the difference between vital voices being listened to and those voices being heard.

In conclusion

Values, Vision and Vital Voices brought together practitioners, academics and policy makers interested in integrated service provision. Gregson, Cartlidge and Bond (1991) suggest that full integration involves jointly agreed aims and outcomes, harmonised systems, processes and boundaries and a focus on addressing the needs of clients holistically. The sessions and workshop discussion emphasised the problematic nature of integration and the many practical difficulties faced by those working in the field.

The opening address highlighted the need for change. Speakers identified a variety of barriers to collaboration: inappropriate organisational structures, a lack of shared procedures and processes, incompatible views about client interests and ill-defined roles and responsibilities. The conference heard of how change although often complex and sometimes slow can be achieved.

Delegates in the conference throughout the day, researchers in the seminar sessions and the keynote speakers let the voices of service providers, children, young people

and their families be heard. Vital voices were heard. They suggested that continued work is needed if collaboration is not simply to remain 'an illusion of action'.

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BEYOND INTEGRATION AND TOLERANCE: SOME OPENING THOUGHTS

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Introduction

The notion of working together particularly across disciplines and territories can be both an opportunity and a threat. The balance of that rather depends on whether you have enough people involved in that change programme who see cups as half full or half empty. It also depends on whether those involved have, as the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire would say, 'the humility to engage in such dialogue'.

As we move deeper into a service integration model we need to populate the change arena with people who see cups as half full and that can be filled, people with a 'can do' attitude, people who are not territorial and people prepared to see things from the other's perspective. Being able to frame one's own professionalism and perspective alongside others, having the willingness to be conscious of the other's priorities and interpretation, will be necessary dispositions to have if we are to move beyond tokenistic integration and, most certainly, beyond tolerance.

The service integration model is designed to enhance and improve the efficacy of provision, particularly to those who are most vulnerable. It aspires to raise attainment and to improve life chances. The practical journey between aspiration and reality will be complex and planning for the journey is essential.

Re-examining concepts

The Warnock report (DES, 1978) problematised the term 'integration'- which was then used to mean locational integration (sharing the same site but essentially operating in parallel tracks), social integration (some shared social space but essentially separate) and functional integration (a combination of the locational and social but essentially separate).

To move beyond integration requires the setting up of equitable partnerships and inclusive processes. Equitable partnerships will only be possible if different sectors, whether they be health, education, the police, social work, the voluntary sector, parents/carers or pupils, are able to work together with respect. Toleration of each other would not be sufficient. Tolerance is a poor tool for building coherence and cohesion. We need to be open about current inequities: for example, in education, the service area I know best, there is still a perception that only teachers can work with young people effectively. Equally, all service providers have at times viewed parent/carers as poor advocates for their children and have perceived them in a deficit model. There has equally been poor information about what each service does, and so misinformation or disinformation ensues which does not aid the creation of equitable ways of working.

The conference title of *Values, Vision and Vital Voices* would seem to me to be a carefully chosen set of words that we need to anchor any 'integration' model within.

Conceptual foundations

As a starting point, service providers need to acknowledge that the society is diverse, with multiple identities and needs. Issues of ethnicity, faith and beliefs, social class, gender, ability/disability, language, sexual orientation, age, geography and so on form part of the myriad of diversities that services now provide for.

Secondly there needs to be an acknowledgement that inequalities exist and that discrimination is occurring. An effective service integration model needs to be anti-discriminatory rather than non-discriminatory. It needs to be proactive rather than reactive. All involved within services need to have a willingness to take action to prevent and reduce the occurrence of discrimination and to redress the consequences of discrimination.

It needs to address the needs of individual pupils but not be stuck on an 'individualised' model which focuses on the problems of pupils. An individualised model can rapidly slip into a deficit model where service providers offer treatment, therapy and remedial action rather than examining the barriers, attitudes and possible

stereotypes that could prevent pupils from achieving to their best potential. There needs to be an understanding of the concept of 'reciprocity'. Service providers provide a service but equally service users have expertise, opinions and experiences to offer which can assist the service provider. Depending on the approach taken, a tool like personal learning plans can be empowering or it can be yet another interventionist tool for professionals.

Understanding the need for structural and cultural changes is therefore a key point. A challenge will be how professionals within an integrated structure ensure their focus is not just on the child/young person they are working with but also on the structures that might limit and constrain the pupil's self-esteem, that might prevent cooperative working and learning, and so on. How can service providers alter the culture of their work environment, of their approach to meet diverse needs? For example, if the 'norm' is to provide a service for white English-speaking pupils, how do mindsets and approaches alter to provide equitably for those from minority ethnic groups whose first language may not be English? Indeed, how can a service integration model not avoid less discussed areas, for example, the area of sexual orientation? The 'norm' at present is to assume provision for heterosexual pupils but what of pupils from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered backgrounds? How can service providers move away from a real danger of a medical and deficit model to one that supports the building of capacities and networks within themselves as professionals, within the diverse range of young people they work with and within the diverse communities and groups that that they have connections with?

Ways of working together

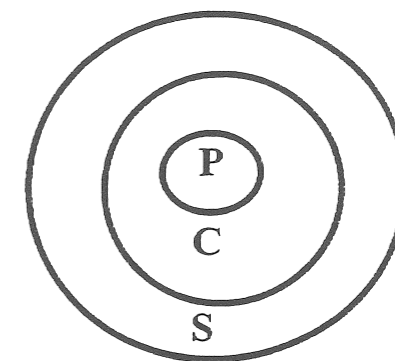
How can we work together in a way that develops our emotional literacy and assists develop critical thinking? It is important to develop a level of knowledge and understanding for staff that personal issues can affect progress, but so can systemic issues such as structural discrimination, racism, sexism, homophobia and so on.

How can an integrated framework place value on social relations within the classroom and school so that the social capital of all working within and having contact with the school is enhanced?

How can an integrated school provision contribute to quality enhancement by

- improving pupil experiences of school,
- assisting to remove barriers to learning (either personal or systemic barriers),
- assisting the building of networks and bridges between home/school, pupils/teachers, practitioners?

It is perhaps important to return again to the need to engage with the Personal, Cultural and Structural framework that Neil Thompson (1993) advocates. Thompson suggests that it is helpful to analyse the situation in terms of three levels. The Personal (P) refers to individual levels of thoughts, feelings, attitudes and actions. The Cultural (C) refers to shared ways of thinking, seeing and doing, and the Structural (S) represents the network of social divisions and institutions that exist, the interlocking of power and influence (Thompson, 1993:19).



At a personal level, an integrated framework engaging with values, vision and vital voices needs to find a way to enable all within that framework, whether that be the headteacher, parent/carer, health worker, carer, pupil, volunteer, social worker, classroom assistant, community worker or others, to feel a positive sense of self.

At a cultural level, people need to have a sense of belonging and connectivity to their environment and fellow workers, learners and peers. This requires issues which limit a sense of belonging to be addressed. That means those who are in charge of service integration models need to find out what makes staff, pupils and parents/carers feel

included and what excludes, demotivates and disempowers. Listening and consultation would be critical before action can be identified.

At a structural level, each individual working within a service integration framework or who is a recipient of that service must develop a sense of personal power – the loss of which will lead to disenchantment, territorialism, indifference, mistrust and possibly inertia.

These are some ingredients to try and work with if we are to have an effective service integrated provision

Moving ahead

As partnerships are built, dialogue with humility becomes critical. Such dialogues must constantly edge towards a breaking down of a ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality to one that increasingly marginalises negative notions of the ‘other’.

Active Listening is important – listening, hearing, reflecting on what each other is saying to assist alliance building.

If the service integration model is to work, each professional grouping needs to be prepared to give and take. One group does not hold the moral high ground, or work harder than the other, or is more ‘professional’ than the other: each has its own area of expertise and experience to contribute. The role of the manager of such a provision is therefore key. Thoughtful leadership is one which would engage in power sharing, in 360 degree feedback appraisals, which will not be territorial but be critical and self-evaluative rather than self-exonerating.

Service integration is ultimately about improving services for those on the receiving end and not a consolidation of a power base for professionals. It is not sufficient for professionals to bridge, bond and link while leaving those whom the service provides for on the margins or completely disempowered. Equal value principles must underpin staff engagements with each other, with the children and families whom providers are working with. There will be diverse agendas, hopes and identities and though fragile bridges may break, they can be rebuilt.

We do well to remember the wise words of Paolo Freire (1972):

Dialogue cannot exist without humility. Dialogue is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? (63)

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge drawing from the work of Neil Thompson and Elizabeth Morris in framing this writing.

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MULTI-AGENCY WORKING: AN EXCUSE FOR INACTION?

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Abstract

Partnership working between education, health and social services is essential if the 'special needs' of children and young people are to be effectively addressed. However present endeavours that focus on creating top-down structures are more likely to become an excuse for inaction than an agenda for real change. More promising is to build from the 'bottom-up' with the core partnership being that between an individual child, their family and a named supporter. The hallmarks of this relationship must be personal contact; continuity over time; joint decision-making and mutuality. Each of these partners in turn will have their own personal support networks offering emotional, practical and informational support. However, unlike the core partnership of family and supporter, these relationships are more likely to occur as needed, to be advisory in nature, to promote knowledge and to use technology rather than face-to-face contacts. Creating cultures that enable these two types of relationships to flourish is a daunting challenge. Some requirements are likely to be a change in professional roles – new styles of leadership and organisational cultures. The priority, though, is to establish the core partnership between families and named supporters because this will force existing systems to change as it is not possible to sustain excuses at this level.

The need for re-formation

The new century has brought a major shift in societal responses to persons with disabilities. The medical model with its emphasis on personal deficits, assessment and therapies has given way to a social model that highlights the disabling impact on people's lives of their environments and the lack of social opportunities (World Health Organisation, 2001). In the United Kingdom, the advent of Human Rights legislation and the Disability Discrimination Acts has underscored the need for children with disabilities to have equal access to the full range of services provided for all citizens. Likewise the increasing focus on the quality of people's lives has shown the need to move beyond education, health and social services if in adulthood,

people with disabilities are to access suitable housing, obtain training and employment and lead richer social lives (Mencap, 2000).

Recent Government reviews of services for people with learning disabilities have highlighted the need for multi-agency working. For example, the Scottish Executive Report, *The Same as You* (2000), recommended that

local authorities, health boards and primary care trusts should prepare 'partnership in practice' agreements for learning disability services in their areas. (15).

In England, the recent White Paper, *Valuing People* (Department of Health, 2001), proposed the establishment of Learning Disability Partnership Boards which are now established throughout England. Chief Executives of the Local Authorities were assigned the responsibility of setting up the Boards. Membership was to include

senior representatives from Social Services, health bodies, education, housing, community development, leisure, independent providers and the employment service. Representatives of people with learning disabilities and carers must be enabled to take part as full members. (108)

Their remit was

overseeing the inter-agency planning and commissioning of comprehensive, integrated and inclusive services that provide a genuine choice of service options to people in their local community (108).

Similar aspirations are often voiced by the general public about government-provided services. A review of Public Administration is currently underway in Northern Ireland (www.rpani.gov.uk). Their consultations highlighted four strong concerns:

- The desire for high quality services that were accessible to all;
- More joined-up working among public bodies;
- Fewer service delivery organisations;
- Urgent need for change.

In the United Kingdom, partnership working is largely being instigated by central government in a top-down approach and as part of a modernisation agenda. However, the burgeoning literature on inter-organisational theory has highlighted the complexities involved in this endeavour:

it has remained conceptually elusive and perennially difficult to achieve.
 (Hudson, Hardy, Henwood and Wistow, 1999, 236).

There are indications that partnership working in general is likely to be undermined by the complexity of the organisational environment in education, health and social care (Greig and Poxton, 2001) and in particular their hierarchical structures (Iles, 2003). Others have alluded to the difficulty in securing citizen participation required in enhanced partnership working (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Although the rationale for multi-agency working in support of children and adults with special needs is sound, proposed new organisational arrangements are built more on hope rather than an assurance of success.

Admittedly it may be premature to write off such ambitious initiatives but the early signs are not promising for the creation of multi-sectoral working. For instance, Ward, Fyson and Watson (2004) reported that Joint Investment Plans for this client group were formulated mainly by health and social services agencies. In over 50% of the 104 local authorities they surveyed in England, education, learning and skills councils, employment, housing and leisure services were not mentioned in their plans.

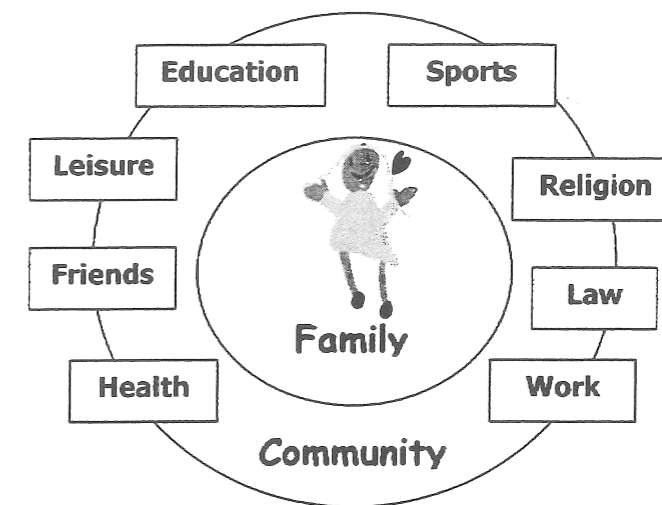
More crucially, a top-down approach begs the question as to the extent to which such changes will impact on the daily lives of people with disabilities and of their families. Past experience tells us the answer - probably very little! Ironically these organisational proposals are contained in the very documents that in other chapters promote the need for person-centred plans and individualised payments so that consumers have greater control over decisions that affect their lives. Surely this thinking must also inform the basis for reforming multi-agency partnerships. In this paper, I aim to explore what this might mean in practice.

A prototype for multi-agency working

We do not have to search too far in order to discover a prototype of the new type of multi-agency partnerships that could make a difference – the family! Bronfenbrenner (1979) recognised this in his eco-system model of influences on the developing child (see Figure 1). The micro-system lay at the heart of the model and consisted of direct, person-to-person experiences with others, most notably within the family home. In

turn the family was surrounded by what he termed the ‘meso-system’ consisting of interactions with other persons in the wider community, including professional services such as teachers and therapists. Beyond this were the wider service systems but he stresses the limited impact they can have on the micro-system.

Figure 1: Multi-agency working by families



Although his model also supports my contention of the need to think from the bottom-up (or ‘inside out’ in his terminology), my interest in introducing his concept of the ‘micro-system’ is to stress the role of the family as an example of a multi-agency provider. In essence this is what families do for all children and no less so for those youngsters with special needs. Burton White (1979), one of the foremost American researchers in the Head Start programme aimed at reducing educational disadvantage among mainly Black American pre-schoolers, concluded:

We came to believe (through our researchers) that the informal education which families provide makes more of an impact on a child's total education development than does the formal education system. (4)

A great deal of developmental research has subsequently identified the processes that families use - often unconsciously - to promote the overall well-being of the child. For example, Kellmer Pringle (1986) saw this in terms of meeting the four core needs of all children, namely for:

- Love and security
- Praise and recognition
- New experiences
- Exercise of responsibility.

I would like to take a different focus although, as we will see later, these four key needs are not unique to children.

If parents are thought of as ‘change agents’ for their child, then it seems to me that four features typify their success.

1. Expectations. Parents presume that the helpless baby will develop into an active toddler who in turn becomes an able pre-schooler. Their faith in the capacity of human infants to acquire the skills of mobility, communication, personal care and socialising is well founded. More crucially, parents act on the presumption that infants already have these competences and it is the child’s failure to perform rather than a lack of capacity on which parents focus.

2. Intimate knowledge. Parents have detailed and intimate knowledge of their sons or daughters. They live with them ‘24/7’. They are with them in a wide range of settings and witness their reactions to a variety of people and events. They are canny predictors of their child’s moods and behaviours and they have a range of strategies for managing both. This parental expertise and experience is invaluable in helping the child to meet fresh developmental challenges.

3. Mobilising support. By definition, a family is a mutually supportive network. Although made up of individual personalities, they often work to assist one another either intuitively or on request. Grandmothers baby-sit; older siblings are allocated household chores; and friends may host ‘sleep-overs’ for the children. Tangible supports like these are often complemented by emotional support or the provision of information. Most of these support transactions are done personally and in response to requests or established routines.

4. Risk Management. Any system has within it the risk of misadventure. The risk is heightened when change is actively promoted – things might get worse rather than better. Parents have to anticipate the dangers and take preventative actions. Often these are informed by the foregoing three features of parental management. They

evolve strategies for gradually exposing their offspring to risk realising that the gains outweigh potentially negative consequences.

I would contend that it is the nature of the relationships within families that makes possible these four attributes of parenting. Namely, families operate on personal, face-to-face communication. The relationships are enduring and dependable. They are multi-functional relationships serving a variety of purposes and needs. They are reciprocal relationships that are of mutual benefit to each other; they are intrinsically rewarding.

Of course families are not the sole influence on their children’s development. The wider societal systems also play important roles as Figure 1 shows. However, it is the parent that is often the instigator of contact with these other agencies and the co-ordinator of their contributions to the life of the child and the family. So not alone is the family an example of multi-agency working but they sit at the heart of a network of agencies that are built around each particular child at various points in their life.

I appreciate that I may have painted a rather idealised picture of how families provide a nurturing environment for their child’s growth and development. Some do not manage as well as others and yet, given the life-long commitment nearly all parents make to their children, it seems to me a fair synthesis of how most cope with the parenting role. As George Bernard Shaw observed in 1944,

*Parentage is a very important profession – (although he went on to add:)
but no test of fitness for it, is ever imposed in the interests of the child.*

After half a century of developmental research, we can safely conclude that no tests are necessary, as the vast majority of parents - in management speak - are ‘fit for purpose’.

Helping struggling families to cope

There are, however, some families who struggle to cope with rearing a child.

- Perhaps because of wider socio-circumstances such as poverty or they are immigrants in a new country.
- Maybe it’s due to the personal circumstances of the parents, illness or divorce.

- Sometimes it's because of the child's characteristics, the presence of learning difficulties or behavioural problems.
- Indeed, these may all combine for a few families.

Our public services - health, education and social services, for example, or various voluntary services that are now available in most areas – all have the avowed aim of assisting the children and/or the families. Undoubtedly most of these services have contributed greatly to improving the quality of the lives of many of the families they have assisted at some point in time. I have chosen the qualifying words of 'most', 'many' and 'some' deliberately. Although it is very hard to make generalisations across such a variety of persons, families and agencies in a whole nation, we can hardly claim that our attempts to assist struggling families have been uniformly successful.

We have three sources of evidence. Families themselves complain of poor services – long waiting lists, unco-ordinated actions and conflicting advice. Indeed the Department of Health in England acknowledged that the relationship between parents and professionals is often combative.

In many services a culture has developed that sees families as a problem and difficult to work with... services need to find constructive and positive ways to work with families in the best interests of people with learning disabilities.

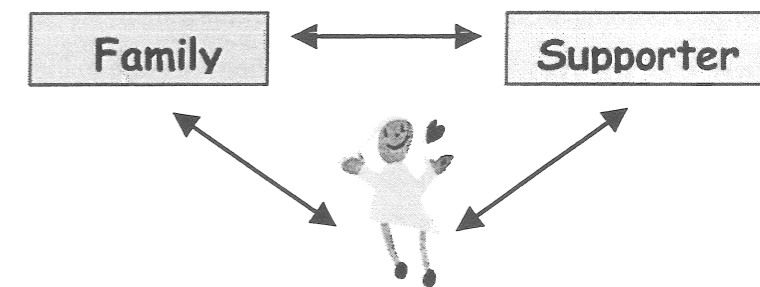
(DHSS, 2001)

Professionals and service agencies also bemoan a lack of resources; unending demands from administrators, unappreciative consumers and service managers, and over-work, all of which may show itself in high levels of absenteeism and 'burn-out' (Rolfe, 2005).

Organisational research suggest inefficiencies in the ways in which many public services operate and are managed, the duplication that exists among them and the failure to co-ordinate their efforts. Their long-established traditions and practices have often proved resilient to change even though major reorganisations have come and gone (Hudson, Hardy, Henwood and Wistow, 1999).

A favoured solution to these services' failures, as noted at the outset, is to emphasise multi-agency working and indeed this would probably have the support of the three constituencies noted above. I want to propose, however, that these initiatives need to be centred around the triad of family, child and supporter if they are really to make a difference in assisting struggling families to cope (see Figure 2). Moreover it is the failure to consider the need for partnership working at the level of the individual family that often results in the perpetuation of ineffective multi-agency practices and procedures.

Figure 2: The triad of multi-agency working



Family supporter

For me, the concept of a dedicated family supporter should be at the heart of any proposed multi-agency working. This role could be undertaken by existing personnel across a range of service agencies, such as teachers and therapists, or new job roles could be created, such as home visitors of pre-school children with special needs. However, more important than the person in the role, is the nature of the relationship the supporters have with families.

In essence this should mirror the essential features of the ways most parents nurture the child's development noted earlier; namely, expectations, intimate knowledge, mobilising supports and managing risks. Moreover the relationship is typified by personal contacts, continuity and dependability. They are multi-functional and reciprocal.

What is crucial, and perhaps overlooked by many, is that the supporter has to forge such relationships not only with the child but also with the parent – usually the mother

- and through her the wider family (McConkey, 2003). This is arguably the greatest failing of existing 'supporters' that are currently provided by services when children have special needs. Teachers and therapists tend to focus primarily on the child and while they often succeed in forging the type of relationship that is beneficial to the child, often their relationship with parents is viewed as a 'spin-off' of those endeavours rather than an essential arm of their work. Certainly the experience of many families is that more professional supports can mean a heightening of their stress whereas the informal supports they receive from family and friends is cited as a source of stress reduction (Truesdale, 2004).

Is it possible for professional workers to develop such relationships with families? The answer is a resounding yes! But it does require them to change their role and working practices. The list below (adapted from Sloper, 1999) summarises the essential features of a quality family support service. More succinctly we might expect these supporters to fulfil the same four needs that Kellmer Pringle (1986) identified for children; namely that families too require love and security, praise and recognition, new experiences, and the exercise of responsibility from the personnel who are their supporters.

Features of a Quality Family Support Service

- The service takes a holistic approach to assessing and meeting the family needs.
- The importance of relationship building between parents and professionals is recognised. Home visits feature as part of their work and first names are used.
- They provide a consistent, single point of contact for the family, such as a link or key-worker. They should be contactable at evenings and weekends to facilitate working mothers.
- They have a flexible, individualised, needs-led approach to their work with families and children. A menu of services needs to be provided rather than prescriptive programmes.
- The parents' own expertise with regard to their child and family is recognised, and actively sought when professionals undertake assessments of the child and when service plans are drawn up.

- They focus on parents' own concerns and recognise the importance of understanding parents' own perceptions of their priority needs.
- The support provided to parents empowers them rather than taking control away from them.
- Siblings and other close relatives such as grandparents are included.

The concept of key-worker is receiving increased attention in service provision during the pre-school years. In essence, a member from a team of professionals is nominated as the named or key-worker for a particular family. He, but more usually she, is the main contact for the family which not only avoids duplication but leads to a more co-ordinated response.

Despite this being such an eminently sensible proposal, research suggests that fewer than one third of families in Great Britain have a named worker they can call on (Sloper, 1999). Moreover there is no legal requirement on UK services to provide a named worker, unlike other countries such as the United States. Although the basic concept is to have one key worker or named contact for each family, there may be circumstances in which a number of family supporters are identified, although too many would defeat the purpose of the proposal.

The idea of key-workers can apply at different times of the child's life, albeit with different titles. It has been proposed as a means of assisting families as their child goes through the transition from school to adult life (e.g. transition workers: Ward, Heslop, Mallett and Simons, 2003); as a means of assisting families and young people to access community supports (local area co-ordinators; Chenoweth and Stehlik, 2004); and in developing countries, as a means of providing rehabilitation to people living in community settings (community rehabilitation workers: Helander, 1993).

This wider role of supporting families as well as the child, places many demands on key-workers for which they are often ill-prepared. Despite decades of rhetoric about professionals working with parents, this topic still receives scant attention in professional training courses for teachers and therapists. Moreover there remains a culture in which working with families is seen as additional or optional work rather

than an essential component of the professional role in services. To my mind, forging new relationships with families is more crucial in achieving true multi-agency working than the present preoccupation with creating new administrative structures. I do accept though that these new structures may facilitate changes in professional practices and cultures, but as with chickens and eggs, one does not necessarily precede the other!

However, we should not underestimate the difficulties in modern society of re-creating the type of relationships that families generate. Two in particular are worth underlining. Services – both public and voluntary - can find it very hard to offer continued and sustained relationships due to staff turn-over. They also experience real problems in recruiting staff who have an affinity and empathy with the families they are intended to support, as most employees come from another social stratum or ethnic group and live remote from the areas in which they work. However, we shall come back to possible solutions later.

Supporting supporters

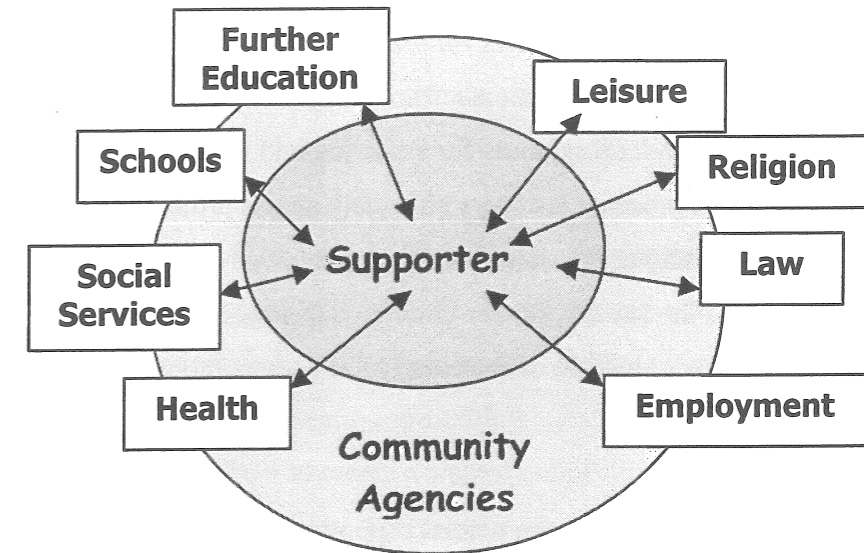
Thus far, my argument has been that families are themselves multi-agency operations and their style of working provides a prototype on which professional supports can be modelled to create a triad of support. At the heart is the concept of a named supporter whose relationships with the child and family shares common features to that found within families. This type of relationship has not been promoted among agencies working with families and children who are in need of support.

But this cannot be the whole picture. It would be unreasonable to expect one person to fulfil all the demands that might be placed on them. Rather they may become the conduit through which further information, advice and tangible help can be channelled to families. Hence we need to examine the supports available to the supporters and the nature of their relationships with one another.

Figure 3 illustrates how the named family supporter can be linked into a network of agencies and supports that are available within that community. In fact there is some similarity between these networks and those presented in Figure 1 for families. However, the main difference is that the connections the family makes are more likely

to be negotiated with the agencies and personnel in their immediate locality, whereas supporters will access nominated contacts across a range of agencies some of whom may be beyond the immediate community of the family. Indeed many families may be unaware of their existence.

Figure 3: Named supporter networks



However, that said, the nature of the relationships that supporters and families have with these agencies may be similar but cannot be of the same intensity as that which developed between themselves. The nature of this relationship needs to be made explicit. I perceive that much of the aspiration towards multi-agency working is frustrated by all the stake-holders having too high expectations of what they can contribute to all the families in need of support. This is especially so when there are no dedicated named supporters available to families. The danger then is that a representative of each agency in Figure 3 (whether statutory or voluntary) is expected to develop a personal relationship with each family. This is neither practical nor desirable. Rather energies need to be directed towards creating a key supporter system and in defining the relationships that are feasible to support people in this role.

The relationship with support agencies can be characterised by four attributes which I have deliberately worded as contrasts with the relationships between named supporters and families noted earlier.

Technologically assisted rather than face-to-face.

Information technology such as telephones, email and the Internet all provide opportunities for named supporters to access information and advice from other persons. These would not wholly replace face-to-face contacts but they can markedly reduce the need for it. This not only saves on time but makes available expertise to families from personnel in distant locations. Linked with this issue, is the development of a set of standardised tools for assessing and reporting on the needs of children and families. At present these vary so widely across professions and agencies that a common language is rare around the perceived needs of children and/or families. One of the success stories to emerge from joint working between health and social services in the care of the elderly has been common approaches to assessing support needs.

Specific Purpose

I characterised the relationship between named supporters and families as being multi-functional in that they may have to deal with a variety of child and family-related issues. By contrast, supporters' relationships with colleagues are more likely to be uni-functional, for a specific purpose. This means defining the particular expertise required of the contacts to make maximum use of their contribution.

Accessed as needed

Not every family needs to be linked with every possible source of support. This follows from the uni-functional nature of their involvement. The overall system will be much more efficient if links are made to particular agencies or persons as needed and also terminated when they are no longer required, probably within a defined period of time.

Advisory

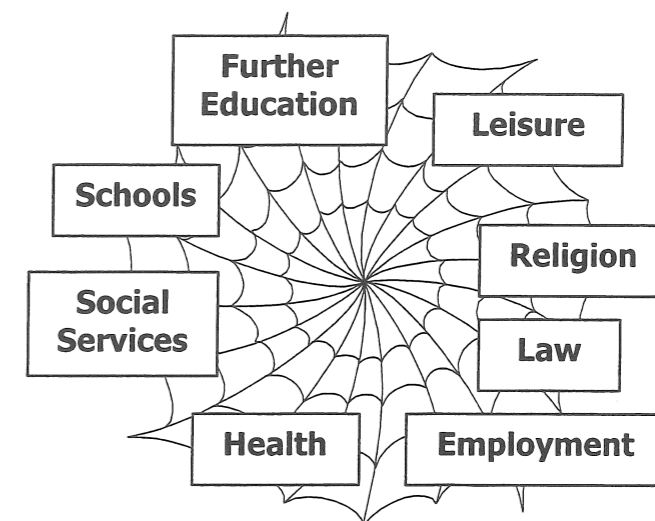
Finally the responsibility for acting on the expertise of the contacted supporters remains with the family and the key supporters. Although their function is primarily advisory, this would not preclude them from directly providing a tangible service to families. However, their involvement is nonetheless limited to a specific contribution and it is up to the family and named supporters to integrate their contribution alongside the other supports rather than expecting them to do so.

Perhaps at this point it should be made clear that agencies, and the personnel within agencies, could fulfil both roles. They may act as named supporters for certain families while at the same time being available to their colleagues in a supporting capacity. In such instances it is vital that the two roles are clearly delineated and that is best done by clarifying the nature of the relationship. However, if certain professionals or agencies are reluctant to cede 'ownership' of their client to others, or if they are hesitant in adopting a consultancy rather than 'hands-on' role, then I fear effective multi-agency working will remain elusive -- a point I shall return to later.

A web of support

Thus far I have proposed two forms of multi-agency working: that between families and named supporters, and between these supporters and other colleagues. However, a third level of support provides the link with what I have typified as 'top-down' approaches. This involves creating formal linkages among the different support agencies shown in Figure 4 to create a web of connections among them.

Figure 4: A web of support



This can be desirable for a number of reasons (McConkey, 2005). An agreement then exists among the agencies that they are working to a common purpose. It ensures that individuals within each agency are pre-disposed to respond to requests for assistance.

It identifies areas of overlap in their work or conversely gaps that might be plugged by creating a new 'joint' service. It encourages the sharing of expertise through mutual staff training and secondments. Other papers presented at the conference examine issues relating to multi-agency working at this level. However for me, it is again the nature of these relationships that distinguishes this level of partnerships from the previous ones I have described.

The relationships required to create a web of support agencies are likely to be:

Procedural – they define the structures and tasks to be undertaken by the agency and personnel.

Administrative – the focus is on costs and accountabilities.

Over-arching – they do not attend to the detail of consumers' needs but rather attempt to map out an over-arching context for meeting the needs of everyone.

Negotiated – often they represent a compromise amongst the vested interests of the parties to the agreement and as such may be difficult to operationalise in practice.

In truth, these features can also creep into relationships between families and supporters, and among supporters, and to an extent this may be necessary. However, I fear these features dominate in debates about inter-agency working which emanate at senior levels within agencies and professions, with the result that real change is slow to occur on the ground. Hence my preference to effect change at the frontline which in turn should create a dynamic for transformation through extant agencies and professions.

Obstacles to multi-agency working

I have no illusions as to the difficulties in creating better joint working across agencies irrespective of where we begin to bring it about. Among the most commonly mentioned are:

Family expectations. With increasing numbers of single parent families or both mothers and father working, parents (and mothers especially) are less available to devote time and energy to providing additional support to their child with special needs. There is an expectation on services to provide this help rather than families.

Professional roles. The growth of a professionalised workforce across all service systems, even within the voluntary and community sector, has created demarcations of their work rather than encouraged blurring and sharing of responsibilities.

Service structures. A major culture shift is required within statutory organisations in particular. Iles (2003) noted the need for greater democratic and cooperative styles of decision-making across professional and organisational boundaries. Among the possible solutions he and others have proposed are a flattening of hierarchical structures, inculcating a spirit of social entrepreneurship within these staff and a culture of outreaching to others in the wider community in order to achieve service objectives. Making this happen would be a major undertaking and only achievable over a long timescale, if at all. Hence totally comprehensive partnerships across diverse sectors may prove to be an elusive goal.

Diverse values and priorities. Existing agencies were designed to fulfil specific purposes rather than created for multi-functional working. Their ability and/or willingness to support a wider range of functions may be limited not just by custom and practice but also by fears around a dilution of their power and influence. Equally they may be reticent to invest in building capacity among their personnel to undertake partnership working.

Lack of consumer advocacy. Many statutory agencies have resisted greater consumer accountability although this increasingly features within Government priorities. The inclusion of consumers at local, area and regional levels is merited on the grounds of democracy and accountability as well as symbolising the new emphasis on responsive service planning.

These obstacles, alongside many others, have been frequently rehearsed at all levels within organisations. All are surmountable given creative thinking and a willingness to change. I suspect many solutions have to be tailored to specific local circumstances. We need to beware of imposing common remedies.

Moving forward

Experience has identified a number of promising avenues for the development of multi-agency partnerships (Wildridge, Childs, Cawthra and Madget, 2004). These include:

Clear leadership: especially in respect of the purpose of the partnership and the strategic outcomes and targets expected from it (Kennedy, Lynch and Goodlad, 2001).

This leadership may come from the top, but equally voluntary organisations and parent associations have also provided very effective leadership.

Mobilise existing services: In most affluent nations there is a variety of agencies available to contribute to new ways of working. Indeed their engagement can be a catalyst for changes in other agencies. Hence before creating new agencies, efforts should be made to identify and mobilise those that are already available. A similar argument applies to personnel. Rather than creating new cadres of professionals, local persons might be recruited and trained to act as family supporters, a strategy that has proved successful with teenage parents for example.

Building capacity among supporters: Multi-agency working requires a reformulation of job roles and job descriptions alongside rewriting the personal requirements of applicants for new support roles. In addition, new training and mentorship arrangements will be needed although much of the learning by necessity is acquired 'on-the-job'. Capacity building appears to be the most neglected aspect of creating partnership working, in that it is presumed that existing personnel have the necessary skills, aptitude and the flexibility to change their roles when it is evident from various studies that partnerships are still highly dependent on the personalities in post (Townesley, Watson and Abbott, 2004). However the emergence of training resources in this area is a welcome development (eg, Cameron, 2001).

Co-ordinator: There also appears to be a strong case for appointing an individual who has overall responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the partnership whether it be at departmental, area or local level. This strategy is being widely implemented in England as part of modernising services for people with learning disabilities (Ward, Fyson and Watson, 2004). However, successful co-ordinators should endeavour to do themselves out of a job as effective partnerships are forged.

Jointly funded initiatives. Partnership working is further enhanced if parties have a financial stake in the endeavour. A common pot of monies can be created to fund gaps in specific services (Waddington, 1995). Extra resources may also be needed to fund the additional administrative and managerial requirements of partnerships (Townesley, Watson and Abbott, 2004).

Avoidance of structures There is limited evidence that the creation of new structures is sufficient to produce more effective partnership working. Rather, energy is better expended in developing and extending relationships, particularly building up trust among the main stake-holders.

Give it time. A recurring theme is the amount of time that has to be invested in making multi-agency partnerships a reality. Politicians and officials in search of

'quick-fixes' are often disappointed by the lack of progress. The danger is that attempts at creating new ways of working are aborted before they have the chance to fully develop. This then reinforces the belief that multi-agency working is an impossible goal.

Conclusions

Organisational systems affect the working lives of all professional staff in public and voluntary agencies aimed at improving the lives of children and families. They also have a direct impact on the lives of the people using their services.

The dearth of research into organisational impacts is remarkable, particularly the identification of best practice and how it can be replicated at different levels and in different geographical areas. Nonetheless the studies that have been done (Mattessich, Murray-Close and Monsey, 2001), coupled with new initiatives such as Sure Start, have helped to identify a core agenda for further research around system change and engagement with users.

Unless this happens the danger is that many families who struggle to cope with the special needs of their child, will continue to receive uncoordinated, sub-standard services with potentially even wider discrepancies being created across the country.

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INTER-AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS AND SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY LINKS TO PREVENT SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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Abstract

This paper analyses the impact of an initiative in one Local Council that was designed to prevent the exclusion of vulnerable young people. An integrated partnership between schools, families and communities was examined in order to assess the impact of such collaborations on social inclusion. The research found that the style and manner of support for young people and their parents/carers was regarded as appropriate when it was perceived as non-judgmental, genuine and equitable. It also found that a coordinated approach to the most vulnerable young people and families that was responsive to situations as they arose was most effective. The staff responsible for coordination were especially valued by teachers for improving home-school communication, for helping to get teachers and parents working together and for coordinating the responses of specialist agencies in their support of young people. The key dilemma that emerged was the role of the staff in supporting early individual intervention to the detriment of proactive community development.

Introduction

The long-term objective of Scottish policy in relation to preventing social exclusion and promoting more inclusive communities is to develop ways of working 'which integrate programmes not just within Government, but at all levels of action right down to local neighbourhoods and communities' (Scottish Office 1999a: 1). Thus schools are expected to work with other agencies both to prevent social exclusion taking place and to help reintegrate those who have been socially excluded into mainstream society. Historically, targeting resources on the most disadvantaged has been an approach implemented to tackle the effects of economic and social disadvantage, for example, Educational Priority Areas and Community Development Projects in the UK (Halsey, 1972). More recently, governments in the UK have focused on raising educational achievement particularly in geographical areas characterised by severe socio-economic deprivation. This is seen as one way of closing the opportunity gap for people as the document *Everyone Matters: Delivering Social Justice in Scotland* (2002) states:

Social justice is about everyone of us having the chances and opportunities that will allow us to use our talents to the full ... We want to stamp out inequalities – where you live should not determine your health, wellbeing and employment chances for your whole life. We want to close the opportunity gap between those who succeed in life and those who fall behind. (Scottish Executive, 2002, 3)

It has long been recognised that agencies must work in close co-operation if they wish to provide an effective seamless response to the needs of socially excluded communities (Dyson, Lin and Milward, 1998; Tett, Crowther and O'Hara, 2003; Webb and Vulliamy, 2001). Such joined-up thinking lies behind a number of international educational initiatives such as inclusive schools, full service schools and Education Action Zones (see Dryfoos, 1996; Campbell, 2002; Power, 2001). In the UK schools are envisaged as playing a key role in the current government's policies to promote social inclusion among children and young people in particular and in tackling social exclusion in general. In Scotland the 'Social Inclusion Strategy' document stresses that:

The Government is investing heavily in programmes to promote inclusion among school-age children, including New Community Schools, Early Intervention Schemes, Alternatives to Exclusion from School and Family Literacy. (Scottish Office 1999b,7)

Furthermore it is recognised that schools on their own cannot solve the problems associated with social exclusion. Research has shown (Atkinson, Wilkin, Stott and Kinder, 2001; Ball, 1998) that multi-agency projects, especially those that are based outside any one school, have been able to provide a structure where take up of services can be addressed and encouraged. Projects that have involved social and health services, housing, police, community education and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) collaborating with parents and schools that focused on providing integrated services at the point of need have been shown to be the most effective (Semmens, 2001; Tett, Crowther and O'Hara, 2003).

In the light of this context this paper will explore the impact of school-family-community collaborations for pupils and their families who are in difficulty in schools or their neighbourhoods. It draws on data from research into one Council's practice that was intended to provide the basis on which to develop a framework for evaluation of an Integrated Community School (ICS) project.

Developing school-family-community links to prevent social exclusion

The principle of inter-agency working has been central to many recent developments in working with young people, both those specifically at risk of exclusion from school and those caught up in wider processes of social exclusion. However, joint working between social work, education and other agencies has a much longer history in Scotland. Indeed, the Kilbrandon Report (Scottish Office, 1964) proposed that children and young people in difficulty should be dealt with in 'social education departments' managing both education and social services in an integrated way (Schaffer, 1992; Kendrick, 1995). While 'social education departments' were never established, collaborative responses have been formalised in 'youth strategies' in Scotland since the early 1980s (Pickles, 1992; Lloyd, Stead and Kendrick, 2001).

Social inclusion initiatives aim to work with children, young people and their families who suffer from a number of difficulties including poverty, poor housing and health and low educational attainment. The *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act* states that there is a 'presumption of inclusion' and that 'school education for any child of school age shall be provided in a school other than a special school' (Scottish Executive, 2000a, 8). Therefore, it is seen as better for the child to be educated at their local school and within the body of their own community as this may prevent social exclusion later in life. Schools are expected to have a continuum of supports for young people experiencing difficulties. The Scottish Executive have made recommendations such as 'schools having a positive ethos' and 'engagement of parents in their child's learning' (Scottish Executive, 2000b, 10) and 'staged intervention to support children' and 'schools should develop agreed systems for shared responsibility' (Scottish Executive, 2001, 14).

In order to address some of these issues the Council studied decided to develop an Integrated Children's Services approach to ensure service integration at both strategic and local levels through developing common standards of practice, information sharing and responsiveness in service delivery. In order to implement this, six 'integration managers' were appointed who were each responsible for a specific geographical area. Their remit was to 'co-ordinate and facilitate local groups of service managers that will jointly plan and manage the delivery of integrated services within the locality' and to 'ensure effective communication between

schools, service providers and the local community'. In addition a further twenty-four 'family support workers' were appointed to 'work with families either in their own homes or other appropriate venues, including schools, to provide support and advice on enquiries/issues such as: debt, housing, counselling or more general family/parenting issues'. Staff were mainly drawn from the Council's existing personnel and most had backgrounds in social work and community education, with a few coming from child-care or teaching.

Research approach

Interviews were conducted by telephone with twenty-four key informants using a semi-structured interview framework. A purposive sample of key informants representing a range of organisational and professional perspectives was identified. The sample included all integration managers and one primary and one secondary head teacher, and two or more non-school professionals from each of the six geographical areas. These included staff from Social Work, Health Services, the Voluntary Sector and Community Education. The informants were identified in partnership with integration managers as people that had already had experience of using the new system. The interviews focused on informants' expectations of the project, their experiences of collaborative work and their vision of outcomes that would represent success.

All interviews were recorded and partial transcriptions made for purposes of analysis. The overall approach followed established procedures for interviewing by telephone (Dicker and Gilbert, 1988). Informants were assured that their views would be reported anonymously and specifically invited to indicate where there were parts of the interview that they would specifically not wish to be quoted. The analysis of interviews consisted of two stages. Two analysts working independently reviewed a small representative sample of interviews to identify the main analytic categories that could be used to systematically 'code' the responses of all informants. These two schemes of categorisation were then compared and an agreed preliminary framework was developed. This framework was then used as the basis for review and analysis of the whole set of interviews.

In addition to the interviews, case studies of effective practice that represented a spread of work across the Council area were selected which covered three broad categories. These categories were: working together, providing particular opportunities for children and families, and individually focused, multi-agency interventions with troubled young people. At least two informants were selected for each case study and these included professional staff from both statutory and voluntary sectors, parents and young people, depending on the particular intervention, so that views could be triangulated. In addition the particular practice identified was observed where this would not breach the confidentiality of an individual. These case studies were then summarised and the information was checked by the informants.

Findings

Most key informants cited the role of family workers as central to the success of meeting the objectives of more integrated services. From a school perspective family workers were seen as performing a useful role, and their actions were frequently spoken of in positive terms when describing the kinds of work that could be done to help families maintain their children in formal mainstream education. One example of an intervention was developing reciprocal links with the educational psychologist, school guidance staff and the social worker in order to support a troubled young man to remain in school. Another was intensive work with parents of an 'out of control' young woman to help the family set appropriate limits for weekend activities. A final example was the family worker's role in supporting the very anxious mother of a child who had been bullied over his transfer to secondary school. The family worker helped both the mother to approach the school in a less confrontational way and also the boy to improve his relations with his peers. This small-scale intervention had a very positive effect on both mother and son and the staff at the transferring and receiving schools who were no longer subject to the rather abusive visits of the mother.

Non-school-based informants were equally positive about this work: *'The family worker role was very much valued'* (educational psychologist). In particular a number of informants stressed the link between family worker and social work roles. For example:

We now have additional support for children and families in our area (as well as) the possibility of support being provided at an earlier stage in families we would not have been able to prioritise. Also some additional support for some of the families we are working with. We've got family support workers picking things up, at an earlier stage than we would have been in a position to allocate. (social work manager)

Some of the most useful interventions were group-based activities designed to work with vulnerable families. One intervention provided a range of school holiday activity programmes for vulnerable parents and their children in collaboration with an NGO, the local Further Education college and the Council's outdoor education team. Another was aimed at preparing and supporting young people in transition from primary to secondary school in order to reduce worries about starting at the big secondary school. As one teacher put it, the result was that *'the worry, the anxiety was toned down to the point that they were able to settle down far more quickly'*.

The family worker role could also be seen as problematic. This was particularly so when the 'cases' picked up were not always those seen as most urgent and difficult. The focus on early intervention meant that existing 'high-tariff cases' were still understood to be being addressed through more traditional mechanisms, and were not always being referred appropriately. There was also a notable tension between the desire for early intervention and pressure to devote resources to more difficult cases. From a social work perspective child protection takes priority and the family workers tend to be drawn into the more complex and intractable cases, leaving less time to devote to more proactive work. Social work services in this Council were in a state of flux and were seen by other services and professionals as under-resourced, so family workers were sometimes used inappropriately to intervene in a difficult case instead of an absent social worker.

The research also highlighted the need for realistic judgements about what is possible in the most difficult cases. Reducing exclusions is one of the priorities at the policy level, but school exclusion is a complex, multi-dimensional process and is used in a wide sense to denote children and young people who are excluded from full participation in school for various reasons such as difficulties in accessing the curriculum, staying away from school or

because their families, such as travellers, have traditionally not attended schools (Lloyd, Stead and Kendrick, 2003, 78). It was thought that the family workers were able to identify 'more families at an earlier stage' (integration manager) than had been possible before and that meant that exclusions were more likely to be avoided. This, however, led to other dilemmas about the use of the family worker's time. In very high tariff cases they could find themselves sucked into focusing almost exclusively on a particularly troubled young person and his/her family, and consequently neglecting their more proactive interventions with slightly less needy or demanding families.

One of the most striking features of the interviews was the almost universal approval expressed by informants for the idea of working together. This was variously expressed as collaboration, partnership and cooperation, and emphasised agencies working together in the interests of young people and families. The increase in joint working facilitated by integration managers was thought to improve clients' access to services (and school access to different funding sources). Informants valued learning more about each others' areas of expertise, and many saw 'blurring the boundaries' between agencies and professional groups as both offering positive potential and presenting new problems and dilemmas.

The Integrated Community School staff teams were seen as central to this process, in that they could facilitate contacts and network development. Schools Liaison Groups also played a valuable part in developing increased trust through face-to-face meetings. One aspect of working together mentioned by a number of informants was the potential for, and experience of, joint training. This was seen as a valuable learning process for staff. One particularly useful practice was thought to be cross-professional work-shadowing, which among other benefits was thought to have helped to resolve confidentiality issues:

Social workers say yeah I know what the school nurse does but if they actually came out and shadowed ... they would be absolutely stunned to the extent of the work and vice versa. A lot of it has got to be education and training for the actual staff involved to make it a success and to break down barriers to working together. (integration manager)

One head teacher described the striking benefits of

an annual meeting drawing together everyone we worked with, as often they didn't know anything about who each other were.

It was clear that most people were realistic about the difficulties presented by different professional perspectives and priorities.

A number of problems existed in relation to collaborative work. There were competing perceptions of where power and control lies.

There are still some tensions around different services coming together to work on joint priorities, different perceptions on how these can best be addressed through an integrated approach. (integration manager)

Problems were associated with the physical location of staff, with a widely held view that 'co-location' of specific staff, outside any individual school, was advantageous. In addition there is a range of more general problems arising from the pressure to work across traditional boundaries. For example, one respondent suggested:

There are attitudinal barriers, which are sometimes the hardest to break down. There are organisational barriers, if you are working with schools ... you do have to consider how this fits into the school's timetable. There is still a lack of understanding regarding individual services' roles and their responsibilities.' (integration manager)

Working together was framed not only as a matter of collaboration between agencies and professionals, but as something that would involve young people and parents as partners. For example, in response to being asked about their vision of an integrated community school, one respondent offered:

I think that would be a team of people who could work together without having to defend their territory. To get rid of the boundaries, a fluidity, where parents, carers and young people, children, were given equal weighting along with staff, that would be my ideal. To be involved, as an equal partner, not just as a tick the box, we've got them there, but as equal partners. (public health nurse)

This way of thinking about the relationship between young people, families and the various

services was expressed in a large number of interviews. It was characterised in analysis as the idea of 'working with' rather than 'on' clients.

Discussion

A range of research shows the efficacy of using joined-up, inter-agency work in relation to young people in trouble at school or in their neighbourhoods (Lloyd, Stead and Kendrick, 2003; Parsons, 1999; Riddell and Tett, 2001). The research suggested that the style and manner of support for young people and their parents/carers was crucial (Cooper, Drummond, Hart, Lovey and McLaughlin, 2000; Smith and Tett, 2003; Stead, Lloyd and Kendrick, 2004). Support offered by professionals was regarded as appropriate when it was perceived as non-judgemental, genuine and equitable. Professionals and families particularly valued the support offered by staff with a specialised focus on vulnerable young people, especially those in voluntary sector projects. This was particularly because they had warm, informal, non-judgemental approaches and considerable expertise in finding alternative ways of working with young people. Professional skills that have been found to be effective for providing support for young people included counselling and group work skills using an informal approach. These are not highly technical skills and are part of the basic repertoire of many professionals such as community educators, social workers and youth workers.

The other main area that research has found to be essential to support for vulnerable young people and their carers is quick and easy access to services and good communication between professionals and the parents/carers. A study of parents of children with a diagnosis of SEBD (Smith and Tett, 2003) showed that they had sound knowledge, clear understanding and good insights into their child's difficulties, yet in many cases this was not acted upon. Rather they had to wait for professionals to make referrals to support agencies and often had to approach a variety of professionals themselves rather than having just one coordinating person to make these connections for them. Semmens (2001) argues that in a crisis situation, which many parents get to before asking for help,

someone with specialist expertise must step in and take responsibility... however, the intervention must be connected with the rest of the client's life. (76)

One of the key points that emerges from research is that parents want to be involved in

supporting their children but professionals can make this a difficult, rather than an easy, process (Kendrick, 1995, Stead, Lloyd and Kendrick, 2004). Clearly, then, a coordinated approach to the most vulnerable young people and families is essential if their exclusion is to be tackled. The approach adopted by this Council appears to enable this to happen through having an integrated system of referrals and the ability to respond quite quickly to situations as they arise.

A study by Lloyd, Stead and Kendrick (2001, 2003) found that it was possible to support the most difficult young people and avoid disciplinary exclusion, but that sometimes the strategies used meant that young people did not actually attend mainstream school. Alternatives to disciplinary exclusion do not always keep young people included in the curriculum or the school and so there must be some questions about how far exclusion was prevented. They found that the key to appropriate support for the young people in their study of three local authorities was

to take account of the lives, values and choices of young people and to combine imagination and flexibility with a non-judgemental, human style. (2003, 88)

Successful approaches involved young people having their views valued and their responses to the curriculum taken seriously so that all the staff involved in working with them saw them as whole human beings rather than 'problems'. Where this was achieved, however, school staff felt that they had to neglect other things as they were under constant pressure to meet targets for achievement or other pedagogical duties.

In this study it was evident that family workers could act as a go-between for the school and the agencies working with troubled and troublesome pupils and their families. They also provided both teachers and other agencies, such as those working in drug and alcohol rehabilitation, with information about each other's organisations, working practices, constraints and perspectives. The workers were able to build up an overview of all the factors impacting on particular families and act to improve communications between schools and families and to set up meetings between family members and those involved in providing them with support. Family workers were also proactive and engaged in preventative work and were perceived as independent from other organisations or institutions whereas families

tended to have set views and expectations of interactions with social workers and police.

A major endemic problem in the development of school-community-family links identified by Dyson and Robson (1999) is their fragmented and localised nature. They view the field as *characterised by a multiplicity of locally-led and locally-developed projects, replicating each other's discoveries and difficulties, but not systematised in any useful way* (which they view as) *influenced by the multiplicity of often short-term funding sources,*

As found by Hallam and Castle (1999) in their evaluation of multi-disciplinary behaviour support teams working to combat exclusions, 'getting the right people' was crucial to success. Personal relationships formed a vital part in developing agency links and inter-agency working. Webb and Vulliamy (2004) found in their study of a project designed to reduce school exclusions that

the amount of co-operation with agencies declined or grew with changes of support worker. (66)

One of the strengths of this project was that these staff were in permanent posts and so the turnover was low and gave time for relationships to develop.

In addition, teachers appreciated that many of the parents of the most challenging pupils were fearful, suspicious or antagonistic towards teachers because of their own unhappy school experiences. Therefore, in such circumstances, the family workers were especially valued for improving home-school communication and for providing 'an indirect bridge to parents' (principal teacher) to get teachers and parents working together. Teachers also came to value the skills of the family workers and to recognise the differences in their relationship with young people and to find ways to positively support each other. The family workers also improved communication between specialist agencies, such as those working in the area of sexual health, and schools. They were able to enhance the knowledge of pastoral staff of the services provided, and ways of working, of these agencies. Parents and young people also uniformly valued family workers for their independence, accessibility and availability, skill in developing trusting relationships and sympathetic advice on problems. *'She's always there for our family whatever happens'* (mother with a troubled daughter).

Conclusion

At this stage in the project evaluation it appears that the strategy adopted is proving effective in promoting social inclusion for a number of vulnerable families. However, it is at an early stage and there is a potential for role conflict ahead. Early indications are that family workers could spend a great deal of their time intervening in individual cases rather than taking more proactive action that might prevent social exclusion. Although these staff have a clear remit to engage in preventative collaborative work schools faced with pupils with challenging behaviours can be very demanding of family worker's time. Gwynedd Lloyd and colleagues (2001) have suggested that

Effective support was not about a matching of perceived problems with a standard model of support; instead it took account of the wishes and life circumstances of the young people. (70)

This is quite a hard criterion to meet but family workers, by being based in particular localities and knowing their communities, are in quite a strong position to do this.

Other research shows that 'exclusionary professionalist agendas, often sustained by deficit ideologies' (Hatcher and Leblond, 2001, 55), can operate to marginalise inter-professional collaboration as each partner competes to have their view heard. It appears that the structures established in this project through the Integration Managers can operate to minimise these effects. Having the whole Council staff working towards a vision of 'every child, young person and their family, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances, living in a healthy, safe environment free from prejudice, poverty and discrimination' certainly assists in enabling the different parts of the Council to work together. We shall see how this works out in practice and how the key dilemma of early individual intervention versus proactive community development is resolved.

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WHOSE VALUES, WHOSE VISION, WHOSE VOICES?

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In my reflections on last year's conference I identified a number of issues that seemed to me to require responses from researchers and practitioners. These included the discourse that we employ in discussing integrated community schools, the managerial challenges involved in ensuring the sustainability of the initiative, the importance of carrying out systematic evaluations at school, local authority and national levels, and the implications of inter-professional working for the initial training of all those involved. I suggested that underlying these issues there was a need to think carefully about the future of schools as institutions. Integrated community schools could either become a focus for a radical systemic shift in the educational landscape or a modest reconfiguration of existing provision.

In what ways did the 2005 conference take the debate forward? Rowena Arshad drew attention to the necessity of interrogating the language we use. She pointed out that there are many terms we regularly invoke in our professional discourse that are potentially problematic: community, partnership, integration, consultation, collegiality, participation. Different professionals may attribute different meanings to these terms, thereby leading to misunderstandings and policy confusion. Lyn Tett gave a practical example of this drawn from the attempt at Moray House Institute of Education to provide a common first-year course for students intending to follow different professional pathways. This raised the interesting question: 'At what point in career development is integrated training likely to be most effective?' Attempt it too early and students with a strong commitment to a particular career may feel they are being deflected from their primary target and lose motivation. Attempt it too late and entrenched attitudes may be difficult to alter. It was pointed out that people working in the formal schooling system were perceived as the most powerful group and that those with a different background (health, social work, community development) often felt that their perceptions were undervalued.

Roy McConkey commented on the strength of professional territorialism and bureaucratic structures. From his Northern Ireland perspective, he recalled a conversation he had had some years before in which a Scot had told him that in Scotland 'we love our institutions'. This highlighted the tension between systems and structures on the one hand and vision and values on the other. He argued that we could not ignore the political and managerial context in which we have to operate, taking account of the allocation of resources and the location of decision-making power, but that we needed to focus above all on individuals and relationships. From the perspective of clients, having one port of call, rather than being confronted with a series of different professionals, each with a separate area of responsibility, and often communicating poorly with each other, was vitally important.

The question of communication – among different professionals, and between professionals and clients – was a recurring theme. Particularly in the case of vulnerable individuals and groups, there was a recognition of the need for their voices to be heard. Helping them to find a voice, and then ensuring that it was listened to, was seen as a major challenge. Reference was made to exercises in 'contrived consultation' whereby views were apparently canvassed but subsequently ignored in the decisions that were taken. A valid distinction can be drawn between 'official' voices, those which enjoy narrative privilege in the arenas where policy is decided, 'unofficial' voices, which may be informed but critical, thereby running the risk of being discounted, and 'submerged' voices, which struggle to be heard at all because official channels of communication are rarely open to them. There is also a valid distinction to be drawn between going through the motions of 'listening' and actually 'hearing' what is being said, especially if some of the messages are uncomfortable and at odds with our self-image and sense of professional identity.

As a counterweight to the tendency to see the existing institutional framework in a negative light, Margaret Doran argued strongly for a strategic planning approach, within the context of the national priorities in education and the agenda which tries to ensure that 'every child matters'. She gave an account of integrated children's services in Stirling where a range of agencies, not just schools, are involved in supporting children, parents and communities. She also reminded us of the political context, the necessity of ensuring that local councillors are

behind new initiatives, and the requirement to be properly accountable for outcomes. Well-intentioned rhetoric is not enough.

Evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of integrated community schools was one of the issues that the conference workshops were asked to discuss. Other topics included professional and community integration, children's rights, leadership in inter-agency partnerships, and constraints on bringing about real cultural change in schools. A number of thoughtful observations emerged from these groups. It was suggested, for example, that the best way to promote attitudinal and cultural change was to have people working together on specific projects, where the aim was to offer an improved service to individuals, families and communities, rather than attempt to define professional roles in the abstract. Creating time and space to enable different professionals to understand each other's perspectives and priorities, through work shadowing, also offered possibilities. It was felt that most teachers have child-centred values but that the emphasis on driving up standards of attainment means that they are under pressure to operate in ways that may compromise those values. Staff in social work and community development may feel that they are dealing with the casualties of schooling and so the potential for inter-professional misunderstanding is considerable. For this reason, taking time to explore values before trying to move to detailed policy recommendations may be necessary groundwork. Several delegates cautioned against pessimism: good work was going at local levels and the integrated community schools programme was still in its early stages of implementation. A longer-term perspective was needed.

On the question of leadership, many headteachers were perceived as being territorial and disinclined to share power. In the new structures that were emerging, a more 'distributed' approach to leadership was required, with decisions delegated to teams with particular areas of responsibility. At local authority level, the merging of 'traditional' education departments with other services would perhaps encourage this trend, with people from a background other than education being appointed to some senior posts. Hard issues about the allocation of budgets and staffing would, however, remain. Another challenging aspect of leadership is ensuring that policies are communicated effectively to front-line staff. Too often there is a gap between strategic vision and operational reality.

Linked to this, the relation between research, policy and practice invites critical reflection. Research is now being taken more seriously, with systemic reviews being commissioned by central and local government, as part of the general aim of trying to make policy decisions more 'evidence informed'. This is to be welcomed but it places new obligations on researchers to ensure that they communicate effectively with the agencies of government and disseminate their findings to practitioners in ways that are accessible and meaningful. There are also risks, especially when it comes to evaluating policies that are already underway – such as integrated community schools. There is a great deal of political investment resting on this initiative. Researchers must be vigilant in ensuring that their evaluations are rigorous, methodologically robust and intellectually independent.