

**Exploring subject disciplinary and
practice specific knowledges and learning for
interprofessional practice
ESRC Seminars 2 and 3 Proceedings**

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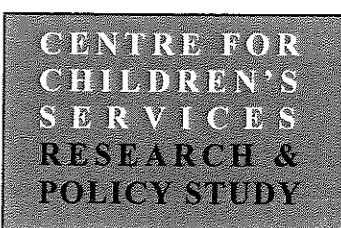
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ESRC research seminar series 2008-09
**The effects of professionals' human and cultural
capital for interprofessional social capital**

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Joan Forbes & Cate Watson (Editors)

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**EXPLORING SUBJECT DISCIPLINARY AND
PRACTICE SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGES AND
LEARNING FOR INTERPROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**

JOAN FORBES AND CATE WATSON
RESEARCH PAPER EDITORS

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

Identifying and examining the disciplinary and other knowledge bases with which practitioners across the children's sector identify and draw upon as intellectual resources in their integrated service for children, young people and families is an important and timely concern in the current moment in Scotland and other places. To explore the interfaces and interstices of professional knowledge and values, and their effects for/in practice, a group of researchers from the universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow and Strathclyde has instituted a programme of research seminars. This research seminars series is supported by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) award.

In October 2008 the second two day research seminar in the series was held at the University of Glasgow, its title: *Exploring subject disciplinary and practice specific knowledges and learning for interprofessional practice*. This second seminar in the series explored the layering of human capital with professional knowledge and assessment frameworks in practitioners' career development. It examined children's sector spaces where the work of different professional groups may be coordinated and where social capital and social inclusion might combine to the benefit of children, families and communities. The role of early training and socialisation in professional roles was considered as an important precursor to understanding the problems of communication that may exist between professional groups. Debate in the seminar sought to uncover the part that social capital might play in helping individuals and families to negotiate difficult children's sector service demarcations and boundaries. Building on the second seminar a third meeting was held at the University of Strathclyde in January 2009, its title: *Practitioners working together in schools and children's services: current practices and future prospects*. Focusing on interprofessional working practices in the children's sector, seminar three examined and questioned how professional identifications and practitioners' subject disciplinary and practice-specific knowledge come together to frame possibilities for interprofessional working and to provide a context for collaboration.

Complexity, identity, failure: contemporary challenges to working together

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Partnerships: the politics of agendas and policy implementation

© 2009 Andrew Eccles

Understanding progress in inter-professional development. Social capital, troublesome knowledge and early career practitioners

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Aims and Objectives

An aim in this seminar series is to bring together social science and health researchers, children's sector practitioners and members of the children's public services' governance and policy communities together with representatives of interested voluntary agencies and regulatory and inspection bodies to explore important critical issues and questions around the building-up and operation of practitioners' human, cultural and social capital in the current moment of moves towards children's services integration. Seminar themes include:

- researching professional identities: theorising social and institutional identities;
- exploring subject disciplinary and practice-specific knowledges and learning for interprofessional practice;
- examining how practitioners work together on schools and children's services: current practices and future prospects;
- analysing the confluences of identity, knowledge and practice;
- in/through the seminar series, building interpersonal and interprofessional social capital between and amongst group members.

The objectives of the seminar series are to:

- examine the tensions and complementarities in the theory and practices of interprofessional working in schools and children's services found in the different disciplinary and knowledge base identifications drawn upon by different professional groups;
- investigate the implications and challenges for the multiplicity of theorisations and self-positionings of practitioners and professional groups for the operation of co-practice work relations, networks and teams in schools with particular reference to how children's services integration policy and related school workforce remodelling is operating;
- examine the wider socio-economic debates concerning the relations between social capital and human capital and, specifically, to explore how professionals' human capital may create interprofessional social capital, the inverse of much of the relevant social-human capital literature which examines how social capital builds human capital;
- provide a practitioners' forum that focuses on current and future service integration developments in schools and children's services, providing a space for participant practitioners from education, health, social care and other agencies involved in children's sector reform to learn about, share and consider ideas of good practice in 'joined-up' working;
- identify opportunities to build collaborative research networks and openings and spaces for cross-disciplinary and cross-professional theoretical scholarship and empirical research, producing and exchanging knowledge that will continue to inform debate in the substantive fields.

Papers from the second and third seminar in the series are now brought together in this edited collection: *Exploring subject disciplinary and practice specific knowledges and learning for interprofessional practice: ESRC seminar 2 and 3*

Proceedings, which is published in the Research Papers publication series of the University of Aberdeen. In keeping with the seminars, this edited collection is intended for all who are interested in current transformations in children's services including, but not limited to, practitioners, managers and leaders, academics, policy makers and representatives of government agencies from the fields of education, health and social care.

It is intended that this publication together with others emerging from the seminar series: *The effects of professionals' human and cultural capital for interprofessional social capital: exploring professional identities, knowledges and learning for inter-practitioner relationships and interprofessional practice in schools and children's services*, will present interested readers with thoughtful and challenging analyses that provide timely critique of important, and sometimes troubling, issues and concerns emerging from current radical restructurings and reformations of the children's sector in relation to the capitals and identities of those involved.

Key debates from the first seminar in the series are published in a previous paper in the Research Papers series:

Forbes, J. & Watson, C. (Eds.) (2009) *Research into professional identities: theorising social and institutional identities. ESRC Seminar 1 Proceedings*. Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen.

Copies of the collected Seminar 1 papers are available from the seminar series administrator: Jennifer Boyd (jennifer.boyd@abdn.ac.uk), School of Education, University of Aberdeen.

INTRODUCTION

AUDREY HENDRY

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

Launching the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, argued that in many areas dozens of agencies and professionals were working in parallel, often doing good things, but sometimes working at cross purposes with far too little co-ordination and co-operation. Joined-up problems, he stated, demand joined-up solutions. Launching the New Community Schools initiative in Scotland in 1997, the late Right Honourable Donald Dewar, then Secretary of State for Scotland, spoke in similar terms. Too many Scottish children, he argued, were caught in a vicious cycle of deprivation and without radical change he saw little chance of breaking that cycle. The Scottish solution was to rely on a new way of working involving more than better co-ordination and co-operation. Interprofessional collaboration, breaking down traditional professional barriers and providing for integrated service provision, was proposed as a necessary 'step-change' in practice.

Education policy discourse now appears peppered by the idea that interprofessional collaboration is crucial in determining whether service delivery to children and families will succeed or fail. A succession of Scottish policy documents adopt this stance. In local authorities there seems to be an unquestioned and widely shared cannon which holds that collaboration is a very good thing and that more of it is needed. Interprofessional practice appears to be a holy grail, capable of delivering excellence in even the most challenging of circumstances.

Moving beyond better co-ordinated services and greater co-operation has proved problematic for some, however. Evaluative reports have suggested that practitioners have found it difficult to translate the concepts of collaboration and partnerships into practice. Practitioners have been described as 'relatively entrenched in their attitudes' and having 'not deviated or altered their way of doing things that much' (Sammons et al, 2003, p.71).

The papers presented in this publication explore a number of important questions arising from the effects of the complex relationships between professionals' identifications, knowledge and learning for inter-practitioner relationships and interprofessional practice in schools and children's services. Presented at a time when local authorities are being asked to once again consider

shortcomings in practice in the light of recent tragic events surrounding the deaths of children, these papers are important.

The paper by Andrew Cooper, *Complexity, identity, failure: contemporary challenges to working together*, sets out the policy context within which calls for 'joined-up' working are situated. The paper identifies assumptions underlying the shift from government to *governance* and examines the complexity inherent in current organisational forms that these changes give rise to. Cooper argues that many policy initiatives are driven by what he refers to as a 'context of failure' – a regularly repeated tragic event that comes to symbolise social breakdown and for which professionals are held to account. Cooper urges that in the rush to apportion blame two aspects are often overlooked: the nature of the task facing professionals charged with protecting children – who may have to deal with adults who do not wish to 'collaborate'; and the complexity of interprofessional relationships and the systems within which these relationships are fostered. He concludes that it is imperative that we understand professional *identities* and in particular perceived threats to identity if we are to surmount obstacles to working together.

Eccles's paper, *Partnerships: The politics of agendas and policy implementation*, begins by pointing out that initiatives and directives aimed at producing integrated services are not new, dating back more than fifty years to the 1964 *Kilbrandon Report* which called for the establishment of social education departments. Eccles argues that our understanding of collaboration must be informed by an understanding of the politics of partnership and so the paper opens with a detailed discussion of the political dimension of partnership working in public services in the United Kingdom. The political as an aspect of the collaboration debate, the paper argues, is underdeveloped. Eccles contrasts between market based policies and those policies constructed in terms of collaboration and currently offered as an alternative to our failures to combat social problems. The lack of virtuous collaborative partnerships, he contends, is often portrayed as being responsible for individual tragedies as well as for the failure to change outcomes for the most vulnerable.

From a local authority point of view, performativity directs both the formal and behavioural aspects of what happens in Children's Services. Local authorities are experiencing more visible inspection procedures and the promotion of choice as an aspect of service delivery. Audit, strategic planning, target setting and performance management are presented as the most appropriate mechanisms for use by service leaders in the drive for excellence. Eccles points out the tension inherent in this, one which arises when individual services are held accountable individually for performance but urged to build collaborative partnerships for practice.

Having outlined some of the barriers and drivers towards collaborative partnership, Eccles moves on to explore the politics of implementation in relation to partnership working. Eccles presents a range of structural, cultural and individual barriers which he suggests are worthy of note. He reminds practitioners of the complex, problematic and troubled nature of working together.

The final section of the paper examines the issue of power relationships in partnership working. In government publications agencies are often presented as

equivalent. Eccles contends that this may not be the case. The paper suggests that tensions may be heightened by the power dynamics at play when individuals and agencies defend particular ideologies, professional identities or established practices. Professional groups often have boundaries, which they feel the need to defend, and offer resistance to those seeking to breach them. In the local authority setting it is not unusual to experience practice which entails the blurring of task responsibilities as the participants attempt to recreate their historic specialised jobs and work relationships. Eccles' insights into how and why this might happen will be useful to any reader seeking to ensure that collaborative partnership working does not become or remain subservient to the original occupational purposes of individual professional groups.

The third paper presented here, *Understanding progress in inter-professional development: Social capital, troublesome knowledge and early career practitioners*, stresses the importance of 'shared theory' in the development of effective interprofessional practice. Given the emphasis placed on induction, mentoring and coaching across local authority services in Scotland, McGonigal and McAdam's exploration of social capital, troublesome knowledge and threshold concepts will be of equal interest to leaders, managers and practitioners, as well as those involved in practitioner education.

The authors begin this discussion with a helpful overview of social capital theory, seeking to enable those working with early career professionals to identify and harness productive social capital. Building on earlier research, McGonigal and McAdam identify ways in which ideas surrounding social capital, threshold knowledge and troublesome knowledge might relate to the development of subject knowledge and inter-professional practice. In an extended discussion they explore how these concepts might be usefully applied in teacher preparation and education.

The article moves on to the focus of McGonigal and McAdam's empirical research, a study of twenty four Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students and the key ways in which these early career teachers use 'bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking' capital to frame practice. Bonding social capital, they propose, helps group members 'get by' and can be seen at work as early career staff learn with and from other teachers daily in school. Bridging capital helps people 'get on'. Typically, sources of bridging capital in local authorities may be education officers and curriculum development teams. Linking social capital is about 'getting around', connecting individual practitioners with other agencies or services.

In addition to social capital theory, McGonigal and McAdam use the developing theory of threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge to illuminate the empirical data from their study. The authors contend that in professional settings there exist conceptual gateways or portals which must be opened up and understood by early career practitioners. These threshold concepts are often troublesome, counter-intuitive and subject to over simplification by those new to a particular discipline or profession. Without mastery of these troublesome threshold concepts however, confident progress through early career practice may be stalled, the authors maintain.

Close analysis of McGonigal and McAdam's data revealed ten possible threshold concepts reflecting practitioners' formulations of professionalism. The writers acknowledge that practice is complex, multi-layered and personal and they highlight the difficulty in reducing practice to a limited set of concepts. Nevertheless, from a local authority point of view, the ten threshold concepts offered as an alternative to competence based understandings of early practice do not appear to constitute a simple re-formulation of existing benchmarks. They have more to offer. A focus on professional threshold concepts and on how these are experienced and used by all practitioners in Children's Services may offer a richer way in which to build interprofessional teams.

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COMPLEXITY, IDENTITY, FAILURE: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO WORKING TOGETHER

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INTRODUCTION

In this short paper I want to take the liberty of making certain assumptions in order, hopefully, to provoke deeper debate on issues relating to inter-professional working and the character of modern public sector organisations.

Recently I attended one of the seminars which form part of the review process Lord Laming has been asked by government at Westminster to conduct in the wake of the 'Baby P' (we now know his name was Peter) case¹ in Haringey and other cases across England now causing public and political disquiet. We know that difficulties in inter-professional communication and cooperation are the factors most consistently cited in analyses of public inquiries and Serious Case Reviews² in relation of the deaths of children over the years (Reder & Duncan, 2004). As Reder and Duncan say in their meta-analysis of these documents, 'The consistency between the findings is striking, with particular clusters around: deficiencies in the assessment process; problems with inter-professional communication; inadequate resources; and poor skills acquisition or application' (2004, p. 96).

I want to consider the problems and possibilities of inter-professional working in human service organisations, and children's services in particular, in terms of an interaction between:

- The task – the nature of the work we do;
- Professionals as people;
- Professionals as members of complex systems;
- The organisational forms that support or contain these systems.

The main assumption I want to make relates to 'complex systems' in public sector work and the organisational forms in which they are embedded, and my assumption is that they have become more, not less, complex in recent years. In part this is because we no longer have a simple public-private-independent sector divide; the public sector 'project' in Britain (maybe there are important differences of degree between Scotland and England) is now enacted via a set of cross-sectoral processes involving all three of these sectors, the overall enterprise supposedly held together by another set of processes and principles called 'governance'. The idea of 'governance' reflects the somewhat curious, hybrid character of the modern public sector beast – neither precisely a part of traditional 'government' in the sense of government functioning as a direct provider; yet not quite not a part of government, since somebody or some set of processes has to assume overall responsibility for the co-ordination, efficiency etcetera of the enterprise, and where public sector organisations are not responsible for delivering services, public money is usually funding whoever is doing the providing. So government has only half vacated the scene.

There is much more that could be said about this new order of welfare, and in a way I am talking about a fifth dimension of interaction – the socio-economic environment in which our organisations are located, and the shaping influence of this environment on our daily practice as this is mediated by our organisations and systems. But, I think I've already, in a few sentences, made a case for the difficulty of knowing where our organisations begin and end. Who is paying for and who is providing services, in what shifting configuration? Are services now a form of 'provision' or are they, in line with the dominant model of market choice, merely the provision of a structure of 'opportunity' in which the onus is on the rational, active citizen to access these opportunities in pursuit of their chosen welfare outcomes – a decent education, a viable pension plan, good health. The American political theorist Philip Bobbitt has written of the passing of the nation state, and the emergence of the 'market state', and this revised concept of the state extends to the welfare state:

Bush and Blair... are among the first market state political leaders. They appeal to a new standard – whether their policies improve and expand the opportunities offered to the public – because this standard reflects the basis for a new form of the State. (2003, p. 222)

This 'mixed economy' of welfare in which it seems to be frequently the case that no one agency, let alone one individual, is in single overall control or holds overall responsibility for the functioning of the total enterprise is the post-modern context of welfare. I will cite one example of how this state of affairs is represented in recent policy literature – a 2008 Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report on Safeguarding Adults:

Despite...subsequent development and implementation of local policies and procedures for safeguarding adults, people told us that it is still not clear who has overall accountability. They said that whilst most of the individual pieces of the multi-agency jigsaw seem to exist in one form or another, it is not clear to people how those pieces fit together to form a coherent picture. Nor is it clear which agency has a complete view of that picture. (CSCI, 2008, p.10)

Baldly stated, did we not have trouble enough managing our inter-professional and interagency relationships in the 'old world' of the bounded traditional organisation? However, one person's safe and well bounded organisational culture, may be another's breeding ground for silo mentalities. Paradoxically, one driver producing the fluid, unstable, flexible, loosely bounded organisational culture of post-modern welfare was precisely discontent with our ability to work effectively across these same boundaries. Answer: loosen or dissolve the boundaries. Or is it?

This question is really at the heart of what I want to discuss – the need for strong professional identities on the one hand, and the dangers of these on the other; the need to have boundaries to work across if professional identities are not to become merged, indistinct, meaningless; and the risk of inadvertently producing a kind of fundamentalist backlash as professional groups seek to defend identities they feel to be threatened by the push towards multi-agency, multi-professional working. At a broader level of analysis, the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1994, p.85) described fundamentalism as 'Tradition defended in the traditional way'.

I do not want to be excessively pessimistic about our capacity for effective inter-professional relationships; but I do not want to be naïvely optimistic either. Much contemporary policy discourse errs on the side of the latter I feel, blithely assuming that professional identities can and will be readily discarded or re-fashioned, I think on the basis of the further assumption that they had little substantive value in the first place, other than as a means of protecting a set of vested interests.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND THE POLICY PROCESS

At the seminar with Lord Laming, one widely shared anxiety concerned how professionals in children's services feel they are now being asked to do jobs quite different from the ones they were trained for: teachers feel they are being asked to become social workers, health visitors feel they are front line child protection staff not preventative health workers, social workers feel like police and since the last Laming report police feel they have become split off from social services and marginalised on the child protection front line. It's a great idea, 'co-locating' social services in schools, but it's the kind of great idea that probably needs 3-5 years to be made to really work as staff from all locations adjust and learn.

There is always something impatient, hasty, pushy about policy change processes – and then, when change doesn't happen as magically and rapidly as the politicians and policy makers are willing it to happen, I think something complex occurs: professional groups are accused of being resistant, inward-looking,

dependent, conservative, and of guarding their vested interests. Well, maybe they are, but maybe also they are manifesting something ordinary, that needs respect – they are manifesting conflict about change, conflict about what they are being asked to give up that is valued by them and may well have been of value to the people they serve. ‘Resistance to organisational change’ is one of those phrases that we often deploy in a lazy, thoughtless manner. Psychoanalytic models of organisational dynamics have perhaps colluded with this, but my colleague William Halton at the Tavistock Clinic has written about how we need the capacity to distinguish between resistance to change on the one hand and the desire to fight to preserve something valuable that is under attack on the other (Halton, 2004). Strong professional identities have evolved not only for defensive and narcissistic reasons; they have evolved in the context of practitioners, researchers, professional teachers and trainers, theorists all collaborating intensively over long periods of time in pursuit of better ways of doing the job, whatever that may be: teaching, doctoring, social work, and so on.

THE CONTEXT OF FAILURE

The imperative towards developing better inter-professional and inter-organisational working seems to be in danger of forgetting this. Why? Well one important reason is what I will call the ‘context of failure’. I have alluded to what is well known to all of us - that in England children’s service and child protection policy in particular has been driven by a perverse process in which about once every five years a significant ‘failure’ is surfaced in the public domain – never mind that similar ‘failures’ are happening all the time if anyone cared to concern themselves between times – and this ‘failure’ becomes the occasion of massive public, political and professional hand-wringing; hasty, panicky, anxiety driven change is usually the result. Well the drive to improve and develop inter-professional working is caught up in this process in my view. One can hardly be against ‘joined-up working’ like it’s hard to be in favour of sin; but it can be galling to feel first, that one may have already been practising it very effectively on the quiet for many years, and second (paradoxically) that we are being herded towards it rather like naughty children who have misbehaved by not talking enough to one another in class – something that teacher has just noticed though it has been going on for years.

If this sounds contradictory, then maybe it is. We can be both very good at working together, and terrible at doing so. What is for certain, given the repetitive findings of 30 years of public inquiries into the worst consequences of us not talking and working together properly, is that despite best efforts we seem not to be very good at improving on the situation. Why might this be? I want to conclude by discussing two kinds of answer – these are not the whole of the story, just some less often noticed and discussed aspects of the picture.

The task

First of all, the nature of the task; one of the consequences of policy change being driven so much by episodes of professional ‘failure’ is that attention becomes almost exclusively directed towards those who are held to have failed, and the systems within which they function. Attention is directed away from the nature of the task in relation to which we are deemed to have failed – the task of protecting children or working to improve the conditions of life of children with complex needs. You cannot protect children at risk without engaging with their families. And the fact is that a small, but very significant minority of these families are just exceptionally difficult to engage with. I think a whole series of (in principle) avoidable professional mistakes and oversights underlay the deaths of both Victoria Climbié and of Baby P but Lord Laming in his first Inquiry Report did have this to say:

Staff doing this work need a combination of professional skills and personal qualities, not least of which are persistence and courage. Adults who deliberately exploit the vulnerability of children can behave in devious and menacing ways. They will often go to great lengths to hide their activities from those concerned for the well being of a child. (Department of Health and Home Office, 2003, p. 3)

At a seminar I attended around the time of the publication of that report I heard a senior manager in a social work agency express this rather more graphically. ‘Look,’ she said, ‘many of the adults we have to deal with in child abuse cases are complete bastards’.

Government commissioned research into serious case reviews between 2003 and 2005 (Brandon, Balderson, Warren et al, 2008) found that only 12% of the children killed or injured were on the child protection register. In other words nearly 90% of the most dangerous cases were not picked up by the very process designed to identify and protect them. The same report notes that:

In many cases parents were hostile to helping agencies and workers were often frightened to visit family homes. These circumstances could have a paralysing effect on practitioners, hampering their ability to reflect, make judgments, act clearly, and to follow through with referrals, assessments or plans. Apparent or disguised cooperation from parents often prevented or delayed understanding of the severity of harm to the child and cases drifted. (p.4)

First, we are talking about extreme cases, and about cases that have extreme kinds of emotional and relational impacts on the workers who deal with them. These dynamics work powerfully and corrosively against us doing the sensible, obvious thing in our communications with one another. Why? How? I tried to write

most recently about this in an article published in the Guardian during the week when the Baby P crisis seemed to be at its height.

Most people who systematically abuse children over long periods need to go on doing this. They are expelling something terrible and dangerous in themselves, and to remove their chosen victim is to dangerously threaten their equilibrium. They are indeed dedicated to disguising what is happening and to throwing investigators off the scent. They know that what they are doing is a terrible criminal transgression in others' eyes. For such abusers, the stakes surrounding discovery could not be higher.

Second, though we see with clear hindsight the 'missed opportunities' and failures to intervene, in the 'here and now' of everyday practice social workers, doctors and police do not know that this is the case where child torture is occurring and being covered up. Such cases may well appear very similar to the many other cases where children are identified as at risk. Anyone who has ever had the unwelcome job of confronting a suspected child abuser will know about the fierce, aggressive denial that is often the response. The accused becomes dedicated to making the accuser feel and believe they are, literally, mad. The problem is that we cannot know whether this terrified reaction is that of someone rightly, or wrongly, accused. If we 'knew' we could, and would, act.

The research evidence suggests that the most 'dangerous families' are anyway skilled at evading the attentions of specialist child protection services. This should not blind us to the tens of thousands of cases each year where children are protected because engagement between families and professionals succeeds. Arguably the system works well enough most of the time, in most cases. In a tiny minority, it does not. But as the saying goes, 'Hard cases make bad law'. These are hard cases indeed, and should not determine the fate of the system as a whole. Social workers have been persecuted in past decades for pursuing the possibility of child abuse into the realms of fantasy. Perhaps 'satanic abuse' was a fantasy (though can we be certain?), but 'organised abuse' and 'ritual abuse' is not. It happens. Workers investigating these cases are not just dealing with aggression and fear. They are working at the borders of sanity. (Cooper, 2008)

Now these forces alone may not explain our failure to act preventatively in these cases, but they are the forces we most often ignore – inter-professional working and communication is more likely to break down in the context of working with people who very seriously do not want us to cooperate with one another.

There is a persuasive model of how professional 'failure' in the context of organisational systems comes about. It is called the Swiss Cheese model, and the idea is that gaps or holes or failures in functioning at a number of levels in the total system may need as it were to come into alignment in relation to a single case so that the case drops through the series of holes in the various slices of Swiss Cheese.

I have simply been trying to describe one important 'slice' that is often overlooked – the dangerousness of a small minority of families and the dedication they may have to preventing us doing our job of working together.

WORKING TOGETHER – SOME FORGOTTEN RESEARCH

Lastly, I wanted to talk briefly about some valuable but I think frequently overlooked research into inter-professional working that might deepen our understanding of the strengths and difficulties of this endeavour. It was published in 1992 as a book called *Anxiety and the Dynamics of Collaboration* (Woodhouse & Pengelly, 1992). It is a dense piece of work, describing a research project in which a whole range of professional groups who are expected to collaborate undertook case seminars which the researchers studied, looking for evidence of how professionals inter-relate. In summary what the researchers found is that professionals are very active in assigning rather fixed roles to one another, and by extension to themselves. This occurred on the basis of a kind of what is 'you' is definitely not 'me', and what is 'me' is definitely not 'you' dynamic. This was a powerful inter-psycho process in which for example, most professionals agreed overtly or covertly that 'knowledge about infancy and child development' for example belonged to health visitors, and not to 'us'; or that 'authority issues' were centrally the remit of probation officers, rather than 'us'. This process was accompanied by subtle or not so subtle acts of emotional ascription and judgement – infancy might be associated with dependency and then denigrated, along with the professionals – health visitors – who had been assigned the role of 'experts' in this field. Fears about carrying authority in role as social workers were similarly projected onto others who were asked to 'carry' them. These aspects of professional role then become lost to the professions who disown them, while those assigned them may feel that they are both misrepresented and burdened with unwanted aspects of their colleagues' own roles.

Now, interestingly, this research was conducted by people whose main work and training was as couple therapists. Perhaps something of what they found about how professions treat each other is recognisable to us from our own more intimate relationships. The problem of how to work together in 'partnerships' is one linking idea; the question of how we sustain a confident (personal or professional) identity that does not depend on first off-loading onto someone else the aspects of our identities we don't like so much, is another; the more positive question of the passions that go to inform our identity is a third – I think a forgotten consideration in why it's hard to get people to adjust to new ways of working and working together is that the threat to loss of identity that this involves is, once again, not just a resistance to change, but the deep fear of loss of something we love. We all probably have a rich story to tell about why we chose the occupation we did choose. For most of us, in some sense, it may not really have been a choice – or more that it chose us. At least that was how it was for me in becoming a social worker. My father was a priest, and in fact his first job was as a curate in an outlying small church attached to Glasgow Cathedral. I believe the roots of my choice of profession are all about my relationship to my mother and father – a way

of carrying on their work in a different, secular vein, a way of staying connected to them and also differentiating. If this kind of thing is true for many of us, then no wonder that as individuals, as people, professional change is hard, something we may both embrace and resist.

So, in a rather meandering way, I've tried to explore the connections between the various layers that influence questions about inter-professional working:

- The task – the nature of the work we do;
- Professionals as people;
- Professionals as members of complex systems;
- The organisational forms that support or contain these systems.

I take it as read that each of these layers has its own particular associated tensions that make the task of inter-professional working both possible, and difficult. I think that our less bounded, more fluid, more flattened, networked public sector organisational forms do make new things possible, but equally pose new threats to professional identity that we must first understand if we are to have a chance of surmounting them.

NOTES

¹ Baby Peter was tortured to death in his home in North London at the age of 17 months. During his life, he had been seen somewhere between 50 and 70 times by health and social work professionals. The case caused intense public anger and dismay in the UK when the details became known in December 2008, and gave rise to a significant review of the child protection system in England.

² In England, Serious Case Reviews, formerly known as Part 8 reviews, are commissioned by local child protection co-ordinating bodies in response to child deaths and serious injuries, where abuse is suspected. Their aim is to create learning from experience but they are currently mired in controversy in relation to questions of public availability and agency accountability for 'failure' – see later on in this article.

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PARTNERSHIPS: THE POLITICS OF AGENDAS AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at political aspects of the growth of partnership working in public services in the United Kingdom. Over the past ten years a burgeoning literature has developed around the importance of partnerships as a central feature of government thinking and, more recently, has examined their organisational features and operation in practice. There has, however, been less specific discussion about the actual politics of partnership working. The political considerations addressed here include the ideological framework in which partnerships have evolved, an examination of the policy making process itself and, often underestimated, the politics of implementation. An overarching concern is the question of power – always central to political inquiry – and a discussion of who might hold it and how it might be exercised in partnership working. The analysis presented here which considers *inter alia* how policy has emerged, tensions between central and local government, and between policy and practice, draws largely on the experience of Scotland which, in its post-devolution guise, has seen particularly concerted attempts by government to change relationships between education, health and social care through partnership working across these sectors.

Within this broad approach there are three areas of discussion. First, a reflection on the wider political agendas in which partnership working has come to the fore. These agendas include ‘third way’ attempts at policy making (Giddens, 1994), as well as the more competitive and managerialist cultures which have become such a central feature of public services in recent years (Clarke, Gewirtz & McLaughlin, 2000). Second, the dynamics of implementation are considered, drawing on a recent literature of case studies which have looked at the gap between the policy agenda and actual outcomes. Third, the paper broaches the question of political power; it might be noted that not all partnerships are equal, whatever the rubric of partnership working might suggest, and thus the way in which political power is exercised in collaborative arrangements warrants scrutiny.

Despite the recent emphasis, partnership working is nothing new. There have been various attempts over the past half-century to bring agencies closer in communication and organisation (see Petch, 2008a, for an overview). In a very obvious sense partnership working which enhances communication and the exchange of ideas is a positive development, especially if it leads to decision making processes that are quicker and can occasion more effective engagement with service users. But the term partnership has had a wider purchase over the past decade and the reasons for this are more complex than simply better practice. The incoming Labour government in 1997 was keen to move beyond the rhetoric of market-based solutions to public service reform that had been a hallmark of preceding Conservative administrations. This is not to imply that the marketisation agenda had necessarily ceased, but rather to argue that the language in which reforms were to be couched had changed. There was, equally, a determination not to return to the organisational arrangements familiar under previous Labour governments – that is, a strong public sector devising and delivering services. Hence much of the change in the direction of partnership working bore the moniker of ‘modernisation’. Thus the notion of partnership carries ideological meaning beyond organisational arrangements or common agendas; in essence it was a rubric in part designed to square a desire to move beyond both the Conservative years and Labour’s traditional identity. That it carries this ideological freight leads to difficulties of definition and interpretation. While there may be excellent examples of partnerships working well in practice, the underpinning logic behind the ideas around partnership should not be ignored. Indeed partnership working has become a catch-all phrase and so lacking in precision that analysis of its impact and outcomes becomes difficult (Ling, 2001). Perhaps that is no policy accident. Yet public bodies which are not seen to be engaging in partnership working of some sort in the current policy climate risk the charge of being iconoclastic.

In addition to its inclusion on so many policy agendas, the very absence of collaborative working has emerged as a key feature in a number of official inquiries – for example, and perhaps most prominently, the Laming Report (Department of Health and Home Office, 2003) – into failures in the public services. As Barrett, Sellman and Thomas (2005, p.13) note ‘The lack of collaborative practice between agencies and professions is seen as being responsible for individual tragedies as well as for the failure to tackle general social problems such as social exclusion, homelessness, and crime and disorder’. What emerges here is the development of a discourse about failure in public agencies in which lack of collaboration commands centre stage and becomes the salient feature. However, further scrutiny of these inquiries often points to a more complex picture. For example, while the first Laming Report made 108 recommendations which were primarily organisational, Laming’s subsequent inquiry in 2009 noted that front line staff were ‘overstretched’ and case loads often ‘very high’ in an ‘under-resourced’ profession where ‘front line social workers and social work managers are under an immense amount of pressure’ (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009, p. 44). This is not to challenge the notion that better communication and collaborative understanding across agencies will make a difference to outcomes. But improvements in communication and

organisation should not shift attention away from perhaps equally important social and resource issues, the answers to which are more conceptually complex and politically difficult to address than organisational change. The concern here, then, is that too much expectation will come to be invested in the partnership agenda as a panacea for shortcomings in the sphere of public service delivery. That such expectations arise is, of course, of some benefit to central government, as the solutions effectively are seen to lie locally and organisationally.

This framing of the issue of partnership working also becomes problematic when it comes to evaluation (Taylor & Balloch, 2002). What is it that is to be evaluated, in the absence of a clear understanding of the terms of reference of partnership working? The mantra of ‘what works’ which drove New Labour policy agendas (Page, 2007) was predicated on evidence-based research. But the lack of precision around definitions and difficulties in measuring the impact of partnerships on actual policy outcomes means that ‘what works’ is hard to test. The specifics of testing performance across organisations have been discussed and researched in some detail. El Ansari, Phillips and Hammick (2001) point to the numerous variables present in the evaluation of collaborative working. This raises an obvious and essential question: given the complexity of the variables, how can we know that changes in outcomes were influenced specifically by new collaborative arrangements? Actual evaluations of partnership working have concentrated on arrangements for partnership and the processes of their subsequent development. Dowling, Powell and Glendinning (2004) note that there is little evidence of impact on services, clients and effectiveness, while Heenan and Birrell (2006, p.64) pointedly argue that ‘...the unrelenting drive towards the integration of health and social care in Britain has been largely politically driven with scant evidence to support the view that it will result in significant improvements’.

A further difficulty in evaluation lies in the question of attribution (Petch, 2008b; Tett, Crowther & O’Hara, 2003; Dickinson, 2008). Since organisations in the public sector have become subject to a much more competitive agenda in recent years (whether through league tables across agencies, star ratings or corporate branding), collaboration brings its own difficulties. Performance indicators and inspection regimes that have been designed to assess outcomes within sectors do not easily lend themselves to a cross sector analysis, while organisations that have become more infused with a managerialist culture are predominantly concerned with meeting internal targets to the detriment of strategic thinking which looks across the broader picture of service delivery. Much of the thinking behind the changes to the public sector in the Conservative years was informed by writing on bureaucratic power which assumed there to be self-interested behaviour in organisations that lay beyond market competition (for a summary see Dunleavy, 1991). While this self-interest thesis has been roundly challenged (Dunleavy, 1991; Goodsell, 2003) there remains the somewhat predictable irony that the more managerialist culture has in itself produced greater levels of bureaucratic behaviour in response to the culture of inspection (Miller, 2005). Organisations have retreated into themselves in the face of intrusive levels of audit. This problem has been recognised in the *Crerar Review* (Scottish Government, 2007) but it remains the case that the climate in which partnership working has been expected to take hold has not been conducive to particularly creative or open thinking. Nor is the future

here immediately upbeat: it will take time for the audit and performance indicator mindset in public agencies to be relaxed as there is substantial vested interest for those engaged in the target and inspection culture to maintain the process.

One approach to partnership working has seen the development of integrated teams. Again, however, the problems of attribution and the complexity of variables are problematic in the evaluation of their performance. A substantial study tracking the experience of older people, who were variously the subject of integrated teams and services provision which remained organisationally separate, noted no significant differences in outcome across the two approaches (Brown, Tucker & Domokos, 2003). Indeed such are the variables and the unpredictability of changes in well-being in the very area where much of the collaborative agenda is being introduced – older people’s services – that some qualitative measures might better serve for an understanding of the differences afforded by more integrated approaches. Such accounts, based on researching the experiences of frontline staff in collaborative settings, do exist (Molyneux, 2001) but need to contend with a dominant paradigm in organisations themselves of ‘measuring the measurable’ which does not lend itself to a more qualitative inquiry. How front line staff perceive partnership working and feel about whether or not it is having an impact on service delivery is a valid approach, but one that is afforded less merit in a performance indicator culture of inquiry. Moreover, qualitative approaches, whilst routinely adopted in social care research, are more likely to be viewed sceptically from a medical research perspective. Evaluation of partnership approaches needs to be innovative if it is to tackle the clear limitations posed by problems of methodology and this type of innovation needs to be accepted by the partner organisations themselves; this is not straightforward. New approaches have tended to be explored several years into partnership working (Dickinson, Glasby, Miller & McCarthy, 2009).

Partnership thinking appears to be better developed in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom (Petch 2008b; Hudson, 2007). Two reasons stand out as an explanation here. First, Scotland’s public services – in particular health – have been subject to less competitive organisational arrangements than in England. Surveying the scene of foundation hospitals in England, Kerr notes that it resembles ‘pre-Machiavellian Italy with warring Italian city states’ (Kerr, cited in Hudson, 2007, p.4). Second, the impetus towards partnership working, while pursued in a particularly top-down fashion in England – with elements of mandated collaboration, as Glendinning, Coleman and Rummery (2002) note – was subject to more detailed scrutiny prior to its implementation in the post-devolution committee arrangements of the Scottish Parliament (albeit that the subsequent circulars and directives have remained mandatory and somewhat prescriptive). Thus, the different social policy arrangements that are developing across the devolved polity that is the current United Kingdom may be impacting on the capacity for partnerships to develop.

Despite this more fertile terrain for partnership approaches in Scotland, there remain structural obstacles to productive collaborative working. One of the most obvious is the design of Scottish local government, the reorganisation of which in 1996 left the legacy of a weak organisational model for collaboration amongst agencies and, indeed, sustainability of essential services. The pre-reorganisation

structure of regional and district government was replaced by a system of unitary authorities. Ostensibly the reorganisation was about greater accountability, efficiency and proximity to local electorates. While the efficiency argument was quickly discounted (Midwinter, 1995), the underlying arguments surrounding the change were about reducing the political power of the existing regional local government and opening up the new local authorities, by dint of their smaller scale, to greater involvement by the independent sector (Boyne, Jordan & McVicar, 1995). This has left the administrative arrangement for partnerships more difficult to pursue, since there is a lack of territorial congruence (‘co-terminosity’) between health and social services and health and education. In theory such unitary arrangements ought to enhance the potential for collaboration, but this was not the primary objective of the reorganisation and the size of post 1996 Scottish local authorities weakens their collaborative potential. The emergence of a Scottish Parliament has created a further tension. Key figures in the Scottish Executive who promoted the partnership approach soon after the parliament was established had had a background in Scottish local government, and there is evidence of a shift to the centre in the relationship between the parliament and locality over policy making, challenging the autonomy of local political decision making (McAteer & Bennett, 2005). Indeed the whole question of local government responsibility for community care – the service area which has been in the forefront of partnership arguments following publication of *Modernising Community Care* (Scottish Office, 1998) – has come under scrutiny, with the suggestion that it might be more sensibly delivered not by local government but from the centre, given the fragmentation of current organisational arrangements and the lack of any real autonomy over service delivery for local authorities (Gallagher, Gibb & Mills, 2007). In this sense the organisational arrangements of Scottish political and policy institutions are flawed both vertically between the centre and locality and horizontally across the incongruent territorial boundaries of agencies.

These issues about structures of government are now being aired in public; in early 2009 the spatial arrangements of local government were subject to discussion among politicians and media commentators, with the suggestion that a return to the kind of large regional authorities that predated local government reorganisation may be necessary for service delivery both to function effectively and to achieve some economies of scale. As it stands, partnership arrangements will not easily prove workable in the sub-optimal legacy of local government arrangements that were devised for particular political agendas and prior to a devolved polity landscape.

THE POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The study of implementation has undergone something of a renaissance in recent years (Hill & Hupe, 2002). Much has been written about the ‘implementation gap’ (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Bergen, 2005) between policy making and actual delivery, albeit Barrett and Fudge’s discussion on this emphasised the need to view policy and action as a continuum and stressed the importance of front line professionals being afforded discretion in decision making (Barrett & Fudge, 1981;

see also Lipsky, 1980 on 'street level bureaucracy' and a rejoinder from Evans & Harris, 2004). In essence there is a conundrum here. Implementation which is enacted according to the express designs of policy makers risks being unworkable as discretion, flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances are best seen as the preserve of knowledgeable front line professionals. On the other hand, allowing this level of discretion risks the policy being hijacked by professional vested interests and organisational inertia. A compounding problem here is the different governance arrangements of the various partners involved in implementing collaborative agendas. Social services for example are subject to local democratic mandate through local government (and in post local government reorganisation Scotland this amounts to a patchwork of potentially different approaches to policy implementation). For example, one of the first products of partnership thinking in community care was the notion of a shared assessment tool. But different assessment tools were introduced in neighbouring authorities even though they might geographically sit within the same health board area. Other central-local tensions may play out in this implementation stage; given the population of Scotland (effectively only half that of metropolitan London) and the diminution of local government power in recent years to the point of homogeneity, there is a logic to centralising service delivery, as Gallagher et al (2007) have noted. But this is also precisely why local authorities might intentionally strive to retain different approaches – as part of a struggle to retain identity. Such is the density of representation in the Scottish Parliament (with its 129 members) that comprehensive delivery across localities has taken on a greater political salience than in pre devolution times; local discretion is of little interest as an argument to parliamentarians who have to account to their electorates. That electors might live in adjacent areas but be subject to different types of service delivery is simultaneously democratic and electorally threatening at different levels of government.

Successful implementation of policy depends on a number of variables, each with their own set of complexities, including resource allocation, which are obliged to compete with other public policy agendas and taxpayer interests. But two aspects of the Scottish polity operate in favour of partnership working here. The areas at the core of the collaborative working agenda – initially social care and health, soon followed by education, are the key departmental responsibilities of the devolved Scottish polity and thus initiatives in this area carry particular political weight. Equally, the flagship policy that distinguished the new Scottish Parliament in its early days was implementation of the Royal Commission on Long Term Care (1999) recommendations in favour of free personal care for older people, a policy for which effective delivery would be essential given its cost implications. These costs, while met by Scottish budget priorities, are funded through the United Kingdom exchequer and thus Scottish citizens have been in receipt of services denied the rest of the United Kingdom on the basis of a long contentious funding formula. Thus the collaborative working agenda assumed a greater political salience in Scotland given that the policy of free personal care was being introduced at the same time. The second advantage to partnership working in Scotland was, as already noted, its less fragmented health care system which was, in addition, relatively better funded per capita than the United Kingdom as a whole.

In short, if partnership is to work, it ought to have a better chance of succeeding in Scotland than south of the border.

Another prerequisite for making policy implementation more likely to be successful is adequate time for policy changes to bed in. Public policy is strewn with initiatives which needed time but were rarely afforded it. In recent years the stakes have never been greater. The Scottish Parliament, under increasing pressure to demonstrate its worth amid declining public support (Eccles, 2001), had a political imperative in seeing results on the ground. Yet in partnership working it was dealing with a particularly difficult area in which to expect rapid progress. The culture of greater flexibility and speed of delivery of consumer goods does not easily lend itself to the complexities of services dedicated to human need, particularly where the organisations required to collaborate have their own long standing organisational arrangements and working cultures. In this respect the implementation of partnership working was flawed as the timetables were too ambitious. This left partnership organisations in the position of agreeing protocols without a realistic sense of how these would be implemented in practice, leaving operational managers struggling to deliver. The first aspect of the legislative framework to be diluted was joint training across professions which only periodically had the time and space to move beyond discussions at a procedural level. In practice, the inadequacies of information technology systems have bedevilled the project; information sharing often initially meant additional burdens on staff time, creating disenchantment with the practicalities of partnership working for some staff from the outset. This issue is crucial. As El-Ansari and Phillips (2005) note, there need to be seen to be demonstrable benefits for frontline staff engaged in partnership working for the project to take root. A further aspect of implementation which might impact on the success of policy is the common use and understanding of language. Again, the different approach to understanding and expressing issues impacting on service users across professions is well documented (Dalley, 1989) and there is some evidence from the early evaluations of joint working that professionals are apt to retreat into their own enclaves when faced with this unfamiliarity.

Two further aspects of the implementation process are worth noting here. First, there have been excellent examples of interprofessional working in a variety of settings over the years. The precise qualities underlying this are complex but the willingness of particular individuals to engage across boundaries is a clear factor. As a systematic approach this falls short (relying largely on key personnel to make universal processes work is at best unpredictable, if not unsustainable). But it remains the case that some staff are more disposed to work this way than others and the level of contribution may vary across different tasks. This is not always about resistance or latter day Luddism; Cooper (2009) deftly explores the underlying reasons why staff are attracted to working in particular professions in the first instance, with the result that they may be more or less willing to work outside the boundaries of certain value bases. Policy advocates and 'change managers' might well imagine that the interprofessional tasks they envisage being undertaken offer no threat to these value bases, but this is not necessarily a view shared by frontline staff. Second, the organisational arrangements for some of this successful interprofessional working have often been ad hoc or informal. It is

precisely the formalisation of arrangements, sometimes headed up by managers imported for the task and operating in a performance indicator framework, which can undermine good working procedures that have developed more organically over time. None of this understanding about the complexities of implementation is an argument against collaboration. Much of it, however, offers cautionary guidance about a reliance on overly rigid structures. Looser arrangements may work better, as more recent research looking at networks in Scottish health and social care arrangements would suggest (Hudson, 2007).

THE POLITICS OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING IN PRACTICE

Without becoming overly subsumed by arguments around where politics ends and administration begins, this section turns to the minutiae of everyday partnership working. The complexities of evaluating the outcomes of partnership working have already been noted, as has the predominance of evaluations based on examining structural arrangements and processes. That notwithstanding, there is a developing literature which has started to examine the detail of how frontline staff have responded to the partnership agenda. In this sense – outcomes aside – there is now evidence of the practice of partnership working within these new structures and processes (Eccles, 2008; McNamara, 2006; Tett et al, 2003). These studies resonate with the difficulties of policy implementation that have been discussed above and illustrate the micro politics of everyday working: issues such as workload equity, challenges to identity and access to resources. The research on collaborative working between health and social care in particular has several recurring themes. These include the predominance of training in collaborative processes but not in the further understanding of working cultures, the equity of workloads across disciplines, the different approaches to understanding ways of working with service users (for example over the issue of consent) and assessment of needs. These accounts of the practices of partnership working emphasise the procedural way in which collaboration has been implemented: through the creation of protocols, alignment of budgets across agencies and statements of commitment to the partnership agenda. In part this reflects a genuine attempt by organisations to work together but there is also an element here of organisations simply responding to the demands and tight timetables set by central government. It is in managing the day to day operation of collaborative working that the problems arise with inconsistent commitment by middle managers to achieving the outcomes required of the often aspirational rubric of partnership protocols.

Stewart, Petch and Curtice (2003) discuss some of the drivers and barriers to partnership working, discussing, for example, planning contexts, operational culture and staff attitudes to change. These barriers might indeed be put in place through resistance to change by professionals who unreflectively adhere to existing patterns of working. But equally some difficulties may arise from situations which are less about the processes of change and are instead centred on professionals having concerns about how collaboration might impact adversely on the experience of service users. This takes the discussion beyond simply the mechanics of better

working through collaboration into territory which deals with value bases or inadequate grounding in an understanding of different working cultures in the new collaborative process itself (Dalley, 1989). Thus, for example, the key tool devised to reduce duplication of assessments of older people by different agencies – the single shared assessment – has been inconsistently utilised by those staff who are assessing. The assessment tool was designed to be handled with equal ease across professional disciplines, but frontline staff have noted discrepancies in its use, most particularly in areas such as personal narrative or income maximisation. This raises a clear dilemma: not duplicating service user assessments may expedite matters more efficiently but if the quality of assessment is lessened in the process would this necessarily constitute a gain for the service user? Equally, if these assessments are incomplete or of poor quality and have to be redone (a routine event based on the testimony of staff themselves) is this not in itself another form of duplication? Perhaps a more fundamental question here would be about the role of generic assessors. Any discussion among policy makers about older people's services quickly turns to demographic change (and at a local level to labour supply in social care) and how these challenges are to be met. A more generic approach to working is one obvious line of enquiry. If the same frontline worker (whether in housing, social care or health) can be expected to undertake an initial (albeit detailed, depending on the tool being used) assessment, might there not be other areas which lend themselves to similarly generic working across a more flexible workforce? Since the research shows initial service user assessments lack consistency of approach, there are grounds for wariness here.

The issue of resources again comes in to play in Eccles' (2008) survey of partnership working in practice. Prioritisation of resources is still a key issue in service delivery. This has a different impact on professionals in health and in social work (where the rationing of service delivery is more explicit). As part of the collaborative approach, staff – regardless of background – may have been designated key workers following on from making an assessment and are thus, nominally, responsible for tracking service delivery for service users. This has introduced health staff more clearly to the politics of rationing and a world of uncertainty over service delivery; assessment for service users may be made more quickly using a single process, but those who have been assessed may effectively still sit in a system where service delivery is prioritised if its funding is based in social care.

PARTNERSHIPS AND POWER RELATIONS

The final section of this paper looks at the issue of power relations in partnership working. The dynamic of power between centre and locality in the implementation of policy has already been discussed, noting the long run shift of power to the centre and the attendant weakening of local government autonomy. This is a useful segue into the question of power relations among different local partners themselves, where questions of variable accountability and democratic access are

raised by the kind of governance arrangements that have emerged in partnership forums.

The notion of partnership implies at least some consensus over objectives but this can underplay significant differentials in power across organisations. Whereas both medicine and education can lay claim to having been influential historically in policy making, based on the weight of expertise or political clout – albeit unevenly depending on prevailing political priorities – social work has rarely enjoyed the same privilege. Some of this is about simple electoral arithmetic; an analysis of social attitude surveys provides ample evidence of how the public view social policy provision (viz, largely based on self interest around the likelihood of current or future use, with health and education prioritised). But equally, the various disciplines have different professional standings; classically, by dint of expertise or the power of organisational foreclosure, social work has long been viewed as a semi-profession (Toren, 1972), with only relatively recent developments in the expansion of its educational foundations and post-qualifying requirements allowing this attribution of professional status to be reappraised. Thus beneath the protocols about partnership, historic power differentials remain and early work on the current round of health and social services collaboration (Wilkin, Gillam & Leese, 2000) notes some very clear distinctions about which voice is more likely to prevail – health – where there are joint arrangements. In the short-term target driven policy culture of recent years, the problem is exacerbated as service management priorities compete; a simple measure of impact on these agendas is the immediate electoral significance of the different collaborating agencies. Here, health and education will win hands down. Even where there has been long established organisational collaboration – for example in Northern Ireland – the medical agenda will tend to remain more powerful in practice (Heenan & Birrell, 2006).

There is a well rehearsed debate about the power of ‘agenda setting’ in organisations (see Lukes, 2005, for an overview) and it is precisely this area which would merit inquiry about how the dynamics of policy agendas in partnerships are being played out in practice. With the advent in some localities of single management structures (such as Community Health Care Partnerships in Scotland) across health and social care – a logical response to the problems of joint working arrangements that had been subject to the tensions of bifurcated management – the setting of the policy agenda assumes increasing importance. On the face of it a plurality of ideas coming from health and social care which feed into a common agenda is a welcome development. But as Schattscheider noted some fifty years ago, ‘organization is the mobilization of bias’ (Schattscheider, 1960 cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 71) and in this respect whosoever holds sway within the organisation holds power. The exercise of this power is not necessarily observable and indeed non-decision making rather than observable outcomes may be a more useful guide to understanding power relations. Thus single management structures offer the possibility for a plurality of issues about health and social need to be tabled, but they equally have the potential for a medical agenda, based on a historic balance of power, to subsume the debate. This paper started with the observation that there has been an emphasis in critical inquiries of public policy on the impact of weak collaborative working, a discourse which in itself may perhaps detract from more fundamental causes of policy failure – such as lack of resources in areas of social

inequality – which are much harder to redress. Can partnership working per se hope to tackle these issues, and can the voices which talk of social disadvantage still adequately be heard in these partnership forums? The jury is out on this; some from a social services background see potential in these new partnership arrangements for ‘democratising health’ and putting issues such as poverty on the agenda; others are wary of the historic power held by medicine and detect that the social care perspective carries little impact. As Crenson argues, ‘a polity...that is pluralistic in its decision-making can be unified in its non-decision-making’ (Crenson, cited in Lukes, 2005, p. 39); the presence of a plurality of groups is indeed no guarantee of outcomes.

The governance arrangements that have seen local government increasingly operate as part of a wider network of agencies which have (often significantly) more indirect democratic accountability alters the politics of representation. Local Government is now so locked into governance networks (Saward, 2005) that the potential for real political difference at a local level, as exercised by the expression of a local electorate, has been largely supplanted by the representation of sectional interests in a variety of partnership forums. Wolman & Goldsmith (1992) talked of urban politics as an arena of ‘well-being’ but noted the constraints on the ability of local government to achieve this; now, essential aspects of this well-being – such as social housing – may lie largely outside local authority control (and indeed may have only indirect representation within Community Health Care Partnerships arrangements) and instead sit in the wider partnership frameworks, with their new forms of accountability. While the structure of local government may be the most obvious area in need of reform, it has instead been the local electoral system that has undergone change. Of Scotland’s thirty two local authorities, only two are now led by one political party with overall control; the rest are subject to a variety of coalitions. This may be democratically refreshing, but it has occasioned political bargaining and sometimes uneasy alliances in local government at the very time when its ability to influence the agenda in complex arrangements of governance networks is under greater pressure. This increasingly complex array of governance arrangements, with their attendant blurred lines of accountability and transparency, is antithetical to the kind of organisational clarity that might usefully be a prerequisite to partnership working. Public policy which impacts on the issue of partnerships is pulling in different and irreconcilable directions; while each direction has its own internal political logic, their cumulative effect makes partnership more difficult.

Thus in what sense, beyond an organisational arrangement, can the term ‘partnership’ be used with any precision or insight? Under the protocols of partnership lie a range of questions over agendas, governance arrangements and changed ways of working that merit close examination. There are perhaps two useful parallels here: one governmental, the other cultural. First, the notion of ‘regime’ theory (Stoker, 1995; Harding 1996) may offer a method of enquiry into these arrangements of governance, drawing as it would on the experience of local authorities in their relations with other, often private sector, organisations in decision making about urban regeneration. Once locked into a commitment with other parties, it becomes difficult to exercise political power on the basis of an electoral mandate in the face of a web of interlocking interests and long term

planning commitments. The same may be true of arrangements across public agencies where the wider partnerships effectively operate as another type of latter-day 'regime'. Second, there are strong resonances here, in the pervasive use of the term partnership, with the notion of 'community', particularly as it has been used in relation to community care over the past fifteen years. There is a substantial literature (see, for example, Symonds & Kelly, 1998) which draws out the similar imprecision of meaning in community that partnership now carries. Is community a territorial designation or an expression of a community of interests? Can it be both, given the inherent tensions between the two, and in what ways is community understood by different professional disciplines, carers or service users? How can we reconcile the use of community as an adjunct to care when communities themselves can be exclusionary or judgemental (Bauman, 2001)? Community clearly has some seductive overtones; with its essentially positive implications, and despite its imprecision as a term, who could argue against it? And yet it was under the rubric of 'community care' after 1993 that highly contentious shifts in the management and delivery of social care were enacted across the United Kingdom. So too with partnership: the term embodies a central plank of a policy discourse which has tried to square public services within the circle of a continuing market driven agenda, but leaves in its wake much imprecision over power relations, value bases and working practices. That forms of partnership working seem better placed to work in Scotland says something about a more distinctive – and perhaps in parts collectivist – Scottish policy identity within the United Kingdom. But even here there is still a need to disentangle the various layers of political power and organisational structures that simultaneously promote, and in practice detract from, the partnership agenda. Like 'community', partnership comes with the potential for unheralded but significant changes in professional relationships.

CONCLUSION

The politics of partnership working extend across a range of issues: there are tensions played out between centre and locality, questions of different governance arrangements across partnership agencies, and the wider issue of how representative government is located in these wider regimes of governance. Differentials in power across professions have a strong historical resonance and micro-political issues are partly played out in the implementation of collaborative working on the ground, where concerns over workload equity and value bases come to the fore.

Some of the politics here is displayed in resistance to change and a failure to 'modernise'; but this very modernisation rubric in itself is based on a powerful set of political drivers which are aimed at wider change across public services more generally. In this sense, partnership working is complex not only in itself, but as part of a wider set of political and ideological complexities that need to be recognised in any understanding of how, and on what terms, partnerships now proceed. There are examples of collaborative practice which, for all the difficulties involved in evaluation, have been successful and appear in the new partnership regimes to have led to better communication and swifter attention for service users.

But unpacking these benefits from the partnership elements that make up wider agendas in public sector reform – some of which are clearly incongruent with improved collaboration – is a difficult task. It is these wider tensions which have the capacity to impact on implementation of joint working procedures and which may – reasonably enough given the inherent complexities – underpin elements of resistance to the partnership agenda.

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**UNDERSTANDING PROGRESS IN INTER-
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
SOCIAL CAPITAL, TROUBLESOME KNOWLEDGE
AND EARLY CAREER PRACTITIONERS**

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INTRODUCTION

If effective inter-professional working is to develop between those who work with children and young people in various educational and care contexts, then some sort of shared 'theory' is needed. Theory here is taken to mean a rationale that is assented to by the different professionals involved in such working together, and a felt awareness of the attitudes, values and constraints that operate within their different contexts. Social capital theory offers one perspective but is a concept which is under-researched (if often cited) in professional contexts. In these overlapping and sensitive areas of professional life, social capital theory might provide at least a framework for thinking about the social issues of poverty and alienation that often bring teachers and social workers (for example) together.

Yet because social capital operates as a heuristic device at a certain level of generality (more effectively deployed at the macro-level of policy or the meso-level of reflection, rather than at the micro-level of practice) it may need an additional theoretical frame to maximise its potential to explore the hard actualities of professional decision-making. Here we offer such a theory, one that is currently used to think about conceptual difficulties and, increasingly, professional learning across a range of academic disciplines. The notion of 'troublesome knowledge' and of 'threshold concepts' can perhaps offer a shared language in which the next generation of teachers and social workers can begin to understand each others' aims and intentions.

The role of the educators and mentors of these new 'inter-professionals', in both higher education and in practice situations, would then become akin to that of translators, ensuring that professional signs (events, disagreements, comments, intuitions) are accurately heard and understood, and appropriately responded to. Before such effective and genuine engagement can begin to take place across the 'caring disciplines', the key people who need to gain fluency in the discourses that they themselves share, and the professional dialects that they do not yet fully comprehend, are the tutors. They are best placed to shape the educative

experiences that beginning teachers or social workers undergo, and also the language that these early-stage professionals begin to understand and use as they enter more confidently into professional, and inter-professional, life.

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS

Professional induction cannot be seen simply as a passive process of transmission and reception of craft knowledge and skills. It also involves values and attitudes, and an openness to reflection on the process of one's own learning. In education (the discipline that the current authors are most familiar with on a daily working basis), becoming professional is an interactive process in which there often occurs a challenging dialogue between the beginning teacher's confidence in the discourse and content of a subject specialism or social/vocational aspiration ('I want to be a really good teacher of physics'; 'I want to help young children learn to read') and the sometimes contradictory voices of colleagues, fellow students, mentors and also children, within the context of classroom experience. The notion of threshold concepts in teaching and learning can provide insights into this dialogic process of adjustment between intention and actual effect, and also into ways in which institutions involved in the education of teachers or social workers might handle the problems encountered in becoming a professional.

The present article builds on an earlier research project that attempted to identify social capital, threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge in teacher education, to consider how these relate to subject knowledge, and to explore whether such concepts, once identified, might be effectively used to reshape the content or process of Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses and the year-long school-based probationer training that follows (Cove, McAdam & McGonigal, 2008a). Exploring the place of values, dispositions and relationships within early professional work contexts, the project led us towards a clarification of the types of social capital created by the processes and practice of teacher education, conceived as an interactive continuum between individual and community aspirations and needs. The ideas of social capital already demanded critique across a range of social and caring professions and we were interested in the various ways in which student teachers seek and find guidance or other sorts of social support, or indeed come to sustain each other in their new professional role.

Social capital theory with its focus on networks, norms, trust and reciprocity offers a new way of thinking about the relational dimensions of learning to teach, and about how teachers during their early professional life begin to relate to a widening range of colleagues, and also to make more effective links to the local communities whose children they serve. This is particularly important in the current policy context of social inclusion and inter-professional working; of the professional mentoring of new teachers in Scottish schools through the probation experience monitored by the General Teaching Council for Scotland; and of concern beyond probation for their continuing professional formation. In all of these contexts, a social capital perspective can usefully guide reflection on current approaches to teacher development in the United Kingdom. In part, our interest in social capital emerged from its popularity as a way of re-conceptualising work in

'the caring professions', but equally it arises from concerns about the way it has been defined and used by policy makers (in a rather uncritical Putnam-derived form. See, for example, Putnam, 2000) particularly within the New Labour agenda of social and educational reform in the last decade. While social capital does appear to have real heuristic potential, its practical application within school contexts is only beginning to be explored (McGonigal, Doherty, Allan, et al, 2007).

In the project we also began to consider how social capital might be working within the relationships and structures of the different school communities where probationer teachers were placed, and we were concerned to identify ways in which teacher colleagues, school-based mentors, university tutors and other professionals could be enabled to identify and make use of productive social capital in the formation of new teachers, and to look at ways in which 'bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking' capital might be operating. Bonding social capital is characterised by strong bonds among group members, helping people to 'get by'. It is valuable in building a sense of shared identity and security, which are crucial at the early stage of professional development. Bridging social capital then helps people to build relationships with a wider, more varied set of people than those in the immediate family or school environment, for example between students and employers, or teachers and community workers. Bridging social capital helps people to 'get on' and not just to 'get by', and is important in helping employment and career advancement. Linking social capital connects individuals with agencies or services that they would not otherwise access easily. It may help people 'get around', and to make connections with others across differences in status: for example, links between parents of children attending the same school, but from different backgrounds, or between their children. Linking social capital can help teachers connect with parents or children from different social, religious or ethnic backgrounds to their own (Catts & Ozga, 2005, p.1-2).

In the context of inter-professional working, one can sense that the initial bonding that often takes place for younger or newer staff within working groups can, if relied upon too much as a defence mechanism to cope with the strains involved in new roles and complex work, actually inhibit the useful and necessary bridging between groups of professionals, each group working within their own frameworks of reference to deal with similar community needs, but from a differing and little known perspective. Again, perceived differences in status not only between any professional and his or her 'clients' but between professional groups themselves, can inhibit the linking capital that might help more experienced professionals to move with some understanding and confidence across various professional and conceptual divides.

Briefly, among the focus group, 24 PGCE Primary and Secondary beginning teachers involved in the study, using online questionnaires and then analysing transcript data from 10 school-based interviews, we found bonding capital present through Local Authority courses run by advisory staff, from fellow probationers and from recently qualified teachers: 'knowing they were in the same position last year'. Bridging capital came as they started to make links with other professionals, such as the Area Learning Support Network staff: 'it's good when you're looking for a job, they know your skills, it's like having a friend'. School mentors sometimes had already begun early to position their mentees for future job

interviews, through advice on experiences to highlight and questions to expect. Thus networks of all kinds proved crucial in the probation year: networks of knowledge, electronic networks (used to share ideas and resources with fellow probationers) and professional networks, as well as friendship groups carried forward from the PGCE year, based mainly on particular links formed during their shared university tutor group experience.

Trust in their former university tutor frequently remained strong and contact was sometimes sustained into this following stage of training. 'Trust' during the probation year remained a problematic term to be further explored, however. In part, it seemed also to be related to reciprocity, as beginning teachers started to feel valued and trusted in turn by school colleagues whose judgement or skill they respected.

WHAT ARE THRESHOLD CONCEPTS AND WHAT CAN THEY TEACH US?

To illuminate the empirical data on early teacher development gained through focus groups, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, we also used the developing theory of threshold concepts. These are becoming seen as key conceptual gateways to confident progress in a range of academic disciplines but prior to our study we found no exploration of them in professional contexts. In our project, threshold concepts were explored through the professional events and social relationships in which troublesome knowledge emerges and is articulated, as well as through the sorts of social capital which can engender and sustain, or else close down, a positive understanding of key concepts for beginning teachers. Since threshold concepts are frequently troublesome or counter-intuitive the need for a clear framework is particularly important for PGCE students engaged in transforming themselves, within a brief intensive period of training, from graduates in a chosen area of subject specialisation into teachers with a vital wider role within any school and its wider community of parents and families.

Despite the complexities of their new professional work, most of the probationer teachers interviewed on the project demonstrated a sustaining 'learned optimism' (McCulloch, Helsby & Knight 2000, p. 118) through the help of mentors and also through having the security of a relatively stable workplace in which to develop their insights and skills over a school year. But what of 'learned pessimism' and the problems of beginning teachers who get stuck at a particular stage of development?

Here the theory of 'threshold concepts' and the notion of troublesome knowledge within teaching and learning come into play. Meyer and Land (2003) introduced the term in exploring the idea that within the particular disciplines of higher education there exist 'conceptual gateways' or portals that can open up a student's understanding of that particular subject in a transformative way. Perceptions are shifted in an irreversible fashion that is unlikely to be forgotten and is difficult to unlearn. Such a perceptual shift is generally integrative too in its revelation of the previously hidden interrelatedness of ideas or procedures within the discipline.

Yet these threshold concepts may also be 'troublesome', framing knowledge in a counter-intuitive way; and they are often difficult to teach to students, even intelligent and willing students, who appear to get 'stuck' at a level of conceptual simplicity with regard to a particular 'next step' in learning. For such students the tendency is to accept or create in their minds a simplified version of the concept which their tutors know is preventing them from seeing the full implications or potential perspectives that a full understanding of the concept would offer on the discipline concerned. They may mimic the knowledge without fully possessing it. Such concepts are thus described as liminal or threshold ones, with some students being halted and becoming 'stuck' at a frontier of knowing. Examples usually given include precedent in Law, depreciation in Accounting, opportunity cost in Economics, entropy in Physics, pain in Physiology and irony in Literary Studies (Meyer & Land, 2005).

No examples appeared in earlier research, in this relatively new field, for the process of learning to teach in primary and secondary schools, nor for the teaching of teachers. Our project investigated what such concepts might be, and in which contexts they might most usefully be encountered. We also considered whether a clarified awareness of such troublesome knowledge might provide a common language for those who share the mentoring of beginning teachers both in universities and schools. The project thus led into areas of liminality and personal growth, and the confusion of the transitions between student and teacher status, and between the pre-professional and professional understandings and behaviours that beginning teachers have to learn to negotiate. This transition often begins at the early stages of initial teacher education (ITE) in simple mimicry of how a teacher speaks, dresses or behaves, but with appropriate guidance there should emerge a more mature state of confident knowledge. Through analysis of the discourse of student teachers approaching the end of their ITE studies, we identified nine possible threshold concepts and then set about testing these further through structured interviews with probationer teachers and their mentors.

WHAT EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE ABOUT THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN PROFESSIONAL MENTORING CONTEXTS?

Our original ordering of 9 possible Threshold Concepts (TCs) reflected the formulation of professionalism in GTC Scotland's Standard for Initial Teacher Education (SITE) into: Professional knowledge and understanding; Professional skills and abilities; and Professional values and personal commitment. These three aspects are then articulated in the SITE documentation into 22 benchmark statements and 10 transferable skills. (This group of benchmarks is a reduction from the almost 50 'teaching competences' in prior documentation that the benchmarks replaced but are still complex for beginners to comprehend.) These benchmarks are all meant to be achieved in the pre-service year of academic and school placement training and then essentially the same areas of professional competence are to be demonstrated to an enhanced degree during the probation year with the support of a teacher-mentor. We discovered that although our graduates had achieved all the benchmarks by the end of PGCE, they still felt that

they did not fully understand exactly what some of these benchmarks really involved. We were keen that any TCs we discovered might be usable as a heuristic approach within the current language of professionalism that PGCE students were being inducted into, and not to be an additional imposition of terms and ideas in a course where many of them already tend to find too much 'jargon'.

Analysis of the interviews with probationer teachers and their mentors led us to identify the 10 TCs listed in the Appendix to this paper. These overlapped with but extended the original 9, and we added detail that might act as illustration or elaboration of the threshold concepts. This would be useful if these concepts were to be used on ITE courses, helping beginning teachers to conceptualise the distinct emphases of the GTC formulation. This might be especially useful with the third element of 'professional values and commitment' which both university tutors and student teachers find difficult to discuss or assess on a confidently evidential basis, since the initial school experience is so fragmented in the PGCE year. Threshold concepts might therefore assist in developing student teachers' confidence about their progression through the teacher education experience and its often puzzling terminology.

It could be argued of course (as we have debated amongst ourselves) whether these really are threshold concepts, or merely a re-formulation of the existing benchmarks. Against such self-doubts we could mention the positive reaction of experienced teacher educators, and also of tutors newly seconded from schools, to the TCs as articulated. The TCs seem authentic, practical and true to the realities of professional growth in teaching and, being derived from the words and experiences of beginning teachers, they appear to possess a realism that gives life to the bureaucratic language of the benchmarks (Cove, McAdam & McGonigal, 2008b). Officers from GTC Scotland also showed positive interest in the study, as did the Society for Educational Studies which had funded the project. Looking back on the research now, we might want to consider whether some of the 10 represent a more significantly transformative threshold than others, and to extend the investigation of TCs 3, 9 and 10: *language* (learning to talk in ways that children want to listen to and understand); *community* (linking the social and intellectual life of one's own classroom to the homes and streets that children come from and return to); and *professional identity* (finding self-recognition in the confident orchestration of complex skills, rather than in managing to display skill in any one of them).

Researchers in the field of threshold concepts share some of this hesitancy about what exactly these ideas are. The point is sometimes made that the idea of a threshold concept is itself one, being hard to grasp in its transformative nature, and also perhaps to distinguish from other fuzzy concepts in the field of education. It is clear that TCs are not 'key concepts', since students who can canter through core elements are brought up short by some concepts more than others, and there is an individuality in their response to these areas of difficulty. The benchmarks are all key elements to be included in overall course assessment yet not all of them produce the same levels of uncertainty for student teachers. Cousin (2008) draws some parallels between threshold concepts and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development with its emphasis on the social nature of learning and the transfigured nature of thought that can be achieved. Yet she points out that this falls short of the 'transfiguration of identity' that Meyer, Land and Davies describe

(2006, p.21). Threshold concepts can also be related to the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on situated learning within communities of practice, and this would tie in with the idea of learning the full implications of the discourse of a discipline, of entering it, and being able to interact authentically with peers in the exploration of the implications of particular sets of ideas or practices.

This sense of taking on a new identity within the discipline (of becoming an economist, a physicist, a teacher or a social worker) takes us towards the ontological as much as the epistemological. It is true that threshold concepts have so far been more easily identified within the 'hard' disciplines of science, engineering and design than in the humanistic and professional ones. Cousin (2008) finds them particularly useful, however, in moving higher education on from a potentially divisive or overly simplistic formulation of 'teacher-centred' versus 'student-centred' learning, by placing subject specialists at the centre of any enquiry about the disciplines they teach. Yet it is also a humane and transactional enquiry, since the student experience of being stuck or transformed can only be gauged through interaction with those who are encountering the concepts.

In *Threshold Concepts in the Wild*, Atherton, Hadfield and Meyer (2008, p.6) describe an international comparative study of beginning teachers in mainly vocational areas of further and higher education, and their revealing attempts to articulate threshold concepts in the subjects they are preparing to teach:

...in post-compulsory education, knowledge is often experienced by learners as inert or irrelevant. ...Since [concepts] are not seen as related, one cannot 'lead to' another, except by association or proximity, nor can an argument be sustained. A corollary is that epistemologically-prioritised or more simply 'cognitive' threshold concepts do not feature much in the experience of learners, unless and until...they have engaged with the ontological challenges associated with the transformation of identity implicit in taking on a working role.

Some of the TCs suggested by these beginning teachers are revealing. A group who taught literacy and numeracy in prisons identified as the biggest threshold concept for their learners 'the recognition that if a prisoner were to become literate, he would no longer be excluded from society as hitherto'. Although this might be from the teacher's point of view, 'transformative', the prisoner might well feel more ambivalent, being in a liminal position that could include feelings that he was betraying his normal social group, hence the threshold nature of this concept is clearer. In contrast those who trained police officers and door managers ('bouncers') identified 'hyper-vigilance' as a key concept, while recognising that such sensitivity to danger at all times might tip over into paranoia. Those in Hospitality and Catering suggested 'how to wash one's hands' as a concept – no longer merely an unthinking mundane action, since its effectiveness or otherwise revealed a different perspective on hygiene in the working environment. It had moved beyond a mere fact to be learned in a Health and Safety module and had become related to the identity issues of taking one's place in a professional group.

WHERE NEXT IN EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON INTER-PROFESSIONAL WORKING?

Teachers and social workers have different perspectives on the individuals and families that they support in their professional lives. Although the individuals and families are the same ones, the early professional formation that their 'supporters' have undergone, and the ontological changes that have taken place in the course of their training, can develop deep-seated misinterpretations of each other's approaches to a given problem. We have arrived at the same situation across markedly different thresholds.

Problem-based learning and opportunities for sharing perspectives on practice and values, particularly at the pre-service stage, are easier to propose than to manage within the constraints of time and student understanding at the early stages of their formation. Yet to leave it too late is to meet perhaps entrenched attitudes and the negative or 'dark' social capital of tight professional bonding. One answer is to ensure that in course development and review the focus shifts from 'content' to values, attitudes, reflective enquiry and an involvement of the students in broad issues of professional identity. Thus notions of self, schooling, society, and the development of beliefs and attitudes (including one's own), become crucial to a curriculum that will lead to future inter-professional openness. Learning how others learn can be assisted by understanding how we ourselves learn, and it is here that threshold concepts can be an illuminating way of exploring both ideas and identities.

This, of course, goes against the grain of what has been current practice in the validation and quality assurance of courses nationally. In education, Scotland shares – although apparently to a less extreme extent – the current close attention in the UK to the acquisition of teacher competences and performative skills. This approach arguably seeks to 'de-politicise' the curriculum and qualifications framework:

Outcomes-based models and their accompanying endless taxonomies and lists of desirable learning outcomes and competences, create a vacuum in debate about fundamental goals for desirable cultural and social capital in vocational education and training. This overlooks difficult questions about who is allowed access to these forms of capital, which agencies and individuals are legitimate stakeholders in defining them and whether they are separate or integrated with other subjects. (Ecclestone 2001, p. 9)

From a mentoring perspective on professional development, the possibility of the co-construction of knowledge is not addressed within such an approach. Relationships with partners tend to be almost exclusively framed as classroom relationships managed by the teacher, rather than being related to the wider community. Developing professionally is defined in terms of 'learning competences', which require beginning teachers to 'diagnose learning needs', 'plan a learning programme', and 'build a portfolio of evidence'.

The competence-based approach is intended to produce a teacher who is skilled both in the major occupational roles and is also able to operate as a 'reflective

practitioner'. However, although the principle of reflecting on experience is recognised, it is too often seen as an individual practice. The social capital that develops both insight and identity through reflective dialogue with a range of others (we can be mentored in many ways) can be inhibited by too narrow a focus on too broad a range of specific competences. A focus on professional threshold concepts, however, and on any individual's experience of them, may offer an integrative understanding of what had seemed merely atomised facts or procedures.

For this to happen much guidance and support will be needed. A focus on threshold concepts, by its nature, involves the discomfort of uncertainty, whereas professional learners at an early stage of development often want the comfort of a precision that cannot be sustained in the light of experience. The key place to start in developing a true 'inter-professionality' (an ungainly word for what may well be an awkward procedure, at least initially) is with their mentors and tutors, upon whose confident professional perspective their students will need to rely as they grow. Only by learning to listen to each other's histories and discerning the crucial areas of potential misunderstanding, by lingering on the thresholds where professional identities are defined and re-defined, – and then building the potential of these perspectives into pre-service and early career experiences – will we be able to interpret for our students (in the looking-glass world of educational and social policy) how different professionals mean what they say when they say what they mean about the children and young people in their mutual care.

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APPENDIX

1. *Teaching is about learning, both the particular achievements of individual children (often those who have initially presented 'problems' for the beginning teacher) and also the progress made by the class as a whole.*

Teaching comes to be seen as being crucially about structuring or segmenting or pacing the subject content appropriately, in order to meet pupils' needs, increasingly with greater relevance.

There may be a discovery of what assessment is, what its forms and purposes are, how it can shape future teaching and learning, how it can clarify learning purposes and positively affect children's attitudes and awareness.

This concept often involves 'children who make teachers think', and the realisation that this is a better working description than 'difficult' or 'troublesome' children.

2. *The same curriculum can be effectively taught in different ways by different teachers across different stretches of time.*

One realises that it is useless to try to teach too much for children to absorb or retain.

A more confident awareness emerges of the need to pace the curriculum and to judge attainment and understanding over longer stretches of time.

One comes to understand that the rhythm of learning involves peaks and troughs.

3. *Language creates ethos, atmosphere and positive working relationships in the classroom, and beginning teachers can learn how to talk in a way that children listen and respond to.*

This involves a realisation of the impact of tone, pitch, pace, emphasis and volume, varied empathetically according to the age, stage, needs and norms of the children being taught.

The impact extends to, and varies within, different contexts beyond the classroom: corridor, playground, sports field, beyond the school gates and into the local

community. (Issues of dialect, accent and solidarity with the community impinge here.)

There is a realisation that the teacher's language needs to model for children (and sometimes for parents) helpful patterns of effective thinking and social relationships.

4. *In class and behaviour management, an individual teacher is most effective when contributing to and helping to sustain the whole-school ethos and structures.*

A confident and committed sense develops of the crucial effect of the establishment of classroom norms of behaviour, organisation, and learned effectiveness (for both probationer teachers and pupils).

Learning to define and to confidently walk the social boundaries between firmness, direction and supportive engagement with young learners is a factor.

Employing discipline strategies appropriately, flexibly and yet consistently in children's eyes helps sustain a positive classroom ethos.

5. *One realises what makes reflection work, and its importance in learning to teach more insightfully and effectively.*

There is a personalised approach to reflection and where this happens best, and a new awareness of what aids or sustains this.

(Possible sources of reflection are careful observation, conversations about classroom incidents, ideas encountered in current or previous reading, journals, dialogue, networks, and thinking time between observation and feedback.)

Apart from learning from critical incidents and colleagues' advice, prompts provided on key developmental areas can promote and support reflection.

There is a realisation that effective teachers are thinking much of the time about effective teaching and learning, and planning for this.

6. *One comes to understand one's own role in the mentoring process and what the aim of the mentoring process is.*

There is a conceptual movement from being judged to becoming an active and interactive partner in a developing professional project.

Trust in the mentoring system can be enhanced by a layering of networks of support and advice at varying levels of formality.

There is a realisation, achieved through observation, anecdote or the attitude of more experienced colleagues, that success in teaching is variable but that commitment and a positive outlook are nevertheless sustainable and vital.

7. *'Professionalism' comes to be seen as attaining the confidence to make a considered choice about how the curriculum might most effectively be taught by an individual teacher to the learners for whom s/he is most closely responsible, while also accepting the need to monitor such changes in an open and honest manner.*

Effective mentoring can model for beginning teachers this combination of flexibility, reflectiveness and responsibility.

One realises that imperfection is part of the picture, that learning and teaching will often be successful only in part, but that 'failures' plus reflection can contribute to professional knowledge and growth.

With more experience of working with others in schools professional discourse becomes an aid to precise reflection rather than a barrier to it.

8. *Relationships matter in teaching and learning: recognising the social dimensions of professional life can make a major difference to a teacher's individual effectiveness in the classroom.*

Taking advice and guidance from others is basically a matter of trust.

There can be negative as well as positive dimensions of teacher networks, especially where there is a lack of active bridging and linking to wider social and professional experience.

Reciprocity and generosity matter in the creation of satisfying professional development: one's contribution and recognition within the community is a source of satisfaction all round.

9. *There is a realisation that teaching and learning take place in 'communities' that overlap and affect each other, positively and negatively: home, school and locality can assist or hinder each other's efforts for children.*

Feedback from parents is often a revelation about children or about oneself. (Parents often validate the beginning teacher's effectiveness.)

The impact of whole-school social, celebratory, creative and sporting events comes to balance or symbolise the worth of individual efforts in teaching and learning. (Social capital dimensions of networks, reciprocity and positive bonding and bridging capital have an influence here.)

The teacher's place within the communities of school and locality is realised (with implications regarding norms of dress, speech, behaviour.)

10. *There emerges an energising sense of 'owning' or 'earning' a professional identity, confidently and realistically understood.*

This involves integration of particular classroom insights or experiences.

This is often evidenced in a positive skill in the efficient orchestration of a multiple range of educational factors which is rarely lost thereafter.

This is felt to be transformative, at least for this stage of development, and is recognised as such by mentors and other colleagues as well as oneself.