Creating strongly collaborative local learning systems: Beyond top-down regulation and the market

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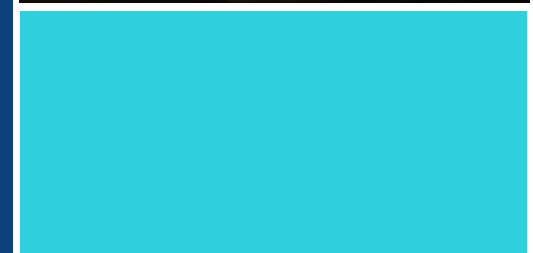
The argument

- New Labour have enacted an 'adaptive' neo-liberal approach to education public services – centralist, marketised with a subordinate social democratic strand (Newman 2001, Hall 2004)

- Recent research suggests a more democratic and locally oriented vision of an inclusive lifelong learning system (Schuller and Watson 2009)

- Need for governance based on 'devolved social partnership', 'strongly collaborative local learning systems' and a more 'ecological' sense of the local (Coffield *et al.* 2008)

- Challenge for professionals – developing a new level of 'good sense'

Neo-liberal governance of post-14 education

- Politicisation, constant change and political exclusion

- Policy levers - unintended outcomes and transactions costs

- Privileging certain voices (e.g. employers) and lack of power sharing of social partnership

- Divisive qualifications policy and increased complexity

- Weak concept of the local; strongly competitive and weakly collaborative

- Conservatives will create a more marketised system

Principles of an inclusive lifelong learning system

1. Vision of an all-through learning system from 14+ with clear moral and educational purpose (Pring *et al.* 2009)
2. Tomlinson (unified) approach to qualifications and credit (Hodgson and Spours 2008)
3. Teaching, learning and progression at the heart of the system (not policy levers)
4. Enhanced professional role in assessment
5. Inclusion reinforced by equity - learners, teachers and communities (Coffield *et al.* 2008)
6. Social partnership approach to labour market and skills
7. Strong sense of the 'local' for collaboration and institutional rationalisation

A devolved social partnership model of governance

- Moving from 'freedom from' and 'freedom to' (Pratchett 2004)

  - A more deliberative and inclusive culture of national politics (Lawson 2005)
  - A new balance of national, regional and local relationships
  - Policy frameworks to replace policy levers (Coffield *et al.* 2008)
  - Democratic accountability and realignment of quangos
  - Collaborative local and regional 'ecologies' – developing inter-dependent relations in a local area (Hodgson and Spours 2009)

Building strongly collaborative local learning systems

- Replacing 'weakly collaborative' with 'strongly collaborative' local learning systems (Hodgson and Spours 2006a, Nuffield 14-19 Review 2007)

  1. Strengthen the leadership capacity of Local Authorities
  2. Develop the role for regional bodies in co-ordinating those aspects of 14-19 development that go beyond local authority boundaries (for example, the planning of specialist vocational provision).
  3. Introduce area-wide accountability measures to provide common goals for partnership institutions (e.g. area-wide performance indicators for participation, achievement and progression)
  4. Key aims for partnerships - develop the learning opportunities for all 14-19 year olds, particularly Entry Level/Level 1 learners and for more opportunities for Advanced Level learners to gain educational experience in the community and working life.
  5. Provide a focus for local professional collaboration around improving the quality of learning (e.g. the 14-19 extended project).
  6. Consider the rationalisation of post-16 institutions to promote choice of provision, equity and efficiency.

Challenges for educator professionalism

- Development of an 'enhanced' concept of professionalism knowledge and practice – constituting a new level of 'good sense'

  - A public/ecological view of LLL- involving the rejection of marketised or micro-management models (Spours *et al.* 2007)

  - 'Policy memory' (Higham and Yeomans 2007) and 'system understanding' (Hodgson and Spours 2006b)

  - Developing 'specialism +' (subject specialism and ability to develop learning skills), using an 'expansive/restrictive' distinction (Fuller & Unwin 2003)

  - Strong 'communities of practice' and its association with vocational and professional identity (Wenger 1998)

  - Collaborative leadership capacities (Briggs 2008) and area-based leadership skills to collaborate with non-specialist educators

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