BRISTOL EDUCATION INITIATIVE
Final Report
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Project Director: James Wetz
Bristol Education Initiative
Business West: Chamber of Commerce and Initiative
Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh
Bristol BS8 3RA
Email: jaibwetz@hotmail.com

'HOLDING CHILDREN IN MIND OVER TIME'

Raising attainment in Bristol's secondary schools: How can we best support young people to be more resilient, to feel safe, to maintain good mental health, and to achieve and enjoy their learning?

Implications for school design and organisation, and the professional support of teachers.

Bristol Education Initiative: a research and design project addressing the needs of less resilient young people who are leaving Bristol secondary schools each year without any formal qualifications.

Working with Bristol University Graduate School of Education, and in association with Antidote, Bristol Local Education Authority, Connexions West of England, Human Scale Education, National Institute of Mental Health England SW (NIMHE), UBHT and North Bristol NHS Trusts Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and University of the West of England Faculty of Education.
Supported by Business West.

CONTENTS

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Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank the five young people who, as research associates, shared the stories of their experience of schooling in the city with such courage and intelligence.

The approach and model for 'Bristol Education Initiative' has been to:

- research a significant issue that is of concern to the education community in Bristol
- use the knowledge, intelligence, and research capability of Higher Education
- work with partners across Business, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, LEA and City Council who could reflect on and support the development of the programme
- provide perspectives about the research issue within fifteen months
- ensure that the study remained closely aligned to the city's policy objectives of Every Child Matters/Change for Children.

James Wetz: Visiting Fellow, Bristol University Graduate School of Education
March 2006

Background and rationale

In sixteen years of leading and managing large secondary schools I became increasingly aware of the school system's inability to meet the needs of a small but 'statistically hidden' group of students who faced the challenge of complex social, emotional and environmental demands. The school system's inability to meet their needs is reflected also in the way in which they were labelled as troublesome and disaffected. My growing understanding of these students caused me to consider whether these disaffected students were in fact students who had lacked affection and were in some sense acting out 'remembered hurt' of neglect, loss or insecure early attachment which schools had neither the expertise nor resource to recognise and attend to.

The working premise of the project therefore is that a significant proportion of students who disengage from education in Bristol are manifesting attachment anxieties related to the quality of relationships and experiences from early childhood. Such issues of 'affection' impact on their learner identities and their resilience to cope with their secondary school experience. The current design and organisation of our secondary schools and schooling (including the size of school, curriculum, assessment, and teacher pupil relationships) limits the capacity to meet the depth of emotional and social needs of these students. This has implications for the way we design and organise our schools and develop teachers as professionals.

This research was carried out between January 2005 and January 2006 and was supported by Business West (Chamber of Commerce and Initiative). The Graduate School of Education at Bristol University provided research advice and direction, and a Collaborative Working Group provided oversight for the project. The Collaborative Working Group which helped shape the brief and critique the preliminary findings included Business West, Bristol University Graduate School of Education, Bristol Local Education Authority, Connexions West of England, Antidote, Human Scale Education, the National Institute of Mental Health England (SW), the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services of the North Bristol and UBHT NHS Trusts, and the Faculty of Education of the University of the West of England. Membership details of the Collaborative Working Group are included at the end of the report.

The views expressed in this report are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the partners associated with the project. There are also supplementary papers accompanying this report which provide detail and background related to sections of the report.

Context

The local educational context for this study has been Bristol LEA's place at the bottom of the league tables for GCSE performance nationally; and with the numbers of students leaving mainstream Bristol schools without GCSE qualifications at 10% – nearly twice the national average.

The social and economic context in Bristol is one where deprivation and personal adversities have continued to undermine the well being of a significant minority of children and young people. The city's most deprived wards are likely to have the lowest birth weight, the highest proportion of 0–15 year olds, and the highest numbers on the child protection registers. In Bristol 22 out of 35 wards have above average child poverty compared to the rest of England.

The national context shows that up to a third of children may at some stage develop mental health problems, run away from home, commit offence, truant and be absent from education, or not be in training or work between the ages of 16 and 18.

The current policy context in Bristol is one where new energies are being brought together for multi agency work in relation to 'Every Child Matters' known locally as 'Change for Children'.

This study presents findings and implications for policy and practice which are directly related to these contexts and in particular seeks to make a contribution to supporting children and young people in the city staying safe, being healthy, enjoying learning and achieving throughout their years of compulsory schooling.

Research objectives

The project had four main objectives:

- To identify the characteristics of the students who left Bristol's mainstream secondary schools aged 16 in 2004 without any formal qualifications.
- To look more closely at the influences that affected a sample of these students to gain insights into their experience of schooling in the city.
- To engage the Bristol community in a conversation about the design of its schools in order to develop models of provision that would be both socially and educationally inclusive.
- To look at how schools might be designed and organised to support less resilient students.

Research methodology

The research element of the project used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Bristol LEA data were analysed to determine the underlying characteristics of 296 students who left compulsory mainstream education in July of 2004 at the age of 16 without any GCSE qualifications. Within this the research project focused on a group of 116 students who although not gaining any GCSE qualifications at the end of their secondary schooling, did achieve average or above average results in English, Mathematics or Science at Key Stage 2 at the end of their

primary schooling. From this cohort of 116 students a sub-sample (five) of young people was identified. The five students selected were profiled against the characteristics of the group of 116, and were invited to co-construct knowledge about the circumstances and experiences of their schooling, through a process of narrative inquiry. The project also undertook a number of field studies, both at home and abroad to look at alternative models of provision.

Data protection and ethical standards

The project took into careful consideration the rights and interests of those affected by the research. Where it was reasonable to do so informed consent was obtained from those directly involved in the research, and where appropriate, steps were taken to maintain confidentiality and minimise intrusion into their lives. The research was conducted in line with Bristol University guidelines on research, with BERA (British Education Research Association), and with the relevant policies of Bristol Local Education Authority and Connexions West of England.

Organisation of the report

The report begins with a summary of the key findings of each of the four elements of the research programme, followed by more detailed discussion of these findings and their implications. The four elements in the report are:

1 Quantitative data on the 296 young people in the Year 11 cohort of July 2004 who left mainstream LEA secondary schools without any GCSEs.
2 Qualitative data derived from the narrative inquiry interviews with a sub sample from this cohort, and outline accounts of their school and family experience.
3 Learning from international policy and practice drawn from field visits to Denmark and Boston (USA).
4 Findings from a study of early relational experience, attachment, and risk and resilience factors.

The report concludes with two specific recommendations that would provide the structure and capacity within the city to develop and address the findings of the report.

Summary of findings from the four elements of the research project:

1 The quantitative data for the year cohort of 2004 showed that:

- A significant percentage of young people (10%) left LEA mainstream secondary schools in Bristol in July 2004 without any qualifications at GCSE, which was nearly twice the national average.
- 38% (116 pupils) of those who gained no GCSE qualifications at secondary school at all, did achieve at least one Level 4 or above in English, Mathematics or Science at Key Stage 2 at primary school.
- 30% of these young people were eligible for free school meals compared to a city average of 17%.

2 The qualitative data derived from the narrative inquiry interviews identified that:

- The young people had complex emotional and social challenges to manage and talked of a sense of isolation both at home and at school.
- The young people experienced many changes in family and school settings between the ages of 5 and 16.
- The young people had experienced significant early loss and separation, mostly with absent fathers.
- The reliability, care, safety, and consistency enjoyed at the primary school was not felt to be available to the young people at secondary school.
- These young people with social and emotional needs excluded themselves from secondary school before reaching the age of 14.

3 The study of international policy and practice highlighted that:

- School design and organisation which is informed by the importance and primacy of relationships enables young people to stay safe, be healthy, and enjoy and achieve in significantly greater measure.
- There is a need for professional support and supervision to be made available to teachers to enable them to reflect critically on the mental health and behaviours of young people with complex emotional and social needs.

4 The study of early relational experience, attachment theory, and child development identified that:

- There is a need for a consistent, reliable, manageable, and safe educational setting/holding environment to support less resilient young people to enjoy learning and achieve qualifications at secondary school.
- The impact that neglect, early loss, and less than secure early attachment has on the capacity of less resilient children to manage the demands of family and school life is very significant.

Quantitative data

Of the 296 young people who left Bristol's mainstream secondary schools at the age of 16 in July 2004 and who did not gain GCSE qualifications:

- 5 wards in the city were significantly over represented
- 60% were male and 40% female
- 83% were 'white British'
- 30% were eligible for free school meals
- 12% had been excluded from school

The full detail of the identified characteristics of this group, which is summarised above, is set out in a supplementary paper available with this report.

The highest concentrations of students leaving without any GCSE qualifications were to be found in 5 wards and 7 schools in the city. In some of these schools the number of students was significant, ranging from between 10 and 20% of the school's Year 11 group.

The gender balance in the research cohort was 60% male and 40% female compared to 52% male and 48% female in the Year 11 group across all the city's schools. Black and ethnic minority students were not over represented in the cohort and the number of students from Asian backgrounds who left school with no qualifications was negligible.

A significant characteristic of the research group was related to eligibility for Free School Meals, with the research group showing 30% were eligible compared to 17% in the Year 11 group across the whole city, indicating that social and economic factors are very significant for the families of children leaving without qualifications.

The number excluded from school was not a significant characteristic although the Narrative Inquiry interviews indicated that many of those who gain no GCSE qualifications are not necessarily formally excluded but self exclude and walk away from school often without even attempting Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4.

No attendance data on the young people in the research cohort was available from the LEA at the time of the research study.

Critical finding from the quantitative data

A critical finding from the data of these 296 young people who did not gain any qualifications at GCSE was that 38% of them (116 young people) did however achieve average or above average results in English, Mathematics or Science at Key Stage 2 at the end of their primary schooling.

It was from this group of the 116 young people who gained a Level Grade 4 or better at Key Stage 2 at primary school in English, Mathematics or Science that a sub sample of 5 students

was selected. This sample reflected the characteristics as closely as possible of the overall group of 116.

Details of these characteristics are also included in the supplementary paper available with this report.

This sample of 5 students was involved in Narrative Inquiry interviews to hear the stories of their experiences of being educated in Bristol.

The average or above average achievement of these students in English, Mathematics or Science at their primary schools might have been grounds to suppose they should have gone on to achieve up to 5 GCSE qualifications at C grade or above, with the possibility of accessing Advanced Level GCE or equivalent, with onward access to Higher Education.

The data were supplied by Bristol LEA, supplemented by Connexions West of England, and analysed by statisticians at Bristol University Graduate School of Education.

Qualitative data derived from Narrative Inquiry interviews: the process

The methodological approach adopted for this research project was Narrative Inquiry. It was used to collect qualitative data on the experience of schooling in the city by 5 young people who gained reasonable results at KS2 in primary school but failed to gain qualifications at GCSE at the age of 16.

The approach seeks to allow the story of the 'student' to be heard as fully as possible. The depth of the narrative rather than the extent of the sample is important. In this approach the interviewer limits interventions to points of clarification about dates, places, names, times etc. Encouragement, acknowledgement of difficulties, and empathic responses are offered by the interviewer. In this way knowledge is co-constructed.

There were two stages in the process.

- The first meeting was around an hour when the young person was asked to share the story of their experiences of schooling in the city. After a short break the interview was resumed for a further 30 minutes when there was an opportunity to raise issues and reflect upon areas that were significant in the interview.
- The second meeting was used to share the transcripts, and to redraft the account of the story that had been written by the researcher. Co-editing the story ensured validity that this is an account of the young person's story and that they feel secure with this account. Four out of five students were able to attend the second meetings.

Key principles of Narrative Inquiry

- The focus is on story rather than analysis and opinion.
- The researcher positions him/herself as a 'naive/curious enquirer'.
- The interviewee is the expert on his or her own experience.
- The contract between the researcher and subject is explicit about the subject's right to withdraw from the research at any point.
- The contract is explicit about the limits of confidentiality.

Narrative interviews were co-ordinated by Connexions West of England

- The interviews were held at the Connexions Offices, Bristol.
- Back up and referral support was offered by Connexions to all young people who participated in the research.
- The researcher identified the subjects anonymously from the data base. Connexions West of England identified the particular students and approached them by phone to ask if they would be willing to participate. Once this was ascertained then the researcher was given contact details. A letter inviting the subject to participate, along with an information sheet detailing the purposes of the research and the methodology involved, and a consent form was sent to the young persons. This was followed up by a phone call to arrange a time for the interviews.

Narrative Inquiry: Young People's Stories

In outline these are the school and family stories of the five young people who provided their narratives for the project.

The more detailed extended stories drawn from the transcripts and without commentary are included in a supplementary paper that is available with this report.

Devlin's story

Devlin achieved a Level 4 for both English and Mathematics, and Level 3 for his Science at Key Stage 2 at the end of his primary schooling. He did not take Key Stage 3 tests or GCSE examinations at secondary school.

The school story

Devlin had been to three primary schools before the end of Year 6. He had significant eyesight difficulties that affected his reading and writing and which were only recognised and addressed at the age of 9, and despite this achieved Level 4 grades in English and Mathematics, and Level 3 in Science at the end of his primary schooling. When Devlin transferred to secondary school he had a number of fixed term exclusions up to Year 9 and was excluded permanently from school after a fight with a teacher. Devlin's Learning Mentor who had provided support for him through Years 8 and 9 had to leave the school through ill health a few months prior to Devlin's permanent exclusion.

Devlin was offered a 10 week Business Course after his exclusion, but for the second half of the summer term in Year 10 and all through Year 11 he was not attending school, or in education. Devlin, with the support of Connexions, is now at College. Devlin had six different educational settings from ages 5 to 16.

The family story

Devlin has an elder sister who has learning difficulties who left school early at 14 for a college placement. Devlin's dad left home when Devlin was 12 months old. His dad, who lives in Leicester, is in irregular contact, mostly by phone. Devlin's mum had a child by a new partner when Devlin was 8 years old and the family moved to a new home on the other side of Bristol where they remained for 5 weeks before the new relationship broke up and the family moved back to Bedminster and lived with Devlin's auntie, and when she sold her home they moved into a council house close by. Devlin lived in four different homes between the ages of 8 and 12.

Commentary

Devlin endured persistent bullying and there was an almost daily struggle to '*manage all the stuff that happened in the day*' and to cope with the constant anxiety about getting out of control.
A few months after Devlin's Learning Mentor left and was not replaced he ended up in a fight with a teacher that led to his exclusion from school. This was not a consistent, reliable, and safe environment for a boy with his background to be able to enjoy learning and achieve in. Devlin in his narrative says over and over again that this is how it was at secondary school, '*what you should expect*' and that there is '*little that you can do about it*'. He became resigned about '*this stuff happening to him*' – the bullying being almost too painful to name directly. He had insufficient resilience to manage this hurtful environment. He felt very alone and isolated with all this difficulty once the Learning Mentor had left.

Kirsten's story

Kirsten achieved Level 4 grades in English, Mathematics and Science at primary school. She did not take any Key Stage 3 tests or sit any GCSE examinations at secondary school.

The school story

Kirsten attended only one primary school where she was exceptionally happy. She would write twenty page stories, enjoyed learning and can remember all her teachers. She wept when she left her primary school. She transferred to secondary school where she found she could be top of the class without having to work hard. In Year 8 she began to play truant. In Year 9 she only attended school for the equivalent of 4 weeks all through the year. She did not attend school at all in Years 10 and 11.

The family story

Kirsten was an only child. She never knew her dad. Her mum and step dad stole to fuel their drug habit, and Kirsten was cooking and looking after herself from the age of 8. At this age with her mum and step dad in bed recovering from scoring the drugs from the night before it would be usual for Kirsten to get herself up in the morning, dress for school, make her own breakfast and get herself to primary school where she was very happy. At the age of 13 she moved out of home and went to live with a friend who was in her 20's and who had a 2 year old girl and whose boyfriend was in prison in Exeter. At the age of 14 she moved again into the house of another friend who tried to persuade her to go back to school.
She then moved back into her mum's house with her boyfriend. Her step dad has been in prison for the last two years.

She would like to know her own dad but is unsure whether he would want to know her.

Commentary

Four out of five young people in this study did not know their fathers who had left within a year of their birth, sometimes months. Loss and separation is a recurring feature of these stories with little support or intervention available to help the young people address this hurt.

> *'And your dad in all this. Did he have a view?'*
> *'Step dad yes. Yes, but he's up the jail now, he's been up the jail now for two years. Don't know my real dad.'*
> *'Have you ever wanted to find out about him?'*
> *'Yes, but I do, but I don't then, 'cos I know that if he wants to know me, if he wanted to know me then he would have got in touch by now.'*

The change of tense here highlights Kirsten's sense of deep loss and rejection. Kirsten, like all the interviewees enjoyed her primary schooling.

> *'I enjoyed primary school, that was really good. I loved working and doing good at school and I had top marks and stuff. It was a good school. It was like we had one teacher and our class was really close and we were really close to our teacher so it really helped us and then that made me want to work for her . . . she treated us like adults even though we were kids. She wasn't a teacher she was more like an auntie or something . . . yes it was like we used to have competitions to see who could do most work and stuff.'*

This speaks highly of staying safe, being healthy, enjoying learning and achieving at primary school. Part of the difficulty expressed in the narratives was that there was an expectation from the young people that when they transferred to secondary school they would re-find that level of personal care and holding, only to find that given their lack of resilience, it was not there for them in sufficient measure:

Kirsten's response to the question '*Are you sad about the fact that you left school*' is an urgent and passionate repetition of a wish: '*Yes, I wish I never, I wish I never left school, I wish that I'd never left . . .*'.

Julia's story

Julia achieved Level 4 in Science and Level 3 in English and Mathematics at the end of her primary schooling. She did not take any tests at Key Stage 3 or sit any GCSE examinations at secondary school.

The school story

Julia attended one primary school and was happy and secure there. She liked her teachers and had good friends. The early years at secondary school she managed. She had 100% attendance in Year 7, but felt she was bored, and felt that there was little choice available. In Year 9 she began to misbehave and was often sent to the support room particularly by her English and PE teachers. She felt her teachers did not like her. She began to truant, attending school for three mornings a week and then not turning up in the afternoons. She did not sit her Key Stage 3 tests.

She did not like her tutor in Year 10. Later her tutor collapsed and died in the school car park. The event was not discussed and the tutor was replaced by a supply teacher. It was at this point Julia stopped attending school altogether. Julia went to College and took a vocational course in Business Administration and passed all her exams. She now works as a receptionist with a computer firm.

The family story

Julia's older sister went to a different school and she too stopped attending in Year 9. Her mum also had children with a new partner. At the age of 13 Julia more or less moved out of home and lived with a friend's family.

Commentary

Patterns of discontinuity and a lack of reliability were evident in all the stories. Julia had felt strongly that she was not liked by many teachers. She left both school and home before she was 14 year of age. She felt she lacked a secure, consistent and reliable setting at school and this may well have been the case at home as well.

Julia, despite her lack of attendance and often challenging behaviour, felt let down when the school did not provide reliable support.

'Unreliable. That's the only word I can put, I think.'

Harry's story

Harry achieved a Level 3 in English, a Level 4 in Mathematics, and a Level 5 in Science at Key Stage 2 at the end of his primary schooling. At secondary school he gained the following results at Key Stage 3, a Level 3 in English, a Level 6 in Mathematics and a Level 5 in Science. He did not take any GCSE examinations.

The school story

Harry attended two primary schools, changing schools half way through Year 5. He had not enjoyed his first primary school where he had felt picked on and really enjoyed the second primary school. Harry felt this school was the very best school he had been to.

Harry began to get into trouble by 'cheeking' the teachers when he transferred to secondary school – he felt he had a knack of being able to 'wind up' the teachers.

He was an able boy who was placed in the top sets. He was part of a group, mostly boys, who were seen as troublesome by the school. He often felt bored by the lessons.

He had a number of fixed term exclusions which he saw as extra holiday.

Harry was dyslexic. Harry failed to share letters about parents' evening with his mum and half way through Year 9 he started to truant from school. He had a Learning Mentor in Year 9. In Year 10 and the first half of Year 11 he truanted a great deal. The final half of Year 11 he did not attend at all. Harry changed his computer entries on the register so that his absence would not be noticed. Harry felt he was playing the system.

In the winter when he truanted he and his friends would drop into the College and play computer games, and in the summer they would go into the countryside to swim and have barbecues. Harry has had a succession of manual jobs sine he left school.

He feels he is a 'cog in a machine'. He would like to go to College.

The family story

Harry has an elder sister. His mother had two children with a new partner when Harry was at primary school and this was the reason for his change of school. His dad left home when Harry was three months old. His dad had been in and out of prison. Harry only met his dad again by chance at the age of 12. Harry's dad died of blocked arteries from cocaine use when Harry was 15.

Commentary

Harry was another young person where the impact of loss and separation that had never been attended to finally overwhelmed his capacity and resilience to manage the demands of secondary school.

'Did your dad live at home when you were small?'
'No when my mum and dad got divorced, I was about three months old. I didn't meet my dad until I was about 13 . . . Well I was at home . . . and my sister rang me and said "oh I've just met our dad" (at the local GP surgery) and I was like OK and put the phone down, I just carried on watching TV and so I watched – programme sort of not sinking in and then I hobbled off (Harry had a broken ankle from falling out of a tree) to the doctor's and met him. It was strange but it was like he was my dad but he wasn't sort of thing and then we were seeing him every sort of weekend and stuff like that and then it sort of faded out and I hadn't seen him since . . . and then I found out he had died when I was about 14.'
'Did he get ill?'
'Yes he had blocked arteries for his heart, prolonged use of sort of like cocaine and sort of smoking weed and that . . . but I don't think that it affected me, it made me not care about anything and I think that was the point at school where I just give up caring. And I give up really worrying about teachers bothering me and stuff.'

Jackie's story

Jackie achieved Level 4 grades in English, Mathematics and Science at the end of primary school. She did not take any further tests or attempt GCSE examinations at secondary school.

The school story

Jackie attended one primary school and did occasionally truant, saying that she felt unwell, sometimes for a day, sometimes for a week. She felt it was a friendly place but that she could have done better. She was nervous about going to secondary school. Very early on at secondary school she felt she began to 'hang around' with the wrong crowd. She started swearing at teachers, getting put out of lessons and then wandering around school making more of a nuisance of herself. She felt it was very hard on the teachers who were sometimes so distressed that they cried.

Jackie was beaten up by a group of around 15 girls when she was 12 years old and ended up in hospital. After this she did not go back to her secondary school. She was 15 years old when a place was found for her at another school in the city. She had not been to school for about two and a half years. She felt she could learn in the new school and that it was calm. By this time she had been drinking heavily with her friends, drinking a litre and a half of cheap cider most evenings. She managed the new school placement for about a term but then gave up because she was drinking and smoking too much to have the willpower to keep going.

The family story

Jackie is very close to her mum and dad although she argues a lot with them. When her mum tried to make her go to school she would throw tantrums and break up her bedroom. She felt she was at times out of control. Eventually her mum and dad gave up and did not try and make her go to school. She now lives with her boyfriend, and recently got a job as a sales assistant in a shop which she had to give up almost immediately because of poor health. She is expecting a child.

Commentary

The narratives frequently speak of the way that the young felt '*unhelped*' by their secondary school settings, their lack of safety, leading to a sense of frustration and isolation and ultimately rejection of school.

Jackie's voice is particularly strong in response to a request for help when she was being bullied:

> *'No, they did nothing. You go and tell a teacher, they say oh if you're getting picked on come and tell us and we'll sort it out. But they don't. They don't do nothing. That's why I left school because I know for a fact that if I went to any teachers, they don't do nothing.'*

Findings from the qualitative data provided by Narrative Inquiry

If the experience of school and family life of these five voices is echoed in any degree by the unheard voices of the other 291 young people who left the city's secondary schools in July 2004 with no GCSE qualifications then the urgency of the case for reconsidering the design and organisation of our secondary schools so that young people stay safe, have good mental health, achieve qualifications and enjoy their learning, becomes compelling.

As the research interviewer, and with 16 years' experience as a secondary school headteacher, I became concerned during the process of how little I had really known of the 'deep stories' of young people and their experience of schooling in the city. As the school and family summaries demonstrate, the stories carry very significant messages for policy makers, headteachers and practitioners about the design of the settings we provide for the less resilient young people who attend our mainstream secondary schools.

The following themes emerge from the narratives:

- a sense of isolation at home and at school
- lack of resilience to manage secondary school settings leading to early 'self exclusion' from school, often before the age of 14
- discontinuity, with multiple changes in family and school settings
- loss of significant others, e.g. absent fathers
- lack of safe, consistent and reliable support in school settings
- contrast of feelings about primary and secondary school experience

The learning from these stories is that the ability of secondary schools, as they are currently designed and organised, to address the needs of young people with complex social and emotional challenges, is limited, especially where the numbers of young people create a critical mass. Indeed, it would seem from the young people's stories that the design and organisation of secondary schools actually exacerbates the difficulties they face. 'Self exclusion' and non attendance at secondary school, often as early as age 14, might from another viewpoint, be seen as 'institutional exclusion' with the design and organisation of schools not making it possible to provide socially and educationally inclusive settings for young people with complex emotional and social challenges.

To support less resilient children the task for school design and organisation is to reduce the sense of isolation, minimise discontinuities, make available significant others whose unconditional positive regard is genuinely felt, and to provide a safe, secure, consistent and reliable environment. Many of the practical aspects of this might well be identifiable in primary school settings. The design and organisation of the Danish school system and Pilot Schools in Boston (USA) which follow, also offer some alternative perspectives.

Learning from international policy and practice

The working premise of the project, that students who disengage from education in Bristol, and are disaffected, are manifesting 'attachment anxieties' related to the quality of relationships and experiences from childhood, is reinforced by the exemplars chosen for this study which included the Danish schooling system, and the Coalition of Essential Schools (Pilot Schools) in Boston, USA.

In both the examples which were visited by the project, when school design and organisation were informed by the primacy of relationships, it seemed that young people were enabled to stay safe, be healthy, and enjoy their schooling in significantly greater measure, than the experience of less resilient children in Bristol. An additional finding was the importance of professional support and supervision being made available to teachers. Such professional support and supervision would enable teachers to reflect critically on the key task of relating to young people with complex social and emotional needs, to address the issues of 'affection' which impact on learner identities,and to work with the lack of resilience of these young people which makes their secondary school so challenging. In both Denmark and in Boston, USA, there had been significant thought given to the design and organisation of schools to address this. A detailed account of the field visits is set out in a supplementary paper that is available with this report. Details are given of the approaches touching upon school size, and organisation, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and teacher–pupil relationships which could helpfully inform the way in which we might consider school design and organisation here in Bristol and the way we develop and support teachers as professionals.

The Danish model

At the policy level a key characteristic of the Danish system is that the schools are relatively independent but highly integrated and accountable to the local community. There is a sense in which the Danish system expresses its collective responsibility for young people. They have set out to make the curriculum socially relevant, interdisciplinary and project oriented. They avoid both setting by ability, and early publication of assessment outcomes for individual children and schools. It is an education system which in its variety of local models and approaches not only offers choice but also ensures that all students can feel that the system is designed to meet their needs, is well resourced and has status. There is a real sense of wanting the provision to be socially and educationally inclusive. In Denmark for less resilient young people there is access to a range of educational alternatives that carry credibility and esteem. Danish teachers have a four year training in a Seminarium and are expected to teach three or four subjects. A main focus of the training is on child development and the skills and approaches that enable the teacher to build class atmosphere and a sense of community for the school in which they will work.

At the school level, the features of the Folkeskole are of interest. There are no transition difficulties between primary and secondary as the schools are aged 6 through to 16, with an optional 10th year which might be taken in a variety of settings, including the residential efterskole.

Assessment is continuous and formative and final certification at the end of the Folkeskole is seen as a statement of the school's relationship to the student. School reputation is not linked to examination performance but to school atmosphere, the quality of school life for the pupils, the quality of the relationships between teachers and students, and the quality of the learning.

The key person for all the students is the Klasslaerer (class teacher) who often stays with the child and his/her form group throughout his/her school career and is also one of the group's main class teachers. This class group is often more important than the school. This is a designed approach and combines the children, their group, their classroom, and their class teacher as elements of security and safety within the school system. The system is centred on relationships in smaller settings. Normally the class group will stay together with their class teacher who will provide greater contact to the group of children by teaching the group several subjects.

Long term class and teacher continuity are seen as a requirement for individual student well being and achievement. These seem very practical design measures to support children being safe, staying healthy, and enjoying and achieving within their school community.

The Boston model

Pilot Schools are part of a network of small schools that exist to promote new and innovative models of educational excellence in Boston's Public Schools. They have important conditions for learning – autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum, assessment, governance and scheduling – in order to better meet the needs of their students. All Pilot Schools are committed to being small and democratic, and unlike Charter Schools are part of the Boston Public School system, so that the whole district benefits from successful innovations. They have the same per pupil spending as other Public Schools in Boston. There are over 2600 students enrolled in Pilot Schools in Boston or 4% of the total enrolment in Public Schools in the city. They reflect the demographics of the city by race, income, and mainstream and special education status.

What is noticeable in these schools is that the classrooms live the mission of personal relationships within a human scale environment, with a strong emphasis on intellectual rigour and challenge, democratic intentions and community collaboration. The practicalities are that students engage with four teachers a week on integrated learning programmes with each learning session lasting 90 minutes; no teacher teaches more than 70 different students a week; and that the staff group of around 20 teachers meet on a regular (sometimes daily) basis to address the needs and behaviours of young people who may find it hard to engage with their learning.

Assessment is known as 'authentic' with students presenting portfolios and exhibitions of their work for assessment of their standard, on a regular basis, to staff, their parents/carers, members of their peer group and community 'experts'. The class atmospheres are calm, students want to participate and teachers engage young people in both the running of the lesson and co-constructing knowledge and understanding.

The design principles of these Pilot Schools are based on the work of Ted Sizer (former Dean of Education at Harvard) and Debbie Meier (founder of Central Park East Secondary School in New York) around a set of Essential Principles for school design and organisation, and 'Five Habits of Mind' that inform pedagogy and learning. Their work is based on an uncompromising belief that

you can't teach a student you do not know, and that if a child does not learn you must look to the school and not the child. A key principle of school design and organisation is to keep the schedule simple so that you can concentrate on the complexity of the children and the complexity of the ideas they are working with. Sizer and Meier felt that smaller schools offered safety and that the smaller structures enable them to respond to family crisis, drug use, pregnancies or the rumour of a fight. They felt that staff could do this not because they were more caring in Pilot Schools but because they have a structure and style that enables them to show care more effectively. Their work and that of Tony Wagner (Co-Director of Harvard Graduate School of Education Change Leadership Programme and Education Adviser to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) is commented on in detail in the supplementary papers accompanying this report. Wagner also suggests that success in urban settings relies a great deal on having political, business and community leaders – as well as parents – who are willing to engage in a sustained dialogue and share the work with the educators.

A recent evaluation of the Pilot Schools in Boston carried out by the Center for Collaborative Education noted that 'for urban, mostly low income students, and students of color, there is an urgency to develop models of schooling that provide greater access to high quality education'.

The evaluation questioned whether the Pilot Schools conditions of smallness and autonomy over resources improve student engagement and performance. The evaluation's findings showed that Pilot Schools ranked highest among Boston Public Schools for attendance reflecting high levels of engagement by students; Pilot Schools have the longest waitlist of any Boston Public Schools and that their desirability has increased over time signalling an attraction by Boston families for small personalised schools; Pilot Schools have the lowest suspension rates of all Boston Public Schools indicating that they are safe places to learn and achieve; Pilot Schools achieve comparably better than the city average in the Massachusetts State tests for Mathematics and English; Pilot Schools have both high rates of graduation and the highest rates of students going on to college within the Boston Public School system.

These two models from Denmark and Boston are driven by design and research rather than resource and response. They offer much to inform the possible design and organisation of schools in Bristol.

Attachment and resilience

In this final part of the findings of the project there is a focus on developing a conversation between education and child and adolescent mental health services, touching upon attachment and resilience.

The conversation is based on the following working proposition:

> *that early attachment and relational experience provides children with an 'internal working model' which is the way they will interpret relationships at home and at school over time. This early attachment will shape the anxiety or security which the child has and will affect the capacity to trust, be curious, to be open to learning, to contain anxiety and to regulate emotions. Cognitive capacity may also be significantly affected by damaging early experience and less than secure attachment.*

The proposition has implications for the design and organisation of school settings. It identifies the need for secure, reliable and consistent settings which can reduce the sense of threat that some less resilient children feel and the consequent behaviours which are acted out if anxiety is not contained. Our schools are sometimes organised in such a way that these less resilient children are forced into role avoidance and unhelpful learner identities, by the demands of a system that they are simply unable to adapt to, in which they feel insecure, vulnerable, unfamiliar and unsafe.

The project looked at key questions which reflect the proposition and the implications for school design that this raises:

- What would a school, learning community look like which provides a consistent reliable setting where the understanding that we learn through relationships is at the heart of its design?
- How might an understanding of attachment theory inform our secondary schools and what would our schools look like if we use attachment theory to influence the design and organisation?
- How can we recognise the impact that neglect and abuse have on children and offer support for teachers to address this? How can teachers be supported through training and development for this work?
- What can be done to shift the focus from children who are pathologised because of their inability to manage the demands of school, to a serious review about the design of school settings in which the emphasis would be on support to be successful?

These questions are explored in the supplementary papers accompanying this report. In particular there is a full discussion on the recognition of the impact that neglect, early loss, and less than secure attachment have on the capacity of less resilient children to manage the demands of family and school life. They also note that this is the work that teachers and schools find so difficult to manage and for which they have poorly designed and organised settings, inadequate training and insufficient support to attend to.

Recommendations

These recommendations are concerned with building structures and capacity within the city to address the issues raised in this report.

Recommendation (1)

Develop a research and design capacity which would be able to provide intelligence for the education service in the city, in relation to less resilient young people to enable them to be educated in settings which allow them to stay safe, be healthy, enjoy their learning and achieve qualifications.

Recommendation (2)

Seek funding for a feasibility study into the design of a 'small school' based on the Boston Public School Pilot experience, but also informed by local circumstances, that might model innovative practice to the main provision in the city, and provide an innovative learning centre for teachers in training.

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Collaborative Working Group

Membership and biographical details

James Wetz (Project Director: Bristol Education Initiative) has worked for over 30 years in education, 16 of these as a headteacher. He has recently retired from the post of Principal of Cotham School, a Specialist Performing Arts College and Post 16 Centre in North Bristol. He is a Visiting Fellow at Bristol University Graduate School of Education, and a Fellow of the RSA. He is Chair of the Board of Trustees of Multi A, a Bristol based charity committed to Arts and Creative Education in the most disadvantaged primary schools in the city; a trustee of the Wiltshire Music Centre Trust; a trustee of the Avon Sexual Abuse Centre; and a trustee of the Richard Feilden Foundation (Education, Architecture, Africa).

Paul Barrows is lead clinician for the UBHT Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Until recently he was the Editor of the Journal of Child Psychotherapy. He is Chair of the Association of Infant Mental Health (UK) and Editor of the World Association for Infant Mental Health Newsletter. He organises the Diploma/MA in Psychoanalytic Observational Studies in Bristol (linked to the Tavistock Clinic and University of East London).

Ian Bell trained in journalism after taking a degree in modern history at Oxford, spending 20 years in BBC network and local radio. He co-founded Tintinna Ltd in 1999, providing a range of communication services and creative consultancy to a variety of companies. He has also provided services to Business West and the Learning Skills Council.

Ruth Deakin Crick is a Research fellow at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol. Ruth originally trained as a teacher of music and physical education and went on to be a headteacher of an alternative independent school. Her doctoral thesis explored the links between self-management of schools and diversity of educational provision. She has an MA in applied theology and a Masters Degree in Education, in school management, administration and policy. Her work includes school based research developing a whole school approach to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and citizenship and values education. She is currently Director of the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) Research programme, exploring the notion of assessment of student learning power and the ecology of learner-centred cultures in schools.

Harriet Goodman is an organisation consultant, group facilitator and project manager, with particular interests in emotional literacy and children's rights. She has designed and implemented Antidote's three year 'Emotional Literacy Initiative' with schools in the London Borough of Newham. She holds an MSc in Management Development and Social Relationships from Bristol University and is currently undertaking a year in Group Analysis at the Institute of Group Analysis in London.

Vicky Heath leads a large multi-disciplinary team of Connexions Personal Advisers, with a particular brief for improving social inclusion, progression and achievement of young people at risk. She has a background in Careers Guidance, having specialised by working in Pupil Referral Units and prisons, as well as in colleges and mainstream schools. She is an external verifier for

the Institute of Careers Guidance and an occasional lecturer in Social Policy for the University of Bristol.

Elizabeth McNess has been closely involved with schools and schooling for 30 years. Originally working as a class teacher both at primary and secondary level, she has also been an involved parent, teacher educator and provider of continuing professional development for educational administrators, teachers, librarians and medics. For the last ten years she has been a member of the academic staff at the University of Bristol Graduate School of Education where she has worked on nationally funded research projects looking at various aspects of teachers' work and pupil perspectives of their schooling. She has a particular interest in the creation and impact of national education policy in an international context. She is providing research guidance to the Project Director for Bristol Education Initiative.

John Savage is Chairman of both Business West Chamber of Commerce and Initiative, and of the Local Learning Skills Council.

John Shears is the recently retired headteacher of Redruth School in Cornwall. He has 36 years of teaching experience of which 20 years have been in headship roles in large comprehensive schools. He was heavily involved in work with the Secondary Heads Association especially where it related to student issues. He is currently working with the National Institute for Mental Health England (NIMHE) South West to develop and strengthen multi-agency work particularly with reference to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and schools. He is NIMHE SW's representative on the Collaborative Working Group.

Mary Tasker has taught in secondary schools and in a University Department of Education. She is currently Chair of Human Scale Education.

Paul Taylor is Assistant Director of Education within Bristol LEA with responsibility for Inclusion and Pupil Services, and is the Local Education Authority's representative on the Collaborative Working Group. His extensive responsibilities include Special Educational Needs provision, Educational Psychology Service, and the Education for Children Looked After Service (ECLAS).

Jane Thomas has taught in both primary and secondary schools and has also been a Local Government Education Officer. On leaving Local Authority work she joined Human Scale Education as the Secondary Schools Project Officer.

Diana Wetz has worked in mainstream and Special Schools for many years as a social worker, counsellor and school governor. She has been involved in teacher support, consultation and training, and has worked with teams under pressure in complex institutional settings. She has developed and introduced counselling services into many Bristol schools. As a therapist currently working in North Bristol Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, she works with young people and their families. She has facilitated groups for parents, and children at risk of exclusion. She offers consultation and training to schools and other statutory and voluntary agencies involved with young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.