Building capacity
in the teeth of the performativity juggernaut

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Abstract
This paper is a case study of an English secondary school under pressure from external accountability because of a persistent pattern of low attainment. The story is one of a senior leadership team resisting the temptation to adopt short term tactical measures and choosing instead to build capacity by fostering teacher leadership. The study draws on interview and observation data collected in the context of a number of school improvement initiatives arising from a three way partnership between the school, the LEA and the University of Cambridge. The perspectives of the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, teacher leaders and other members of staff involved in the initiatives are examined to support the analysis of the process of capacity building. The particular role of teacher leadership and the forms of support that have enabled it to flourish are explored.

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In this paper I explore the case of a school which has struggled to resist the pressure arising from the performativity discourse and has been able to sustain a capacity building approach to school improvement.

The strategies developed in the UK and more recently in the USA under the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation address school under-performance and school failure. However, they carry with them a number of threats. One of the most obvious threats is the undermining of long term capacity building because of the perceived need to have an immediate impact on particular indicators of improvement in time for the next inspectorial visit. Linked to this is the tendency towards reliance on the heroic genre of leadership (MacBeath, 2003). Since the review of school effectiveness research commissioned by OFSTED in the UK in the mid-1990s (Sammons *et al.*, 1995) it has been assumed by many that rapid improvement depends on school leaders being charismatic, determined and authoritarian. It is argued that this school effectiveness mindset has led to an erosion of trust. Bottery (2004) for example draws on Ritzer's account of the "MacDonaldization of society" (1993) to argue that 'turbo-capitalism' has distorted the aims of schools and has undermined communitarian values and social capital. In particular, trust and agency are weakened. It is hard to imagine how sustainable school improvement could be secured in such environment.

In this paper I explore this dilemma by focussing on the case of Barnwell School in Stevenage, (in Hertfordshire, UK). The school is an 'associate school' within the 'Carpe Vitam: Leadership for Learning Project', an international research project funded by the Wallenberg Foundation (MacBeath *et al.*, 2003; 2005). It is also involved in a school partnership in which the University of Cambridge has worked with Hertfordshire local education authority to support school improvement (Frost *et al.*, 2003).

In brief outline the case study focuses on a particular strand of development, the use of a particular teacher-led development project as a vehicle for transforming the quality of teaching and learning. The project involved the use of 'learning preference profiling', a type of initiative popular in UK schools although controversial in the University Departments of Education (see for example Coffield *et al.*, 2004; White, 2004). However, the focus of this study is not the nature of the classroom practices involved; rather it is the potential of initiatives such as the learning preference profiling project to be effective as engines for school improvement by "awakening the sleeping giant" of teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001).

Barnwell: a 'school in challenging circumstances'

Barnwell School is a secondary school in the town of Stevenage, Hertfordshire. It is situated in the middle of a housing estate in an area of economic and social disadvantage.

The school had been under considerable pressure having been categorised by the DfES as a 'school facing challenging circumstances' (SFCC). This categorisation is not in fact based on an assessment of the challenges faced by schools, but simply on the level of measured attainment. Any school in which the proportion of pupils achieving a particular standard in the public examinations at age 16 (5 A-C grades at GCSE) falls below 25% is automatically classified as a SFCC school. Being classified as a SFCC brings with it the advantage of additional funding; a grant channelled through the local education authority is tied to a 'Raising Attainment Plan'. However, it also brings with it what many would see as an additional challenge. Schools 'in challenging circumstances' are subject to a rigorous programme of inspections which can lead to a further categorisation as a 'school with serious weakness' or even as a 'school requiring special measures'.

A focus on learning and teaching

It was no surprise to the Headteacher that the first inspection following the SFCC categorisation identified 'weaknesses in teaching and learning' as a matter to be addressed urgently at Barnwell School. According to school effectiveness research, the effective school is one in which a focus on teaching and learning is maintained (Sammons *et al*, 1995; Scheerens and Bosker, 1997; Hopkins, 2001). Critics of the paradigm have tended to be scornful of this as a 'finding'. John Elliott, for example made the following observation.

> Most of us would find it conceptually odd if definitions of 'good schools' made no reference to a focus on teaching and learning and anyone who has done an elementary course on the philosophy of education will have learned that the intention to bring about learning is a logically necessary condition of teaching. So we don't need SER (school effectiveness research) to inform us about 'truths' that are essential conceptual ones.
>
> (Elliott, 1996: 206)

Elliott is not alone in objecting to the reductionism of SER (see Wrigley, 2004 for example) but while I sympathise with his desire to resist such apparently simplistic truths, I think he misses the point here. There is no shortage of well meaning rhetoric about the aims of schools, but to actually achieve a focus on teaching and learning is not as easy as it sounds. The everyday practical discourse of schooling is so easily dominated by organisational, behavioural and motivational matters that pedagogy itself is squeezed to the margins. Even harder to achieve and arguably more desirable is a focus on *learning*. More recently cutting edge schools are found to be making an explicit commitment to a focus on 'learning' - separated out from that potentially amorphous concept - 'teaching-and-learning'. A recent empirical study in the USA for example emphasises *learning* in the following principle.

> School and district leaders can advance powerful and equitable student learning by establishing a focus on learning—by persistently and publicly focusing their own attention and that of others on learning and teaching.
>
> (Knapp *et al.*, 2003: 14)

Following the inspection the senior leadership team instigated a range of measures that could be described as 'tactical' (Gray *et al.*, 1999). One of the key players in this case study describes how this impacted on her own work as a middle manager.

> I was required to undertake more rigorous monitoring of pupil progress and performance to ensure those students who were predicted 'C' grades or above in the forthcoming GCSE examinations actually achieved these grades. I was also asked to provide additional support for 'C/D' borderline candidates within my subject area. This consisted of organising and delivering after school revision sessions and a two day revision course during the Easter vacation. After the 2003 examination results had been published, I was required to identify any 'D' grade students who had missed a 'C' grade by less than 10 marks to enable the school to request their scripts be remarked. As a direct result of this process, the overall school A-C grade pass rate improved by 1%.
>
> <div align="right">(Johnson, 2004: 6)</div>

The focus here is not on teaching and learning as such. Monitoring in order to target borderline C grade candidates and providing additional revision sessions is a superficial exercise, but, for a school whose overall score is 24% (pupils achieving between grade A-C), it is also necessary. The Headteacher needed to work with the grain of the inspection regime and, in any case, it did seem to have some advantages. In an interview he talks about the weight that the inspection regime was lending to his efforts to improve basic levels of competence in classrooms.

> I think what has happened .. has been beneficial …it's come along at the right sort of time… they (HMI) were saying the quality of teaching needs to be improved ….it's clearly identified what the agenda for the school has to be…. we have got to make sure when they come back that the quality of teaching is good … it's made it easier to sell it. Even people ...who don't necessarily subscribe to it …could see what we're trying to do as a school. So I think that's been very helpful.
>
> <div align="right">(Headteacher interview)</div>

However the Head was also aware of the danger of using the pressure from the inspections in a way which would discourage teachers who were already competent. A rigid implementation of prescribed classroom practice would be counterproductive.

> …..we needed a framework which would not be too imposing and restricting on the talented teachers we had. …. a framework so that at least a benchmark level of competence was reached by all teachers, and the children had a consistent diet across the school….things like having the 4 part lesson and the learning intentions.
>
> <div align="right">(Headteacher interview)</div>

He was mindful of the need to retain good teachers. Some schools in the locality had been badly affected by the vicious circle whereby the school's declining reputation has led to recruitment problems which in turn has led to the employment of less competent and

transient staff. Declining effectiveness then leads to draconian models of leadership and overly prescriptive systemised approaches to classroom practice. Eventually, the good teachers seek an environment in which they can express their professional creativity. So the Head knew that the school needed to move beyond the 'benchmark level of competence' and to develop their teaching repertoires. In order to do that they would need both "scope and support".

Building a culture of reflection and enquiry

Prior to the HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) visit, the senior leadership team had already begun to build a professional culture in which reflection, inquiry and most importantly risk taking were prominent features. The 'Teaching and Learning Forum' for example was one strategy that provided a space for teachers to hear presentations from their colleagues about innovative practice. This was a voluntary, collective activity taking place at the end of the teaching day. All members of staff were invited and nobody was coerced or pressured into attending. The sessions were organised and chaired by Paul Barnett, a Deputy Head.

Another capacity building initiative already established encouraged teachers to engage in action research and drew them into a knowledge building process. This was the 'Research and Development Group' which met on a half-termly basis to support their school based research dedicated to raising achievement by providing guidance and strategies for the whole school. In an interview Paul explained:

> ….we'd created a tradition of staff looking at small scale enquiry… but impacting on whole school policy. So we'd looked at the attitudes to learning of students, and we'd looked at the role of assessment for learning and comment only marking. We'd looked at our rewards and sanctions policy over the period of 3 years. And we take a project for a year, and we involve all members of the school community, in the sense of teaching staff, non-teaching staff, the parents, the students, the governors, are all involved somewhere in an enquiry, and their views are sought as to how they feel about a particular element. And then all of that's drawn together and we share it with governors and staff, and out of that will become an amended policy, or a new direction.. …..the research and development group can typically be 20 members of staff… a range of responsibilities, a range of experience….
>
> (Interview with Deputy Headteacher)

Paul Barnett had responsibility for developing the teaching and learning at that time and whilst he was pleased with the way these initiatives were contributing to a more reflective culture he was constantly looking beyond the school for ideas and structures of support. The school had brought in all the usual itinerant gurus but this was not sufficient as Paul explains in his own account.

> I had experienced a sense of frustration at the lack of impact I felt I was able to make in developing sustained improvements in student learning. I had been responsible for many successful 'training day' presentations and activities … these

had reinforced in me the view that INSET is an event whereas school improvement is a more organic process to be engaged with over time, (Stoll and Myers, 1998). The HMI inspection also awakened in me an awareness of a synergy in my role between leadership, school improvement, professional development and learning. The central thread for me became the link between leadership and learning.

<div align="right">(Barnett, 2004: 2)</div>

Paul operated on the belief that "ideas are out there" (Fullan, 1993: 85) but this needed to be more than the acquisition of bought-in experts. The Headteacher, Richard was also aware of the need to reach out and make use of a range of external structures of support. He had been one of the few Headteachers to attend a presentation at the LEA professional development centre to examine the potential of the 'Herts. M.Ed in Teaching and Learning' to contribute to development activities in schools. This programme had been created through a partnership between the LEA and the University of Cambridge specifically to support school improvement (Frost *et al.,* 2003). Paul Barnett, the Deputy Headteacher had also enrolled as a student on the programme and had committed himself to an investigation focussed on 'leadership for learning' (MacBeath *et al.*, 2003). The Head of the PE department, Jackie Johnson also enrolled. This was just the beginning of a trend that saw the signing up of a further 6 teachers on the masters programme and even more than that on the linked Teaching and Learning Certificate programme. The number of teachers engaged in professionally focussed inquiry was rapidly approaching a critical mass.

A teacher-led initiative

The school had also responded enthusiastically when invited by the local education authority to participate in a school improvement partnership in which 14 schools in challenging circumstances engaged in development activities supported by the LEA and the University. At one of the workshops for the school coordinators, Paul heard about the learning preferences profiling project through a presentation from a coordinator from another school – Julie Roberts (Roberts, 2001 & 2002). Julie was responsible for Religious Studies in her school and she had experimented with the use of learning preference profiling as part of her own M.Ed project in the previous year.

Julie's project confronted the fallacy of 'ineducability' in schools where a recurring pattern of low attainment has become established. She had used a profiling instrument based on multiple intelligences categories (Gardner, 1983), having made a rigorous comparison between this approach and the most popular alternative, the so called VAK approach promoted by consultants such as Mike Hughes (Hughes, 1999). She argued that the profiling instrument can only record the learner's responses at a particular moment; reliable conclusions cannot be drawn about differences that might be stable and consistent over time. However, the profile of learning preferences can be used as a basis for reflection and discussion. Julie concluded that learning preference profiling activity can:

- enable pupils to reflect on their learning habits and the effectiveness of their preferred learning strategies;

- enable pupils to become more aware of the variety of learning preferences within the class;

- provide an opportunity for pupils to participate in the evaluation of teaching.

(Frost and Roberts, 2005)

This dialogue – both teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil – appeared to have a number of beneficial effects. Pupils developed their capacity to evaluate themselves as learners, became more committed to the learning process and developed empathy for each other which led to a dramatic effect on the classroom climate; behaviour was more positive and there was a discernible increase in the level of cohesion in the class (Roberts, 2001).

The process also enables teachers to develop their teaching repertoires. Julie's research suggested a hypothesis that learning preferences profiling can provide a vehicle for teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and to understand why particular methods work and why they work well for some pupils but not for others. It can help teachers to develop their current teaching repertoires to include a broader range of methods, materials, and techniques for reaching an ever wider and more diverse range of learners. It follows that, if all teachers within a school are drawing from a wide range of activities in their teaching, then all pupils will be engaged because they will be learning in their preferred way at some point throughout the school day. This leads to a real sense of justice in schools like Julie's. It was this hypothesis that Julie offered to the other schools in the school improvement partnership.

A strategic approach to the project at Barnwell School

The senior leadership team was easily persuaded by Paul Barnett that the learning preferences profiling idea had the potential for impact on the quality of teaching and learning. It provided the Headteacher, Richard, with the means to take the school beyond that 'benchmark level of competence' referred to earlier.

> ….the project comes in as a very useful way for teachers to review their practice, to try and match the aims of the school. ..I've tried to use it as a vehicle for achieving all lessons in the school being good or better, and a consistency of approach across the school.
>
> (Headteacher interview)

Following the first of the visits from the inspectors, the Headteacher had been able to establish a basic template for lessons to try to secure consistency across the school but he knew that the broadening of teaching repertoires could not be achieved by brute force.

….you need to find ways to break those people out of that sort of comfort zone… because those criteria (for judging a good lesson) I've just mentioned …the kids are quite, they're compliant and they behave themselves ….is not good teaching and it's not good learning ..they would not be sufficient for it to be judged a good lesson or better. So …I think you do need more subtle ways

<div align="right">(Headteacher interview)</div>

The question of subtly is crucial. At Barnwell, the senior leadership team understood the need to achieve a delicate balance between top-down and bottom up leadership. This corresponds to the concept of parallel leadership.

> Parallel leadership encourages a relatedness between teacher between teacher leaders and administrator leaders that activates and sustains the knowledge generating capacity of schools… a process where by teacher leaders and the principals engage in collective action to build school capacity.

<div align="right">(Crowther et al., 2002: 38)</div>

The structure of parallel leadership

Jackie Johnson, the Head of PE was also a student on the M.Ed programme. Her capacity for teacher leadership had already been noticed by the senior leadership team. In the first year of the course, participants are asked to identify and explore a theme which they then pursue through an empirical, school-based project in the second year. When Jackie consulted the senior leadership team about the most appropriate focus for her own research and development project, it was agreed that she should take over the coordination of the learning preferences project within her school while Paul Barnett, the Deputy Head would adopt a support role. As a member of the M.Ed teaching team I would supervise Jackie's research.

The senior leadership team also provided strong support for the project by identifying Jackie and two other teachers as 'aspiring Advanced Skills Teachers' who were allocated some time and asked to form a strategic team to support the work of the project. In the UK, the Advanced Skills Teacher status is a government initiative "devised to reward excellent teachers who wished to remain in the classroom" (Standards Site, 2004). ASTs are expected to devote a proportion of their time to supporting other teachers through the sharing of "best practice ideas and approaches". What was novel in the Barnwell situation is that the school designated these 3 teachers as *aspiring* ASTs gambling on the prediction that they would eventually be successfully assessed by the external agency appointed by the government for that purpose. The key to the project's success is the way it has been managed as a research and development process within the school. The process is carefully steered by the 'strategic team' which meets once a week, chaired by the Deputy Head, to discuss progress and to plan the next intervention.

Drawing teachers into the dialogue

The teaching staff were *invited* to participate in the project at Barnwell School. This is another interesting gamble given that the school was subject to such external accountability, but it paid off. Jackie Johnson, the project coordinator, made an announcement in the staff briefing in which she described the project she was involved in and that there would be meeting after school for those wishing to participate. Jackie expected a handful of her colleagues to come along, but in fact almost the entire staff came to hear about the project and the subsequent level of commitment to the idea within the schools was massive. This is how Jackie herself explained it in her M.Ed thesis.

> I anticipated a handful of my colleagues would attend this meeting due to the unprecedented demands now exerted upon them by external agencies such as HMI and the LEA. However, 43 members of staff attended the meeting, representing 14 different departments within the school and the subsequent level of commitment to the idea was considerable. This enthusiastic response could be a reflection of the capacity building which had already taken place and the united belief that, through the development of our own professional repertoires, we could make a significant contribution to the continued development of teaching and learning within Barnwell. It may also have been a response to the fact that this initiative was not HMI driven but instead was promoted as a local, Hertfordshire based research project supported by Cambridge University. This may have led to staff developing a sense of ownership of the project.
>
> (Johnson, 2004: 30)

In gaining the interest and commitment of her colleagues to this experiment, Jackie had successfully exercised leadership. She did not do this from a position of power but rather on the basis of her professional authority as a good classroom teacher and the moral authority of the case (Frost and Harris, 2003). As discussed in the early part of this paper, there is a growing discourse on teacher leadership in the UK, but the growth of so-called 'distributed leadership' (Bennett *et al.*, 2003) is often held back by the assumption that leadership relies on bureaucratic authority derived from a formal position and that authority is a commodity that can be simply conferred from someone further up the chain of command. Teacher leadership can draw on different kinds of authority to effect change. The traditional hierarchical model of organisation assumes a fixed connection between the position in the hierarchy and the authority possessed, but as Sergiovanni (1992) reminds us, this 'bureaucratic authority' is only one type. 'Technical-rational authority' is increasingly important as the evidence-based practice discourse gathers momentum. 'Professional authority' based on 'informed craft knowledge and personal expertise' is powerful in that teachers seem prepared to trust the practitioner with a reputation for excellence in the classroom. At Barnwell, Jackie Johnson and her strategic team seemed to possess a great deal of both 'technical-rational' and 'professional' authority.

The teachers who had volunteered to take part in the project were asked to identify a class of pupils and to begin to engage them in a dialogue about how they prefer to learn. The multiple intelligences based instrument used in the previous year was further refined and

introduced to the pupils. Jackie and the team provided the teachers with guidance on how to introduce it and how to guide the pupils in completing it. The data was then collected and analysed by the strategic team who were then able to provide the teachers with a profile of each of their pupil's learning preferences. Form tutors were provided with a list of their form group's most preferred and least preferred ways of learning. In their planners, the students had a pre-printed page which read, 'My most preferred way of learning is…. and my least preferred way of learning is….'. Form tutors were asked to help their pupils complete this page and discuss with them the brief descriptions of each of the 7 MI categories. The reflection and dialogue about 'how we prefer to learn' was supported through school wide publicity. Very large posters explaining the learning preference categories were hung in the corridors and in the main conference hall and members of the strategic team led 'assemblies' about learning preferences.

> Assemblies were utilised as a vehicle for the dissemination of this information as it was adjudged that this, more formal, forum would be a powerful means of reinforcing awareness of the learning preferences idea and, most importantly, would serve to instigate a discourse with students regarding the teaching and learning process. ….it would demonstrate to the students that…. this was actually a whole school project involving a large number of staff and all their peers in Key Stage 3.
>
> (Johnson, 2004: 35)

The engagement of a group more than 40 teachers in a collaborative action research project such as this is a very ambitious endeavour requiring good management and direct one-to-one support. The strategic team provided coaching for their colleagues and had shared out the various subject departments between them for this purpose. This support was in part about inspiration and confidence building and in part straightforward practical help. One of the other members of the strategic team spoke about her role in an interview. Here she focusses on the leadership aspect.

> Well, it's trying to get people involved, obviously, because they are obviously so busy with what they have to do on a day to day, sort of paperwork and drudgery, I suppose. But trying to give people ideas, inspire them, and try to sort of give them some confidence …..to have a go, and make them realise it doesn't have to be something that does take an awful long time to do…..really it's just like little things that you can do to start with the project and to make a difference. So trying to let them see that, and give them examples of what they can do.
>
> (Member of strategy team interview)

One of the challenges for these teacher leaders has been working outside of their own subject specialism.

> I've been quite lucky there with my own department… we're all really very open to trialling different ideas anyway…..and I'm also involved with the maths department ….I've been up to observe Sharon, and she'd done some really brilliant stuff….I

think it actually gave her confidence, because I don't think she realised that she was doing exactly what we wanted her to do. So when I saw it and I could write a few lesson observation notes for her, I think it actually gave her confidence, made her realise that she was definitely going along the right road. ……But of course it's quite difficult with a subject like maths, where you really do need the specialist knowledge to be able to help them. So I found that a bit tricky, though after I went to Sharon's lesson, she was doing ratios and so on, I could actually go, I did some research from the internet, and I came up with different sites, where they've got different activities using the learning preferences.

<div align="right">(Member of strategy team interview)</div>

The link to departments also provided an opportunity to get direct feedback on classroom practice which was taken account of in the strategic team meetings alongside the data fed back by the project researcher. One of the most challenging aspects of the project was the need to evaluate the strategies being explored in the classroom and gather illustrative evidence to feed back into the discussion. The project was influenced by the thinking represented by the diagram below.

<div align="center">
Figure 1
Leading learning-centred development work
</div>

(Frost and Durrant, 2002)
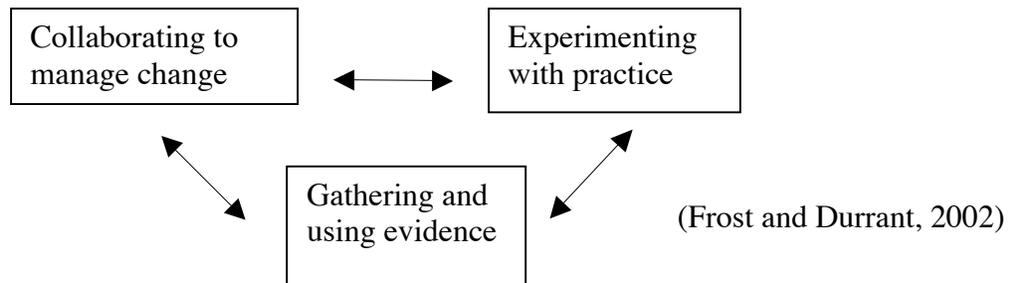
The term 'action research' could well be used to describe the mode of development employed in this project at Barnwell School. It satisfies the usual criteria for that research paradigm in that it entails supporting change and improvement (Elliott, 1991) and the pursuit of justice through collaborative action and inquiry (McTaggart, 1994). However, the action research tradition tends to carry with it limitations such as the tendency to be individualistic. In the model represented above there is a better balance between collaboration in a professional setting, evidence gathering and classroom based experimentation. At Barnwell, the challenge was to make practice visible on a large scale. We had a project researcher for a few days but the scale of her classroom observations was inadequate. Ideally we wanted all the participating teachers to keep field notes of some kind but busy teachers were not able to do this. A breakthrough came with the proposal to use self-adhesive 'post-it' notes on which teachers could record small snippets of data. When these post-its had been distributed to teachers within the 10 schools in the original project, the coordinators reported that the teachers had not used them even though they had been given the guidance on what to record and so forth. In contrast, the idea was successful at Barnwell because it was managed. The strategic team constructed a mock-up of a brick

wall on a notice board at the entrance to the staff room. They distributed different coloured post-its to each subject department together with a simplified version of the framework of evidence guidance that had been used in the earlier project. Whenever a teacher used a post-it to record an observation, it would be posted on to the wall. Soon, posting observations took on a degree of competitiveness and it was clear which departments were contributing the most to the wall because of the colour of the post-its. As the wall grew, members of staff found that it was worthwhile to stop and read the post-its as they passed on their way into the staff room. These classroom observations therefore became the catalyst for cross-cutting conversations about teaching and learning. The observations were typed up and subject to analysis by the strategic team. They also provided the researcher with starting points for observations and interviews.

Throughout the academic year, the strategic team were constantly alert for signs that the project was losing momentum or that aspects of the project needed some additional support. A range of strategies were used to revivify the focus and keep the attention focussed on learning.

After a year the impact of the project together with the other initiatives was becoming evident. It is significant that in the final HMI inspection report it was noted that:

> …this initiative (the learning preferences project) which involves a high proportion of staff volunteers, is strategically and systematically managed and has an evident impact on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms.

> (HMI Report, March 2003)

This report signalled that the inspectors were satisfied that the trajectory of the school was one of improvement rather than decline. The threat of the designation of the categories of 'serious weaknesses' or 'special measures' was averted. During the summer vacation, the results of the public examinations were published and showed a massive gain. This is not how the project was judged however. Jackie Johnson's evaluation was much more concerned with the capacity that had been built through this project. In her own M.Ed dissertation she was able to draw upon a wide range of qualitative evidence to highlight changes in students, attitudes to learning.

> We now have a culture where it is not unusual for students to discuss their learning with both their teachers and their peers. One teacher reported that she often hears students talking about what they have done in lessons, how they prefer to learn, what they have found interesting and she finds this exciting as she has never worked with students who are so enthusiastic about their learning.

> (Johnson, 2004: 46)

Similarly she had strong claims to make about the growth in personal capacity of teachers in the school. Their renewed enthusiasm for teaching was evident and one teacher even talked of 'being born again' as a teacher. More significantly in terms of the development of

organisational capacity (Hargreaves, 2003; Mitchell and Sackney, 2000) perhaps is the development of professional practices such as mutual observation which had developed because of the project rather than having been imposed as part of the performance management.

> There have been numerous examples of good practice where colleagues have worked together in the classroom to provide support for each other when trialling new strategies whilst other colleagues have established peer observation teams. This involves one member of staff teaching the lesson and the other providing them with feedback at the end of the lesson. This is a major breakthrough as previously, many staff would have perceived lesson observations as a threatening concept. Instead it is now viewed as a process which serves to reassure and build confidence in staff. We have also had instances of staff from cross-curricular teams working together to develop teaching strategies and plan lessons.
>
> (Johnson, 2004: 51)

The Headteacher's judgement again is in line with his statements about the reasons he supported the project in the first place. Although he knew that attainment had to be raised in order to ensure the school's survival he was nevertheless unflinching in his commitment to long term capacity building. It is not surprising therefore that his evaluation of the project focuses on the intellectual and social capital within the school as a community (D. Hargreaves, 2003).

> the benefit of the project has been that it has developed a camaraderie and a common language amongst the staff as well…..it's given people opportunities to talk …with people with whom the don't necessarily always talk with, communicate with or meet in the staff room.. this gives people a common identity and a common reason for conversation.
>
> (Headteacher interview)

The most important lesson from this study for me can be expressed succinctly; when the going gets tough - the tough exercise leadership and they do so in such a way that teachers are enabled to do the same. At Barnwell School, the exercise of teacher leadership has been effective in transforming not only the quality of teaching and learning but also the capacity of the school to continue to develop.

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