
Introduction to the Project: the approach to learning

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Teaching and Learning Research Programme

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Outline of the Presentation

- The project in TLRP
 - The policy background
 - Learning challenges identified in LIW
 - Professional learning
 - Organisational learning
 - Some of the research questions
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Learning in and for Interagency Working (LIW)

- TLRP Phase III
 - Professional learning
 - Drawing on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) understandings of learning to look at how practitioners learn a new way of working
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The Dynamic Nature of Social Exclusion

- 1990s OECD discussions – view of child as ‘at risk’ of being unable to contribute to society
 - Social exclusion is disconnection from experiencing and contributing to what society offers
 - Social exclusion is a dynamic: vulnerability results from interacting aspects of a child’s life
 - Preventing social exclusion is to disrupt a child’s trajectory of vulnerability – e.g. putting in protective factors
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Early Intervention Revisited

- PAT 12 Report on Young People (Home Office, 2000)
 - *Every Child Matters* (2003); Children Act (2004)
 - Extended schools programme
 - Treasury-DfES Policy Review (Jan, 2007)
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Learning Challenges for Practitioners

- Include:
 - Recognising how other practitioners interpret children's trajectories and seeing increased complexity
 - Recognising how other professionals respond to their interpretations
 - Knowing how to work with other professionals while respecting their expertise
 - Knowing how to work outside 'the safety of their institutional shelters'
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Learning Challenges for Organisations

- Include:
 - Enabling people to collaborate across institutional boundaries
 - Enabling them to work responsively with other practitioners and with children and families
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Approaches to Learning

- Learning as acquisition and application
 - Learning as participation in social practices
 - **Learning as transformation – of self and of world** (the approach taken in LIW)
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Learning as Transformation

- Learning involves internalising the ideas that are culturally valued **and** externalising them
 - We are shaped by our cultures but also shape them by our actions on them
 - As we are shaped by and shape our worlds **both we and they are changed**
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Learning as Interpretation and Response

- Acting on our worlds involves interpreting e.g. a child's trajectory and responding to that interpretation
 - In interagency work to prevent social exclusion it **also** involves recognising that other professionals will interpret that trajectory differently and will respond to it differently
 - Practitioners learn from others interpretations: giving expanded interpretations of the trajectory
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Learning and Motivation

- How e.g. a child's trajectory is interpreted reveals a lot about what is valued in a professional culture
 - An interpretation elicits professional responses which reveal what is permitted in an organisation
 - Professional action needs to be examined within an analysis of the organisation in which it occurs
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Interagency work as Resourceful Practice

- Not easy to follow organisational custom and practice when working responsively with other professionals
 - Need to be able to recognise what others offer and how to access it in order to accomplish their work
 - Need to be able to make one's own expertise explicit so others can recognise it and draw on it in their work
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Some More Challenges in Working with other Practitioners

- We were looking at people who work across organisational boundaries doing new forms of work which were not sustained by existing practices
 - They needed to see themselves as parts of local systems of distributed expertise
 - Children's trajectories change and practitioners had to follow them, work responsively with the child and each other
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Learning in New Forms of Work

- Professional learning is evidenced in how we use professionally valued ideas in our professional actions
 - But interagency work is **a new form of work**. What ideas are being developed in this new form of practice?
 - In LIW we elicited ‘everyday’ understandings of practices and helped practitioners to move towards what Vygotsky called ‘scientific concepts’
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What is being Learnt?

- New practices were emerging which reflect this newer form of distributed expertise and responsive action
 - They were presented to us as everyday understandings e.g. *I can feel quite isolated at times*
 - We worked with them to develop concepts that could be used to take forward practice e.g. *knowing how to know who*
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Professional Learning in and across Organisations as *Activity Systems*

- We looked at organisations such as multi-professional teams or local networks of practitioners as systems which were working on common tasks e.g. disrupting a child's trajectory of exclusion
 - We focused on what practitioners did as they worked on these tasks; what ideas were revealed in their actions; and what contradictions were revealed in their organisations as they did this work
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Organisational Learning: the final three case studies

- A new multi-professional team that was learning to work together
 - A loosely coupled team working with looked after children
 - A boundary between an extended school and the reconfiguring children services in a local authority
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Organisational learning: expanding professional understandings in teams

- Multi-professional teams may lead to greater professional understanding of the complexities of children's trajectories
 - Those new understandings are likely to raise questions about e.g. current custom and practice i.e. the implicit rules in the team
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Organisational learning: expanding professional understandings in more distributed systems

- Organisations are traditionally inward looking, sustaining their practices and safeguarding their practitioners
 - Organisational boundaries are risky places for practitioners who are learning from other professions – e.g. can they act on their own organisations and shape them?
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Two of the Research Questions

- What are professionals learning when they do interagency work?
 - What forms of interpersonal and organisational practice are associated with this learning?
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Five Stages of LIW Project

