

A City for learning

Notes from workshop discussions

This paper sets out the main points from four breakout discussions at the 20 June 2012 Sadler's Wells event, A City for Learning. Participants were representative of a range of London based institutions (in arts, culture, film, heritage, higher education, sports, museums, libraries, science) as well as a small number of school leaders and young people.

Response to the concept of the London Curriculum

Universally participants welcomed the idea of:

- Better engaging young people with their city
- Better connecting cultural assets with schools and young people
- More effectively utilising London's cultural assets for educational purposes

It was felt that this would not only help with educational attainment it could also be a vehicle for developing young people's sense of belonging to their city, of pride – of diversity, heritage and tolerance – a London ethos. It could also 'ripple' out to families – influencing them to engage with the city and what it offers.

They agreed that the London Curriculum could be a vehicle to do the above and could be very powerful.

Approaches to the London Curriculum

Process or list?

A key debate for the discussion was two contrasting interpretations of the concept – at one extreme the London Curriculum could be a 'tick-list' of core *London* things every young person should do as part of their education (...see the Elgin Marbles, take a trip to Parliament) at the other it could be a set of processes and ideas about how to better engage pupils in their city.

The majority of participants favoured a more engaged and developmental model than the 'tick-list' approach but were keen that it was grounded in practicalities and not simply an aspirational 'entitlement' that would be too vague to really implement or track.

Curriculum enhancement or new curriculum?

There was a debate about whether the London Curriculum could be a way of 'London-ising' the existing curriculum – for instance by teaching geography through partnership with the RGS – or whether the London curriculum was a series of discreet and additional learning modules. There was a discussion about whether it needed to be one or the other and a lot of support – and examples of good practice – in the context of working with cultural partners and using non-traditional approaches to teaching the curriculum.

To be credible with schools it was essential that the London Curriculum, have a clear relationship to learning outcomes and educational progression.

The question was posed '*We can't address the challenges/flaws of the wider curriculum through the London curriculum - or can we?*

The importance of place

Delegates were very clear that building a better connection, sense of ownership and engagement with London – and its many wards, villages, localities – was a great aspiration for the initiative as well as a good starting point in terms of building content.

Unlocking place might mean an ongoing enquiry by schools/CYP/organisations into their local area, it could include communities, families, history, employers, cultural offer etc.

Co-design or consistent model?

A number of delegates favoured an approach to the London Curriculum that was very much about a school co-designing a programme of work with a partner organisation, perhaps focussing on exploration of the local area or development of a particular part of the academic curriculum. This kind of approach would mean individual schools developing distinctive programmes. The benefits would be that they would respond to the particular needs and interest of those schools and pupils but it would be difficult to track this across the city or have a sense of all London pupils moving through consistent stages of knowledge and development.

Content scoping

There was some debate about the nature of an area based curriculum. The RSA – who have been working on area based curriculums in other areas – made the point that they can have three distinctive functions

- A curriculum ABOUT a place (i.e focussing on the history, assets and content of the place)
- A curriculum BY a place – that is co-designed by schools and teachers and the community around their assets
- A curriculum FOR a place – that is a curriculum that directly responds to the distinctive needs of the place (for instance London needs young people with particular skills to fit its workforce, it has issues with safety and risk taking for young people)

It was agreed that these things are not necessarily mutually exclusive and could be a useful structure for defining content.

A number of London specific themes were suggested-

- Online resources and support (materials etc) – exploring ways of helping young people feel safer travelling around as well as opportunities to engage families and parents
- Cultural diversity. Families, dancing, food, language....
- What is the *language* of London?
- London is a Global City. There is an aspirational quality. How do we articulate the value of London?

From trips to sustained partnership

There was strong agreement that taking young people out of the classroom and engaging them in the world around them – in almost any context – was a good thing. However it was also recognised that a ‘trip’ to a museum or library for instance was not necessarily in itself a meaningful learning experience and certainly not a partnership. We should be aspiring to a range of engagements – from really good trips to sustained partnerships.

How to implement the London Curriculum

Focus on teachers and fix the practical barriers

Schools are often hindered from engaging with wider partnerships by relatively straight forward practical barriers – transport, cover, targeted marketing, accessibility. A concerted effort to minimise these practical barriers could have a significant impact on schools capacity to offer more to their pupils.

There is a need to make it easier for teachers to access learning outside the classroom. Providing advice, support and incentives to teachers to help them engage with organisations more imaginatively is essential. There is a need to teach/support the teachers with respect to their knowledge of London – probably this needs to happen before we focus on young people.

Leadership in schools will be essential. Buy-in cannot just be at teacher level. Heads have to be involved. Therefore advocacy aimed at school leaders would be useful to ensure the programme did not become ghettoised within certain subject areas.

Carrots and sticks

There was considerable debate about how best to engage schools in the London Curriculum. A spectrum of measures was discussed from Mayoral-led advocacy and campaigning to persuade schools to take part in a programme to making it part of an Ofsted framework . In this context the question was asked – who owns the London Curriculum? This will be crucial to ongoing leadership and engagement of school leaders as well as providing focus, leadership and monitoring/evaluation.

We need to consider and test an imaginative range of incentives for schools – inter-schools competitions? Credits? Artsmark equivalent ‘badge’? Brand ‘points’ i.e making the London Curriculum something parents look for when choosing schools.

Equity across London

Some schools are already fully engaging their young people in the opportunities London offers whereas others are not. There was strong support in the discussion for priority to be given to those schools not currently engaging but there was no clear answer as to how make this happen. It raises the question of overarching strategic interventions – how would this work? How would schools provision be benchmarked? What incentives would make a ‘non-engaging school’ engage?

A number of useful suggestions were made – helping exemplar schools by providing case studies and also mentoring/ambassador schools from peer schools. The London Challenge was mentioned a number of times as a successful initiative that would be considered as a model (although in was

noted that London challenge – student entitlement model – was not ambitious but schools still found it difficult to do). Perhaps models for working with the pupil premium could also be a strategy.

Changing the cultural sector

Whilst much of the discussion focussed on the role of schools it was also clear that potential partnership organisations would have to change the way they worked as well. How could partner offers be better aligned to learning outcomes/curriculum objectives? How could partner offers be more consistently applied or developed across the City? Would it ever be possible to have real equity – with every schools able to access every offer? How might offers be assessed for their quality and relevance?

Without an overarching strategy to pull the myriad of offers together (which was generally felt to be an impossible task) it would be very difficult to develop a consistent London wide programme. However an approach of empowering schools to model something with partners they chose – and providing schools with more capacity to understand and navigate different offers – could work.

The advent of Culture Education Partnerships – as championed in the Henley review of cultural education – might be a cost effective model for supporting schools and sharing information on different offers. A networking of sub-regional partnerships could be a useful vehicle for roll-out of the London Curriculum.

The Arts Award – which supports young people to develop their creative talents and interests – is a way of developing engagement with a range of arts offer that is young person focussed rather than schools focussed – this model might be a useful one to consider.

Capacity: what capacity do cultural organisations have to provide opportunities? It is a changing landscape with diminished resources. The offer may change as funding dries up.

Next steps

- The Inquiry is due to release its findings in September 2012.
- Schools and teachers will be engaged in the concept of the London Curriculum during the consultation period
- A New Direction will continue to work with GLA and develop a small group of leaders in the cultural sector who can help steer and develop the policy as necessary

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