Commentary
Introducing our Schools

Our three schools, GIFT Academy, Highway Hope Schools and WIOCC Supplementary School show us a tantalising glimpse of the advantages of working as a consortium where the combined individual strengths of each school contributes to an exciting and robust overarching school unit. Under the administrative umbrella of MEaP (Making Education a Priority) the schools offer their students an educational provision that includes academic attainment in the core academic subjects (Maths, English and Science), high quality extra-curricular activities, personalised mentoring for both students and teachers, self-confidence building, cultural competency skills and a focus on enterprise and its requisite soft skills. The consortium has also made links with wider agencies including Manchester City Council, University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University. The latter is important as this partnership caters for the continuing professional development of the teachers. Elsewhere (Clennon, 2014), I outline the innovative partnership building that MEaP has developed, so I will not rehearse these developments here.

However, with all of this activity, MEaP remains unsupported by any statutory funding (like most other supplementary schools). This poses questions about its sustainability in the long run because schools run on a voluntary basis can only do so much even with the best qualified staff. So, the challenge for MEaP will be in how it is going to strategically re-form its structures in order to become more sustainable and to take advantage of the Educational Excellence Everywhere aspirations. It remains to be seen in the light of the ROTA (2014) report whether MEaP will be able to take advantage of Free School status, although this has to be a path that needs to be considered. However, with its provision of enterprise education, it means that MEaP might be able to compete alongside other providers for (funded) contracts to deliver this type of education.

Here is where the education market in terms of promoting competition (an explicit aim of the white paper) comes into its own. MEaP and other providers have the opportunity to become ‘niche’ providers who cater to specific sectors of the market, (again, as the white paper seems to be encouraging). So, the question here now is; will
the market be a level playing field to allow niche providers open access to their niche markets? Or will they be crowded out by preferred (larger) market providers? There is a tricky balance to strike here. How far does a consortium like MEaP conform to market expectations in order to win market contracts? If innovative African and Caribbean Diaspora pedagogies already seem to be barred from the current education market, how can they make themselves more attractive to the market without compromising their distinctiveness? However, there is an existential argument around distinctiveness and its market value. Being unattractive to the market means that schools have to look for other types of sustainable (educational) structures that do not rely on government-led market structures but more on grassroots entrepreneurialism. If this latter approach is to be adopted then MEaP will have to seriously think about its grassroots community organising activities. This becomes a potentially ‘revolutionary’ process where MEaP and others like it will need to galvanise community assets and existing wealth\(^1\) to create coherent community and grassroots economies that can sustain its educational activities. This then puts education right at the heart of community regeneration and the “sustainable communities” agenda (Kagan, et al., forthcoming). When the white paper talks about encouraging competition in order to drive up standards, it needs to ensure that competition is set up on an equal basis as ROTA (2014) has called for in their recommendations concerning the Equality Act 2010.

However, what I find intriguing is; if the government fails to create level playing fields in which BAME schools can equally compete, it by default will create a segregated educational system where BAME schools would then be forced to create their own markets. Segregation via fragmentation is of course the natural consequence of a neoliberal educational terrain but if left unchecked it could also mean an even more fragmented (and eventually segregated) market economy. If certain education markets prepare their young people to enter certain more localised employment markets\(^2\), this will inevitably lead to self-segregating communities. However, when seen through this marketised process of competition, these communities could well be seen to have been forced to become self-segregating due to their barred access to the general market (Clennon, 2016).

So, it would appear that a fragmented market can only be prevented from becoming segregated by ensuring equal access. Once parallel markets have to be created due to barred access to the general market, segregation becomes inevitable. In our era of PREVENT and our fear of so-called self-segregating communities, we can see that

\(^1\) Communities tend to be richer in social and cultural capital than they think and these capitals do have economic outcomes if harnessed efficiently.

\(^2\) which Studio Schools were originally set up to achieve (Clennon, 2014)
Education can be viewed as the miner’s canary for the development of both our communities and the market economy.

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Works Cited


