

Whatever Happened to EPAs? Part 2: Educational Priority Areas – 40 years on

GEORGE SMITH, TERESA SMITH & TOM SMITH

ABSTRACT Twenty years ago George Smith wrote ‘Whatever Happened to Educational Priority Areas?’ for the Plowden twentieth anniversary edition of the *Oxford Review of Education*. He is still working in the same field – a tribute, he says, not just to the impact of the NHS and medical sciences, but also to the power of the agenda and ideas set by the Plowden Committee as well as the intractable nature of many of the issues it addressed. In this article, the authors first sketch the origins and development of the Educational Priority Area idea in the 1960s and its subsequent decline and rise, through the development of area-based initiatives under the Labour governments since 1997. They then analyse the current position of the former EPA areas 40 years on, to demonstrate both continuity and change.

The Origin of EPAs

New readers will need to know something of the background to Educational Priority Areas (EPAs) – and older readers may possibly need reminding. The Plowden Committee developed the ideas of its predecessor, the Newsom Committee, for what it termed a policy of ‘positive discrimination’ by area in education. The idea of EPAs, set out in chapter 5 of the report *Children and their Primary Schools* (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967), was for such economically and socially disadvantaged areas, where ‘educational handicaps are reinforced by social handicaps’ (para. 153), to be identified and targeted with additional resources and innovative educational developments. The idea and its elaboration was the work of key members of the committee, in particular Michael Young (later Lord Young of Dartington), who drafted this chapter. It owed something to the contemporary Kennedy/Johnson ‘War on Poverty’ being developed in the United States, which had a very high emphasis on education including the still flourishing Head Start programme, but perhaps as much to the local UK tradition of community studies and small-scale innovation

that Young had promoted around the Institute of Community Studies in East London from its foundation in 1954.

The EPA idea was an unequivocal success for the Plowden Committee. The committee itself made EPAs its clear overriding priority, with initially some 2% (rising later to 10%) of the most disadvantaged areas of the country to be designated. And once the report was published and debated in Parliament the idea received all-party support. Meanwhile the political and entrepreneurial skills of Michael Young, who had by then become chair of the newly founded Social Science Research Council (SSRC) [1], and Chelly Halsey, then adviser to Tony Crosland and his successors as Secretary of State at the Department of Education and Science (DES) [2], kept pushing for a significant response. Their aims for a major programme were never met; but an exercise to designate 500+ primary schools as EPAs was mounted, teachers in these schools received additional salary, and there were small-scale building programmes that gave priority to these areas. Additionally an action research study in five areas of the country was set up (in Deptford in London, central Liverpool, Balsall Heath in Birmingham, Denaby Main/Conisbrough in South Yorkshire, and Dundee) to test out innovative ideas that could be extended to other areas if proven successful, in what Halsey, who directed the programme from Oxford, termed 'experimental social administration' (Halsey, 1970). These programmes (which were very small scale, and funded by the SSRC and DES) ran for three years and reported in 1972 with a five-volume study published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office (Halsey, 1972; Morrison et al, 1974; Payne, 1974; Barnes, 1975; Smith, 1975). By then Mrs Thatcher was Secretary of State for Education. Yet she welcomed the EPA findings, particularly on pre-schooling; and these fed into the 1972 White Paper, *Education: a framework for expansion*. While this part of the EPA programme was among the first such area-based studies where action and research were combined, more followed – as other departments joined education, making use of the Urban Programme launched in 1968. The idea of positive discrimination to target social disadvantage seemed well entrenched, and the stage set for further advance.

Decline and Rise

From this high point in the early 1970s, the 1987 article charted the way that education ceased to be the central mechanism for tackling poverty as the baton moved on to other areas of social policy. The EPA idea itself was challenged for its confusion between areas, schools and children. So by the time that Mrs Thatcher came to power in 1979 there was little left of the original package. The emphasis on raising standards and the focus on individual performance by pupils and schools, reinforced by the battery of reforms from 1987 onwards, left anything from EPAs (for example, the salary supplement to teachers in social priority schools) as a residue of an outdated and redundant policy concern. Curiously the related research emphasis on 'value-added performance' and the measurement of individual pupil progress rather reinforced the same

idea. The aim was individual improvement, with rather less concern about systematic and structural differences between groups and areas. Poverty and social inequality were definitely not on the agenda – though a detailed history of the period might point out that even at the height of this counter-revolution, policy developments such as the Additional Educational Needs allocation by DES to local education authorities (LEAs) and schools was made surprisingly more generous in the late 1980s to disadvantaged areas (perhaps if only to ensure that the new LEAs created when the Inner London Education Authority [ILEA] was abolished could actually afford to operate).

By the 1990s, it was clear that whatever the virtues of the new regime and its emphasis on standards and accountability, the old problems had not gone away. In a study for the newly formed Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (Smith, 1994) it was pointed out that the majority of schools in the most disadvantaged areas were also very poorly rated by Her Majesty's Inspectors; and as the new league tables began to emerge in the 1990s, the relative information about performance that had previously been only available through specialised surveys or enquiries became almost routine. The picture revealed was far from encouraging.

The tide began to turn in the early 1990s. One of the last HMI reports, *Access and Achievement in Urban Education*, published by Ofsted in 1993, presented a bleak picture: 'little achievement and not much access' was one apocryphal comment. The report's author deliberately drew on the Kennedy 'War on Poverty' metaphor to argue that 'the rising tide of educational change is not lifting these boats'. This analysis was given greater emphasis by the magisterial Joseph Rowntree Foundation's *Inquiry into Income and Wealth* (1995) with its clear evidence of the massive increases in income inequality since the 1970s. The ideas of focusing on particular areas or groups that had dominated the late 1960s/early 1970s were revived (for example, in an editorial in the *Times Educational Supplement* of 24 January 1997, 'Plowden Report Revisited: positively discriminating') and worked their way into the emerging thinking of the New Labour government, through figures such as Michael Barber and Tim Brighouse. However, it was not EPAs that were revived, but the very similar 'Education Action Zones', perhaps midwived through the French 'Zones d'Education Prioritaires' (themselves heavily influenced by the earlier EPAs in Britain).

New Labour and Area-based Initiatives

The election of the New Labour government in 1997 marked a sharp swing back to neighbourhood projects – 'area-based initiatives' (rapidly shortened to ABIs) now seen as the answer to the geography of disadvantage described in the reports by the newly established Social Exclusion Unit, for example *Bringing Britain Together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*, published in 1998. Poor neighbourhoods had more than their share of unemployment, poor housing, high levels of lone parent households and children growing up in

families on benefit, high levels of ethnic minorities, poor literacy, school leavers with low grades, and poorly performing schools. Residents complained of crime, vandalism, litter, pollution, poor facilities such as shops and public transport, lack of community spirit, unsupervised youngsters on the streets. A national strategy to 'turn around poor neighbourhoods' was announced: it included the New Deal for Communities, Education Action Zones, Health Action Zones, Employment Action Zones, and the Sure Start Local Programmes.

The policy rationale for this revived focus on the geography of disadvantage relied heavily on three things. First, it drew on the increasingly sophisticated data available at national level which revealed the gaps between the most and least advantaged areas in the country, trends over time, and the stubborn persistence of poverty and deprivation both at a regional level and also in small pockets in some of the wealthiest neighbourhoods (see Goodman & Webb, 1994; Green, 1996; Noble & Smith, 1996). This, in a way, mirrored the 'rediscovery of poverty' in the 1950s and 1960s, although there seems little evidence of awareness by politicians of such precedents. Second, it has drawn explicitly on research, particularly on young children's development, demonstrating the gap in life chances between children growing up in poverty and those in well-off families in well-off neighbourhoods – for example, Leon Feinstein's research (Feinstein, 2003, 2004) and the research carried out by the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al, 2004). This again mirrored the research in the early 1960s, particularly in the United States, on the influence of family and neighbourhood on the developing child and hence the potential of early intervention programmes, most notably the Ypsilanti High/Scope Project headed by David Weikart (Schweinhart et al, 2005). And third, it built on assumptions about 'community' or lack of it, and the importance of 'capacity building' and the right social environment to build up individual skills and strong self-sufficient neighbourhoods, mirroring the 'rediscovery of community' by sociologists in the 1950s such as Michael Young and Peter Willmott with their 1957 study *Family and Kinship in East London* and the establishment of the Institute of Community Studies. The Social Exclusion Unit's 1998 report wrote about 'developing a national strategy', and 'how to maximise the contribution of communities themselves and what capacity building is needed to promote that' (p. 47).

The impact of the first six years of the Labour government's policies on social exclusion among children aged 0-13 and their families was reviewed in a series of studies for the Social Exclusion Unit in 2004, dealing with both early years provision and education (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004; see chapter 5, 'Lack of Access to Quality Early Years Provision' and chapter 6, 'Poor Educational Access and Achievement (age 5-13)'). Area-based initiatives included Education Action Zones, established under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and the Excellence in Cities programme launched in 1999, with its Excellence Clusters variant to target small pockets of deprivation following in 2001. By 2002, a range of more general initiatives also intended to benefit children and young people in the most disadvantaged areas, sometimes focused

on specific areas such as literacy and numeracy, was rolled up into the Excellence in Cities initiative – Learning Mentors, Learning Support Units, City Learning Centres, Specialist Schools and Beacon Schools. Academies, announced in 2000, were also an important component of the strategy to raise school standards in the most disadvantaged areas. In 2002-03, schools ‘facing challenging circumstances’, where fewer than 25% of their pupils achieved General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at A*-C or equivalent in at least five subjects, received additional targeted funding through the School Improvement Grant or the Excellence in Cities programme. So programmes targeted at schools in the most disadvantaged areas included not only area-based initiatives but also more general initiatives emphasising overall school improvement or particular programmes for particular groups or areas of work.

The government set out its early years strategy in the 1998 Green Paper, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (Department for Education and Employment, 1998). Sure Start followed in 1999, with Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) established to bring together education, health and welfare services for young children and their families in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the country. By 2006, when the SSLPs were rolled up with Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres into the new Sure Start Children’s Centres, according to government figures (Department for Education and Skills, 2006) some 650,000 young children were benefiting from these initiatives.

The number and range of initiatives and new programmes targeting disadvantaged areas, children or schools are impressive, but how far has educational expenditure followed this focus on area-based policies? A 2004 analysis of spending on children (Sefton, 2004) estimated that over the period 1997-98 to 2003-04 – the first six years of the Labour government – there had been an increase of 32% in education spending in the 10% most disadvantaged local education authorities, compared with a 25% increase in the 10% least disadvantaged. Much of this may have been generated by revisions to the Additional Educational Needs (AEN) formula, which takes into account social needs through measures of children living in ethnic minority families and families dependent on income support or tax credits, resulting in more generous allocations to local education authorities serving the most disadvantaged areas. However, this may not necessarily filter through to the schools, as the AEN allocation goes to LEAs. As Sefton notes, this may mean that a school with an advantaged catchment area in a disadvantaged LEA does much better financially than a disadvantaged school in an otherwise advantaged LEA.

Successful financial targeting of disadvantaged areas and groups has also been demonstrated by studies of the Learner Support Funds and Education Maintenance Allowances, which support post-16 study other than in higher education. Around two thirds of young people receiving LSF and EMAs live in areas that qualified for ‘widening participation support’, that is, the most disadvantaged areas (e.g. Tyers & Bates, 2005).

The key question is how successful these policies have proved in terms of their outcomes. For the early years, there has been a very slight increase in the

take-up of childcare (up 5% between 2001 and 2004) by parents in the 20% most disadvantaged areas (Bryson et al, 2006), which suggests that programmes such as Sure Start and the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative have been successful in increasing access for working families with young children in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It is also clear that Sure Start has been successful in targeting these neighbourhoods (Barnes et al, 2006). However, the evidence for the impact of early years programmes on children's development is mixed (as indeed would be expected from the US research). The EPPE project (Sylva et al, 2004) focused on disadvantaged children rather than disadvantaged neighbourhoods in its findings that pre-school experience can boost development at Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7 years). The Sure Start interim evaluation (National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2005) showed some very modest improvements in three-year-olds' behaviour (more socially competent and less anti-social than similar children in comparison non-SSLP areas), but this did not hold for the most disadvantaged children of teenage mothers.

If we turn to school-age programmes, Ofsted's 2003 report on Education Action Zones and the Excellence in Cities programme concluded that standards in schools in disadvantaged areas were rising at a slightly faster rate than in all schools but the gap between them was still too wide. A 2004 report (Kendall, 2004, p. 35) noted that pupils in Excellence in Cities schools were more likely to achieve five or more A*-C GCSEs than similar pupils in schools not included in the Excellence in Cities programme. The most recent evaluation of the Academies (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2006) deals with 15 schools for the period 2002-05, all serving highly disadvantaged catchment areas and all but one with 'predecessor schools' falling into the lowest 10% of the national performance distribution at Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11 years). The evaluation concludes that as a group the schools demonstrated some small overall improvements in pupil performance in comparison to other schools with similar characteristics, however with a sub-group performing less well than the national average and other similar schools.

Other programmes also show very modest results, for example the 'Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances' project (Macbeath & Gray, 2005). Eight schools were selected serving 'challenging areas', with 15% or fewer of their students achieving five or more GCSEs at A*-C in 1999 and 2000, 40% or more eligible for free school meals, and 39% or more with special educational needs. Their performance and operation were followed between 2001 and 2004. While neither the project schools (nor their comparative control group) could be said to have changed significantly, there were some small signs of upward movement.

If the Thatcher and Major years were marked by an absence of programmes to target social and economic inequality or the related educational problems, then the spate of projects, programmes and other initiatives since 1997 is making up for lost ground. In comparison to the first phase from the 1960s and 1970s, the scale is very much bigger and in some areas, such as the pre-school sector, there has been a transformation in both the range and extent

of provision, with poorer areas receiving proportionately more attention. The gradual development of programmes over the 1960s and 1970s has been replaced with a rapid across-the-board series of efforts that are confusing, to say the least, even to those closely involved. And there is the same confusion over whether the targets are areas, schools or children. The evidence on impact suggests at best modest gains, and this at a time when the economy has been improving in ways that have reached through to some of the most disadvantaged parts of Britain. The former EPA areas, designated in the late 1960s, may well have benefited from these changes. This is the question to which we now turn.

Where are They Now?

Some 40 years after the launch of the EPA idea, designed to target initially the 2%, rising to the 10% most disadvantaged areas in the country, we can ask how well such areas are doing now in relation to the rest of the country. But first we should clarify the ways in which we might be able to address such a question. It would be good if we had a continuous series of datasets covering these areas since the late 1960s. But it is important to underline how scarce such local data were at that time; apart from the decennial national census data (and a 10% sample census in 1966), there were virtually no data collected in a uniform way at local level across the country. Such data have only become available in significant amounts in the last 10 years, gathering way with the release of national administrative and other data through the Office for National Statistics (ONS) neighbourhood website launched in 2001. In the late 1960s there were neither desktop PCs nor even electronic calculators. Processing survey data could only be conducted on large mainframe computers.[3] All the data for the EPA action research project were collected by specially conducted surveys of teachers and parents, combined with very extensive testing of primary and secondary school pupils using nationally standardised tests (Payne, 1974). These studies were only carried out in the five EPA research areas, and we have no information on the position elsewhere at the same time point. Only from the 1980s onwards, with the development of local indices of deprivation, initially using the national census but since 2000 drawing on a growing range of administrative and other data to supplement census data, has it been possible to state with confidence the relative position of different areas in a consistent way.

The selection of the EPA areas and EPA schools was carried out using professional or administrative judgements. The exception was the work done by the ILEA research and statistics group to identify London EPAs – the one determined effort to take the Plowden criteria for educational deprivation and apply them systematically to the data available (predominantly local census data attributed to the neighbourhood of the school and school-level data, see Halsey, 1972, chapter 4). Only since 2002 has it been possible, using the national Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and National Pupil Database (NPD), to

plot the de facto catchment areas of every maintained school in England and build up systematic educational profiles for any area.

There is also the continuing confusion over whether the original EPA designation was of areas, (primary) schools or even pupils. These were hopelessly entangled from the start. There have been boundary changes, schools have opened and closed or have been renamed or restructured, making any continuity over such a long period virtually impossible to track. Finally there will have been significant changes in the areas; anybody who was in the target primary schools as a pupil will now be aged at least 40 and likely to be parents themselves – and almost certainly not living in the same area.

Nevertheless, it is possible to say something about the broad changes affecting the four action research EPAs in England. What follows is simply an outline analysis. Yet it raises some very real questions about the contemporary policy response to such areas in the twenty-first century. Using the most recent series of social, economic and educational data, we compare our four project areas with the most disadvantaged or lowest scoring 10% of areas on the grounds that this has been in principle a significant focus of policy since the late 1990s. We also include the national figures where appropriate, or the notional midpoint of the national distribution (the 50th percentile).

The Four English EPAs

We focus on the four original English EPAs as designated in 1968 (the fifth was in Scotland) – in central Liverpool, part of Deptford in London, Balsall Heath in Birmingham and a mining community in South Yorkshire, part of the then West Riding LEA. As far as possible we have reconstructed the project areas using the mapping system in the ONS neighbourhood statistics website to include the core of the 1968 defined project areas (these were not always tightly defined at the time, as the projects essentially focused on schools). The fit is more or less exact for the West Riding, which had very well defined boundaries, and also for Liverpool. In the case of London and Birmingham, the core of the project areas is included, but they may also have included adjacent areas.

All four areas were selected in 1968 because they were felt to meet the Plowden criteria for an EPA, though only the London EPA was selected on the basis of any very detailed data analysis. But it was accepted that they were very diverse. In the late 1960s the West Riding EPA was an almost wholly white working-class area with a very stable population and very significant employment in the local pits and related industries. It was a community with strong vertical roots – according to the EPA surveys, some 65% of the mothers of primary school-age children had been brought up in the same area. That part of inner Liverpool identified as the Liverpool EPA had a relatively small proportion of recent immigrants but was judged to be among the most deprived urban areas in England – some 28% of the children in primary schools were in receipt of free school meals (the highest among the four EPAs – this was largely before unemployment had begun to rise sharply in the first of the major post-

war recessions). But it was also an area with strong vertical roots, with 60% of mothers claiming to be brought up in the same area. Both Deptford and Birmingham EPAs were marked by more recent mobility with fewer parents claiming to be from the same area. This was particularly true in Birmingham, where it was reported that almost a third of residents had been born outside Great Britain. In the EPA testing programme at primary school level, less than 4% of children in the Liverpool project schools were recent immigrants (on the definition then used); in Deptford it was more like a quarter and in Birmingham it was approaching 40% (Payne, 1974, Table A3, p. 7). The effects were in part reflected in the test results, with the Birmingham EPA results overall well below those for the other areas. The West Riding, which contained virtually no recent immigrants, had test scores generally not far (less than half a standard deviation) below the national average, judged against the test standardisation sample.

Former EPA Area	% White British	% Limiting long-term illness	% Working age: limiting long-term illness	% Working age adults with no qualifications	% Adults with a degree or higher level qualification	% Working age getting Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
London EPA	39.9	14.8	11.9	25.1	30.4	5.5
Liverpool EPA	71.6	23.2	17.9	33.1	19.9	6.6
West Riding EPA	98.1	27.6	19.6	48.8	7.5	3.6
Birmingham EPA	16.6	19.2	18.2	48.5	13.2	10.5
Most deprived 10% England	76.5	24.5	19.1	45.7	10.9	6.9
England	87.0	17.9	11.3	28.9	19.9	2.6

Table I. Former EPA areas, 2001 Census data and selected admin data.
Source: Cols 2-6, 2001 Census; Col. 7, Department for Work and Pensions Admin Data 2006.

As Table I shows, using census data for 2001 and administrative data for 2006, the West Riding area is still predominantly all white. The mining ended in the 1980s, but has left its mark with the proportion of adults experiencing long-term illness, sickness and disability. The former Liverpool EPA area is now a more mixed area with more than a quarter of its population from non-white groups. The trends in the other two areas mean that in both cases the majority of the population is non-white. The former Birmingham EPA area, now with a non-white population of over 80%, has particularly high levels of adults receiving Jobseeker's Allowance and among the highest levels of unemployment in the region.

How do the areas stand in terms of their overall deprivation? Table II shows the relative positions of the four former EPAs in terms of the overall scores on the widely used national Index of Multiple Deprivation (Noble et al, 2004).

Former EPA Area	Overall average rank	Income average rank	Low income affecting children (IDAC) average rank	Education average rank	Health average rank	Employment average rank
London EPA	5933	4999	4569	14,368	8955	8019
Liverpool EPA	1725	3469	1412	5535	487	3759
West Riding EPA	3841	5656	6101	2994	2710	2575
Birmingham EPA	1261	957	2887	4719	2116	1518
Most deprived 10%	<3248	<3248	<3248	<3248	<3248	<3248

Note: these are the unweighted average rank scores for the Super Output Areas that make up each EPA area. Super Output Areas have populations of approximately 1500 people, and there are 32,483 in England. The most deprived SOA in England is ranked 1; the least deprived 32,483.

Table II. EPA areas and ranks on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), 2004.

As Table II shows, there is considerable variation on the different components of the IMD in the four areas. In terms of their overall deprivation score, only two of the 1968 EPA areas (Liverpool and Birmingham) actually fall within the most deprived 10% of Super Output Areas (SOAs). Part of the reason here is combining a number of SOAs together. In the former London EPA only one of the 12 SOAs that make up the area falls into the 10% most deprived category. But in the former West Riding EPA there are still some very disadvantaged SOAs within the former mining area – three of the SOAs that make up the nine selected are in the most disadvantaged 5% in the country; but they are offset by others that are significantly less deprived overall. The former Birmingham and Liverpool EPAs remain highly disadvantaged on the overall IMD measure with some of the most deprived SOAs in England included. The former Liverpool EPA now has nine of its 15 SOAs in the most deprived 1% of SOAs in England. Overall, of the 54 SOAs selected for the four former EPA areas, 30 are in the most deprived 10% of SOAs in England.

The IMD overall score is a composite of many different components or domains. Thus the Education domain, which combines data on working-age adult qualifications with children's performance in the school system, shows rather better results. Only the former West Riding EPA is in fact overall in the poorest 10% on this measure, whereas Birmingham and Liverpool are within the 20% most deprived category and London is moving more or less to the midpoint of the distribution. Again there is some significant variation within

each area. But the former West Riding EPA has seven of its nine SOAs in the most disadvantaged 10% on the education measure.

We can break this information down further by looking at the more recent performance data in terms of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16 years) results for 2005, using the PLASC and NPD systems to generate estimates for each SOA (Table III). We can also look at the proportions of young people from each area successfully entering higher education (Table IV), which is now an increasingly critical measure of educational results.

Former EPA Area	% Getting Level 4: English	% Getting Level 4: Maths	% Getting Level 4: Science	% Getting 5+ A*-C GCSEs
	London EPA	76.5	72.7	81.8
Liverpool EPA	57.3	58.7	70.2	37.3
West Riding EPA	67.3	61.3	73.9	30.7
Birmingham EPA	65.2	64.1	74.6	47.5
Lowest 10% of areas	60.7	55.6	71.4	28.6
50th Percentile	81.8	77.3	89.5	56.3

Table III. Percentage of pupils in maintained schools getting Level 4 at Key Stage 2 and 5+ A*-C GCSEs in 2005. Source: Pupil Level Annual School Census and National Pupil Database (Department for Education and Skills, 2005).

Former EPA Area	1999-2002	2000-2003	2001-2004
London EPA	28.4	30.7	31.4
Liverpool EPA	14.3	15.2	17.7
West Riding EPA	10.8	11.1	12.3
Birmingham EPA	25.3	26.2	24.1
Lowest 10% of areas	10.7	11.4	11.5
50th Percentile	32.5	33.6	33.8

Table IV. Entry to higher education by those aged under 21: three-year moving average 1999-2004. Source: UCAS Entry to Higher Education data 1999-2004.

These data back up the results from the IMD material suggesting that educational performance in the former London and Birmingham EPA areas is now at a rather higher level particularly for young people aged 16+ (GCSE) and 18+ (entry to higher education). We do not have comparable data from the 1960s, but at that point the performance by pupils in the West Riding EPA primary schools was not far below national test averages, though falling back in the higher age groups. The groups then doing least well were the pupils of ethnic minority origin who had quite recently settled in the country and had significant English language problems. Though the figures in Table II show that these groups now predominate in the schools in the former Birmingham

and London EPAs, their educational results suggest that in both areas, and in the Birmingham EPA particularly, their educational results are very significantly better than might have been expected at the time of the EPA programme or would now be predicted on the basis of their overall continuing high levels of social and economic deprivation. By contrast, the more or less all-white former West Riding EPA appears to be more educationally disadvantaged than would be predicted on the basis of its overall levels of deprivation or the lack of any English language problems.

Conclusion

If in the 1960s we had had the detailed and comparative local data we now possess and have drawn on here to a limited extent, then it might be that the EPA areas selected in the late 1960s would have had slightly different boundaries. However, many of the areas identified then still contain some of the most disadvantaged areas in England 40 years later, showing that the professional or administrative judgements made at the time were not wildly misplaced, though they lacked any external or relative validation. The one area that was selected using precise criteria turns out to be – 40 years later – rather less deprived, though this may be to do with the general improvement in the economically buoyant London area, and the proximity of Deptford both to central London and to some highly advantaged areas. Some of the changes in the other areas may reflect ‘islands of improvement’, or they may always have been slightly better off locations within an otherwise very deprived area.

Perhaps the most striking conclusions to emerge from this brief analysis 40 years on are: first, the continuity in many of the areas selected 40 years ago (30 out of the 54 SOAs identified in the four EPAs in 1968 are even now in the most disadvantaged 10% of areas in England, based on the 2004 IMD measures); and second, the changing relative fortunes of these areas. Thus in the 1960s the poorest performing group, and the one subject to most concern in the 1960s onwards, was the recently arrived ethnic minority population with English as a second language. While these groups are still very economically deprived, as can be seen in the former Birmingham EPA, they are also apparently doing much better than would be predicted on the basis of their continuing economic deprivation. On the other hand, the area that seemed closest to the national profile of educational results in the late 1960s is now apparently more educationally disadvantaged as other areas move ahead. This can be seen clearly in terms of the 16+ and 18+ educational outcomes for the West Riding in comparison to those for the former Birmingham and London EPAs. Because of the way that the Department for Education and Skills allocates the significant additional funding to LEAs, according to the so-called AEN formula, some areas (such as the former West Riding EPA) actually receive less in per capita expenditure at secondary school level (and probably primary level too, but we have not yet been able to calculate that) if they are in a moderately disadvantaged LEA. As a result, they will receive close to the

average level of expenditure for the country as whole, despite being highly disadvantaged.

Some 40 years ago Plowden set the objective of raising educational levels in such areas: 'The first step must be to raise the schools with low standards to the national average; the second quite deliberately to make them better' (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967, para. 151). Some progress has been made in some areas and by some groups, but there is still a very long way to go.

Notes

- [1] The Social Science Research Council was later renamed the Economic and Social Research Council in a wing-clipping exercise under Sir Keith Joseph.
- [2] See Smith & Smith (2006) for a more detailed coverage of these events.
- [3] The parent surveys on the EPA action research programme in the late 1960s, with around 1000 respondents, had to be analysed on the Chilton Atlas at the Rutherford High Energy Physics Laboratory, one of the largest computers in the United Kingdom at the time.

References

- Barnes, J. (Ed.) (1975) *Educational Priority, Vol 3: Curriculum innovation in London's EPAs*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Barnes, J., Cheng, H., Howden, B., Frost, M., Harper, G., Dave, S., Finn, J. and the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) team (2006) *Changes in the Characteristics of SSLP Areas Between 2000/01 and 2003/04*. Research report NESS/2006/FR/016. Department for Education and Skills. London: HMSO.
- Bryson, C., Kazimirski, A. & Southwood, H. (2006) *Childcare and Early Years Provision: a study of parents' use, views and experiences*. RR723. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Central Advisory Council for Education (1967) *Children and their Primary Schools*. The Plowden Report. London: HMSO.
- Department for Education and Employment (1998) *Meeting the Childcare Challenge*. Cm 3959. London: The Stationery Office.
http://www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/P0000584.doc
- Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children: making it happen: an action plan for the ten year strategy: Sure Start Children's Centres, extended schools and childcare*. <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>
- Feinstein, L. (2003) Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort, *Economica*, 70(277), pp. 73-97.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-0335.t01-1-00272>
- Feinstein, L. (2004) Mobility in Pupils' Cognitive Attainment during School Life, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 20(2), pp. 213-229.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grh012>
- Goodman, A. & Webb, S. (1994) *For Richer, for Poorer: the changing distribution of income in the United Kingdom 1961-91*. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

- Green, A.E. (1996) Aspects of the Changing Geography of Poverty and Wealth, in J. Hills (Ed.) *New Inequalities: the changing distribution of income and wealth in the United Kingdom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halsey, A.H. (1970) Social Scientists and Governments, *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 March, pp. 249-251.
- Halsey, A.H. (Ed.) (1972) *Educational Priority: EPA problems and policies, vol 1*. London: HMSO.
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (1995) *Inquiry into Income and Wealth*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Kendall, L. (2004) *Excellence in Cities: overview to December 2003*. Report 01/2004. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research.
- Macbeath, J. & Gray, J. (2005) *Responding to Challenging Circumstances: evaluation of the 'Schools Facing Exceptionally Challenging Circumstances' project*. University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education.
- Morrison, C.M. in collaboration with Watt, J.S. & Lee, T.L. (1974) *Educational Priority, vol 5: EPA – a Scottish study*. Edinburgh: HMSO.
- National Evaluation of Sure Start (2005) *Early Impacts of Sure Start Local Programmes on Children and Families: report of the cross-sectional study of 9 and 36 month old children and their families*. NESS/2005/FR/013. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Noble, M. & Smith, G. (1996) Two Nations? Changing Patterns of Income and Wealth in Two Contrasting Areas, in J. Hills (Ed.) *New Inequalities: the changing distribution of income and wealth in the United Kingdom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Noble, M., Wright, G., Dibben, C., Smith, G., McLennan, D., Anttila, C. & Barnes, H. (2004) *The English Indices of Deprivation 2004*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- Office for Standards in Education (1993) *Access and Achievement in Urban Education*. London: HMSO.
- Office for Standards in Education (2003) *Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones: management and impact*. HMI 1399. London: Office for Standards in Education.
- Payne, J. (1974) *Educational Priority, Vol 2: EPA surveys and statistics*. London: HMSO.
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2006) *Academies Evaluation: 3rd annual report*. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Schweinhart, L.J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W.S., Belfield, C.R. & Nores, M. (2005) *Lifetime Effects: the High/Scope Perry pre-school study through age 40*. Ypsilanti: High/Scope Press.
- Sefton, T. (2004) *A Fair Share of Welfare: public spending on children in England*. CASE report 25, London: Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics and Save the Children.
- Smith, G. (Ed.) (1975) *Educational Priority, Vol 4: the West Riding project*. London: HMSO.
- Smith, G. (1987) Whatever Happened to Educational Priority Areas?, *Oxford Review of Education*, 13(1), pp. 23-38.
- Smith, G. (1994) Urban Education: current position and future possibilities: some evidence from research, Ofsted conference on Access and Achievement in Urban Education: nature of improvement, Birmingham, 2-3 November. Published in

- Barber, M. & Dann, R. (Eds) (1996) *Raising Standards in the Inner Cities*. London: Cassell.
- Smith, G. & Smith, T. (2006) A.H. Halsey: Oxford as a base for social research and educational reform, *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(1), pp. 105-126.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054980500496379>
- Social Exclusion Unit (1998) *Bringing Britain Together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*. Cm 4045. London: The Stationery Office.
- Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *The Impact of Government Policy on Social Exclusion Among Children Aged 0-13 and their Families: a review of the literature for the Social Exclusion Unit*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project: final report: a longitudinal study funded by the DfES 1997-2004*.
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/SSU_FR_2004_01.pdf
- Times Educational Supplement* (1997) Plowden Report Revisited: positively discriminating, Editorial, 24 January.
- Tyers, C. & Bates, P. (2005) *Learner Support Funds: second evaluation final report*. Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies.
- Young, M. & Willmott, P. (1957) *Family and Kinship in East London*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

GEORGE SMITH was Professor A.H. Halsey's graduate student in Oxford in the 1960s. He then worked as an education consultant for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and as researcher on the Educational Priority Areas, based in the West Riding from 1968-72. He subsequently worked on a number of area-based programmes including the Community Development Project. He was both lecturer and researcher in Halsey's Oxford Department from the mid-1970s. He served as a research adviser to Her Majesty's Inspectorate and the Office for Standards in Education until 1996. He is currently Reader in Social Policy at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at Oxford and since October 2005 has been Head of Department. He continues to conduct research on educational disadvantage and the evaluation of policies in this field. He has also played a central role in the recent development by the Social Disadvantage Research Centre of the national Indices of Deprivation across the UK.

Correspondence: George Smith, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford, Barnett House, 32 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2ER, United Kingdom (george.smith@socres.ox.ac.uk).

TERESA SMITH worked in the West Riding EPA from 1968 to 1972, concentrating on early education programmes. Since 1975 she has been a lecturer in the University of Oxford, currently in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work. Her research focuses on community and childcare, and the evaluation of community-based programmes for young children and their

families. She led the national evaluation of the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative, which targeted childcare in disadvantaged areas, and the feasibility study for the evaluation of Children's Centres. She contributed to the government's Strategy Unit 2002 Interdepartmental Review, which led to the development of Children's Centres and the extended schools agenda, as well as to the Social Exclusion Unit's review of services for children and families. She is an adviser to the House of Commons Select Committee for Education and Skills.

TOM SMITH is Director of Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI), a commercial spin-out consultancy from the University of Oxford's Social Disadvantage Research Centre. OCSI helps public sector organisations identify deprived neighbourhoods, target resources, evaluate programme effectiveness and strengthen regeneration bids. OCSI brings together expertise in area deprivation analysis, social exclusion planning, small area statistics, resource targeting, government policy, geographic information systems, and database and web development technologies.