SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT - ‘MARKET’ MODEL VERSUS LOCAL AUTHORITY MODEL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CPD PROVISION FOR TEACHERS.

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As the capacity of Local Authority involvement in school improvement rapidly declines in favour of the ‘market’, there is an opportunity to reflect on the comparative merits of the two models referred to in the title. The provision and uptake of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers has been a vexed subject nationally (Pedder, 2008). This paper presents an ‘insider’ view of a Local Authority's attempt to provide CPD through research and development and bringing research information to teachers akin to the Kings Medway Oxford Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP) model.

Observations were made over a period of 10 years (2003 - 2013). In 2008 the DfES funding was switched to go directly to schools from Local Authorities and this was a turning point. The study is therefore divided into two phases; 2003 - 2008 and 2009 - 2013.

The paper contrasts the LA’s 'monitoring and support' model for providing CPD to teachers and schools, tailored to their needs and informed by research, with the attempts by the 'market' to fill the vacuum left by LA. The coercive nature of the 'Standards Agenda' has intensified leading to severe 'triage' (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) and 'double triage' (Singh, BERA 2013) and what appears as 'desperate' measures by schools to meet the league table demands. Nationally, the headline GCSE figure for 2013 of 68.1% A* - C grades is suspect, 'inflated' because it includes BTEC results which have been, in many cases, 'made up' or 'marked up' (Singh, BERA 2013).

The research has adopted a mixed methods approach and includes analysis of the LA pupil performance data and national statistics on GCSE performance. Interviews with teachers, head teachers and LA officers have provided the qualitative data. For the purposes of comparison, the focus has been on the CPD provision for teachers in one core subject, science, with the question, 'How well have the two models compared in relation to CPD provision for science teachers?'

The analysis has been carried out using the Critical Realist notions of 'absence' and 'the four planar social being' (Bhaskar 2008, Hartwig 2007, Norrie 2010). The findings suggest that market-led school improvement has had coercive consequences for teachers, without any significant improvement in the quality of teaching.