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COUNTERING LEARNER 'INSTRUMENTALISM' THROUGH

CREATIVE MEDIATION

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant features of the educational reforms introduced since 1989 has been the emphasis on raising achievement levels. One of the dangers of this emphasis is that teachers and learners become instrumental in their approach to teaching and learning. Research on the creative mediation of policy shows that primary teachers appropriate reforms and adapt them to ensure a high level of learner involvement in learning. This pilot study of three year 5 and 6 classes focuses on the creative teaching strategies used to maintain learner involvement in the wake of all the reforms of the 1990s. In particular, the study uses learner perspectives as a major part of the data set. Our tentative conclusions are that the clarification of learning objectives with the learners and the reconstruction of appropriate creative learning contexts has had an effect in countering learner instrumentalism. These approaches were effective in developing learners' awareness of the learning process and enabled them to articulate perspectives concerning those processes. However, we did not find much evidence of teachers incorporating these learner perspectives into their curriculum and pedagogic programmes.

COUNTERING LEARNER 'INSTRUMENTALISM' THROUGH CREATIVE MEDIATION

INTRODUCTION

Educational reform in England and Wales in the late 1980s and 1990s, included four specific features, the introduction of a National Curriculum, national assessment tasks (SATs), Ofsted inspections, and the prescribed literacy and numeracy hours in primary schools. The effects of the first three reforms on primary school learners was studied in the extensive Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience (PACE) longitudinal research from the autumn of 1989 to the summer of 1996. There were nine 'classroom studies' in which the children were tracked from Year One to year Six. The teacher data came from 48 schools and the whole sample was drawn from across England (Croll 1996; Osborn, McNess and Broadfoot 2000; Pollard et al. 2000). The PACE research found that teachers predominant response to the reforms 'was one of incorporation, in which many teachers were able to adapt the changes into existing ways of working – at least to some extent' (Osborn, McNess and Broadfoot 2000).

However, they also found that a highly significant group of teachers were able to respond more actively to changes through 'creative mediation' (Osborn 1996) and they identified four forms in operation – protective, innovative, collaborative and conspiratorial (Osborn, McNess, and Broadfoot 2000). Research into creative teaching, carried out during the same period as the Pollard research, found that the teachers who

worked creatively 'appropriated' the reforms to maintain their creative practice (Woods 1995, p. 8).

However, the introduction of the literacy and numeracy hours and the increasing importance of national testing was implemented after most of the PACE data collection and the research on creative teaching (Woods and Jeffrey 1996) had been completed. Research that covers all four reforms suggests that the reforms as a whole reduced the use of teachers' experience, their knowledge of children and created a 'hurry along' climate (Dadds 2001). The full extent of the reforms requires more research into how teachers are creatively mediating all the reforms and the way in which they are managing to appropriate aspects of the reforms to improve practice.

One of the dangers of an unmediated reform, a compliant response, (Osborn, McNess and Broadfoot 2000) is that 'instrumentalism' (Pollard et al. 2000) becomes predominant, resulting from the pressure to 'deliver' (Dadds 1994) the curriculum to increase achievement levels. The PACE researchers concluded that where teaching responses were most conformist it was 'difficult to avoid the sense of children in flight from an experience of learning that they found unsatisfying, unmotivating and uncomfortable' (Pollard et al. 2000), p.103). The authors' 'broad overview of the PACE data on pupils suggests that many were playing the system, were reserved, were bored, were risk averse and were shy of engagement in learning' (op.cit. p. 290).

Woods (1995) sees engagement in learning for primary learners as child meaningful, suggesting that pupils make sense of learning on their own terms, based on their interests. He argues that learning takes place best when a mutually shared understanding between teachers and pupils is built through negotiative discussion. Central to

meaningful learning is a sharing by teachers of the processes of exploring knowledge and the institution of pedagogy relevant to their experiences and interests.

The 'dissatisfiers' (Herzberg 1971) of learning may well become dominant if meaningful learning is not pursued. Where this is the case assessment regimes can result in learners devaluing subjects even when they achieve high gradings (Pollard et al. 2000). Learning identities are then constructed as 'pupil' identities based on a pragmatic approach to learning (Duffield et al. 2000).

We wondered how teachers who valued creative teaching were managing to maintain learner commitment and meaningful learning in the wake of more insistence on direct teaching and an increasingly prescriptive pedagogy. Our current pilot case study focuses on the way four teachers have creatively mediated these developments and how learners responded to these mediations. The most significant of the teachers' mediations was the explication of teacher intentions, the reconstruction of a relevant pedagogy for learners and more coincidentally the development of a language to enable learners to take part in an evaluation of teaching and learning practices.

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

This small pilot research project was carried out on 17 days from October to December 1999 and in May 2000 with three classes of Yr. five and six (aged 10 and 11) bilingual, mainly Bangladeshi learners in an inner city school. The school included a specific commitment to creative practices in its policies by making learning relevant, encouraging some control and ownership by the learners over the learning process and providing opportunities for learner innovation. School visits for learners included a visit

to a local art gallery and a 'new technology' printing operation. A school journey was observed at an environmental activity centre, as was the engagement of the learners in an afternoon workshop dedicated to the physics of bridge building with ropes, a four week improvisation singing workshop, the use of drama to enhance curriculum priorities and art lessons focused on highlighting different perspectives. Within the more formal curriculum – literacy, maths and science - we observed teachers using video recordings of plays, books and biological systems to support teaching programmes. An active 'hands-on' approach was adopted for science, design and technology programmes and art and craft techniques were used productively by learners to design their own writing books. Learner interviews of school support staff were used in developing note-taking skills and the teachers role-played literary characters, as did learners. Alternative mathematical strategies for specific computations were explored, learner preferences were encouraged and computer programs exploring scientific areas were in constant use by small groups.

The school complied with the reforms and organized its teaching by curriculum subject, in time slots, except for occasions when they adjusted the timetable to accommodate special curriculum events. These events, such as the singing workshop, did not generally have any connections with the formal National Curriculum but they contributed to a creative culture (Jeffrey 2001a). The subject boundaries in the classrooms were strong as was the pedagogic frame (Bernstein 1971) but on occasions there was a weakening of the subject classification and framing to enhance creative teaching and learning. The research period included an Ofsted inspection and observation of SATs for Year 6.

An ethnographic research approach was employed which included classroom observations, the writing of field notes, the collection of relevant school documents and recorded conversations with teachers and learners. A semi-structured conversation schedule was prepared for interviews with teachers and learners. During these conversations issues of school life were highlighted and alternative, oppositional and differing perspectives were invoked to generate debate. Photographs of classroom and school activities were used as a stimulus for conversation, discussion and argument.

EXPLICATING TEACHER INTENTIONS

One of the major developments arising from the reforms is the necessity for teachers to establish detailed objectives for each teaching period. These plans are used for the assessment of learner achievement and for accountability procedures, such as Ofsted inspections, whose inspectors require evidence of progress in lessons measured against pre-determined objectives. The appropriation of these objectives was influenced by the reforms such as an Ofsted inspection,

> I say at the beginning of a lesson 'what I want you to get out of this by the end of it'. I never used to do that. I used to assume that they would empathize with me and understand these things as if by magic. I just think that I am giving them clearer goals than I probably ever have done in my teaching career so far.... That timetable wouldn't have been there prior Ofsted, it's there and it's real, it's not Mickey Mouse. I worked it, I'm happier, the kids are happier and I genuinely think it works. (Jeffrey and Woods 1998)

However, the Pollard (2000) research concludes that where the teaching was most compliant primary learners at Years 5 and 6 had a relatively limited conception of teachers' intentions. These learners could not articulate any understanding of what they were doing and they lacked a language for talking about learning,

> A concern for the children was to find out as precisely as possible 'what she wants' and to respond to well-known idiosyncrasies, (Pollard et al. 2000 p. 178).

Our current research found three significant factors, emanating from the reforms that contributed to a clarification of teacher intentions. These were clear teaching and learning objectives, the incorporation of a significant amount of direct teaching as opposed to independent learning, and the highlighting of specific technical vocabulary and concepts attached to each subject.

New pedagogic programmes had encouraged the identification of teaching and learning objectives and this transparency filtered down to the learners in our research. They were expected to record a lesson's objectives at the beginning of their work, and the teachers emphasised these objectives, 'we're going to find out how poems are constructed this afternoon', (Teresa Yr. 6 teacher) 'We're going to learn how blood flows round the body' (Carol Yr. 6 teacher). Test papers were explained in terms of their objections,

> Unless you make it explicit for children what this test paper is doing, what it is trying to find out, what the children are expected to know about 'this, this and this', they don't make a connection with the process (Teresa Yr.5 teacher)

Making learning objectives explicit, albeit an initiative of the reforms, opened the door to learners' awareness of teacher intentions.

A second factor in aiding awareness of teachers' intentions is the extent of direct teaching. The prescriptive programmes have increased direct teaching by designating the type of pedagogy teachers employed, e.g.: delivering, working independently and collaboration. Although we have no systematic data from our current research, at least one carpet session, where all the class are gathered together, of over forty-five minutes was recorded on each day we visited. Every lesson began with at least a fifteen-minute introduction and most concluded with a shared whole class review of the lesson lasting at least ten minutes. We estimated that the balance between direct teaching and independent learning, in each lesson was even.

Creative teaching has been shown to include direct teaching. In our earlier creativity research we found that teachers spent between 20 and 25 per cent of teaching time talking to the whole class (Woods and Jeffrey 1996). However, the nature of the dialogue has been affected by the prescriptive nature of curriculum and pedagogic programmes. The teachers in our previous research allowed time for learners to develop their own dialogues as a group, encouraged the use of their imagination and found time for 'off task' discussions (Woods and Jeffrey 1996 p.107-114). Whereas the whole class dialogues observed in the current research focused more strictly on the delivery of content, such as the lesson on figures of speech in the Literacy programme.

> The poem Hist Whist is read by Teresa and the children are asked to indicate what they think it is about and then they are asked about their beliefs in the supernatural - Halloween, ghosts, going to sleep in the dark. Teresa then goes on to talk about the structure of the poem, about punctuation, stanzas, onomatopoeia, rhythm and rhyme, alliteration. The children knew about the last one. They are asked to spot

other ways of writing poetry other than fiddling with the text, e.g.: shape, as in the Cummings poem. One child offers metaphors – 'describe it one way and meaning another'. Teresa describes the difference between the simile and a metaphor. Personification is introduced. (FN 9/11/99)

Direct teaching enhanced the clarity of learning objectives. A third factor that assisted this clarification was the importance attached to technical language and concepts.

The 11 o'clock lesson was maths. The children were given a list of musical instruments with prices attached to them and Teresa talked to them for over 20 minutes about what 'range' meant in terms of a range of numbers and how they could divide up the list of prices into a set of regular 'ranges'. They then had to construct a bar graph of the ranges and find out the mode, mean and median of the set of price lists. The learning is done as a group, with the teacher taking correct answers as an indication that 'we're getting there'. There were many quizzical looks as they attempted to take on new information and concepts, and language such as 'class intervals' and 'discreet data'. Teresa talks of 'interrogating' the data and 'interpreting' it. They are asked to make out some questions from the graph. 'Give me a fact' she asks (FN 18/10/1999).

Learners respond to many different aspects of teaching and learning and the 'newness' of a curriculum topic. The facts, stories and insights can satisfy a fascination for knowledge (Jeffrey 2001b), 'It was interesting because before we made the yoghurt we looked at the packaging and we learnt new words like 'prototype', that I didn't know before' (Raju). The language of evaluation in this design and technology project was foregrounded, 'review, evaluation, consumer, preference, analysis, and analyse a design

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process, (FN 23/11/99). The technical language was then re-incorporated in evaluations by learners and in some cases creatively, 'I enjoyed the Millennium Bridge workshop because when I was holding the tension of the ropes I could feel the force' (Rogina)

One of the features of meaningful learning is the opportunity for learners to take part in a discourse concerning classroom teaching and learning practices. Where there is a lack of a discourse about what is to be learned and about learning, learners are left to devise strategies for survival with only limited information regarding educational purposes (Duffield et al. 2000). The clear explication of objectives by teachers in our research, deriving from the reform guidelines, lessened the ambiguity of teacher intentions. However, this explication was carried out done in a climate where the relevance of learning to learners was maintained.

RECONSTRUCTING A RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Our research into creative teaching (Woods and Jeffrey 1996), during the introduction of the National Curriculum, found that primary teachers attempted to ensure control, ownership, innovation and relevance (Woods 1990) for learners by engaging with knowledge in different ways. They: shared knowledge and created it together; examined learner's perceptions of knowledge - 'possibility knowledge' - together; took account of prior knowledge; role-played 'puzzlement' to develop an exploratory culture; valued pupil knowledge; developed common knowledge in the classroom and problematized knowledge. They organised the learners' experiences as both group and individual study by, allowing learners to 'stagger their entry' into curriculum investigations, allowing time to 'revisit projects' and devising a 'workshop culture' of learning where all learners

did not necessarily cover the same ground but shared their findings, (Woods and Jeffrey 1996).

Knowledge, in the current research was not so much 'discovered' or explored but introduced and grappled with, to develop understanding and 'collection' (Bernstein 1971) by learners. Teachers' general objectives were concerned with achieving 'a balance of knowledge in terms of what you pass on, and what conclusions you encourage children to reach themselves. I think you can overburden them with knowledge, but you still need knowledge to provide a contact with them' (Carol Yr. 6 teacher). However, the creative strategies used to make learning relevant have had to be restructured. Our earlier research showed teachers 'responding to learner's emotions, engaging interest, maintaining identity and developing learner's educational evaluations' (Jeffrey and Woods 1997, p.17) to ensure relevance of curriculum and pedagogy to learners. The current research showed teachers more intent on balancing emotional reactions with learning imperatives emanating from curriculum reform and this resulted in a more pragmatic use of emotions to engage interest. A re-orientation of learner identity towards a 'pupilization' (Woods, Boyle, and Hubbard 1999) has been a direct consequence of recent reforms but the teachers countered the more negative effects such as the differentiation of individuals by achievement gradings with the development of a team identity to learning. However, they gave less priority to developing learner's educational evaluations. The original four aspects of a relevant pedagogy (Jeffrey and Woods 1997) have been reconstructed as a dual emphasis on engaging interest and developing a team identity.

Engaging Interest

Engaging learner interest in the wake of the reforms has meant a greater emphasis on outcomes rather than process but still retaining the importance of devising strategies to encourage learners to take ownership of specific teaching and learning objectives.

> When people in my class say 'we don't like Science, and we can't do Maths' I feel it is a challenge. I say 'you can do Maths and you will like Science', and I lower their fear. That is what I enjoy about teaching, that feeling that you have won the battle to engage interest (June Yr. 5 teacher).

Teachers prioritised the use of media narratives, humour and role-play and the more cognitive adventure of problem posing to engage interest.

Media narratives, humour and role play

The teachers in our earlier research created atmospheres of excitement, wonder, fascination and tension to generate learners engagement in the learning process through story telling, 'teachable moments' and developing common bonds of humanity (Woods and Jeffrey 1996). In the current research there was a greater emphasis on the use of relevant media narratives such as video representations of science and literacy narratives. The importation of video reflects the contemporary experience of children with this form of representation and the strong relationship that young people have with narrative as the main vehicle for processing experience, (Fox 1989; Woods and Jeffrey 1996). The choice of a cartoon film of Romeo and Juliet for a Literacy Hour project was directly relevant to the learners' interest in film as a learning medium.

60 children sit cross-legged, hands under chins, arms crossed in laps, fingers caressing the floor in front of them, fiddling with an ear, arms crossed over hunched knees as they gaze at the television drama. One child sits with her hands resting on her knee under her chin - her body rocking gently backward and forward. Smiles and knowing looks with the eyes are expressed as a love scene is shown. They break into quiet laughter and show gentle and smiling disgust at a kiss. The thumb and finger of one boy plays with his bottom lip as he stares intently. Some fingers rest in his mouth and he grins slightly at embarrassing moments. There is some laughter and their heads and bodies begin to rock as the love scene develops. Smiles come and go. As the scene changes to a discussion between the Friar and Romeo so the giggles subside and concentration ensues. The comical parts are greeted with amusement, smiles and sparkling eyes. The pinpoint TV glare can be seen in their staring eyes. The poignant music at the discovery of Juliet's body makes them discard their smiles and they view it with straight serious faces.

However, the involvement of the learners through this medium is punctuated by a focus on specific curriculum learning objectives as teachers

interject to illuminate details of the plot and characters. Robina talks of this as being working time. Immediately it finishes Teresa asks them 'did any good come out of it'. She then asks what they thought of it but there are no answers. She asks if they thought it was sad but doesn't refer to the way the music created the atmosphere. There is then some information given about Shakespeare's language and the nature of dialect. Robina continues to supply specific vocabulary and facts

and information that they should know. Then they go back to the classroom for religious education (FN 18/10/99).

Stronger 'classification and framing' (Bernstein 1971) of teaching means the use of more teacher 'performances', an affective creative teaching characteristic used sparingly in our earlier research. (Woods and Jeffrey 1996) 'Teresa, the teacher, cracks a joke and the children laugh….She is animated as she plays the Nurse from Romeo and Juliet with an aching back. The children laugh and turn to each other smilingly (FN – 19/11/99). The new structure of discrete lessons and the objectives led curriculum means, for creative teachers, an increase in the construction of performances for each session to engage the learner's interest (Jeffrey Forthcoming)

Creativity, in the hands of these teachers, has become part of the new reform process, 'We try and plan to be creative. It has got to be planned for. It is very rare that our teaching and learning is creative through being spontaneous. It can't be, nothing is spontaneous any more' (June Yr. 5). In a literacy hour session, Robina and Carol did their direct teaching by acting out an extract from Romeo and Juliet focusing on character and differences emphasising the textual rhythms,

Taking other identities such as that of a fictitious character, artist or designer is part of planning for creativity. An adventure book designed to appeal to young people is read to the learners and they compare it with a film of the book,

> The learners discuss acting a 'rage' in a film and how a character's feelings of being alone might look in a film. Trisha gets them to perform this and she also encourages one of the children to act the part of a director. The children then have

to go and do their storyboard – scene setting and character behaviour or interchange (FN 6/12/99).

Learners take the role of artists.

Carol arranges her Yr. 6 class to sit around a square of tables drawing charcoal pictures of a still life scene. They smudge and shade in sections carefully and converse down their line of 'artists'. Carol again uses technical detail, for example 'warp and weft, textured, grainy'. She says they must make these come through. She makes them work in virtual silence - independently. There are fewer smiles and more concentration than other sessions. Carol asks her children, 'Can you see through the picture? 'What is the relationship between the objects? Can you make the softness of the cushion and a hardness of the chair more apparent?' She exhorts them to look at the 'texture, tone, composition, shape and space'. She is bringing them into the artist's world by focusing on the technology of the artist's practice. (FN 17/11/99)

The teachers also plan to

model the kind of thought processes and questioning of the knowledge. In fact I was doing that in Art this afternoon. Ok, I was asking for their response, but I was responding as well, as a person not a teacher. When I am working, I am always conscious of modelling my learning. It is being able to learn about learning as well. As a teacher, I am quite conscious of wanting to be a learning model. I am not the holder of knowledge that they have to unlock (Carol Yr. 6).

June set up a shop in a design and technology project, with a variety of ingredients to be 'sold' to the learners so they could add them to a basic yoghurt mixture. The children decided what the ingredients should be and Joanna purchased fruit, food colourings and chocolate. Later the learners took the role of evaluators,

> 'At first it was too light so I added chocolate and it became darker and tasted better' (Opu). 'Mine tastes very nice but I do not think anyone will buy it because it doesn't look very nice' (Kibria). 'The taste and the colour was OK but it did not smell very nice. I was unsure how to change the smell' (Ishatt). 'The crinkles make it a crunchy texture' (Opu). 'I mixed and mixed and got carried away but it still tasted good' (Kibria) (FN 23/11/99).

Young children naturally play a variety of roles (Woods, Boyle, and Hubbard 1999) and learners' interests are engaged by opportunities to do so,

> I would give this activity 10 because at home I don't do really interesting things. It is boring at home. I love school because we do fun activities. This time I had a chance to do something on my own. When I am at home my mum is always there to help me and I don't like that.

By extending teacher performances into learner 'role play' teachers show how it is possible to inhabit the curriculum content and then to step outside it and examine it. The teachers were managing to teach creatively and to teach for creativity (NACCCE 1999)

Problem Posing

Problem posing has been a significant characteristic of creative teaching (Woods 1990; Woods 1994; Woods 1995; Woods and Jeffrey 1996). The type of problems that constituted creative teaching have often been those which demanded mainly open-ended solutions in order to encourage learner discussion and debate about the different paths they might take – possibility thinking (Craft 1997). However, with more whole class teaching, lesson limits and prescribed objectives teachers have widened the definition of problem solving to fit the new situation by including more 'closed' problem solving. In these contexts learners face more problems which have fixed solutions like a puzzle or a quiz. Where the activity is fairly technical an appeal to the detail of the techniques can be enough to maintain a learner's interest, 'I liked learning how to put the numbers in the columns to do subtraction. If you don't do it properly you can't do the sum accurately' (Fareena).

Offering a limited choice is an example of a 'closed' problem which learners appreciate for it increases feelings of control and ownership over learning. June taught her Yr. 5 class two different strategies for finding the difference between two numbers - subtraction and equal addition. The learners were then invited to select one as their preference, thereby incorporating an element of choice.

The teachers maintained the 'workshop' principle (Woods and Jeffrey 1996) but the same investigation is now done at the same time by all the learners. June posed a whole class collaborative problem in a science lesson concerning

dissolving solids. They had to predict what would happen to five contrasting solids - salt, flower, sugar, sand and plaster of Paris - if dissolved in water. Results were analysed on the carpet as a class. 'The sand changed the water colour'; 'Some did not dissolve and stayed at the bottom' (FN 9/11/99).

This activity is another example of a relatively closed problem, an experimental problem. The search for evidence in literature is offered as another problem but treated a little more openly,

> Teresa is reading a class story of the adventures of a girl. However, they don't just have to listen, they are set a problem to solve. The author ambiguously portrays the girl as an angel. The learners have to provide some evidence for this possibility and they find phrases such as 'she floats as a cloud', 'she gets away with things', 'she smiles heavenly'. (FN 8/11/99).

The school journey provided the teachers with an opportunity to construct more open-ended problems. The Yr. 6 learners had to design and construct a model shelter with twigs, small branches and other natural materials. This activity completely absorbed them as they went about their problem-solving task.

> Negotiations abound. 'Shall we do a square one or a triangular one?' 'Shall we add an extension?'; ' Shall we have a roof?' Shall we use the door of your design on the structure of mine?'….Cutting frames, supports, doors and walls to the exact size becomes both a trial and a source of satisfaction. They hold and balance the resources against one another, demonstrate muscular sawing, delve into boxes, and stand and stare, studying the particular. They queue patiently to get their models

glued together, commenting on someone else's, appropriating other's ideas whilst still discussing and arguing about the development of the shelter. Freshly glued models are carefully transported to their tables for further embellishment with eyes fixed on their creation (Memo –The Learning engagement 7/12/99).

The learners' engagement in this creative process enhanced: their awareness of learning processes, 'I liked doing the design because I liked improving it, putting on more detail'; the importance of 'choice to do it the way we wanted to'; the opportunity to use imagination, 'I enjoyed the design because I was able to imagine myself living in it'. They articulated an awareness of the value of continual learning, 'You learn from doing things, how to do them better next time', and an awareness of experimentation, 'I liked doing the design because we could try using different things and then change them if we wanted to', 'It is better learning by doing things because you learn by your mistakes'.

Occasionally, where it was thought desirable and productive the subject boundaries (Bernstein 1971) were weakened by the teachers to provide more problem posing.

> The children were doing a potato printing design for a cover for their school journey books. However, Carol introduced a mathematical element by insisting that they made a rotating pattern. The children were very engaged with the problem of creating and maintaining the pattern (FN 9/12/99).

Problem posing has been expanded as a means to engage learner interest by teachers who are reconstructing their strategies to ensure higher levels of interest within the parameters of increased prescriptive pedagogies.

Developing a team identity

In our previous research (Jeffrey and Woods 1997) maintaining identity was an aspect of creative teaching which specifically involved encouraging individual creative practices, strategies and discussion, debate and peer resolution of issues and learning problems, a form of democratic practice (Jeffrey and Woods 1997; Woods and Jeffrey 1996). The current context of prescriptive programmes and SATs imperatives means that there is more of a focus on performance and as a consequence learner identities have inevitably become more reconstituted towards individual achievement in terms of standardised 'level descriptors' (QCA 1999).

> One of the teachers told us that one of us had reached level 5. I thought she was good. (Farida) I was happy for her but at the same time I thought I could have done better. (Lutfa) I once had a low mark and I was very upset. If you have the lowest mark in your class you will be very ashamed. You feel alone. Sometimes people laugh at you. (Kumol)

A performativity discourse has pervaded all schools (Ball 2000; Jeffrey Forthcoming), 'Sometimes it doesn't matter so much if you don't work so hard but something important like the SATs does matter because if you do not get good marks you will have let yourself down' (Lutfa).

The teachers make the most of this cultural change, 'It is part of the current strategy to increase whole class teaching so that all the children hear the answers from others and hear the information in a way that might be more acceptable to them as they share knowledge' (Teresa Yr. 6 teacher). The learners then take up the team culture,

We work at the SATs to make our teachers proud of us. So that teachers can say 'you have got the highest marks of the schools in our borough. So they can say we are the best group (Kumol).

Teachers concerned to ensure creative learning experiences have taken advantage of team identity to encourage learner collaboration, as in the example of the school journey where the learners were asked to build a full size shelter from material found on the edges of a wood.

It was good building the shelter because we were in a team and sharing ideas (Shereena). It is good to know how to work as a team, helping each other. If you forget something the other people in your team will help you. Whereas when we were doing our models each individual might only concentrate on their own and you would get less help (Shazia). In our team we had to talk together and get ideas from each other. You have to know who was going to do each job. We shared the jobs out in our team (Asheema). We learnt teamwork. This team was good because they gathered everything together (Rahanna).

Team identities bring the learners and teachers closer, in terms of school objectives, for example, in an Ofsted inspection,

All the children were really sensible because they wanted to show that our school was the best school. We wanted to get a better report and we were told that if we didn't get a good report we would get into the newspaper (Shameena). If we had a bad report people might not send their children to the school. (Rahanna)

Learners began to identify with their teachers' position in the performativity discourse.

It is hard for the teachers to teach us such a lot and they spend a lot of time doing it. And if we don't get 'level four story' it looks like the teachers have not worked hard enough. If we don't succeed it would have let them at down because they have worked so hard trying to get us to get good marks.

Other more standard strategies for maintaining personal identities, such as an appeal to cultural experience (Woods and Jeffrey 1996), were still in evidence, 'The learners prepared questions for a Buddhist visitor by firstly interviewing each other about their own religion and then collaboratively sorting out appropriate questions' (FN 18/11/99).

The new structures have led teachers to construct more whole class 'performances' with fewer individual teacher-learner interactions but a whole class collaborative culture has developed in pursuit of 'common knowledge' (Edwards and Mercer 1987). Focusing on commonalities, rather than differences, was a fallout of criticism of child centred approaches to teaching and learning in the late 1980s (Alexander, Rose, and Woodhead 1992). Learners' identities have been reconstructed to focus more on achievement levels but these teachers have acted creatively in establishing team cultures to mitigate the negative effects of individual differentiation.

LEARNER EVALUATIONS

Our earlier research showed that teachers were keen to develop learner evaluations of class practices by encouraging argument and discussion of curriculum issues (Jeffrey and Woods 1997). This action created the language necessary to engage in those evaluations. Our current research showed fewer wide-ranging discussions between teachers and learners of curriculum issues and learners' individual experience and

perspectives. However, we found that this did not mean that learners lacked a language to conceptualise learning and engage in evaluations.

Learning experiences were described as: intellectual organization, 'I learnt how to make yoghurt. I have never planned things like that in my life. I learnt that I have to think about it' (Nipa); empirical experimentation, 'I thought that if you put food colouring in it would change the flavour but it didn't' (Shazia); the investigation of variables, 'I learnt that taste is not everything and that you have to think about colour, texture and how the package looks' (Farida); decision making processes, 'I was unsure whether putting chocolate in would make it taste good or not. I learnt that you have to experiment' (Parvin).

The learners proposed 'fitness for purpose' solutions (Alexander, Rose, and Woodhead 1992) for effective learning, 'I think there should be quality noise in a classroom. When we were doing something like making the yoghurt it could be quite noisy, but when we are reading it needs to be quiet, so that we can concentrate', (Asheema). The 'doing and sitting' issue was solved with more flexibility, 'I think I would prefer to do a little bit on the carpet then have a little bit of doing and then come back to the carpet so that I remember each part easily' (Rheena).

The Pollard et. al. (2000) research found that children's experience of classroom assessment was 'remarkably consistent' (op.cit. p. 152). They

> are aware of assessment only as a summative activity and use criteria of neatness, correctness quantity and effort when commenting on their own and others'

work…There is no evidence that teachers were communicating any of this formative or diagnostic assessment to their pupils' (Pollard et al. 2000), p. 152-3).

Learners, who had been made aware of teaching and learning objectives, engaged and made to feel part of a team were able to understand some of the advantages of a formative assessment for learning.

'I like getting the marks because I like knowing where I have gone wrong so I can put it right. And then I can improve' (Parvin). 'I like doing them because we can work independently. When we go to secondary school we will have to work independently and no one will be helping us' (Kumol). 'It is good working on your own because when you do your SATs test you have to do it on your own. It is like a challenge to yourself to see how independent you can be' (Farida). 'I love it when Teresa gives me back my marks. Then I tell other people what I got and they tell me their results and we can see how good we are. If someone gets more than me then I think I should work harder and become as good as them' (Shuheema).

In some circumstances low achievers became demotivated and dysfunctional. In such circumstances they intended to deny the tests, not wanting to talk about them, desiring not to be seen as 'getting it wrong' or asserting that 'tests are boring' (Pollard et al. 2000). Our sample of Yr. 6 learners included 12% who were 'excused' from the SATs revision process by their teachers who thought it would be distressing for them if they found themselves failing too often. However, they did not, perhaps surprisingly, perceive this as a benefit but as a denial of their rights to take part in the revision process.

'I wanted to do them all, especially the maths. But in some ways I didn't want to do them because they are too hard'. (Farheena). 'You don't understand. We want to do them but we want to understand them so we can do them'. (Rogina). 'So we can be brave and good'. (Shaheeda).

This could also be seen as an example of the wish to retain team membership.

Learners acted to challenge negative emotions induced by testing through self-examination and reflection, 'Sometimes when you get a low mark you know you are better than that. You know that you didn't try very hard. That happened to me once. I sort of knew I had not tried very hard so I was not that disappointed with the low mark' (Lutfa).

Involvement in the process of assessment enabled debates to emerge about how to improve assessment procedures.

'They could let the teachers decide on our levels' (Raju). 'The problem is that if you are the teacher's pet, you get higher marks' (Shumeena). 'I would give extra marks for those who did it quickly but allow lots of time for all of us, (Shereena). The problem with that is that it might encourage some of us to rush it', (Parvin).

They recommended that assessment policy and procedures include: the introduction of graded tests, 'Those people who didn't do well in the first test should be able to have another one that was easier for them' (Raju); streaming, 'I would have groups doing tests that are similar. Those that can do the hard tests would do them together and those that could only do the easier ones would do them together', (Raju); adjusting the test instrument, 'I would have tests with answers in, where they give you a clue, (Wahidua);

less testing and more effective collaborative assessment for learning 'You could put everyone's ideas together and choose an answer. That would help everyone as well, it would help them to understand' (Shumeena).

Evaluations of the assessment process itself broadened to include evaluations of the relationship between testing and valued learning experiences. The learners reflected on the process of curriculum and assessment and articulated some general observations, 'I would prefer to do project for a week or some maths for a week and then have a test. You would do better this way because you knew the work' (Shereena). A concept of balance was invoked. 'I like tests and doing things because tests get your brain to work but it is also nice to do things like make slippers. It is fun and you get to relax, but I like my brain working too', (Mehedi). The balance between direct teaching and learning and active learning was also debated and provided evidence of their awareness of learning processes.

> 'It is better learning by doing things because you learn by your mistakes and you can improve things. It is better than sitting on the carpet and listening to someone.' (Asheema), 'You use more of your own ideas when you're doing things.' (Shameena), 'However you can generate ideas and ask questions on the carpet (Farida).'

In spite of a decrease in open classroom discussions and debates about curriculum and learning the learners had developed a language to conceptualise learning and pedagogy, due to their involvement by teachers in the purposes of lessons and the development of a team culture. Two of the factors that influenced these competencies were, making

teaching intentions manifest and the creative development of learner relevant

pedagogies.

CONCLUSION

Croll (1996) argues that schools are 'embedded in a dynamic network of personal

identity, values and understandings that are constantly developing in the light of internal

and external interaction, pressure and constraint (op.cit. p.156). Our current research

shows how teachers have built on the more public expression of educational purposes

and processes to make their intentions clearer, resulting in improved learner awareness

of the nature of the teaching and learning process. Secondly, the reconstruction of a

relevant pedagogy as a creative mediation by teachers assists the maintenance of a

dynamic interaction between learners and learning. One of the consequences of the

combination of these two approaches has been to generate a language for learners to

articulate their awareness and understanding of teaching and learning. However, in order

to fully challenge 'instrumentality', learner voice and negotiative discussion (Woods

1995) needs to be incorporated into the process to construct a form of teaching and

learning that enmeshes learner involvement. Although our research found learners to be

aware and articulate we did not find much evidence of teachers involving incorporating

learners' perspectives in an evaluation of their teaching and learning practices.

The argument for taking account of learner perspectives in colleges, schools and

classrooms has a broad base. It is a human rights issue enshrined in the United Nations

Charter, article 12, a citizenship and democracy issue (Young, 1999, Davies 1999) an

accountability device (Ofsted, 2001), a market-consumer issue, (Ball 1997) a vehicle for

improving schools (Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace 1996), a strategy for increasing

learner commitment and motivation (Rudduck and Flutter 2000), and an opportunity to enhance learner collaboration with teachers (Donnington, Flutter and Rudduck 2000). The incorporation of learner perspectives into educational programmes enhances commitment to school programmes (Rudduck and Flutter 2000) and can assist new goals such as 'learnacy' - lifelong learning (Claxton 1999).

Looking to the future the general conclusions of the Pollard research were that,

> The real challenge is not whether we can improve on each and every measurement of performance in the basics but how we can create policies and practices that enable a virtuous circle to develop between standards, imagination, capability, flexibility and self confidence. We must combine knowledge, skill, creativity and commitment to learning. (Pollard et al. 2000, p. 316)

The virtuous circle needs to include the incorporation of perspectives to establish a common platform for engagement with teaching and learning The outcomes would be more effective teaching and learning, more commitment from learners and a closer relationship between teachers and learners.

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