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Developing a Performative Identity

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ECER 2009

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Introduction

The influence of policy texts upon student - or learner - development depends largely on the influence they wield. Policy discourses are one of the main means whereby policy texts, in the settings in which they operate, influence the value, the implementation and the inscribing of those texts on learners. This research focuses on how policy texts and a performativity discourse influences the development of primary school learner identities alongside creativity policies and texts.

General Policy Context

A powerful text of performativity now exists. It is underpinned by a major policy to improve economic status and social well being, a market based approach that encourages performance-based activity the generation of a culture of performativity (Lyotard 1979; Ball 1998; Ball 2000). It is a technology, a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgements and comparisons and displays the performances of individual subjects or organisations to serve as measures of productivity. In the educational field the performativity culture is being used by government to raise standards in schools, to raise the achievement of the mass of the population. In setting targets for itself as government and for LEAs and schools it hopes to develop a highly skilled workforce that can compete in what it sees as a new global industry – the knowledge economy. The higher the skills base and the higher levels of excellence achieved in knowledge acquisition and how best to use that knowledge the higher the economic return will be for the UK.

Theoretical Framework

Our approach is a critical one based on the approaches of Michel Foucault. The genealogical approach of Foucault seeks to chart ruptures/changes between systems of thought and to identify coherences across discourses, in our case the performativity and creativity discourses (although we only deal with the former in this paper). It seeks to discover rules of formation by which spoken and textual discourses operate within the institutional milieu of non discursive practices. The latter refer to institutions, political events, economic practices, and processes.

Schools, in this framework are non discursive arenas (institutions) where discursive statements are monitored and controlled, vetoed or allowed by those with power,

including the practitioners themselves. We follow Foucault's methodology in analysing discourse in relation to social structure and focus on the effects of power. We are interested in institutional analysis and how technologies of power – performative practices such as testing and targets - isolate the mechanisms by which power operates and to document how policies and their cultural antecedents attempt to normalize individuals through increasingly rationalized means by constituting normality, turning them into meaningful subjects and in some cases docile objects.

Foucault's description of the complex processes of governmentalisation, (Rabinow 1984) which involves the emergence and development of new technologies of power on individuals and populations, accounts for the construction of different forms of social beliefs and values, and hence furthers our understanding of hegemony. It is possible to utilize the concepts of Gramsci and Foucault (Olssen 2006) in a combined perspective. Governmentality thus refers to the global coordination of power at the level of the state as opposed to the microphysics of power. It refers to discourses concerned with the "arts of government" by which the State politically coordinates power to effect particular constructions of the subject. For Foucault, the liberal art of government is not an ideology or philosophy but a prescription for rule.

Central government educational policy texts have dominated schools in recent times from the National Curriculum, national assessment testing, inspection reports, QCA guidelines, national reports and the publication of school standards. These texts are written documents but they also contain values perpetuated through specific discourses mediated by language and beliefs about the role of education in society and the economy. These discourses bring objects into being, they form the object of which they speak (Ball 1993) such as policy texts and they construct particular types of social relation through the relative strength of the practices they determine. The recognition of policy texts as discourses opens up greater possibilities of interpretation and action than a more prescriptive approach to policy analysis allows.

Methodology

Our theory of knowledge is a sociological approach that derives from empirically studies related to social theories and personal realities. We try to get to know the sub-culture of the classroom and school and take the view that people's personal realities and beliefs (Walford 2007) are embodied in speech and behaviours. The observations

and analysis of the micro, we believe, is linked to macro discourses, policies and structures. We saw ethnography is a relevant and appropriate methodology to support our Foucauldian theoretical frame.

- This research analysed the thick policy and pedagogic environments through our ethnographic methodology which is predominantly qualitative. Data collection was intended to be over one school year for each of six schools enabling us to follow annual assessment periods and the critical creative events within the school year across five Local Education Authorities. However, due to extensive researcher absence due to ill health we only managed to gain learner perspectives from two city underprivileged schools. The whole database included 52 days observation and collecting fieldnotes, 54 recorded conversations with teachers and other significant adults and 32 recorded conversations with about 70 learners from two of the schools. We transcribed all recorded conversations with management, teachers, pupils that we saw as being of theoretical significance.

Our analysis is in its early stages due to the lack of researcher activity but the methodology so far proceeded in the sequence: data collection – analysis - data collection – analysis. The process provided ‘spiralling insights’ (Lacey 1976) as it sought to generate theory from the data using the method of ‘constant comparisons’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Data storage, retrieval and analysis were supported by the use of the qualitative data analysis computer package Atlas Ti.

The formation of performative identities

We largely follow Snow and Anderson's (Snow and Anderson 1987) construction, with some modifications, distinguishing among social identities, personal identities, and self-concept. Social identities are 'attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to place or situate them as social objects.' (Ball 1972) (p. 1347). These are largely 'imputations based primarily on information gleaned on the basis of appearance, behaviour, and the location and time of the action'. In the context of our research, we find the notion of an 'assigned social identity' (Ball 1972) useful. These are imputations based on *desired* or *prescribed* appearance etc. Personal identities refer to the 'meanings attributed to the self by the actor,' and are 'self-designations and self-attributions brought into play during the course of interaction' (Ibid.). They may be consistent or inconsistent with social identities. The self-concept is the 'overarching view of oneself as a physical, social, spiritual, or moral being', and is 'a kind of working compromise between idealized images and imputed social identities' (p. 1348).

Foucault rejected any notion of an essence of being asserting that self and identities are constructed in particular contexts affected by non discursive institutions, texts and discourses.

Although our perspective of identity, outlined above comes from an interactionist perspective, which Foucault rejects in favour of a relational basis for the formation of identity it is not inconsistent with his approach. The interactionist perspective accepts the idea that selves and identities are constructed in contexts, similar to the idea of the situational self, (Nias 1991) and Foucault is addressing a more fundamental question of being and becoming. Pollard and Filer (Pollard and Filer 1999) describe young children's learning career as 'a continuous spiral' (p.22).in which identity is seen as a representation of the self-belief and self-confidence which learners bring to new learning challenges and contexts.

Foucault sees social relations as inter-related dependencies (Olssen 2006) which have in the social and historical process has three aspects: first the **intra-discursive**, which concerns relations between objects, operations and concepts (in this case knowledge) **within** the discursive formation; second the **inter-discursive**, which concerns relations between different discursive formations (social, humanist and creative) third

the **extra discursive** which concerns relations between a discursive and the whole play of economic, political and social practices (political values). The first section of the paper focuses on the discourses attached to the extra discursive relations, Relations between a discourse and the whole play of economic, political and social practices.

Governmentalism

Pre-discursive practices such as national curriculums and testing and assessment systems are linked (enchainment) to discourses. On the one hand pre-discursive practices establish and imply norms, controls and exclusions. On the other hand they render true/false discourse possible. While such practices thus act as constraints upon discourse they are unable to totally explain the discursive context of explanation and belief, which is that practices underdetermine the discursive context of their explanation of which one example is the enterprise text (Olssen 2006). Peters (Peters 2001) summarising Burchell (Burchell 1996), says this enterprise text constitutes the distinguishing mark of the current style of governmentality and is a pre-discursive text, while 'education and training are key sectors in promoting national economic competitive advantage and future national prosperity. They are seen increasingly as the passport for welfare recipients to make the transition from dependent, passive welfare consumers to an enterprise self' (p.85) Within the enterprise formulation there is the clear message that each individual is responsible for him or herself; if you don't have a job, create one and if you fail it is a result of your inadequacies.....all individuals are correspondingly indebted to society for the conditions and structures provided and on this basis individuals should contribute in direct proportion to the luck or good fortune they experience.

School cultures are imbued with awards and rewards, of cracking learning barriers, producing performances for each other, for parents, for the community, for funders, for celebrations, for targets, for corporate image, against each other internally in the shape of sports and other competitions and against other schools. A powerful discourse of 'learning to strive' brands the journey through the pervasive homilies and target setting for learners and teachers. People, including learners play the game and gain satisfaction from the process of performance and performance outcomes with apparent joy and the raising of self esteem at the climax of any performative journey.

Learner's understanding of performativity is acute and at the same time the discourse they use represents the construction of governmentality (Foucault 1979),

- Jo. The SATS are a test of what the teachers have been teaching us and how good our teachers are teaching us.
- R. How does that work?
- Jo. because if the teacher doesn't teach you hardly anything or if you don't understand quite as much because it hasn't been explained you'll get another level
- R. But who tests the teacher?
- Jo. The government.
- R. How do you know that?
- Jo. because my mother told me that the teachers get tested that's why we do SATS.
- G. Our teacher told us that our SATS go to the government and if we mess it up the government won't be happy with our work, that's what Miss E. said.
- R. Does that worry you?
- G. Yes, in case our work's rubbish and if I only got 4, only got 4 questions right out of 20 I don't think the government would be happy with us (C-Yr.5)

Governmentality is imposed through the strong performativity practices (ibid) which focus on status and the discourse confirms this, 'someone in Number 10 is probably happy when we get good results' (V-Yr.6).

- R. Why are people making you do these SATS?
- Ma. To see where you are.
- R. But you know where you are, you've been told.
- Ma. Making sure for secondary school, maybe.
- C. So our school can show the secondary school and they can place you in a higher group or a lower group.

C. It would be good for them if we got higher results, Pegasus would have a good name for itself among other schools.

Ma. You don't want other people thinking our school is no good because people are getting low SATS results, kids won't come to this school (C-Yr.6)

An improving life is being lived out by everyone in the institution and this has now become an institutions main objective – that of improvement. The discourse of improvement, challenge, and progression (weak performativity) (Jeffrey and Troman 2009) pervades their discourse,

I. I think having a target is good so you know what you need to learn, to improve so I think it's a good idea.

Ch. I wanted to know what my target was because I thought it would improve my handwriting.

R. Why do you want a higher grade?

C. So you can move forward and then do harder stuff and then you don't have to do stuff that's too easy.

R. Do you want harder work?

C. I want harder work.

I. I want a higher grade because then people will think you are getting better at things and people will think better of you (P-Yr.5).

This discussion could sum up the economic, political and social aims of global governmentality, that of improving oneself, working hard as an aim in life and social acceptance through levels of attainment. There are three specific ways in which these values are processed.

Stratification

The practice of stratification (Riddell 2005) is embedded within the governmentalisation process. Classification and objectification involve the human sciences, which developed after the start of the nineteenth century and which ensure the provision of expert any authoritative knowledge, and an assortment of dividing practices which objectify; the subject, providing classifications for subject positions (mad, normal, intelligent, unintelligent, high flyer, slow developer, etc.) (Olssen

2006). In education these operate through whole range of techniques, including examinations and other forms of assessment, streaming practices, and the like.

‘The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short it *normalizes*’ (ibid. p195). The power of the norm is the new law of modern society. It adds to *parole* (language) and *tradition* (text). Normalization imposes homogeneity but it individualises by making it possible to measure.

Stratification of young people in schools to identify the particular labour market for which they are suited was developed in the 1950s-70s through the tri-partite system of selective schools was another form of governmentalisation. The current performativity discourse appears to offer more opportunity to ‘improve’ and move into different stratas through hard work. In the primary school learners are sorted in classrooms into groups according to ability in language and maths, even in classes as young as seven.

R. So what are these SATS all about?

Th. It’s getting ready to go in Yr. 3.

R. But why do you have to do these SATS to do that?

Th. To see how good we are and then we can learn more things.

Jade. To see how clever we are.

R. Are you clever?

(general, ‘yes’)

Th. I’m a bit second best and Jade’s like the other one a bit third best, because I’m a bit better than Jade but Jade’s a bit better than David,

J. He’s clever.

R. How do you know that?

J. because he’s on the highest table, because we have highest to lowest tables we sit at.

Th. Jade and I are sort of the same because we are on the same table but I’m going to move up to spelling group. If you’re on roses you get the hardest

and if you're on Jack's table, tulips, you get middle-ish and if you're on peaches for spellings it's quite easy, they're for the other groups (P-Yr.2)

Performative stratification embeds the idea of differentiated levels of competence rather than ability and acts as an effective disciplinary technique for learners responsibility is placed upon them to progress to higher levels.

Everything is levelled (assessed) to start with and gradual but steady inclines are negotiated with extra pulling and pushing needed for learners to gain new level labels. Each annual report states clearly the levels each learner attains in each subject and sub category and personalised learning is focused on improving these levels and progressing to the next level is almost mandatory as teachers cannot be seen to have failed to improve a learner's level. These processes of daily performative life have a powerful affect on even young children.

Best effort

A second aspect that is embedded is doing your best. This acts a driver for performativity – an ethical approach – and at the same time it is seen as a reason for failure to achieve at the highest level, an acceptance of their stratified level,

R. Why didn't you just take the time off school?

D. You wouldn't have got a mark.

R. Is that what your teacher told you?

D. Yes 'cos if you came in the next day, you'd only have done half and you wouldn't get all the marks you could have got.

R. And why would you want to get the marks?

D. 'cos then you'd know you'd tried your best.

R. And is that important to you D.

D. yes (Yr.6-P)

These two discourses of achieving targets and doing one's best appear to be contradictory. Doing your best is contrasted with achieving. They are contrary discourses, eg: you must succeed to win but if you fail you are told never mind 'you did your best'. This is a lived exhortation. They live the contradictions of a capitalist life (Mills 1959) - striving with out ever mostly succeeding and having to accept their

failure. The latter is often used as a humanist response to failure to progress but at the same time within the progression narrative learners are exhorted to work harder to progress implying that their best is not good enough if targets are not met. In the performative framework doing one's best is never quite good enough for there is always another rung to be climbed.

Self responsibility

They are then, thirdly drawn into self assessment for improvement making it their responsibility for performance (Beach and Dovemark 2007), the individualising of performance (Fielding Forthcoming); (Hartley 2007; Hartley 2008), another major disciplinary technology.

We are given reports for maths, science and literacy. You get that twice a year and you get five smiley faces to colour in and the teachers get another five. You say how well you think you've done and they put in what you have done and your parents look to see what you think you are good at against the teachers. And compare them really,

I: So do you find that useful?

Yes because you get to say how much you think you're improving (Yr.6-V)

They are clear about the advantages of performativity as they gradually develop performative identities,

R. If you were a teacher would you make your children do these tests?

C. Yes I would because it's important to know what level they're on and what they need to learn on and what they need to practice on and they need to work on to make them better (Yr.4-P)

The teleological element of education for future social and economic status involved in performativity are clear to see from the discourses used by these primary learners. As this educational practice takes hold through target setting, testing and assessment young learners begin to equate tests as the major characterisation of learning and being knowledgeable,

R. Did you like doing these tests this week?

(general yes, yes, yes)

R. What did you like about them?

Jade Because it makes us cleverer, more clever than we are.

The extra discursive relations of social, political and economic practices are seen through the discourses of learners as they articulate their aspirations and the uses to which education can be applied. The main discourses used to define and describe learning were those associated with hard work, endeavour, challenge, rewards and achievements. Discourses pertaining to exploration, investigation, innovation, argument, discussion, collaboration, contributions connected to something such as creative learning were marginalised, particularly for Year 6 learners (Jeffrey and Woods 2009).

The construction of knowledge

Foucault thus forces us to consider that it is not just educational principles but also school premises and modes of organisation that are important for understanding the constitution of subjectivity. And rather than representing the school as an agency of reproduction, Foucault sees it as a form of disciplinary and bureaucratic governance that both reproduces and constitutes identity.

Relations between objects, operations and concepts – the intra discursive – were of particular interest in what was a dominant form of teaching and learning – testing – but not the only one experienced – see creative teaching and learning. Testing pedagogies and the processes attached to them had their own particular construction, sometimes contradictory to other forms of teaching and learning and produced their own specific forms of experience. We identified some of those practices concerned with, space and time, knowledge conceptions and relations, ritual practices and strategic engagement.

Space and Time

The intra-discursive relations could be seen in the environmental use of space and the organisation of that space (Lasch and Urry 1994). In one school the tables and chairs in the year six classes were organised in the shape of a horseshoe with the teacher and the boards at the open end. Not only could the teacher see each learner easily there was were no spaces to hide acts of resistance or subversion behind the backs of others and all learner utterances were directed to the middle space totally occupied by the

teacher who could easily reach a learner in a split second without losing any positional control. This form of total control also encouraged open dialogues and a feeling of being part of the whole. This arrangement appeared to be mainly instituted for SATs revision and the grouping of tables was more common throughout the rest of the school.

Phenomenological – subjective - time was marginalised and sidelined in favour of technical rational time (Hargreaves 1994),

Tables with fluffy toysVictorian hall (also used for lunches). Jane is giving out instructions, stressed no extra time would be allowed. Just about 16 children all wearing school uniform. Roger adjusts standard clock so it will easily show 20 minutes ie: set for 9.40am even though it is 9.35am, for test to end at 10.00am. The hall is former church hall - big stained glass window at one end - wall bars at one end - multipurpose space. The Victorian payment by results inspection visits would probably have take place here (FN-V-Yr.6-9/5/2006).

Testing situations create test identities, participants who play the role of testee, inscribing governmentalism,

Courtney writes out the 4 times table to find out how may packs of 4 in 50 instead of using the calculator. Josh turns another page and is halfway through in less than 20 minutes. I suspect he isn't following the instructions. He appears to read the questions but has not used the calculator at all. He is possibly playing the role of being tested without having the correct answers or using the appropriate methodology (FN-C-Yr.6-18/5/07)

The classroom surroundings in those classes Yr. 6 classes dedicated to knowledge absorption frames the classroom discourse,

There is another board of famous figures - Shakespeare, Einstein, Keats, Marlow, Dickens, Gallileo with groups of children attached. These must be groups. Yet little work or theirs. All the revered work is factual knowledge, there are no arguments, different views. It's like a learning factory. There is also a do's and don'ts board (FN-P-11/05/2007)

Relationship to Knowledge

Foucault's concept of practice refers to a pre-conceptual anonymous, socially sanctioned body of rules that govern one's manner of perceiving, judging, imagining and acting. As our identities and bodies are constructed through such discursive practices the partitioning of truth from falsehood is much more difficult in Foucault's view than has been previously thought and something that is never finally assured. In addition discursive practices are always complex articulations of the true but in a particular historical juncture. Hence Foucault analyses how discursive practices constitute that provide a perspective within a particular normative context of possible thought and action and that become legitimised as true expressions (Olssen 2006).

SATs performance is institutionalised through specific programmes to improve learner's test results and the focus on correct answers to test questions is intense and more investigative discourses and relations are discarded as knowledge becomes narrowly conceived.

An adult - supply teacher - is working with two Yr.6 pupils on science – the schools Flying High Project = those on the cusp of Level 4. He gives them questions about orbits, eg: what keeps the earth in orbit round the sun? Why does the moon's appearance change shape as it orbits the earth. One of the boys says 'Did you see the moon change colour. It was all red'. Adult says 'It was very picturesque, a lovely colour'. The child says, 'my dad said it was as if it had been warmer it would have been redder. He looked it up'. The adult says 'anyway let's get on'. He doesn't follow up the child's interest at all. How long does it take for the earth to rotate around on its axis? And he says 'You've got to learn the words, that's what we want you to learn, so I can't explain it differently. (FN-C-Yr.6-21/3/2007)

The pre SATS journeys for Yr. 6 and sometimes shorter ones for other years are about playing the game, revising constantly, regurgitating some answers but also learning to apply facts. Testing is seen as a challenge and a chance to focus on a number of short recalls and more intricate problems, opportunity to test the success of the journey and the process of it. Both teachers and learners appear to accept the challenge and the struggle of testing journeys even when they know they are handicapped.

Performative rituals

As the intensity of the testing practice develops so does the development of a routinised practice, one in which the relationship with knowledge and teaching and learning becomes deadening experience, a distancing of the self from the learning process. SATs preparation is a disciplinary technology focused on the tests not the knowledge with which they are engaging,

They are handed back their science mock tests from yesterday and they finish those they didn't do and check them. Their teacher says 'make sure you fill in all the parts'. He reads out the questions. One boy tells me he can read them and then looks closely at them. The teacher says 'every hand should be up now'. You know it's not a bar or a pie graph. It's a bouncy ball graph' and they have to comprehend - read the tables. Is this scientific knowledge or mathematical technology? They all concentrate except for two boys who fiddle with a pen and play with rulers. These are no cheers or smiles of delight just coping. They have to answer some questions about temperature. They are asked what equipment they would use - a thermometer and I ask them if they have ever used one in school and they say no (FN-C-Yr.6-11/5/2007)

Routinisation is a feature of the wave of practice sessions dedicated to preparing for SATs and instilling National Curriculum knowledge,

Lisa prepares the often in lesson by logging on to a BBC Internet site. Each is called BBC schools service, science aged 10 to 11 entitled 'Fighting the spread of disease'. She then makes up some unfinished sentences on a paper board, 'To prevent becoming ill from the food''To prevent becoming ill from insect bites you could''To prevent the spread of colds and flu you could''To prevent catching diseases you could...' All this preparation is for a teaching assistant to take the class this afternoon.

The children carry on with their lunch, seemingly totally uninterested in what she's doing. Learning appears to be a routine operation, a workplace. Teachers appear to balance their lessons rather than integrating them. It is a seamless experience of changing activities. Another science sheet appears on a board concerned with micro organisms. The task is to complete a table. They then

have to look at some science pictures on the screen and complete sentences.
These are all task orientated (FN-P=17/04/2007)

Strategic Engagement

Both teachers and learners develop strategies for managing this performative process, entering a grey area between truth and falsity that is a bedrock of the performative process of testing competence and knowledge.

Courtney continues to tap her calculator and Stephen joins in. Francis, their teacher, whispers to Courtney about an answer and after he leaves she rubs out the circle although she was meant to circle 'all' the amounts. He does the same with Aleisha on a different question and watches her as she uses the calculator and points to one of the circles where the instructions say 'write in the missing signs'. He encourages her to use a calculator (FN-18/5/2007)

A mutual instrumentalism (Pollard, Triggs et al. 2000) develops, 'Francis asks for volunteers to go with a supply teacher for revision for whatever they want and 2 boys answer the call' (FN-P-11/5/07).

And the learners are not averse to fabricating results as they try to make sense of the imperative to perform well,

R. This is comprehension, two types of comprehension, one where you're allowed to look at the text to answer the questions and one where they take the text away, read it and then they take it away.

D. I read it all, I read it twice actually and then I couldn't remember it once it got taken away so what I did, it was kind of cheating but it wasn't really cheating, I looked back to answers before and I just slightly changed them so they wouldn't be recognisable (C-Yr.6)

Fabrications are enacted by young people just as they are by teachers. This learner's comments on his grades were untrue apart from his 'n' for English.

So what did you think of your report?

D. Good, mostly. For maths I got 4 for English I got none, an 'n' for English for Science a 4.

R. So what did your parents think of it?

- D. Good, they thought it was really, really good.
- R. Even though you got an 'n' for English.
- D. They knew I was going to get an 'n' because I've got a disability, reading and writing, dyslexia, they thought my level 4's were good. I feel all right (Daniel, P-Yr.6)

Their strategies are understandable to adults and to learners as is the game (Olssen 2006) and it defines people as well as constructing a contextualised learner identity,

- R. I noticed that 17 people put less than they actually got right, what do you think that says about those 17 people?
- L. They don't have faith in themselves.
- A. They're like nervous, they don't trust themselves 'cos they think like they got it wrong, but I've never in my life got 19 out of 20, so that's why I put low numbers 'cos I'm not that good at spellings.
- R. I noticed that some people changed their spellings and gave themselves a higher mark, why would they do that?
- A. They just want to make like they can spell better than everyone in the class.
- J. 'cos they want to be good spellers.
- A. They want to be better than others, they want to think they're the best in class but they're not they just cheat (Yr.6-P)

Teachers began to act out of character as they became determined to succeed at the performative task, particularly where it was not a Yr. 6 SAT but an annual testing.

- A. We had to do it twice because we kept getting the spellings all wrong.
- R. What did you get wrong?
- C. There were words like 'idea' and people got the easy ones wrong.
- A. And we spelt 'any' eny.
- R. And Miss said you'd got to do it again.
- C. And one person got 20 out of 20 and one got 18 and she ripped the others up and put them in the bin.

- R. What did you think of that?
- A. She could have kept the ones she ripped up so she could have showed us the difference that we did (C-Yr.5)

Foucault focus on practices as the main indicator of the power of texts such as policy is to show both the inconsistencies and contradictions which go to make up the identities of those in these particular contexts. Studying the relations between objects operations and concepts, in this case learners, testing and knowledge shows how a particular text is managed and it also shows the strategies used to manipulate the imposed text. In this case it has shown how the relation between knowledge and learning has been constructed to produce indifference and strategies to subvert the dominant text and a concept of knowledge that is framed by test questions.

Subjective Experience

Different discourse formations such as performativity, creative pedagogies and humanist social relations are the third area of dependency identified by Foucault - inter-discursive relations. Learners experience dilemmas, tensions, and constraints as they try to manage conflicts and symbiotic relations between different influential texts as well as the intensity of life within one particular dominating text exemplified in the last section and the cultural imperatives indentified in the first section. These intra-discursive relations may mean support for one text at the same time as supporting apparently contradictory positions or practices from another influential text.

For some in Year 6 it is too much, especially those who find them difficult,

- R. You've done lots of practice tests though haven't you?
- L. A bit too much, we do them every day all day.
- D. We've done tests for two months, no longer than that, all day, non stop apart from playtimes and lunch.
- R. Have you enjoyed any of it?
- D. No, because it doesn't stop all day? (C-Yr.6)

Later on, after it was all over, a different evaluation is made,

- R. Was it worth all that practicing? If you had to do it again would you, all that practicing of tests, day in day out?

D. Yes, yes I wouldn't mind, you have to do it anyway, again, you have to do your GCSE's and that's what normal study is. My brother has to do GCSE work and he's like, 'can you help me'. (Daniel, P-Yr.6)

However, during the process of revision and regular testing any variability of results in practice tests creates confusion and uncertainty and the cause is interpreted as student failure and responsibility,

I: Right. So do you feel confident that it will be different next week, you could have a different grade?

I think so, yes

I: So you've done a lot of work.

I don't really know because my tests have been up and down.

I: Right. It's not always the same scores.

Yes, because sometimes I don't read the question properly all the time (V-Yr.6),

This uncertainty about competence gnaws away at the view of the self, (Ball)

It makes you very nervous

I: Why is that?

Because it's a lot of pressure. Because say if you got a really good mark, its quite pressurising so you need to get another good mark and if you got a bad mark its pressurising because you need to do better. So either way it's kind of scary.

And sometimes it can be really annoying because in your practice ones you get really high ones and in your proper ones you can get really low ones.

Then you wish the test before had been the proper one. (V-Yr.6)

They are conscious of the inbuilt feelings of failure that courses through a performative text, 'I know that feeling though, you want to get that level but you put yourself down and say you know you're not going to be able to do it' (Yr.6-P) so, one can maintain an acceptable social performative identity.

Their performative (Jeffrey and Troman 2009) learning identities became the relay (Bernstein 1971) through which social relations are formed,

R. Do you know other people's levels?

Together. Most people, but some didn't want them read out.

R. So you had a choice. Why did you choose to have your level read out?

C. I wanted to find out my grade.

R. But you could have asked your teacher afterwards.

C. Most people were having their grade read out and I thought I might as well have mine because I might have a good grade.

I. I thought I might have a good grade and I wanted my friends to know,

R. Why would you want your friends to know?

I. I don't know, so they're impressed.

C. You might want your friends to know so you can help each other get good grades (FN-P-Yr.5-5/4/07)

Stratification influences how they behave towards each other,

K. I think it's quite easy for the higher groups but for the lower groups it's harder because they don't know much. You know that girl walking past, she's in the lower group.

R. What do you think she feels being in the lower group.

J. She might feel embarrassed. People might say 'we're in the high group' and 'that's easy' and stuff like that and she might feel disappointed about not being in the higher groups.

K. And she might start to cry maybe and she might tell her mum and then her mum might tell the teacher and then we'll be in trouble, so we mustn't say nasty stuff to other children otherwise we might be in trouble (Yr.3-P)

However, at the same time learners play the game (Foucault 1980) and some gain satisfaction from the process of performance outcomes with apparent joy and the raising of self esteem at the climax of any performative journey,

A. Do you know what, I'm so excited about I'm getting my level. In my Maths test I got 19 out of 20, I was really chuffed with myself because I can't believe I got that, because it's getting close to SATS and I'm getting better at learning because my brother, who is in Yr. 10 is teaching me stuff at Yr.7 level. I really get excited, I don't know why, I couldn't believe I got 19 in my spelling (Yr.6-P)

Highs and lows are experienced, valued and sometimes traumatic,

Ma. It makes you nervous. Sometimes when you're nervous you get lower marks, you panic and you can't like concentrate as much as you were going to. When you panic you can't concentrate properly and when you can't concentrate you start to panic about the questions and you can't answer them and you have to go on and answer the question really quickly (Yr.6-P)

but they have also absorbed the 'challenge' discourse, central to taking responsibility for learning,

R. Did you like doing your SATS, (all chorus 'yes'). Why did you like doing them, what did you like about it?

Le. 'cos all the classes were silent 'cos when we usually do work like writing they're normally noisy and always talking.

L. They help you learn more 'cos when you go up to a higher class like when you are in Yr. 4, they help you learn more in Yr. 4.

M. I liked it because I like doing tricky maths stuff and English and I like doing the times tables as well and I think it was really good (Yr.3-P)

They develop a continuous conflicting performative identity that, for most of them, sways back and forth between self congratulation and self denigration,

J. It's scary, it's hard, when they say you have to get it right and you don't. You feel bad, 'cos you haven't got it right and then when the teacher tells you it's easy and everybody should know it and you've got it wrong, it's upsetting and annoying 'cos you knew that you knew it but you hadn't written it down.

R. What does it make you feel about yourself?

J. It makes you feel that you're not very good at that subject.

G. Sometimes I feel that I'm doing something completely different from everybody else, it was sort of funny and I wasn't happy.

Jo. Sometimes if you get a question on what the lesson has been about and if you don't understand it you'll be quite embarrassed if front of the class. Yes it has happened to me (Yr.5 – P)

Performative identities are a continuous mixture of developing confidence, having it shattered, feeling successful and confident to experiencing panic and anxiety, from being assigned high status to feelings of rejection but all the time knowing that both self worth and social identities are based on striving for better performances and continuous improvement.

R. So next week you're going to have your SATS, are you looking forward to it.

D. No

L. I'm not worried about them. I just know I'm going to get an N, nothing.

R. I thought they were all numbers.

L. Yes but you can get an N for Not Levelled. N in Science N in Literacy and N in English. When we practiced in Year 6 he gave out all our levels and he called out my name and I looked at my sheet and it was N N N, No Levels and that's true.

R. So have you told your parents that? (yes) what did they say?

L. They said when you do it next time try harder.

D. I said to my mum I'm going to get an N in my SATS and she goes, don't put yourself down already you don't know because it hasn't happened yet.

R. How do you feel about being a 'No level'?

D. I'm not really bothered, they don't really mean anything.

L. Sorry but it means you will get a good job, so the cleverer you are you will pass your GCSE's.

R. So how do you feel about getting a 'no level'?

L. Not that happy because I know I can do a lot better but I know I'm going to get an N.

D. You try 'cos of the feeling inside

R. What's this feeling inside Daniel?

D. Like you want to get a level, at least a Level 4 but you don't reckon you will get a level, you're afraid you'll get a Level N.

What is central for Foucault is that identity is not a substance in the classical sense and hence lacks a stability of meaning by which it could be defined ahistorically. Foucault's relational approach portrays actors as embedded and identity as developing in concrete social practices where stability is always transitory and precarious (Olssen 2006). What Foucault clearly conveys us that individual subjects create themselves in relation to social, political, and regulatory structures of their environment. Ethical action and agency are regarded as political, and as forms of power which is itself represented as a force that circulates. Both in his books and in interviews Foucault presents a picture of individuals who are interconnected and interdependent with each other and with the structures of social and institutional control—where freedom, itself considered political, is conceived of as self mastery within a set of societal constraints.

Conclusion

The construction of performative learning identities occurs during the educational and social practices of performative teaching and learning and the discourses used exemplify that construction but at the same time they confirm and embed those performative practices in daily practice and therefore contribute to the formation of performative identities. The influence of these educational and social practices upon young people from 7-11 is both extensive and significant. They have absorbed the values of aspiration, continual effort and improvement as a way of life; they have a view of knowledge as that which can be tested; an awareness of the significance of differentiation and stratification and they have learned to fabricate their educational

practice to further performative objectives. At the same time they see the value of testing and target setting to achieve those objectives and regard learning as a progression from level to level and of being hierarchically organised and assigned. Their personal identities are being recreated constantly as their social identities are altered to cope with both the assigning of imputed identities and the social imperatives in educational settings. Their self worth – their view of themselves – is then developed in the context of their social practice. This would be the same in creative teaching and learning situations but the dominant activity in most primary schools is the performative one, particularly in its weak form – the progression narrative.

The use of the Foucauldian perspective is that it shows that this is not just a correspondence reproduction of macro values but that respondents find some satisfaction from the social practices, that they differentiate between them from time to time and that they construct strategies to cope with them and manipulate them recognising the subjective affect they have upon themselves and their peers.

The idea of mixing Gramsci with Foucault is that we are forced to alter our idea of the structure of social conflict (Olssen 2006). Foucault doesn't see power as structured or binary between dominators/dominated or as exclusively repressive. As well as being repressive power is also productive, and far from being contained in the state or repressive apparatuses power is exercised at all levels of society. Gramsci and Foucault share a dual analytic focus on forms of knowledge and relations of power through which the human subject has been objectified and constituted and on the techniques of the self and related discourses in terms of which human beings are made into subjects. Both focus on a concern with forms of government to which human beings are subjected, disciplined, modified and reconstructed. Through such a common perspective the dangers of interpreting hegemony as a form of socialisation (from above) are averted. Rather now it is represented as constituted through practices in concrete historical settings from below (Olssen 2006).

According to Marshall via Olssen (Marshall 1996) the very concepts we use to construct our identities are such as to make independence and autonomy illusory enterprise, equality of opportunity and responsibility. Hence education via governmentality effects the production of a new form of subjects –those who believe they are free. Such an education simply introduces a new form of social control and

socialisation as well as new and more insidious forms of indoctrination whereby a belief in our own authorship binds us to the conditions of our own production and constitutes an identity that makes us governable.

In the final analysis Gramsci and Foucault present a more powerful perspective on social structure taken together than each does on his own. It produces what can be seen as a new form of historical materialism. Although it is not specifically a Marxist conception in that it is not a theory of the economic base of society or a critique of political economy or of the traditional Marxist dialectical method, it still provides for a general theory of domination which consistent with historical materialism takes all social, economic and political practices as transitory and all intellectual and discursive formations as inseparably connected in institutional relations and to power (Olssen 2006).

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