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**Working class girls and child-centred pedagogy: what are the implications for developing socially just pedagogy?**

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**Abstract**

Existing international research suggests that widespread performative pedagogy has contributed to producing educational inequalities for 'disadvantaged' learners. There have also been calls for alternative pedagogies, which can be characterised as child-centred. This paper analyses pupils' hierarchical positioning in a contemporary, mixed socio-economic, child-centred classroom using Bernstein's theory of competence pedagogy and the concept of the ideal pupil. The ideal pupil's central characteristics were perceived 'intelligence' and 'good humour', which were closely associated with middle class boys. Middle class and working class girls were positioned against a female ideal pupil, who would take on a supporting role by creating a facilitating environment for boys' learning. While middle class girls were moderately successful in approximating these characteristics, working class girls were positioned at the bottom of the class hierarchy. These findings have implications for these pupils' self-perceptions, and raise questions about the implications of child-centred pedagogy for social justice.

Keywords: child-centred pedagogy, competence pedagogy, social justice, gender, social class, inequalities

This paper makes a contribution to the ongoing international debate about what a 'socially just' education system, and thereby pedagogy, might look like (Francis & Mills, 2012). It follows Griffiths' (2012) definition of social justice in which education is understood as both a positional good, and in terms of learners' experiences of schooling. This means that all learners should have equal access to educational achievement to improve their prospects of employment and their socio-economic standing. They should also be enabled to experience positive relationships with teachers and peers, in which they can experience enjoyment of learning. It is therefore imperative that socially just pedagogies not only aim to raise the attainment of disadvantaged learners as measured in tests, but also focus on learners' experiences of education. Both these factors are likely to contribute to shaping learners' self-perceptions and their present and future engagement with learning (Reay, 2010).

Recent research suggests that the predominantly performative pedagogies (Bernstein, 2000) that are pervasive in England, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, contribute to producing educational inequalities (Arnot & Reay, 2006; Broadfoot & Pollard, 2006; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Hayes, Johnston & King, 2009; Rogers & Lapping 2012; Smyth, McInerney & Fish, 2013). These studies variously demonstrate how learners, particularly from working class and minority ethnic backgrounds, develop negative self-perceptions and orientations to learning. They are discriminated against through pedagogical practices such as 'ability' streaming and grouping, have negative relationships with teachers, and are excluded from educational achievement and sometimes from mainstream education altogether. This could be characterised as unjust in terms of the equal distribution of education as a positional good and enabling a positive experience of schooling.

In recent discussions about the role of pedagogy in educational inequalities, the need for alternative forms of pedagogy has been asserted (Francis & Mills 2012). Some of these arguments identify the need for a pedagogical model which profiles learner choice, autonomy and independence (Boyle & Charles, 2011; Francis & Mills 2012; McGregor & Mills 2011), requires teacher professionalism (Johnston & Hayes 2007; Reay 2012,) and a focus on meeting children's individual needs in terms of their specific social contexts and identities (Alexander, 2010; Gonzales et al 2005; Lingard, 2005). Such pedagogical features can be characterised as child-centred. Whilst

there is no agreed definition of child-centred pedagogy, its central focus is on the individual child's need for liberty to develop as a unique person. It relies on teachers' professional judgements rather than standardised techniques and criteria for assessment of learners' performance (Langford, 2010). Importantly, CCP focuses on *perceived* innate characteristics of the individual child rather than the work they produce (Bernstein, 2000).

While CCP has been largely replaced by performative pedagogy in countries where educational policy can be characterised as neoliberal, it is an 'enduring approach and a revered concept in Western-based teacher preparation' (Langford 2010, pp. 113). For this reason CCP continues to be seen as a known and preferable alternative to performative pedagogy, widely viewed by teachers and academics as damaging to both teachers and learners. CCP developed as part of a progressive politics of education with the aim of emancipating and empowering children (Bernstein, 2000). There is a temptation to look back nostalgically to CCP, and for especially older teachers to potentially advocate them to newer teachers (Hartley, 2009). In England, CCP became pervasive in education policy in the 1960s, but was replaced in the latter half of the 1980s when the English National Curriculum and standardised high-stakes testing were introduced.

In the English and North American contexts and over the past 40 years, CCP has been criticised for creating educational inequalities on the basis of gender (e.g. Arnot, 1991; Best 1983; Delamont, 1990; Langford, 2010; Sussman, 1977; Willes, 1984), and of gender and social class (Clarricoates, 1980; Walkerdine, 1990). This paper extends these critiques by arguing that contemporary child-centred pedagogy may not necessarily be more socially just than its previous incarnations in the 1970s and 1980s, or than contemporary performative pedagogies (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009). It demonstrates this using a case study of a Year Four classroom (aged 7-9 years) in a contemporary English primary school where the pedagogy used can be understood as child-centred. Here, working class girls were particularly marginalised in the classroom. Moreover, they were effectively excluded from being positioned as 'good' learners because of the intersection of their social class and gender in contrast to middle-class girls and especially middle-class boys.

To explain how unequal pupil positioning can be reproduced in classrooms using CCP, Bernstein's (2000) theory of competence-based pedagogy is used. Bernstein theorised CCP as one of three forms of competence pedagogy, calling it the 'progressive/liberal' form (Bernstein 2000, p. 50). The paper will therefore use Bernstein's term 'competence pedagogy' as interchangeable with CCP, although it is recognised that CCP is only one form of competence pedagogy. This enables an analysis of how key features of CCP, especially the focus on perceived innate personality characteristics (Ivinson & Duveen 2006), contribute to reproducing educational inequality for working class girls in this case. Theories of positional identity (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner & Cain, 1999; Reay, 2012) are used to understand how children are positioned as learners in the context of child-centred pedagogical practices, and the device of the 'ideal pupil' (Becker, 1952; Benyon, 1985; Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009) is used as a theoretical and methodological tool for understanding the processes of positioning.

**Performative and competence pedagogies**

Bernstein (2000) identified two theoretical types of pedagogy: performative and competence-based. In a performative 'visible' pedagogy explicit rules are set out by the school and teachers for learners' conduct and behaviour; there is a strong focus on assessment via standardised tests, and clear demarcation of academic subjects. Learners are judged as a result of the products of their learning and how these measure against external criteria for success. Academic performance or 'ability' are

seen as a result of effort rather than perceived innate 'ability' (Bernstein, 2000). In comparison to performative pedagogy, competence-based pedagogy is 'invisible' in that there are no explicit rules to be overtly implemented by teachers, because learners are expected to be self-regulating (Bernstein, 2000).  There are less clear boundaries around subjects (curricula are often topic based). Time and space are fluid and learning is paced according to children's perceived needs and interests. As a result of a focus on children's 'natural' inclinations, individual children are evaluated in terms of their perceived innate characteristics, such as 'being bright' (Walkerdine, 1990). Arguably, such characteristics could also relate to discourses about learners' gender, ethnicity and social class. In this connection, theory of positional identities can be helpful in understanding how such discourses affect how learners are positioned and evaluated. As Walkerdine (1990) argues, CCP in practice has favoured a specific set of characteristics that have historically been associated with masculinity. She argues that the purpose of CCP is to create a neo-liberal individualised, autonomous, free individual capable of rational thought. The idealisation of these characteristics can be traced back to the European Enlightenment when they were conceptualised as inherently male. Women, on the other hand, continued to be seen as inferior:  'the female provided the biological prop both to procreation and to servicing the possibility of "man"' (Walkerdine 1990, p. 67). In Bernstein's terms, this means that in a competence pedagogy the 'imagined subject' is likely to be a boy who exhibits characteristics associated with an idealised masculinity as described above. The role of women (as teachers) and girls is to create an enabling environment which allows boys to develop as independent, rational and autonomous learners. Conformity, good behaviour and neatness are therefore valued over independence in girls in helping to create an atmosphere of order and calm (Read, 2011; Walkerdine 1985 in Langford, 2010). Boys' resistance to teachers is legitimised as the child exercising power and agency, and non-conformity is seen as a sign of 'cleverness' (Walkerdine, 1990).

The gendering of the ideal pupil has been shown to persist in contemporary pedagogy as shown by Brooker (2005), Connolly (1998), Francis et al (2014), Langford (2010) and Renold (2005). This study contributes to this literature by offering an explanation for the process of children's positioning within the framework of a competence/child-centred pedagogy.  This affords an analysis where children are judged by teachers and peers' on the basis of their perceived innate characteristics related to socio-historical understandings of 'ability', gender and social class. As will be seen, this central tenet of CCP identified by Walkerdine in the 1980s was very much in evidence in a contemporary English primary school classroom.

**Pupil positioning and the ideal pupil**

Positional identities can be understood as identifying the self in relation to the other. However, the power to position oneself is closely related to agency (Holland et al., 1999). In a given cultural context, the freedom or power a person has to position her/himself in relation to others is enabled or constrained by wider discourses on gender, ethnicity, social class and 'ability'. For example, Reay (2012) argues that dominant discourses around education value middle class subjects as 'bright' and successful over others. Such subjects are therefore afforded greater power to position themselves as preferred and 'good' learners in relation to other children. Learners' subject positions are reproduced on a daily basis through interactions between pupils and between teachers and pupils. For example, in a performative pedagogy, relationships between teachers and pupils are more likely to be characterised by a focus on discipline and rules, time-keeping and the importance of achievement in tests (Hempel-Jorgensen 2009). In a competence-based pedagogy on the other hand, we might expect the ideal pupil to be characterised by high levels of gendered self-regulation, and

exhibiting characteristics of independence, autonomy, rationality and humour (Walkerdine 1990). This can be combined with dominant discourses about gender and social class, which have been shown to influence teachers' and children's perceptions of the characteristics that constitute an acceptable or 'good pupil' (Connolly 1998; Darmanin 2003; Reed-Danahay & Anderson-Levitt 1991; Renold 2005). In this paper the device of the 'ideal pupil' is used to understand how pupils position themselves in relation to each other in reference to their perceptions of the teachers' version of an ideal pupil. This relates to the imagined subject in a competence pedagogy in that the teachers' perceptions of the ideal pupil comes from historical understandings of gender, which children internalise. Yet the ideal pupil concept and positional identity theory allows for a more detailed examination of the classroom processes and relationships that create children's positioning within a competence based classroom.

**The research data**

The data in this paper are derived from a three-year (2004-2007) mixed methods project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The project investigated the impact of school composition on school process and pupil achievement. The data come from the qualitative arm of the study which consisted of an investigation in 12 schools. This paper draws on data collected by the author during the school year 2005-6.  Although the data come from a larger multi-case study project this analysis can be seen as a critical single-case study (Robson, 2002; Yin, 2009). Data are used to shed further light, building on Walkerdine and Langford's work, on how particular learners can become marginalised on the basis of gender and social class in a classroom characterised by competence pedagogy/CCP. The data are therefore used to further develop theoretical understanding for analysing other cases rather than extrapolation to a wider population of schools (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The data used for this paper include lesson observations across the curriculum throughout the school year and interviews with Year Four children, the Year Four teacher and the head teacher. The aforementioned ESRC funded project identified a set of 'matched pupils' in each of the 12 case study schools for the qualitative arm of the project. The pupils were selected as they were nearest to the average level of attainment within the administrative area they were located. In the present case study school, the two most 'average-attaining' pupils were both girls. The two matched pupils were interviewed with two of their friends who were also girls. A friendship group of four boys (out of a total of six boys in Year Four) was also interviewed to provide the perspectives of boys.

Unstructured, non-participant (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) lesson observations were conducted across the curriculum (12 in total). The observation data was used to establish the dominant mode of pedagogy (Bernstein 2000) by identifying key aspects of performative or competence pedagogy as outlined above. As a non-participant observer, the researcher made notes on the activities of the matched pupils, but also the teacher and other children. Notes were made using the following themes: seating arrangements, amount and type of discipline episodes, nature of learning activities, sequencing and pacing of activities, children's movement within in and out of the classroom, conversations between the teacher and children and among children, children's non-verbal activities (e.g. writing, drawing).

The interviews with the teacher and head teacher were used to triangulate observations to establish the mode of pedagogy. In addition, the teacher interview and the interviews with children were used to understand the processes of children's positioning and the construction of the ideal pupil concept. All interviews were semi-structured to balance cross-class and school comparison with

eliciting interviewee perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The interviews with children included questions about their perceptions of their teacher and his interactions and relationships with children, what pleased and displeased the teacher and the characteristics children thought their teacher would like if a new child joined the class (the ideal pupil, Broadfoot et al., 2000) and children's perceptions of targets, behaviour, timekeeping and grouping practices. The head teacher interview covered questions on the school intake, the school's approach to grouping/setting, curriculum organisation, behaviour policy and pastoral care of children. The teacher interview included questions on their perceptions of the school, the children in their class, their pedagogical style, discipline issues and children's level of engagement.

The researcher sought to redress the adult-child power imbalance in relation to the child participants (Hill, 2005). The research took place throughout a school year which allowed the researcher to position herself as an 'outsider' researcher, independent from school staff, interested in children's experiences and perspectives. She avoided inhabiting a 'teacherly' or authority role by not giving directions or orders in relation to children's school work or behaviour. Interviewing children in friendship groups may also have contributed to redressing power imbalance as children were more able to shape the interview through discussion with each other (Hennessy and Heary, 2005).

Data collection was carried out in accordance with the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2004). Parental consent (in writing) and children's verbal assent was gained prior to interviews. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the data. The names of the school, the teacher and children are all pseudonyms.

A coding framework was developed, based on Bernstein's (2000) concepts of competence and performative pedagogy and the concept of the ideal pupil and positioning theory. Axial codes (Flick, 2009) were identified to connect the mode of pedagogy with the way positioning took place in relation to understandings of the learner in terms of perceived innate characteristics. These were used to generate themes on using the theoretical framework and will be discussed further in the section on findings.

**Competence-based pedagogy in practice**

Greendale Primary School was a village school with a mixed social class composition with 13 children in Year Four. Four children were from professional middle class backgrounds, six were from non-professional middle class backgrounds and three were from working class families. Social class was determined on the basis of highest parental occupation using the Goldthorpe-Hope scale (Goldthorpe-Hope, 1974).

According to the head teacher, the school prioritised responding to pupils' perceived emotional needs and fostering their personal alongside their academic development over raising their attainment. There was also little pressure from parents in this regard:

> The parents don't stand out there saying: "my child's a Level 4B, how are you going to make him a 4A?" – they don't do that. They're just very grateful, I think, for all that is done and they recognize that an enormous amount of work is done by the staff - for their children. (Head teacher)

In the year prior to fieldwork 83% of children had achieved National Curriculum (NC) Level 4 in Literacy and the corresponding percentage in Numeracy was 82%. At the time of fieldwork Level 4

was the benchmark achievement for pupils in the final year of primary education (age 10-11 years) as set out in the English NC. This significantly reduced external pressure to raise attainment levels.

The school had few formal policies. There was no behaviour management policy and no formal discipline systems in the Year Four classroom or in the school as a whole. Any disruptive behaviour was dealt with on an individual basis through reprimanding or discussing the behaviour with the pupil. This happened occasionally in the Year Four classroom. The regulative discourse (Bernstein, 2000) was therefore weak since children were expected to self-regulate their behaviour which is a defining characteristic of competence pedagogy. The head teacher explained that teachers were given a high degree of flexibility and autonomy in their lesson planning and teaching style. In Year Four, this meant that there was little overt emphasis on the pacing and sequencing of learning typical of performative pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000) and if children were enjoying a particular activity or it had taken longer than planned, the teacher was in a position to prolong it. From lesson observations it was apparent that  if, for example, a pupil asked a question that lead the lesson in a different direction, the teacher would allow this in order to explore pupils' interests. Teaching was often planned according to cross-curricular topics, although literacy and numeracy were regularly taught as separate subjects. This meant that classification of curriculum subjects was at times strong and weak, suggesting elements of performative as well as competence pedagogy. These pedagogical features are all strongly suggestive of a mainly competence based pedagogy and the teacher could therefore be seen to employ CCP, Bernstein's (2000) 'progressive/liberal' form of competence pedagogy.

Children were mainly taught as a mixed 'ability' class and were seated in friendship groups although these correlated largely with perceived 'ability'. The teacher's perception of children was highly characterised by his perceptions of their 'innate' level of intelligence as commensurate with competence pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000). In the teacher interview he referred to pupils according to whether he thought they were 'bright' or 'dim' and described the class as very polarised in this respect, positioning the middle class boys as 'bright' and the mainly working class girls as 'dim'. The two matched pupils, Leah and Ella, were seated together and were ranked by the teacher as fairly 'bright' although Leah was deemed 'weaker' in numeracy. Both were from non-professional middle class families. A group of five girls were seated together and were ranked as generally 'dim' by the teacher. Three were working class and two were from non-professional middle class families, where one parent was in a working class occupation and in receipt of working tax credit, which is a government benefit for those in work with low incomes (this did not apply to Leah and Ella). These two girls were interviewed with Leah and Ella. Most of the girls in this group were taken out of class for numeracy, for separate instruction during numeracy lessons. Five boys were seated together, four from professional middle class families and generally regarded as 'bright' by the teacher. These boys were interviewed as a group.

**The ideal pupil and children's positioning**

Children's perceptions of the ideal pupil were highly gendered, reflecting a central tenet of competence pedagogy. The ideal boy and girl pupils were conceived of in very different terms. The male ideal pupil exemplified the ideal learner in competence pedagogy as described by Bernstein (2000) and Walkerdine (1990). He was thought to have two overriding attributes: 'intelligence' and good humour. Significantly, many of the boys interviewed constituted themselves as ideal pupils and cast the ideal in the image of the (male) teacher, who was also seen as 'funny' and intelligent. The following excerpt captured a moment where the teacher and the boys engaged in an activity entailing a certain amount of 'funny banter' and 'cheekiness'. Additionally, the activity was highly

gendered not just in the way the boys and the teacher communicated, but also in how boys and girls were characterised.

> RESEARCHER: What pleases your teacher the most?
> James: Good work. And good humour.
> RESEARCHER: And good humour, ok. And what else did you say, Thomas?
> Thomas: good work- uh, good behaviour and good work
> Jonathan: In our work he allows us to not really make fun but do friendly banter.
> George: He lets us, we were like doing some work and the girls had to do a description about boys and the boys had to do a description about girls
> Jonathan: And we wrote something like, he wasn't nasty but
> George: Yeah he allowed the boys to write something like, erm, girls always buy clothes they already have and stuff.
> RESEARCHER: And were the girls allowed to do the same thing?
> Boys: Yeah … boys are always talking about [soccer]
> James: It's all being a bit cheeky about the opposite sex

Furthermore, the male ideal, unlike the female one, was seen as well behaved but with room for fun and not 'being good' all of the time. The male ideal pupil was told off sometimes, as were the group of boys in the interview; but that was considered a positive and desirable characteristic.

> ... it would be like a combination of someone like maybe me because I'm good at maths, English and someone who's good at all subjects ... But like, we're good at work, but we sometimes get told off. (James)

The boys positioned themselves, and hence the ideal pupil, in relation to a hierarchy of 'intelligence' placing themselves at the top as 'independent' workers, reflecting Walkerdine's (1990) argument that autonomy is highly valued in a competence pedagogy and is seen as an ideal male characteristic.

> Because he [the teacher] can set a bit of work for us four, independent work, for us four to share and do, as a group. Then he sets for people who are ok, a different, say a Heinemann page and we go on to Heinemann five and do a page there. And people who are stuck, he works with on the board. (James)

Being 'good' at a range of subjects was considered very important by the boys and the topic of who was good at what came up frequently in their interview. Conversely, not being good at maths was also frequently brought up by both those who thought so about themselves, such as Thomas, as well as their peers. Also, as James pointed out here, being seen as not good at maths was associated with being differentiated from the other boys. Thomas was therefore to some extent excluded from the group in that he couldn't (or felt he couldn't) participate in the boys' helping each other with their work and he was sometimes taken out by the Teaching Assistant for numeracy lessons.

> James: Yes, but I don't know whether Thomas over there can [laugh] share ideas out in the group because he has a bit of trouble with maths.
> Thomas: Yeah, I'm not very good at maths. But I like history and science.

This illustrates how the boys positioned themselves and each other to create a hierarchy of 'intelligence' in an innate sense as typical of competence pedagogy. This is in contrast to 'ability' hierarchies in more performative pedagogies where being good at a subject can be seen as a result

of hard work. However, while Thomas was positioned below the other boys he struggled to reposition himself throughout the interview by asserting his talent in other subjects.

Boys also actively positioned themselves and each other, to create hierarchy, on the basis of being 'not too good' in terms of their behaviour, but knowing the limits of this:

> James: And he [the teacher] doesn't just want someone who's good at work, cos we're good at work but we sometimes get told off
>
> Thomas: Not people like Ben because he elbows quite a lot
> George: He does actually fight and not with his fists.
> RESEARCHER: What do you mean?
> James: He kicks people. He's come in before and someone's, someone, I'm not going to say names but it's just, slightly got in front of him, so he just walked in front and just shoved the door in his face…

In this example, the boys positioned themselves above Ben but within the limits of 'getting into trouble' as desirable behaviour. They achieved this by positioning Ben as having crossed the line into unacceptable behaviour and therefore as further from approximating the male ideal pupil. In summary, the ideal boy pupil was able to tread a fine line between being told off occasionally but otherwise very 'intelligent' and able to produce funny banter on an equal footing with the teacher. This resonates with Walkerdine's (1990) assertion that ideal boy learners need to be seen as agentive and non-conformist to be seen as 'bright'. It also echoes findings of Broadfoot et al. (2000) and Francis et al. (2014) where boys, but also girls, sought out a balance between being perceived as a good learner and avoiding being seen as a 'goody' or 'boffin'.

The female ideal pupil, in line with Walkerdine's analysis of girls in child-centred classrooms, was seen to be equipped with highly developed social skills in order to create a congenial environment in the classroom both in terms of the physical environment (i.e. tidying up) and the social atmosphere.

> RESEARCHER: …what do you think pleases your teacher?
> Chloe: When we're good.
> [Silence]
> Leah: Well… he's pleased when we do something, when we listen, when we do…
> Ella: Or tidy up, put something away that's not ours.
> Leah: Yeah, when we put something away that's not ours
> Marie: And when we get a task and we do it well
> RESEARCHER: So Marie why do you like sitting next to Laura?
> Marie: Cos she's kind and helpful and she's very funny.
> Leah: Especially when it comes to skipping!
> RESEARCHER: Right… So why's it good to sit next to someone who is kind and helpful?
> Marie: Because if you didn't sit next to someone who's kind and helpful you could get stuck with things like I do sometimes.
> RESEARCHER: What, like work?
> Marie:…and they could be really horrible to you.
> Leah: And you would not be a kind and helpful person yourself.
> …

> Chloe: If you sat next to someone who was glum all the time then it wouldn't make you happy
> …
> Marie: And if you are upset or something they might cheer you up.

The girls referred to behaviour ('being good') and performing tasks well, which could be seen as a reflection of performative pedagogy. For example, Leah and Ella place emphasis on tidying up other pupils' mess for the benefit of the class as a whole. Yet the expectation of these behaviours is not made explicit by the teacher and therefore should be seen as a result of pupils' self-regulation. These girls appeared to have internalised their expected roles, which strongly points to the effect of invisible competence pedagogy. The sense of self-sacrifice that Walkerdine (1990) and Langford (2010) argue underpins the role of women (teachers) and girls in supporting the learning and development of boys is evident here. In the following interview extract, the girls discuss the importance of desirable feminine characteristics that support positive social relations in the classroom and identify their undesirable opposites:

> RESEARCHER: …What sort of person do you think the teacher would like to have if a new boy or girl came into the class?
> Leah: Friendly
> RESEARCHER: Yeah?
> Ella: Good… quiet… quick working.
> RESEARCHER: What else do you think he'd like?
> Chloe: He'd like someone who's polite
> Leah: yeah he'd like someone who's not shy.
> RESEARCHER: Ok.
> Leah: …like me, cos I'm extremely shy.
> Chloe: …who takes care of other people
> Ella: …who says 'please' and 'thank you', or 'no, thank you'.
> Leah: and doesn't teach them rude things or bad manners.
> RESEARCHER: Ok, what do you think Chloe?
> Chloe: People who take care of other children

The female ideal pupil was also seen as meeting teacher expectations in terms of completing tasks to a good standard and attaining their learning objectives. There was also reference to a more performative conceptualisation of 'ability' as being the result of working hard and 'trying one's best', contrasting significantly with the male ideal pupil. This could be read as a reflection of the knowledge that the boys were considered the most 'intelligent' pupils by the teacher. It could also be understood as an attempt to reconstitute the 'intelligence' hierarchy as a performative 'ability' hierarchy, in which they could move up through hard work. This attempt was ultimately not recognised in the boys' accounts. The girls' account of the ideal pupil also contrasted to the boys' in that none of them positioned themselves as approximating the ideal pupil. Leah, for example, notes that she is 'too shy'. Here, she may be measuring herself against the male ideal pupil in recognition that he is ranked above the female ideal in terms of the central position of boys in the competence-based classroom (Walkerdine, 1990). Nevertheless, while the girls were generally positioned as less than ideal, or in a subservient role to the boys, both boys and girls positioned themselves hierarchically in relation to the working class girls. The struggles that the children engaged in reflected the gender policing identified by Renold (2005), which resulted in gender and class defined hierarchies in primary school classrooms.

The mainly working class girls (including two from non-professional, low income middle class families) were seen as lacking both in terms of the ability to support a congenial learning environment and in terms of their lacking 'intelligence'. The group was also constituted as 'arguing and bickering' which was seen as undesirable.

> Jonathan: … basically if someone like Alison, and if there was quite a lot of people coming, like four or five girls…Alison, Charlotte and Marie [working class and non-professional middle class girls], and people like that then they'll probably join with them people and it'll be a bigger argument for Mr Clarke. Today they were arguing…
> Thomas: Well we have got a new girl… Natasha, she came in as a new girl…but…she sank into the girls' group quite quickly
> Jonathan: And now a lot of the girls are good friends with her.
> Thomas: I think some of the girls are quite a bad influence on her. Because when she first came in, she was ok, alright, but all the girls bring in their toys and stuff and Natasha thought 'oh, I'll start bringing in my toys' and she's not very nice any more [inaudible]

> RESEARCHER: So can you tell me what your friends are like? Can you describe them to me?
> Ella: Well the girls [referring to girls in mainly working class group], they normally argue. Not with us, just with themselves.

The discourse about learners in this classroom is therefore not only deeply gendered but also classed. This is particularly apparent when the working class girls are positioned as opposite to the female ideal pupil in being argumentative and less 'intelligent'. These girls are positioned in relation to a construct of the dominant ideal pupil as essentially middle class and male (the autonomous, rational, 'intelligent' and agentic learner), and the middle class female ideal pupil (the sensible, supportive, 'able' and kind learner). While the working class girls were not interviewed in this study to understand their perceptions of the ideal pupil and their participation in positioning, it seems likely this would have a negative impact on their self-perceptions as learners and their orientations to learning.

**Discussion and conclusions**

The implication of this case study analysis of a classroom where the dominant mode of pedagogy is competence-based (or child-centred pedagogy) (Bernstein 2000) is that such pedagogy can be highly unjust for some pupils. In this classroom, the competence pedagogy used by the teacher engendered a hierarchy among pupils on the basis of perceived innate pupil characteristics related to their social class and gender. Most boys and the two non-professional middle class girls were able to position themselves as approximating the ideal pupil to varying degrees. The working class girls and non-professional middle class girls were positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy as they were seen as much less 'able' and 'arguing'.

This analysis of a classroom using competence pedagogy is striking when compared with accounts of 'child-centred' pedagogy where it is seen as anti-hierarchical and child-centred classrooms as 'democracies of acquisition' (Bernstein, 2000). It raises questions as to whether CCP is *necessarily* a more socially just alternative performative pedagogy. In the case of this classroom, this is because socio-historical constructions of gender and social class underpin notions of the ideal

pupil in competence-based pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000), and serve to reproduce broader social inequalities in the school context.  While this analysis is based on an individual case study, when connected to Bernstein's theory of competence pedagogy and an international range of critiques of CCP (e.g. Brooker, 2005; Hartley, 2009; Langford, 2010; Walkerdine, 1990), it is unlikely that it is an isolated example. Further research is needed to establish how inequalities are potentially produced in classrooms in the different contemporary cultural and social contexts (and with different social class compositions) where child-centred pedagogies are used, to complement the body of existing research on the production of inequalities in more performative classrooms. This could take the form of multiple- case studies to allow for inter-school comparison. This could take an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989) to understand the convergence of social discourses to shape identity positions and the lived experience of, for example, working class girls.

For CCP to produce more equal outcomes for all pupils, it needs to be disentangled from its socio-historical roots. This is because dominant gender and social class discourses render middle class boys superior as learners at the expense of working class girls in particular. In whichever social and cultural context CCP is used, it is essential for practitioners and learners to examine the influence of dominant discourses about gender, social class and other identity categories on how any ideal learner is constructed in their classroom, and how this informs learners' hierarchical positioning in relation to each other. Indeed, to achieve a classroom that is not characterised by intense hierarchical positioning on the basis of social class, gender, etc., it is arguably *necessary* to identify and challenge the influence and consequences of such discourses (Berlak, 2005).

Yet CCP has much to offer to more socially just forms of pedagogy, such as making learning relevant to children in their local context (e.g. Moll et al., 2005), allowing learners to have control and ownership over their learning (e.g. Lingard, 2005) and allowing learners to co-construct curricula (e.g. Apple and Beane, 1997). Most of these authors, among others, have been involved in developing pedagogies that can be described in Bernstein's (2000) terms as radical child-centred pedagogies because they explicitly aim to achieve more socially just outcomes for all learners. They are based on central features of CCP but focus on challenging and subverting power hierarchies in the classroom.  Arguably it is this form of CCP that needs to be further developed in order to contribute to producing more socially just outcomes for learners who are disadvantaged by discourses about, for example, social class and gender. If this line of research and practitioner enquiry is taken forward it is very possible that CCP can be developed as more socially just.

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