

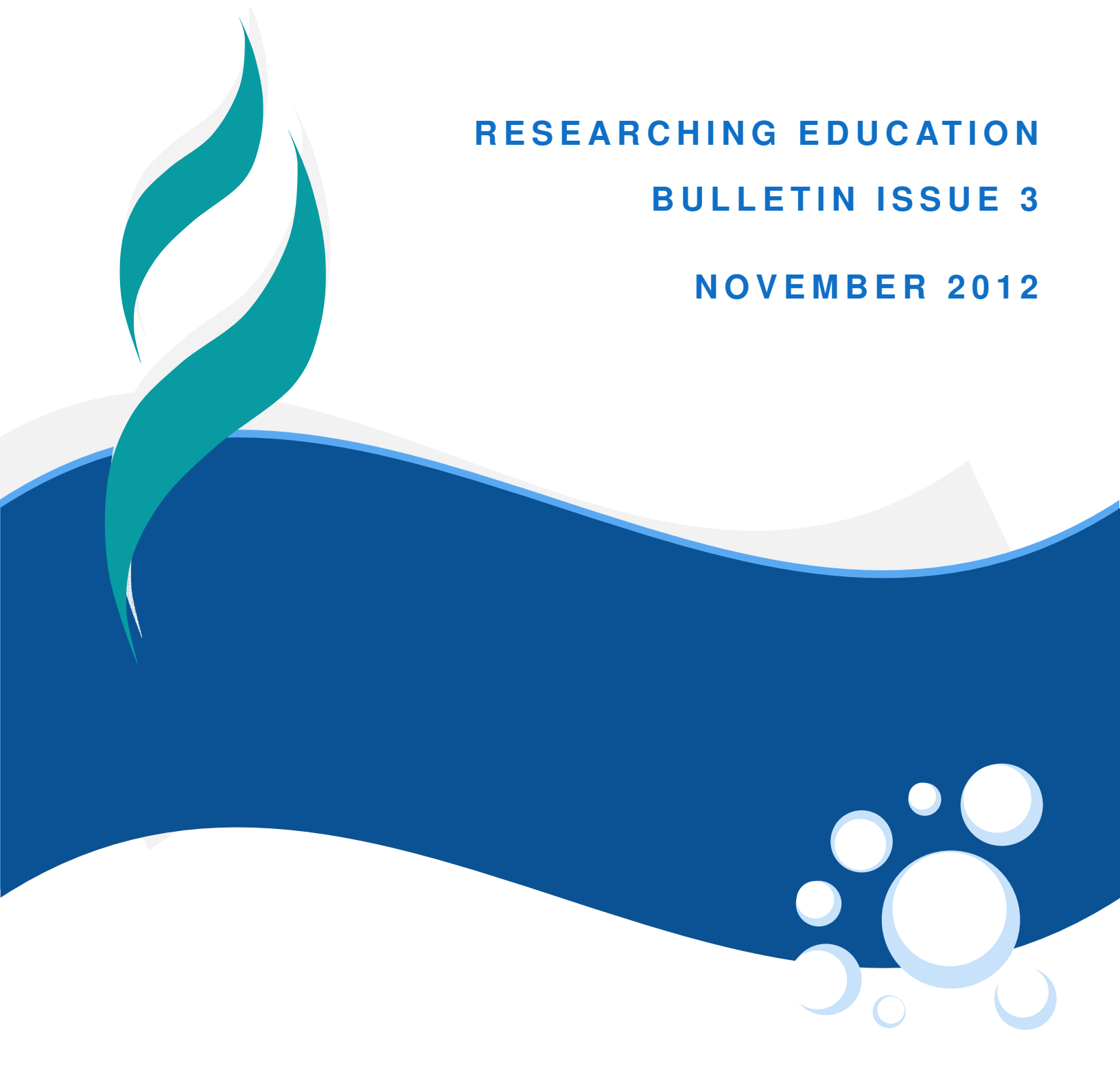


*Improving education
through research*

RESEARCHING EDUCATION

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Editorial

Tony Luby

Association of Chartered Teachers Scotland

Welcome to the third issue of SERA's *Researching Education Bulletin*. On behalf of the Association of Chartered Teachers Scotland (ACTS) I should like to thank and congratulate the Scottish Educational Research Association for this successful initiative. This issue gives Chartered Teachers an opportunity to demonstrate that our practice is informed by reading and research through engagement in practitioner enquiry (Standard for Chartered Teacher 4.2.2). It also gives us a voice whereby we can enhance the quality of the wider professional context of teaching and contribute to the literature on current educational issues (Standard 4.4.1).

In the first article Sheila Waddell reports on a research project into the experiences of bilingual minority ethnic parents at a Glasgow secondary school in which 34 different languages were being spoken. In the second article Lynne Jones reflects on the experience of ascertaining the impact of introducing regular, whole school mixed-age sessions in a West Lothian primary school. Remaining in the primary school sector, but far removed from the Central Belt, Mike Brown investigates personalization within the curriculum as practised within a three-class village primary school in southern Scotland.

In the fourth article, Mei May Thong outlines part of her personal journey as she discusses 'Safe Space.' Developed in Manchester, she applies this to her Outreach work in Glasgow, based in a Special School with primary age children who have Social, Emotional and Behavioural Needs in mainstream settings. In the final article, Tony Luby analyses action research in an Aberdeen secondary school whereby pupils developed dialogic skills through inter-faith dialogue.

A common theme is developing – diversity! Chartered Teachers embrace such a wide and diverse range of backgrounds and this is reflected in this issue. There is a plurality of practitioner inquiry that is to be welcomed as we try to realise the vision of Moore (2012: 136) in *Teaching and Learning: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture* that: 'Teachers should perceive themselves as *researchers and theorists* as well as practitioners.'

On behalf of the Editorial team I hope that you enjoy reading this issue.

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Talking Up Inter Faith Dialogue



Involving Bilingual Parents in their Children's Education

Sheila Waddell

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As part of a Master's degree in Chartered Teacher Studies, a research project into the experiences of bilingual minority ethnic parents of the services offered to them was carried out at a Glasgow secondary school. The school roll was 950, and just over 12% of the pupils were bilingual with 34 different languages being spoken. The most widely spoken languages apart from English were Urdu, Punjabi, Arabic and Cantonese. Two thirds of the bilingual pupils spoke Urdu, Punjabi or both.

The aims of the research project were to find out what bilingual ethnic minority parents thought of the services offered to them; ask if they thought these could be improved; and draw up a professional action plan based on the findings of the research in order to involve bilingual parents more in their children's education. An MSc in Chartered Teacher Studies differed from a conventional Master's degree in that it had to embody not only research, but also Professional Action, a key component of the Chartered Teacher Programme.

Methodology

The main methodology chosen was a questionnaire, which was issued to all bilingual parents, as this was the only practical way of obtaining the views of the 80 sets of parents concerned. It was also decided to ask parents to return questionnaires anonymously to try to avoid reluctance to record negative responses. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with a random sample of parents in order to probe the results of the questionnaire more deeply. In addition, school documents recording attendance at parents' evenings were also analysed.

The questionnaire was piloted in a neighbouring Glasgow secondary school with a similar pupil population and then sent out to all bilingual parents with a covering letter, informing them why the research was being carried out and assuring them that their anonymity would be respected. Parents were also offered the use of an interpreter.

There were a number of challenges: firstly, identifying a school for piloting the questionnaire, as no two schools are identical; secondly, would parents answer a questionnaire that was anonymous? Thirdly, while attendance at parents' evenings would be analysed as far as possible, it was impossible to ensure 100% accuracy, as some parents arriving late might not sign in.

Despite these concerns, 46% of bilingual parents returned the questionnaire, as opposed to 30% of all parents returning one sent out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) prior to a school inspection three months earlier. One parent objected to the questionnaire as she felt it was an invasion of her privacy, while several wrote down on the questionnaire that they were delighted to be asked for their views. No parents accepted the offer of an interpreter, but three parents asked neighbours to help them fill out the questionnaire.

Following analysis of the results, semi structured interviews were carried out, with the majority of parents selected agreeing to be interviewed. One insisted on being interviewed at her place of work, while only one parent used an interpreter. The interviews confirmed the findings of the questionnaire, while they also picked up three parents who had not returned the questionnaire.

However 37% of the respondents to the questionnaire had been to university and a school in a different catchment area might have thrown up different results. In addition, over half the parents did not return the questionnaire.

The findings

In contrast with the MEPESS Report (SEED, 2005) where bilingual ethnic minority parents had a negative view of Scottish schools and teachers, 100% of respondents found the school friendly and helpful; while 94% found class teachers helpful. Attendance by all parents at parents' evenings was generally high, with no overall pattern emerging; 81% of bilingual parents said they attended regularly. However, despite the fact that bilingual parents attended S1, S3, S4, S5 and S6 parents' evenings and the regular S2 parents' evenings for reporting back on progress, none of the parents of the 15 bilingual pupils attended the S2 parents' information meeting. Attendance by bilingual parents at this meeting in previous years had also reportedly been very low or non-existent, although this had not been strictly monitored. This was a matter of concern, as the S2 parents' information meeting gave parents the opportunity to talk to the careers officer, as well as subject and pastoral care teachers. They were also able to ask questions about courses and subject requirements for specific careers; so that they could help their children make informed subject choices.

A majority of respondents (78%) wanted more information on key stages in Scottish Education in their own language, while nearly all (98%) wanted extra work for their children if they were experiencing difficulty with the Standard Grade English Reading Paper. The vast majority (93%) also stated they would be happy to check that any extra work given to their children was completed.

Just over four fifths (81%) said they would attend a drop in session during the school day to discuss concerns about their child's progress, while 60% of respondents helped their children with homework. Just over half (53%) attended school functions like plays, concerts and the awards ceremony (prize giving).

Relevance to educational practice

The research was relevant to educational practice as an action plan was drawn up in the light of the findings. This involved the preparation of information on key stages in Scottish secondary education,

such as transition from primary to secondary school and S2 subject option choices with the respective year heads. This was then translated into Urdu, Punjabi, Arabic, Chinese Farsi and Spanish.

Bilingual pupils experiencing difficulty with reading comprehension passages were identified with the help of the English Department and a bank of reading passages was prepared. Passages were then issued to bilingual pupils as part of a reading skills development programme and marked on a weekly basis with pupils being given detailed feedback.

Two boys who had originally agreed to take part became reluctant to complete the work and the help of their parents was enlisted. At the end of the programme all pupils who took part were asked for their views in a short questionnaire. All said it had helped them. The main benefits seem to have been developing an extended vocabulary and an improved ability to answer and understand questions. One pupil said his language skills had improved; a second said it had helped to develop his exam techniques; while a third said it had enabled her to “*answer questions more quickly.*”

All those who took part passed Standard Grade English at General Level or better, with two gaining Credit (Band Two) passes.

A daytime drop in session was set up and six parents attended, three on more than one occasion, while regular monitoring of attendance patterns at parents’ evenings was established. Information was also sent out to bilingual parents in their own language (as far as possible) at key stages in their children’s education. There was a favourable response to this and attendance at S2 Options parents’ meetings rose from 0 to over 80%.

As a result of the research project and the action plan there was greater co-operation with bilingual parents, which has led to improved Standard Grade English results for bilingual pupils. Previous research by Gillies (1989) and Bhopal (Pickard, 2004) has shown that English is an area where bilingual pupils underperform compared to other subjects.

In addition, bilingual parents became more involved in monitoring homework and were better informed about key stages in their children’s secondary education and were more willing to come in to school to seek advice and help.

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Vertically Challenged?

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The aim of this small-scale action research project was to establish what the impact of the recently introduced practice of regular, whole school mixed-age sessions has been in my setting.

Since October 2010, vertical groups (VGs) have been timetabled for 45 minutes one afternoon a week. There are 12 vertical groups, each with about 18 children from every stage across the mainstream part of our school. Vertical groups have a P7 leader and a P6 co-leader who often have the responsibility for running the session. VG meet in the same room and are

supported by the same teacher and in some cases the same pupil support worker, each week. These sessions have tackled a range of issues, most with a citizenship focus.

From the start, staff recognised lots of positives in VGs. However, researchers have pointed out that: ‘The reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption. The meanings that they attach to their experiences are not necessarily the meanings their teachers or parents would ascribe... [and] are not always visible or accessible to adults.’ (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr 2000:61) As this realisation came more sharply into focus, my particular research question developed from a “wondering” about whether children of different ages, stages, abilities, genders and even personalities were all gaining in this new style of learning situation. Indeed, literature indicated to me that: ‘...studies concerning the impact of organizational pupil grouping practices suggest that no one form of organizational grouping benefits all pupils.’ (Kutnick et al 2005:3) Our Infant classes are capped at 18 and the vertical groups are that size too, and while the older children in larger classes might appreciate the smaller group size, I was particularly worried that the Infants might feel intimidated, being surrounded by “big ones.”

Figure 1: Typical whole school VG session



Given that my research question asks what vertical groups look like, it was essential to collect visual data but, since it is contended that ‘the use of both visual and verbal (written) texts

provides a way to hear different stories, or multiple tellings' (Johnson 2004: 10); in order to access as broad a spectrum of opinion as possible, I decided to collect a mix of data from pupils and staff.

VISUAL DATA: Photographs taken over the year in all groups (see Figure 1). Films of one whole school feedback and two VG sessions (see Figure 3). Drawings from a large sample of P1-P7 children (see Figure 4).

WRITTEN DATA: An evaluation of vertical groups by the pupil leaders and co-leaders (see Figure 2, P6 co-leader). A Venn diagram completed by pupil council members, comparing and contrasting the Pupil Council and vertical groups.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: To find out about the head teacher's rationale for introducing mixed-age learning opportunities, to find out about the topics and group allocation from a colleague given that responsibility, and to record the first impressions of a visitor.

GROUP INTERVIEW: To find out about the perceived pros and cons from teaching and non-teaching colleagues (see Figure 2, Teacher).

Figure 2: Examples of data collected

"Vertical groups looks like teamwork from P1 -P7 when all the classes combine and do brilliant activities." *P6 co-leader*

"... one of the things we were really picked up on when HMI came in the last time was the lack of social experiences and ... knowledge and understanding of the world that children from this kind of environment have and if you think about the topics we have covered in vertical groups, we are opening up a whole new world to them." *Teacher*

Quotes taken from written evidence gathered from pupils and from a group interview with staff respectively.

Figure 3: Samples of data

“Only the big ones get to do the stuff” – P1 child

“I hate vertical groups... coming down to this class” – P4 child

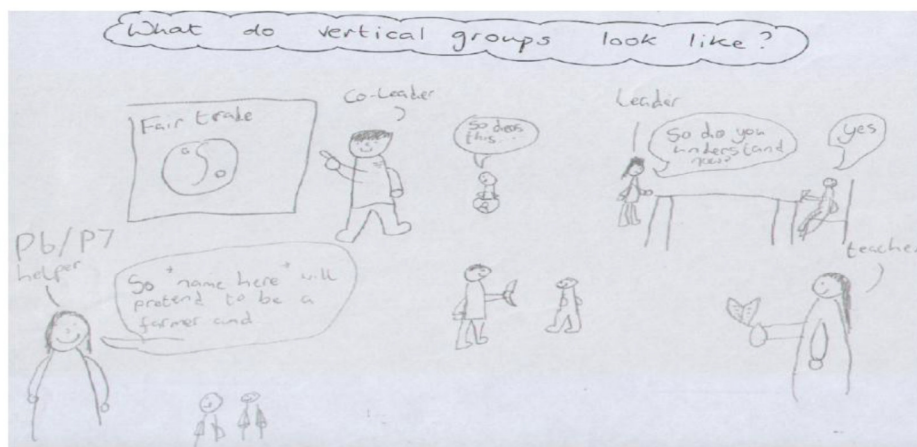
Comments made by P1 pupil as he talked about his drawing and by P4 pupil in the course of a filmed vertical group session.

The vast majority of pupil drawings collected were full of positive imagery and I would tentatively conclude that my initial concern about Infant pupils perhaps feeling overwhelmed was probably not the case.

A concern voiced by both staff and pupils to differing degrees was that of pupil leaders and teachers being adequately prepared for the different topics. At least one of the assigned pupil leaders found the responsibility for leading lessons on subject she wasn't well versed in herself hard to bear. Teachers spoke of times when it wasn't clear who was meant to be leading and of not feeling properly prepared beforehand. As for the particular issues themselves, many staff thought some, like Fairtrade, were too difficult and abstract for the Infants. However, the children's 'reality' was clearly revealed in the 20% of Infant pupils' drawings (13 of 65) that featured images relating to Fairtrade, with only the Diversity lesson featuring more often (in 16 drawings). This compared to 28% of Junior pupils' drawings (28 of 101) featuring Fairtrade, with Safer Internet and Being a good neighbour the next most popular (in 5 drawings each). In other instances of a disconnect in information collected from different types of evidence, it turned out to be the children's drawings which held the details of the truth, *their* truth. For example, pupils who had widely been supposed by staff not to be enjoying VGs for reasons such as elective mutism or autistic spectrum disorder; when asked to draw what vertical groups looked like, they drew pictures full of smiley faces and bright colours, which seemed to indicate quite the opposite.

Overall, vertical groups were seen by management, pupils, staff and visitors to the school as being overwhelmingly positive, even powerful, in terms of their function in providing more opportunities for pupils' voices to be heard, and in terms of their impact on pupil-pupil and pupil-staff relations across the learning community.

Figure 4: examples of visual data



Two prominent issues emerged from the data.

- Even for those children in the sample that were assumed to be struggling with the multi-age, mixed ability set-up and/or the learning content, their vertical group looks like a very supportive space for focused and highly productive democratic participation. The superficial impact of VGs on communication and community has been tangible from the start; however, the depth of impact on individuals was only truly revealed by asking pupils for a thoughtful, personal, visual response.

- At the outset, vertical groups were instituted as: ‘a deliberate re-structuring for opportunities to share’ decision making and consultation with the wider pupil population. For this to be a sustainable change however, ‘it should not be underestimated that transforming organizational and cultural structures requires a great deal of time and effort over the long term.’ (Waterhouse & Møller 2009: 127) Pitching a lesson appropriately to engage such a broad spectrum of age and ability is a challenge even for an experienced teacher. Fundamentally, it requires an investment of time and space in the effective forward planning of issues as well as a commitment to the training of leading pupils in the issues themselves; and some simple teaching/management techniques. In this way, the nascent student leadership in the school will be properly supported rather than vertically challenged.

Conclusion

This research shows that, in their very first year, vertical groups had a positive impact on both pupil voice and relationships across the school community. In the terms of Hart (1992: 8) there has undoubtedly been movement up the ‘ladder of participation’. However, in order to be able to say that our children consistently stand on the highest rungs of genuine, child-initiated participation on the ladder, there is some collaborative development work to be undertaken to further improve the participatory and democratic nature of vertical groups in my setting.

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Exploring the Impact of Personalisation and Choice upon Primary School Pupils' Motivation

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As one of seven “Principles for Curriculum Design”, “Personalisation and Choice” is embedded in current educational policy in Scotland. The idea of “Personalisation”, as the name implies, places the child at the heart of the teaching and learning process. Aligned with “Personalisation” is “Choice”; if pupils are afforded more choices in their learning, they will learn to become more autonomous, self-determining and more motivated (McLean, 2009). Personalisation and Choice is now part of our educational vocabulary, yet there is no consensus on a precise definition of the term, nor is there a body of evidence to support claims that it is an effective pedagogical strategy.

Personalisation is a term which fully emerged in the United Kingdom less than a decade ago, where the former Labour administration promoted it as a ‘Big Idea’ in education in England and Wales (Pollard and James, 2004). Whereas in the recent past, *differentiation* was perceived as a way of addressing individual learning needs, Personalisation and Choice is said to allow the learner to take greater responsibility for his or her own learning: a “natural evolution of differentiation” (Buckley, cited by Galloway, 2009: 134).

Commentators on Personalisation link the idea to the largely abandoned “child centred” pedagogies of the 1960s and 1970s (Jeffs, 2008). Critics draw parallels to the rise of consumerism and consumer culture, where learning is described in terms of products (Hartley, 2009) and brand (Fielding, 2006). Advocates, on the other hand, use phraseology which suggests more solid and enduring outcomes: pupils engage in “co-constructed learning” (Humphreys, 2008: 32); they are “co-investors in education” (Sebba et al 2007: 72); they need to be “active creators” of their learning (Rudd, 2008: 123).

The participants in this research were Primary 6 and 7 pupils in a three-class village primary school in southern Scotland. At the time of this research, the school’s Development Plan noted how pupils had expressed a desire to have a greater say in taking the school forward; and specifically in having greater responsibility for setting personal learning targets.

Research took place with the class throughout a cross-curricular project in which groups of pupils prepared a detailed plan for a makeover of an area of the school grounds. At the end of the term, each group presented their ideas to the rest of the school, with the most popular pitch

being adopted for the makeover. Though pupils were to work as part of a group throughout the project, learning would be personalised in that individuals had considerable scope for defining their own contribution to, and role within, their group.

Children have an increasing role to play as participants in research about what affects their lives (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007) and if “Personalisation and Choice” are to be among the cornerstones of pupils’ learning in the future, it therefore seems essential to discover from children themselves what impact this strategy has upon their approach to learning.

Information was gathered in a number of ways, mainly through a *qualitative* approach; Greig et al (2007) suggest that this is the most useful method to use when conducting research with pupils in this age range. It was essential that the pupils’ actual words and actions provided both hard evidence and also a basis for subsequent discussions. Qualitative data was gathered using the following methods:

- Teacher Observation and Participation: data was generated using a diary description method.
- Questionnaires: these provided an opportunity for reflection and for self-evaluation.
- Parental questionnaire: this provided an opportunity for triangulation.
- Focus group: this group of six pupils met on three occasions, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the project, with discussions recorded and transcribed, enabling coding of comments to take place.

From each of the questionnaires, focus group discussions and participation and observation sessions, evidence emerged to suggest that pupils are recognising that Personalisation and Choice – and the responsibilities that go with them – is impacting positively upon their motivation to learn. This evidence can be categorised as follows [including evidence obtained from pupils]:

Positive responses connected to ‘five key components’ of personalised learning (Pollard and James, 2004). [One of these ‘five key components’ is listed by Pollard and James as “Beyond the classroom: Learning in community context”. When presented, in a questionnaire, with the statement, “At school, I learn new skills which I use both in and out of school”, 100% of pupils questioned said they “Agreed Strongly” or “Agreed”].

Use of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). [In observation of group work, pupil “S”, a pupil with additional support needs, demonstrated interpersonal and naturalistic intelligences by defining her own specific role within her group].

Understanding of the value of feedback (Black et al, 2002). [In Focus Group discussions of teacher feedback, pupils’ comments included, “It helps you get things done better if you get good feedback” and “They (teachers) come over and they say, ‘Oh that’s really good!’ and then it boosts you up and you’re like, ‘Yay! I’m doing good!’”]

Understanding of the importance of goals and target-setting (McLean 2003). [Comments in Focus Group discussions included, "I think goals and targets are a good thing because then you have something to aim for, and then you just aim for that thing"].

Benefits of being able to present work and learning in different ways (Barnes, 2007). [Among the items on a wall display by a group which comprised pupils with additional support needs was a word search; this included vocabulary and terminology specific to the project. Viewers of the display were invited to take a copy and return it to group members once completed].

Empowerment through having choices and responsibilities (McLean, 2003). [When questioned on their attitudes to having greater choices and responsibilities, the group of twenty pupils provided fourteen responses which were coded as positive].

Understanding of importance of "twenty-first century skills" (Galloway, 2009: 119). [One such skill is said to be "team working". A majority (65%) of pupils believed they had learned team working skills throughout the course of this project, as indicated by coding of responses to the question, "Identify five things you think you have learned or achieved in the garden makeover project"].

Understanding that learning is cross-curricular (Barnes, 2007), with explicit reference to most Curriculum Areas within A Curriculum for Excellence. [Pupils were asked to, "Identify five things you think you have learned or achieved in the garden makeover project". Responses indicated that pupils perceived learning in all but one of the Curriculum Areas specified by A Curriculum for Excellence].



This evidence links closely with McLean's (2009) description of the '3As', Affiliation, Agency and Autonomy, which he asserts are the essential pre-conditions for pupils' motivation.

Despite the evidence gained from pupils in support of Personalisation and Choice, a number of reservations were also expressed. These can be summarised as:

- A lack of clear structure in their learning.
- Reservations concerning the composition of work groups.
- Feelings of discomfort at demonstrating learning as a presentation or a performance.
- Reservations about the idea of being allowed more control of their learning; some pupils believed that what they learned was the sole responsibility of teachers and that having greater choice was distracting.

Due to the “conceptual elasticity” (Hartley, 2008: 378) of Personalisation and Choice, they mean “different things to different people *at the same time*” (Pykett, 2009: 378; original italics). The concept has quickly been embedded in educational vocabulary and policy (Hartley, 2008) despite its efficacy being supported not by research but instead by commentary. This project provides some evidence from pupils that they are likely to feel more motivated as a consequence of Personalisation and Choice but sufficient reservations were expressed to persuade us that more research is needed into the use of this particular strategy. A more precise definition might aid this process, though schools can – and should (Hartley, 2007) – make what they will of Personalisation and Choice. This flexibility is, perhaps, the very essence of A Curriculum for Excellence.

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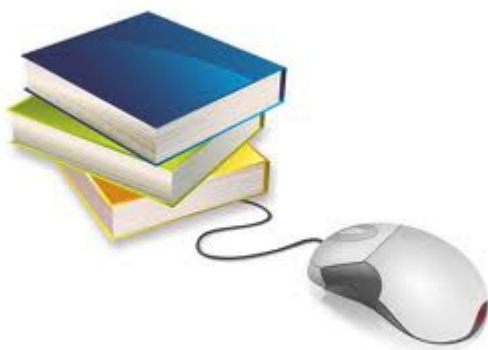
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A Safe Space

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Introduction

I am an Outreach Teacher in Glasgow, based in a Special School and I work with primary age children who have social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN) in mainstream settings. Safe Space is a term borrowed from my past involvement with the Emotional and Trauma Support Project (ETS, 2001-2006) in Manchester. ETS providers adopted the idea of establishing a 'Safe Space' to enable and engage with traumatised children through creative and therapeutic interventions which make sense of their lives and let them experience 'magic moments'. 'Safe Space' was developed as an approach, amongst other creative interventions, in my Outreach work.

A Safe Space in Outreach Support

Creating a 'Safe Space' for creative and healing work is central to my outreach support for children with SEBN through collaboration with significant adults, where individual needs and some confidential issues may be addressed. The conversations which take place within this space are fundamentally to engender change. The significant adults may be a parent, grandparent, carer, Class Teacher or Pupil Support Assistant, whose voices of influence are most effective and who is committed to supporting the child in consistent ways. As communication and collaboration between home and school strengthen, the effects of the safe space work can help establish support, security and boundaries. Hence 'Safe Space' is essentially about establishing a secure base for positive change. In order for children to be helped to change, they must first feel safe (see Figure 1).

Stability and a sense of safety are essential before we can explore difficult issues. A 'secure base' is created when the primary carer and I work in partnership, establishing a triangular relationship with the child (see Figure 2), providing security and support in making changes. This idea is similar to Geddes (2006) triangular relationship between teacher, child and task in a two dimensional relationship. The safe space in my scheme is three dimensional with 'change' at the apex of the pyramid. The class teacher, who may be the second attached figure, is gradually brought into the connecting frame which further strengthens the base. Creative interventions and different approaches may be used within the secure base for meaningful communication and to mediate change.

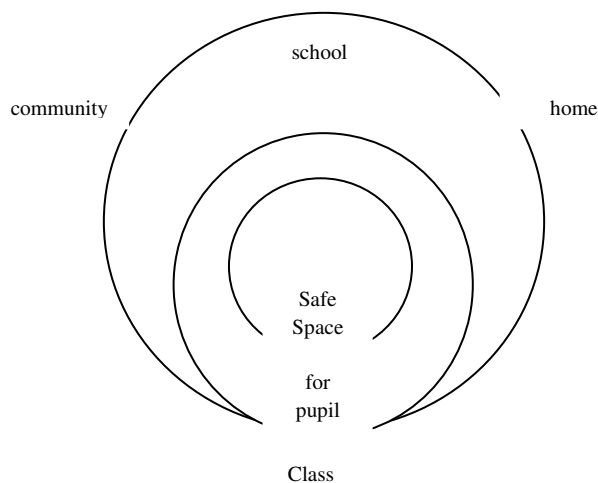


Figure 1

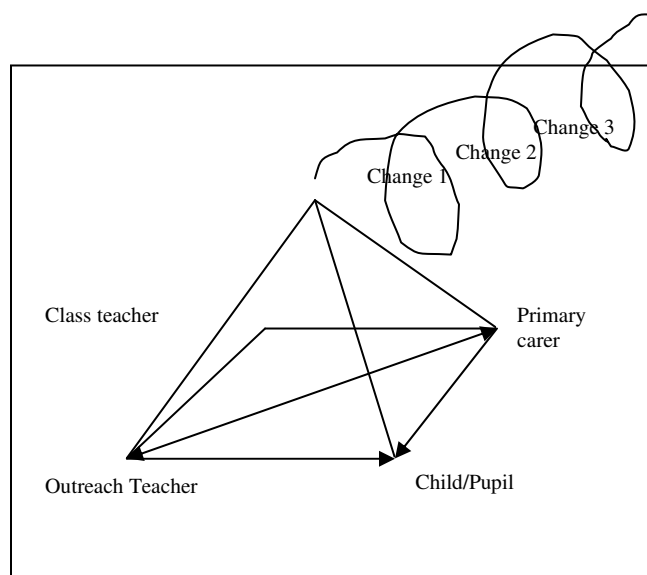


Figure 2

Throughout my work I have learned that when a secure base cannot be established in complex cases, then change is limited even when effective interventions have been tried. The involvement of the primary carer or attached figure is crucial in establishing this space. When change happens, it becomes a process and may be likened to a spiral, requiring different approaches and interventions at different stages. (Geldard and Geldard 2002)

Mediating Change

I have found that children communicate effectively through images and drawings, and are responsive when I engage them through their chosen medium. "The relationship between thought and word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought: thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" Vygotsky, 1962. Children felt understood when I put their feelings into words and empathise with their inner turmoil or struggle. Thinking and speech helps to mediate between the social aspects and the individual. Vygotsky believed that children are "capable of far more competent performance" when they are properly helped ("scaffolded learning") by adults.

Safe Space work is about helping to scaffold change. The learner must want to change his/her behaviour and feel competent to make those changes. I work in partnership with the primary carer to 'protect' the vulnerability of the child, to boost confidence, build resilience and bring about what is ready for change. When behaviour interferes significantly, I would resort to alternative approaches that are innovative and creative. Hence I am practising aspects of Mediated Learning Experience (Falik nd) which involves intense interaction between the child and me (mediator) to change the child's behaviour. The essential ingredient in mediation is focusing on the stimulus world of the child, on understanding and working with their responses and to follow the lead in their behaviour.

We also need to consider the child's sense of readiness for change. It is a partnership where the child gives his/her view of events and perspective on what should take place. It is this mental view/perspective of events, according to Geldard and Geldard (2002) that the child has power to change such as comparing past circumstances, present changes and the progress achieved. If a child can change the interpretation of events, past or present, with help, then their perception is changed and they have more choices. Oldham et al (1978), Melzak and Blackwell (2000), Geldard and Geldard (2002) and Townsend (2002) all support this theory of change that if a child can be helped to make small changes in their perception then it follows that the situation in the child's internal world changes.

Theoretical framework

Literature review and reflection has led to conceptualizing this Safe Space theory. Keith White in his book 'The Growth of Love' described safe space as a 'secure base' for exploration – "and for humans, exploration is the essence of growth and development". Here he talked about the home his family had set up for children in care. He says that children are "essential and resourceful partners in the creation of a secure base" and stressed the importance of stability in this environment. Essentially, it is about how security is experienced by the child. Hughes (2006) described creating a safe setting for psychotherapy work where exploration occurs with non-verbal attunement, reflection and non-judgemental dialogue along with empathy and reassurance during the therapeutic process. I

believe as teachers we can create Safe Spaces in schools and our classrooms for children who have SEBN.

Reflecting on Safe Space work in Outreach Support

Between 2006 and 2011, 25 out of 35 assessed cases received Outreach Support which ranged between six weeks to two years. Safe Space work was carried out amongst other interventions for 16 of these cases, which involved the pupil and their primary carer. There were positive outcomes for ten of these cases and the pupils remained in their respective schools, except for one who was re-referred a year later. Tribute must also be paid to the schools and teachers who worked with these children and their families with complex needs, by providing a sense of belonging, supportive ethos and community, security and stability through routines and boundaries. For these children the quality of relationships, both at home and in school were critical in helping them change their behaviour and to become more manageable. Change did not go far enough for six children to remain in the mainstream. There are circumstances when Safe Space may not work because the adult and child have mental health issues, ongoing Child Protection issues, poor attendance and inconsistent engagement. Three such case studies were described by Thong (2008, 2012).

Conclusion

Safe Spaces can be created in school through anti-bullying and health policies and practices, establishing a climate where children feel safe and special, have a sense of belonging and are enabled to thrive and to achieve. The ethos and environment of the school can play a significant part in supporting and promoting healing and restorative work.

A Dutch programme, known as the Pharos project (De Ruuk 2001) promoted school as a suitable context to create a 'healing environment' for a psychosocial programme. This programme was dependent on the teacher's professional skills, aptitude and expertise in creating a safe healing ethos in the classroom through teaching emotional literacy and supporting emotional intelligence development in a safe place, where children are free to be themselves and are helped to love again.

There was definite realization across the services about working with parents and addressing the challenges posed by those who were 'hard to reach'. Donny Scott (Children and Families Department, Edinburgh) spoke about the cultural differences between home, school and society, at the 2011 conference for the Association of Chartered Teachers Scotland (ACTS). He questioned the impact of parental involvement in their children's learning and partnership with schools. If attention is given to creating Safe Spaces in schools for hard to reach children and their carers; perhaps this may provide the impact for which we are searching.

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Talking Up Inter Faith Dialogue

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Background

Employed as a Chartered Teacher of Roman Catholic RE (RCRE) I teach small groups of pupils attending state secondary schools in Aberdeen city. Whilst undertaking a series of classroom-based tasks for postgraduate studies at Oxford University, I discovered that I was providing insufficient opportunities for pupils to engage in dialogue. This was particularly concerning as I had been keen to enable the pupils to adopt a deep approach to their learning through critical reflection and peer teaching. A starting point for this was to encourage the kind of dialogue that ‘...aims to promote communication with and between students, to demonstrate the value of the views of the students, and to help participants to share and build meaning collaboratively.’ (Hattie 2012: 74)

Action research

There were twenty Catholic pupils available in S3 & S4 and all were invited to participate in an action research programme. Half of the pupils accepted the invitation and each pupil selected a non-Catholic friend for conversations that were structured according to the recommendations of McKenna et al (2008):

- ❖ the conversation task is sharply focused at the outset, and preferably it is text-based;
- ❖ the conversation partners should be aware of the ‘ground rules’ and have a good, shared understanding of the activity; and
- ❖ the participants should be encouraged to freely exchange ideas and viewpoints and to explore other avenues for discussion.

I was stationed outside the room in which the pupils’ conversations took place; and these conversations were recorded and later transcribed.

Interventions

There was a series of three interventions with the twenty pupils in which:

- A. Free-ranging discussion took place between the pupils and this was analysed with regard to:
 - *cumulative talk* i.e. pupils ‘...build positively but uncritically on what the other has said’;
- and

- *exploratory* talk i.e. pupils ‘...engage critically but constructively with each other’s ideas’ (Mercer 1995: 104).

B. There were teacher-led intervention as the pupils read two text extracts prior to engaging in discussion ; and

C. The pupils watched a six minute video clip prior to their conversations.

Exemplar

According to Mercer (1995: 104) exploratory talk is characterized by ‘statements and suggestions [being] offered for joint consideration [and] these may be challenged and counter-challenged, but challenges are justified and alternative hypotheses are offered.’

Douglas: Well I might disagree with you there because I think that um...humans are the cause of sin because God gave us freewill, he didn’t want to control us otherwise we’d be like robots.

Craig: Uh huh.

Douglas: And that wouldn’t give us any freedom at all, we’ll always be good and God gave us freewill to choose what is right but obviously humans didn’t choose that way, they didn’t the right way and they’ve become selfish, like Eve tricking Adam into eating that apple which caused him to sin against God, and that obviously angered God and I think for me I think that’s because of sin, humans are the cause of sin.

Craig: Yeah, I’d agree that humans are the cause of sin and no doubt our sort of freewill, if we have it. We often choose the wrong path and, again the Adam and Eve story is a fantastic way of illustrating society, and how people sin and what effect it can have. But, again, I think these stories need to be taken with a pinch of salt; and that they are in my opinion nothing more than stories. But you can still read into them as much as you can read into many sorts of novels and literature; which of course we know they aren’t true stories. But we can still appreciate the moral values that they give us such as to name a few, *The Lord of the Flies* and *Animal Farm*, that many of us studied in English um...that’s my point of view with regards to that.

Douglas: Well I think the stories could be pretty accurate because they’ve been passed on with the Bible and the Catholic Church; they’ve been passed on ever since Jesus came into this world as a form of God and even before that in the Old Testament.

Exploratory talk is evidenced by the initiator, Douglas¹, offering a view on the relationship between humanity, freewill and sin. This view is challenged by Craig, the respondent, who justifies it through criticism of a too literal understanding of the Creation story. Rather, an alternative hypothesis is mooted whereby the Creation story should be regarded more like a novel that contains important moral truths. This view, in its turn, is counter challenged with an appeal to the authority of the Bible and Tradition.

Findings

This proved to be a very rich experience. The pupils remained on-task and there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the teacher-led interventions helped to promote both cumulative talk and exploratory talk amongst the twenty pupils who participated in the study. On average, throughout the three interventions, the pupils' conversations comprised 54.5% cumulative talk and 22.8% exploratory talk. These two types of talk were indicators that pupils had been involved with *peer teaching, critical reflection and deep learning*.

Upon concluding this series of three conversations, the pupils completed a questionnaire survey comprising test items used in previous religious education (RE) research concerning deep learning (Luby 1995). A Chi Square Test analysis of their responses confirmed that a dialogic approach to RE encouraged them to adopt a deep approach to their learning.

Finally, the twenty pupils were asked to sum up (anonymously) in a sentence what they thought about this experience as a way of learning in RE. All responded positively and cited primarily pedagogical and social reasons such as given below:

- ❖ *Pedagogical* e.g. 'A learning experience that enables you to see other people's views and perspectives and ultimately how your beliefs compare'; & 'It's very good for learning about the things that are difficult to get your head around; also it helps me accept others opinions and attitudes towards religion.'
- ❖ *Pedagogical & Social* e.g. 'Allowing me to learn by listening to other people's points of view, which often contrast with my own, has greatly benefitted my understanding of some Catholic ideas; and has done so through a medium which I find enjoyable.'

Reservations

Almost always, one has to be aware of the 'Hawthorne effect' – whereby participants '...exhibit atypically high levels of performance simply because they are aware that they are being studied' (Macefield 2007: 145). The simple act of removing the pupils from their usual class engendered a degree of excitement and this may explain, to some extent, the 'edge' to the pupils' conversations.

¹ Fictitious names to preserve anonymity.

Future research

As the research was conducted in one city comprehensive school that can fairly be described as having Mid-High levels of attainment and is situated within a catchment area of Mid-High levels of affluence; then future research should increase the sample size of both pupils and schools in order that findings can be generalized. In particular, there is a need to take account of different schools with regard to:

- ❖ Levels of attainment (High – Mid –Low);
- ❖ Affluence of catchment areas (High – Mid – Low);
- ❖ Location (city – semi-rural – rural); and
- ❖ Types (comprehensive; selective; faith).

Also, the main foci of the teacher interventions and the pupils' conversations had been the topics of science & religion and historical evidence. However, another focus of values had been identified but not pursued. The work of Harrison (2011) offers some promising avenues for exploration with regard to this topic. Hopefully, these factors will be addressed through forthcoming studies.

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