

Education, schooling and learning for life: how meaning and opportunity build from everyday relationships

Effective teaching and learning equips learners for life in its broadest sense, as well as for specific tests of performance. This Research Briefing reports on a sequence of studies on this topic. At its heart was detailed tracking of the learning of middle and working class cohorts of children from age 4 to age 16. The work attempted to understand the role of pupil perspectives, strategies, relationships and identities in the authentic personalisation of teaching and learning.

- Relationships between teachers and pupils remain the basis of the moral order of the classroom – and thus underpin discipline and behaviour. → A positive classroom climate for teaching and learning depends on respect, trust and the mutual exchange of dignity between teachers and pupils.
- Children develop their identities as learners through successive experiences and contexts as they move through schooling. → The most fundamental form of education, the process of becoming a person, requires careful consideration as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills.
- Pupils actively negotiate their way through schooling. When reviewed over several years, this can be seen as a 'pupil career'. → Understanding the progression of these strategic biographies is an important contribution to meaningful personalisation of provision.
- The match to school provision of learner identity, social relationships and cultural resources strongly influence the overall outcomes of education. → Personalised provision in schools should respond to the social, cultural and material experiences of different groups of learners and to the struggles for meaning and opportunity in their lives. Inequalities between schools make this extremely challenging.

The research

The *Identity and Learning Programme* preceded TLRP but is associated with it because of Andrew Pollard's involvement in both and because of its relevance to TLRP. It has provided a way of thinking about learning through the lifecourse which is being used in interpreting TLRP's diverse portfolio of projects.

Relationships

The Identity and Learning Programme originated in the synergy of Andrew Pollard's full-time teaching in primary schools with his part-time study through masters and doctoral qualifications and subsequent early career publications. The most significant of these was *The Social World of the Primary School* (1985), which offered an analysis of teacher and pupil perspectives, school settings, classroom interaction and coping strategies. The following arguments stand out:

Relationships between teachers and pupils are the basis of the moral order of the classroom. This establishes the climate in which teaching and learning occur.

The interaction of teacher and pupil classroom strategies tends to create and amplify social differences between children. Pupils adopt strategies in patterned ways, identified in terms of high conformity ('Goodies'), negotiation ('Jokers') and opposition ('Gangs').

The classroom strategies of teachers and pupils often mesh together. In a common form of this, 'routinised teaching' is associated with 'pupil drift', as each party seeks to avoid risk and challenge. This may compromise standards of attainment.

face and how does the learner tackle them? Fourth, what are the opportunities to learn in the classroom and or other settings? Is the classroom climate conducive to learning, and is there appropriate instruction, feedback and support? Fifth, what are the formal and informal outcomes? How do these affect the learner's self-image and esteem, and thus feed forward into the individual's cumulative sense of personal worth and identity as a learner?

The Social World of Children's Learning (Pollard with Filer 1996) was the first empirical report to use this model. The following main conclusions were drawn.

Children's development of identities as learners can be conceptualised as a spiralling process through successive learning experiences and specific social contexts.

Relationships with parents (or carers) and siblings are major formative influences on a very young child's sense of self as a learner. Parents act as mediators, helping their child to interpret new experiences. Gender is a very significant factor in this.

Pupils are more likely to become effective learners if they are able to manage their coping strategies and presentation of self in ways which are viable in relation to different teachers and classroom contexts, and in relation to their peers.

Pupils are more likely to become effective learners when they have sufficient self-confidence, capacity for self-reflection and trust from their teacher to manage higher levels of risk and task ambiguity in classrooms.

Pupil careers and strategic biographies

The Social World of Pupil Careers (Pollard and Filer, 1996) focused on the development of children's identities and learning dispositions through seven years of their primary school careers. It built on and added to the longitudinal pupil case studies of *The Social World of Children's Learning*, documenting continuity and change within cases, as well as variations between them. This allowed us to describe children's emergent sense of self as learners, and their changing conceptions of 'pupil identity'. More analytically, an understanding of pupil identity in terms of the dimensions and dynamics of strategic action was formalised.

By way of our major conclusions, we thus suggested the following:

For analytic purposes, we can distinguish between four major dimensions of pupil strategies for coping with school life: conformity (being 'good'), anti-conformity (being willfully naughty or deviant), non-conformity (being un-knowingly deviant, perhaps through immaturity) and re-defining (negotiating with the teacher, often used by children who like to combine 'having fun' with their school work).

Children shape their strategic biographies as pupils within a matrix of social relations and cultural expectations of home, community and playground, as well as classrooms.

Pupils' strategic biographies are dynamic. Pupils actively negotiate a path through successive teacher and classroom settings, shaping, maintaining and actively evolving their identity and careers.

Identities as learners

In 1986/7 a new project was initiated by Andrew Pollard based on extremely detailed qualitative study of a cohort of ten young children moving through a white middle class primary school from age 4 to 11. In due course, this was complemented by Ann Filer's study of a similar cohort from a white working class community. These studies accumulated further through study of the children's secondary education, to become a unique longitudinal ethnography documenting the social influences on a contrasting sample of pupils throughout their compulsory schooling.

A key representation of such social processes is shown in Figure 1.

There are five key elements of this model which together produce a cyclical – or, in cumulation, a spiralling – representation of learning through life. First, the context. When and where is this life being lived? How does biography interact with history, geography and socio-economic conditions? Second, 'who' is the learner? What are the characteristics of his or her identity, as formed by social relationships with significant others in their lives, when they act to use the resources available to them and to realise their potential? Third, what are the learning challenges they

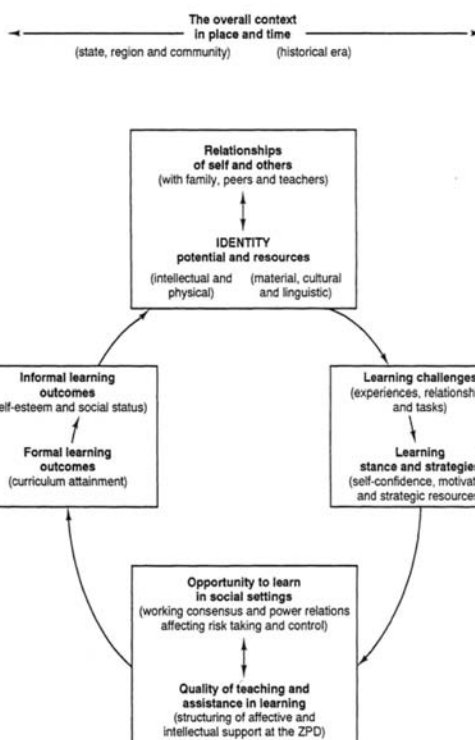


Figure 1: A model of learning, identity and social setting

Overall outcomes of education

Continuing the same study, *The Social World of Pupil Assessment* (Filer and Pollard 2000) highlighted social processes among and between teachers, parents, pupils and peers which had influenced pupil performance and the assessment practices and judgements of teachers and parents. This suggested that the notion of objectivity in assessment practices and outcomes should be viewed with considerable caution. More specifically:

Individual performances by learners cannot be separated from the contexts and social relations within which they are embedded.

Assessment techniques are social processes and therefore vulnerable to bias and distortion.

The ostensible results of assessment take their meaning for individuals from social and cultural processes of interpretation and via mediation by others.

In the final part of the Programme the case-study pupils, from both primary schools, were tracked through their five years of compulsory secondary education to age 16 and GCSE.

Now widely dispersed within one urban area, the study involved data-gathering in four comprehensives, a grammar school, a city technology college and four independent schools. We applied our understanding of learning processes, pupil career and social factors in assessment to these contexts, with particular reference to strategic action, the shaping of identity and the influence of social class and gender, both inside and beyond the schools.

We identified a strong pattern in pupils' identity experiences by school type. In Figure 2 below, we summarise the differentiating and polarising effects arising from the cultural match and mismatch in these different settings.

This analysis highlights the relative continuity and internal consistency between the values and expectations of the independent and selective schools, and the families and peer groups associated with them. There was relative clarity in the circumstances in which each individual pupil sought to maintain a viable identity and manage their strategic biography. Such shared understandings offer fertile ground for personalised provision.

Many of the skilled working class families offered quality time and emotional support for their children. They enabled a range of out of school cultural and sporting activities (including music, dance, drama, rugby, football, gliding, diving) and derived considerable pleasure from their children's experiences. Nevertheless, such parents were sometimes disadvantaged in relation to school systems in that their knowledge, confidence or interpersonal skills often failed at crucial times.

Indeed, the comprehensive school pupils in our study often experienced disparities in the discourse, values and expectations of significant others in their homes, schools and peer groups. The achievement of viability within such varied contexts resulted in the development of more fragmented identities, which in turn embedded the potential for future disruption in approaches to learning and patterns of strategic action. Continuity in the development of strategic biographies appeared to be harder to achieve for these pupils. For this reason, the achievement of authentic personalised provision is likely to be more important for these learners, but also harder to establish and sustain.

Competition and 'choice' between schools in this city thus produced differentiated educational experiences and reproduced inequalities.

Summary

English school children are extremely active in the construction and negotiation of their lives, whether at home or in playground and school settings. Children, teenagers and others act, however, within the particular historical, economic, political and cultural context of their communities and society. This produces discrepancies of resource and opportunity associated with social class, gender and ethnicity, and in the ways in which particular priorities and structural inequalities are expressed through the education system.

Major implications

This research traced how social influences on learning broaden as young people develop. It illustrates why an awareness of learning as a social activity is important, and why learning should be seen in relation to the development of identity over time.

Our analysis stands in stark contrast to the narrow target-setting of many contemporary, centrally directed, education systems. Such approaches tend to emphasise formal aspects of provision and to over-simplify teaching and learning processes. Maximising the potential of children and young people calls for a more appropriate understanding of them as social actors within their cultures and communities, and of how education fits into, and contributes to, their lives as a whole.

This analysis complements studies of factors associated with differential educational outcomes by identifying social processes which could help to account for them. The Identity and Learning Programme shows how individual students struggle to cope with their circumstances and, in so doing, reproduce some issues and construct others anew.

The bottom line is that social contexts, both within and beyond formal educational institutions, have enabling or constraining effects on learning as the strategic biographies of learners are played out. Patterns in provision will therefore have consequences in terms of patterns of outcome. National and local governments, and those who lead or work in schools, have very significant responsibilities in this respect. New approaches to personalised provision are unlikely to be able to fully overcome structural influences on learning outcomes.

One educational representation of 'learning through the lifecourse' is offered below in Figure 3.

The consideration of such models and the relationships, processes and narratives which underpin them indicates the potential for qualitative longitudinal studies in highlighting connections between different spheres and phases of life.

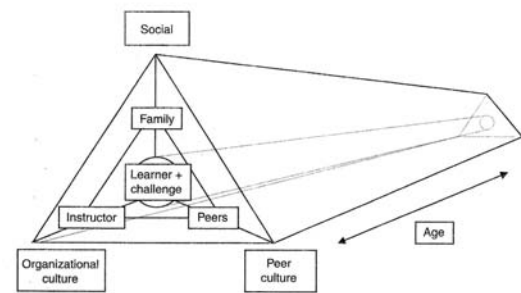


Figure 3: Social influences on learners through the life-course

Put more grandiosely, the development of personal identity and of narratives as ways of creating meaning through life is of enduring significance for humankind. Such ideas are deeply embedded within our cultures through concern for personal development. However, the modern world presses remorselessly for short-term performance in the drive for economic competitiveness and efficiency, and implicitly undermines other concerns for quality of life and social justice. There are indications that such imbalances can have the unintended consequence of depressing social adjustment and long-term motivation, and can create and amplify exclusion. In the case of education, such issues raise fundamental questions about the most appropriate conceptualisation of learning, teaching and education for modern societies. Authentic forms of personalisation, in this context, are a very significant challenge to the system as a whole, as well as to the classroom practices of teachers.

Work on such issues is being undertaken in the UK by many academics and in a number of current initiatives, including some within the TLRP. This large programme is building on key ideas explored within Identity and Learning Programme and elsewhere to contribute to a meta-narrative across some 70 projects distributed across the lifecourse.

	Independent and selective schools (6 schools, 8 pupils)	Comprehensive schools (3 schools, 8 pupils)
Socio-cultural contexts of home, school and peer group.	Closer match between home, school and peer discourses (fewer available 'ways to be') with regard to cultural, educational and future occupational identities.	Greater disparity among home, school and peer discourses (many, often mismatched and contradictory, perceptions of 'available ways to be').
Individual identities	Individuals tend to have a more consistent identity across school, peer and out-of-school settings. Less disruption to pupil identity on change from primary to secondary school contexts.	Individuals likely to have a more fragmented identity across school, peer and out-of-school settings. More frequent disruptions to established pupil identity on change from primary to secondary school contexts.
Learning strategies	Individuals show much less fragmentation of strategies, quicker emergence of coherent orientations and adaptive responses across curricular and social school contexts	Individuals' strategic responses likely to be more fragmented, especially in the early secondary years, with slower emergence of coherent orientations and adaptive responses across curricular and social school contexts.

Figure 2: Match and disparity in contexts, identities and learning strategies

Further information

Books associated with the Identity and Learning Programme are:

Pollard, A. (1985) *The Social World of the Primary School*, London, Cassell

Pollard, A. with Filer, A. (1996) *The Social World of Children's Learning*, London, Cassell

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (1999) *The Social World of Pupil Career in Primary School*, London, Cassell

Filer, A. and Pollard, A. (2000) *The Social World of Pupil Assessment in Primary School*, London, Continuum

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (forthcoming) *The Social World of Secondary Education*, London: Continuum.

Supplementary publications include:

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (1999) 'Learning, policy and pupil career: issues from a longitudinal ethnography', in Hammersley, M., *Researching School Experience*, London: Falmer Press.

Pollard, A. and Filer, A. (2001) 'The myth of objective assessment: an analysis in relation to primary education', *Education 3-13*, Autumn.

Pollard, A. and Triggs, P. (2000) *What Pupils Say: changing policy and practice in primary education*, London: Continuum.

Pollard, A. (2003) 'Learning through life – higher education and the lifecourse', in Watson, D. and Slowey, M. *Higher Education and the Lifecourse*, Buckingham: Open University Press/SRHE.

The analysis also underpins all editions *Reflective Teaching – a handbook for professional practice* (Continuum, see www.rtweb.info).

The warrant

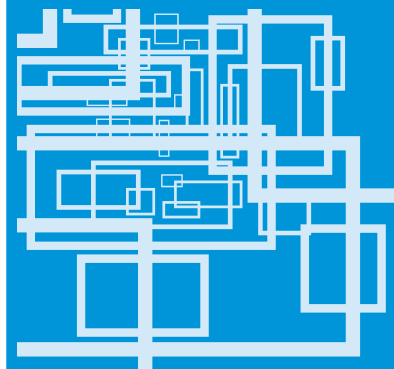
The empirical base of the Identity and Learning Programme was longitudinal ethnography. The learning and social relationships of two cohorts, each of ten children, were tracked between the ages of 4 and 16. These cohorts of indigenous white British children were balanced by gender but contrasted by social class. They were drawn from affluent middle class and skilled working class areas of a city in the south of England. Data from classrooms, playgrounds, schools, homes and community were collected weekly over 12 years and this enabled extremely detailed case-studies of children's learning over time and in different contexts to be constructed. All case-studies were validated by respondents. Comparison and analysis of these case studies is the basis of the more abstract level of analysis presented in this Research Briefing.

The themes and conclusions of the Identity and Learning Programme have been presented to a large number of teacher, student teacher and parent audiences over the past 15 years. The work consistently generates empathic identification and projective validation as individuals relate to the accounts and analysis of experience, identity and learning over time. Because of the focused sample size and duration of the study, the depth of engagement is felt to enable a particular form of insight which is not easily obtained through other methods. It resonates with the experience of many individuals in reflecting on their own educational biographies and those of their children and pupils.

The findings of the Identity and Learning Programme build on, and contribute to, our accumulating knowledge of learners and teaching and learning through schooling. The publications articulate with other appropriate literature, and all of the outputs have been subject to peer review. For a methodological account, see:

Pollard, A. (2007) The Identity and Learning Programme: 'principled pragmatism' in a twelve year longitudinal ethnography, *Ethnography in Education*, Vol. 2, No. 1 pp 1-19.

Teaching and Learning Research Programme



TLRP involves over 60 research teams with contributions from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Work began in 2000 and will continue to 2011.

Learning: TLRP's overarching aim is to improve outcomes for learners of all ages in teaching and learning contexts across the UK.

Outcomes: TLRP studies a broad range of learning outcomes, including the acquisition of skill, understanding, knowledge and qualifications and the development of attitudes, values and identities relevant to a learning society.

Lifecourse: TLRP supports projects and related activities at many ages and stages in education, training and lifelong learning.

Enrichment: TLRP commits to user engagement at all stages of research. It promotes research across disciplines, methodologies and sectors, and supports national and international co-operation.

Expertise: TLRP works to enhance capacity for all forms of research on teaching and learning, and for research informed policy and practice.

Improvement: TLRP develops the knowledge base on teaching and learning and policy and practice in the UK.

TLRP Directors' Team
Professor Andrew Pollard | London
Professor Mary James | London
Professor Alan Brown | Warwick
Professor Miriam David | London
e-team@groups.tlrp.org

TLRP Programme Office
Sarah Douglas | sarah.douglas@ioe.ac.uk
James O'Toole | j.o'toole@ioe.ac.uk
tlrp@ioe.ac.uk

TLRP
Institute of Education
University of London
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL
UK

Tel +44 (0)20 7911 5577



Project website:

<http://www.tlrp.org/project%20sites/ILP/index.html>

Project team:

Andrew Pollard and Ann Filer

Project contact:

Andrew Pollard
TLRP, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL
a.pollard@ioe.ac.uk
020 7911 5581

ISBN-978-0-85473-748-2



9 780854 737482

March 2007