Embedded voices: building a non-learning culture within a learning enrichment programme

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Abstract

The researchers examined transcripts of comments made and dialogues engaged in by children, teachers and student teaching assistants during a 10-week enrichment programme for gifted and talented children aged 7–9 years. Attempts were made to match these utterances with the programme's aims and aspirations as expressed in a promotional document. Little evidence of match was revealed, but considerable evidence did emerge of the extent to which dominant technical-rational discourses and practices permeate even privileged and non-state-sponsored educational environments, at the expense of children's learning. Suggestions are made for foregrounding the processes of high quality pupil learning rather than the products of pupil performances in enrichment and extension programmes, and thereby for achieving greater congruence between this programme's avowed aims and practice.

'Between the conception and the creation … falls the Shadow'. (TS Eliot – The Hollow Men)

Introduction

Since the creation of a national curriculum for state schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland via the Education Reform Act of 1988, teachers in these countries have been operating in a high-pressure, high-accountability, high-support and low-autonomy environment. This environment is governed by finely-grained national policy directives, buttressed by a strong inspection framework, which are intended cumulatively to drive up teaching standards and improve school effectiveness. With the election of a national coalition government in 2010, specific initiatives such as the extensive (and expensive) National Strategy framework have been discontinued, but the requirement for teachers and teacher-educators to adapt to new and detailed policy requirements and inspection schedules has continued apace.

Underpinning the teaching, assessment and surveillance practices of the past quarter-century is a set of technical-rational assumptions (Schön, 1983, 1987) which are normative and hierarchical, and rooted in the tenets of positivism and structuralism. The characteristics of these assumptions have been articulated by Lester (2001) and are summarised here: knowledge is regarded as being essentially reified, objective, stable, general and divorced from the 'knower', and amenable therefore to classification and transmission within taxonomies of subject-specific knowledge-bases. Pedagogic understandings and practice are therefore predicated on the belief that knowledge precedes and shapes action.

Consistent with this conceptualisation, analytical and deductive thinking is applied rationally and convergently in the pursuit of problem-solving efficiencies and capabilities. Pupils and their teachers are seen as players of discrete yet also generalised roles ('pupil' vs 'teacher'), rather than as unique and complex individuals and agents of their own learning – learning which, like learners themselves, can be equally complex, idiosyncratic and messy. Considerable status is given to abstract and ill-defined concepts such as ability, intelligence and talent as predictors of scholastic achievement and as stable constructs around which classrooms and educational provision can be organised – e.g. via streaming and setting practices, 'gifted and talented cohorts', even the concept of mixed-ability teaching.

As befits this epistemology of practice, subject or pedagogical experts define what is to be learned (in the form of curricula, syllabuses, units of study, core competences and skill sets) and, via theories as to what constitutes good practice, even how it is to be learned1 (DfES, 2006a; DfES, 2006b; Johnston and Watson, 2007; Department for Education, 2012). As part of this, the notion is permitted – indeed embraced – that 'learning outcomes' can and should be identified prior to delivery of a course module or individual lesson – and that all pupils can and will produce evidence of having met these outcomes.

Although exceptions to the dominant epistemology of practice will continue to be evidenced in theoretical critiques and in classrooms which foreground learning over performance (cf. Hart et al., 2004; Nuthall, 2007; Furedi, 2012; Watkins, 2005; Watkins et al., 2007; Swann et al., 2012), teachers and pupils are ultimately subservient to the prevailing technical-rational assumptions of a 'banking model' of schooling (Freire, 1996): both teacher and pupil operate within systems rather than on them (Lester, 2001).

The effects of this technical-rational discourse on teachers' classroom practices are well-documented (e.g. Wood, 2004; Jones, 2010; Goodwyn and Findlay, 2003; Lofty, 2006; Hart et al., 2004; Collins et al., 2010).2 Typically, these effects are characterised by a teacher and pupil focus on performance goals rather than mastery goals – i.e. a concern for proving competence via measures of scholastic attainment rather than improving competence via the development of skills, insights, knowledge and learning dispositions (leading indirectly to high performance). Some recent research within the field of goal achievement theory has even provided data for theorising about how learners' adoption of mastery versus performance goals orient them to value very different qualities in their teachers (Senko et al., 2012): learners pursuing mastery goals seem to favour teachers who stimulate and challenge them intellectually ('concept-builders' Twiselton, 2004), whereas learners pursuing performance goals favour teachers who are effective 'task managers' and 'curriculum deliverers' (Twiselton, 2004) and who provide clear signposts to academic achievement.

In addition to the many examples of transformative classroom practice provided in the educational literature and identified above, enrichment and extension sessions provide obvious opportunities for transcending normative practice. Though the concept of enrichment is by no means unproblematic (cf. Feng, 2005), most definitions encapsulate those experiences that replace, supplement or extend instruction beyond that normally offered by the school (Correll, 1978; Stanley, 1979; Eyre and Marjoram, 1990; Freeman, 1998; Department for Education, 2011). Given the expectations and constraints operating on teachers and pupils within their day-to-day experiences of school, it could reasonably be assumed that enrichment and extension sessions afford welcome opportunities for

sloughing off that which is imposed in favour of that which is novel, intrinsically interesting and congruent with teachers' core beliefs around learners and learning.

This paper examines the aims of one enrichment programme for able pupils and seeks evidence of divergence from currently dominant classroom practices and expectations. It then interrogates data collected during the course of several sessions of this programme in search of evidence for the pursuit and achievement of the avowed aims.

Structure and aims of The Enrich Programme3

The Enrich Programme (TEP) is a programme that has been conceived and delivered by a selective secondary school in the north of England, and it has been running for several years. TEP is funded privately via generous philanthropic sponsorship and it is targeted at able children aged 7–9 years attending state primary schools within its socially and (occasionally) culturally mixed catchment area. Groups of roughly 20 children from four or five primary schools comprise each cohort – each cohort attends TEP one afternoon a week for 10 weeks. In total, approximately 240 children experience TEP over the course of a year. The children are bussed in to each session, which lasts for 75 minutes, and they are also encouraged to contribute to a dedicated moodle platform and to occasional between-session follow-up activities. There is no charge to the children or to their schools, but a small minority of schools elect to fund additional places in order to provide an equivalent experience to all their (age) qualifying pupils – i.e. irrespective of the child's achievement-level or ability. The dedicated TEP classroom space is filled with attractive, busy and stimulating wall displays, consisting substantially of examples of children's work.

TEP has been designed by a teacher with extensive classroom experience in both the primary and secondary phase of education, and it is delivered to each cohort either by this teacher or by a colleague, with the support of a dedicated TEP teaching assistant and several sixth form students attending the host school. The tutor-child ratio is therefore high, at approximately 1:5. TEP follows a set pattern of activities and experiences, with each session shaped around a specific theme. The format is often carousel-based, with an initial introduction by the teacher followed by each small group of pupils experiencing a succession of different activities – albeit related to the day's theme – at different tables. Some activity tables receive adult or sixth form support and some do not, this being contingent on the level of complexity attending the activity.

In international surveys of provision for highly able children, it has been found that enrichment activities 'often lack clear goals' (Freeman, 2001: 218), and it is therefore difficult to compare the effectiveness of different programmes. Whilst most opportunities for engaging in stimulating activities with likeminded peers could reasonably be expected to be positively regarded by participants (if this is the criterion for evaluating such opportunities), 'the question still remains as to what kind of extra provision is the best way of helping them. Might not a climbing or canoeing holiday have the same effect?' (Freeman, 2001: 219). The three most important enrichment goals identified by Freeman (1998, 2001) in her international research syntheses are:

•Increased analytical and problem-solving skills;

•Development of profound, durable and worthwhile interests; and

•Stimulation of originality, initiative and self-direction.

In keeping with Freeman's finding that few enrichment programmes have clear goals, the aims of TEP are not made explicit in operational terms. However, they can be inferred from a descriptive document produced by its creator and principal teacher. This document also sets out the rationale, educational principles and broad modus operandi of the programme. These can be summarised under the following categories, with direct quotations taken from this document:

•Developing intelligence. There is explicit affiliation with notions of intelligence being 'malleable and … developed through passion and persistence'. Carol Dweck's notion of mindset (Dweck, 1999, 2006) is referenced on several occasions, especially in relation to the experiences of 'gifted and talented' children.

•Collaborative learning. Children learn to develop 'their abilities to work in teams' and 'collaborative thinking' is encouraged. 'We aim to develop their questioning, talking and arguing skills', and '[o]ur [TEP] maxim "I don't know the answer, let's work it out together" is at the core of all that we do'.

•Self-esteem. There is considerable emphasis on 'rais[ing] the individuals' self-esteem', 'improv[ing] pupils' self-esteem', and pupils experiencing 'a carefully designed process in order to develop their own self worth … and to understand how to celebrate their own strengths and weaknesses'.

•A focus on learning rather than performance. 'We place emphasis on the children loving their learning rather than the factual recall that is so often used as a measure of learning', and reference is made to TEP's deliberate distinction from a 'system … obsessed by outcomes' where '[q]uality is measured through product rather than the process' – creating 'trivia experts' as opposed to the '[i]nnovators, leaders and creative thinkers that our society needs'. The guiding philosophy of TEP is expressed on the document's title page: 'The joy of learning is in the journey. [Our] journey is personal, unpredictable, expansive and irresistible.'

•Novelty and curiosity. 'We aim to surprise, entertain and to stimulate a desire to explore further'. 'We encourage creative, curious … thinkers' and provide an 'exciting hub of wonder' that 'fires their imagination beyond the confines of the typical primary classroom experience'.

•The impact of 21st-century technology. 'Our teaching style and pace … reflects the changes in brain development and thinking that is taking place as a result of exposure to today's technology'.

•Toleration of failure and the valuing of risk-taking. 'At all times during our [TEP] sessions both "failure" and "exposure" are encouraged. We instil in our pupils an understanding that to fail and to be seen to fail is not a reflection on ability but rather an indication that something is challenging.' It is hoped that the experience of frequent failure will lead TEP pupils to 'try, take intellectual risks and seek out further learning that is challenging to them'.

•Progression. To facilitate adaptation to the routines and expectations of TEP, '[i]nitially the sessions are fact based' but '[i]ncreasingly the challenges and activities … are less directed and more open-ended' in pursuit of creativity and the nurturance of such learning dispositions as perseverance and resilience. 'We change the children's approach to their learning' and this change 'remains with the children beyond their time with us. [TEP] has the potential to change the life path of the children that have involvement in it.'

Design and methodology

Research questions and research design summary

We started the study with the following closely inter-related research questions: What sense do participating children make of their TEP experiences? What are the claimed benefits of participation in TEP? To what extent are these claims demonstrated in audio recordings of pupil utterances? Is there evidence of progress over the course of the programme?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this study interrogated the likely nature, intent and effect on TEP aims of conversations, feedback, instructions, verbal fillers and other utterances made by pupils and tutors during TEP sessions. These utterances comprised the primary data, which were subjected to a search for evidence via an iterative cycle within a logo-visual thinking (LVT) exercise.4

Data collection and ethical considerations

The primary data in this study were collected by one of the authors, who attended seven of the nine TEP sessions experienced by one cohort of children (the tenth session had had to be cancelled by the host school). This cohort was identified by the TEP staff as being typical of most TEP cohorts.

In keeping with the permissions received from the University's research ethics committee, the parents of all the research cohort pupils had been informed about the purposes of the study (gathering data to evaluate its effect and the achievement of its aims) and provided written permission for audio recordings and observations of TEP sessions to be made and analysed. It was made clear that all contributions would be anonymised for reporting purposes, and that a summary of the report would be made available to parents.

The researcher was introduced to the children from the outset as someone who was not a 'helper', but who wanted to find out about TEP and how the children experienced it. She positioned herself to the children therefore as a friendly and, over time, familiar, benign but largely non-facilitative presence in the classroom – an adult concerned with observation rather than intervention. On one occasion she also accompanied the children by bus to and from the session and made notes of their conversations.

Since the researcher could not take digital audio recordings of each table's activities simultaneously, she took up positions for the most part (but by no means exclusively) at tables where there was not a strong adult or sixth form presence. This allowed her to record conversations and individual utterances which were often child-led, and therefore more likely to capture the unmediated experiences of the children. These recordings were subsequently converted to transcripts.

Method of data analysis

Four representative sessional transcripts were drawn from the mid to later TEP sessions for this cohort of children. Pupil utterances in these transcripts were analysed according to coding categories which emerged through a LVT exercise (Best et al., 2005), slightly adapted for the research purposes of this study: Three of the authors, working together, identified key terms and phrases from the programme's promotional document (referred to above in 'Structure and aims of The Enrich Programme'). These were highlighted and transcribed individually to cards. The following stages then ensued:

1. These cards were collaboratively sorted into thematic clusters, and each cluster set or category was then given a 'title' – which aimed to capture the essence of each set/category. The following categories emerged:

◦ Self-regulation (including pursuit of own excellence, persistence, self-criticality, confidence in own judgment);

◦ Nature of learning (including love of learning, valuing of failure, valuing of process over product);

◦ Enjoyment (including memorability, passion, pleasurability);

◦ Creativity (including speculation, exploring alternatives, connection-making, curiosity, exploratory self-talk);

◦ Change (including the development of intelligence, the raising of aspirations, the raising of self-esteem);

◦ Learning-led, task-oriented interaction (including evidence of higher-order thinking, exploration of rich concepts and concept development during dialogue and argument).

2. A TEP session transcript was randomly selected, and 50 consecutive discrete utterances (brief exchanges, exclamations, comments, observations, questions, etc.) from this transcript were extracted as per stage 1 above.

3. The attempt was made to locate the extracted utterances within the categories created in stage 2 above.

4. When the researchers perceived there to be no natural fit between the utterances and the pre-identified categories, new cluster groupings were formed, leading to the creation of new sets/categories. The following new categories emerged through this process:

◦ Performance-led, procedure-oriented interaction – between children or clearly on an equal footing if with adult (including procedural questioning, low-level collaboration over task requirements, and other instrumental verbal exchanges);

◦ Performance-led, product-oriented interaction (including all pupil utterances with a perceived focus on achieving a given solution and resultant task closure);

◦ Social, non-task-oriented 'drift' (including off-task observations, anecdotes, musings, etc.);

◦ Reassurance (including solicitations of support/advice substantially from adults);

◦ Self-referential aggrandisement (including expressions of competitive point-scoring or finding a task easy, soliciting praise, etc.);

◦ Helplessness (including expressions of despair and negative self-attributions in the face of perceived difficulty).

5. The transcripts of four TEP sessions were identified as representative of all the collected session transcripts, and each of these four transcripts was then subjected to full coding analysis as above. This was undertaken primarily by the researcher who had carried out the data collection and transcription process and who could therefore draw on her notes and contextual experience to confer additional meaning to the text when required.

6. Throughout this stage, three of the authors met periodically to make independent coding decisions for the same samples of transcript, in order to gauge the consistency of category attribution for particular utterances. A high degree (>80%) of inter-coder reliability was established, and where differences did arise, these were resolved through discussion and fuller examination of the context of the utterance, or agreement that many utterances could legitimately straddle more than one category – the boundaries between categories are by no means always clear or impermeable. Minor modifications to the category names were made throughout this process – i.e. when some sharpening or broadening of these names was required.

7. Finally, towards the latter stages of this cycle, the reliability of inter-coder judgments was strengthened further by submitting utterance samples from the four evaluated transcripts and the emergent categories to four researchers who were experienced in qualitative research but not involved in any way with the present study. A similarly high level of judgment consistency (>78%) in assigning utterances to categories was obtained.

Results and interpretation

The results of the coding analysis are summarised in Table 1 and Table 2.

From the Tables it can be seen that one-quarter of the analysed utterances could be assigned to the categories extracted from the document establishing TEP's aims, claims and rationale. Three-quarters fell outside this range and would be clearly recognisable within a contemporary, standards-driven classroom – i.e. they lie in stark contrast with TEP's mastery-oriented aims and aspirations. Fully half the utterances were identified as being performance-oriented, either related to low-level procedural engagement with the task or focused on achieving demonstrable task closure – often in the form of a successful 'product'.

These proportions, whilst ostensibly poor in terms of TEP aims and claims, could conceivably still represent real differences when contrasted with those gleaned from a comparative non-enrichment classroom. Whilst such a comparison falls outside the scope of this study, the present data justify a closer examination of the actual utterances and their coding judgments. A brief summary of each category's results is now offered and interpreted, with researcher notes (in italics) appended to utterance examples as recorded.

Self-regulation

This category corresponds in large part to the third of Freeman's three 'most important' enrichment goals (Freeman, 1998, 2001) referred to earlier, namely the stimulation of originality, initiative and, especially, self-direction. In this study it was also taken to include the pursuit of personal excellence, persistence, self-criticality and confidence in one's own judgment. Utterances falling into this category amounted to 7%, including the following representative examples:

'Oh!' and 'Oopsy!' (recognising an error)

'Because it's 36 – ah, no!' (recognises the mistake; he writes 36 x 1)

'There's saying there's more than it though' (calculator has got into decimal places)

'I don't think mine's going right'

'Why don't you just try it?'

'Oh no – I've done it totally wrong.'

It is apparent that many of these utterances represent fairly weak and lower-level manifestations of self-regulation – mostly recognition of mistakes – and even the stronger examples of self-regulative processes at work, as in '[t]hat doesn't look right'(takes a new print-out to try again), still refer back to awareness of error – arguably an important but early-stage manifestation of those meta-cognitive processes underpinning self-regulation. Plentiful too were strong contra-indications for self-regulation, and although these were categorised as such, some of these utterances could also have been categorised as 'Performance-led, product-oriented interaction', or 'Helplessness':

'Miss Jenkins, I think I'm done' (no reflection)

'I want to do something else.'

'How long until we're stopping?'

'Can I go down there now?' (points to another activity)

'It's finished. I don't really have time to do it.'

'I just guessed' (in response to a peer's question: 'How did you work that out?')

Nature of learning

This category incorporates all utterances which suggest a love of learning and which privilege a focus on the processes of learning over a concern with its products – a dominant theme in the aims, claims and aspirations of TEP. No child utterances were coded in this category, but two contra-indications were:

‘Miss, if we learn about South Africa, we won't need to listen because we've been doing South Africa at school.’

‘Does this take ages?’

The absence of positive coding decisions for this category is partially explained by the occasional overlap between this category and others like ‘Creativity’ or ‘Enjoyment’. For example, the utterance ‘[I’m trying] … to see if I can get that bit’ (unclear. He is quite absorbed) could reasonably have been coded in any of those categories.

Enjoyment

This category incorporates all utterances which suggest passion, pleasure and memorable moments. Nearly 2% of utterances (nine in total) were coded in this category, including:

‘This might be fun!’

‘Wow! It does it for you’ (= the tessellating shape just fits in if drawn correctly – sense of discovery)

‘Am I allowed to do another one?’

‘Lily, Lily, Lily – see that!’ (indicating his pattern on the other tables).

Creativity

This was by some margin the best-populated of the categories extracted from the document expressing TEP aims and claims. That said, the category’s boundaries were fairly generous and included all utterances associated with speculation and counterfactual (‘What if …’) thinking, exploring alternatives, making connections, curiosity and exploratory self-talk. For this reason, some utterances which might arguably have been coded elsewhere in Table 1 were captured in this category (see example in ‘Nature of learning’ above). In total, 15% of utterances were coded in this category, a significant number of these (14) occurring in overheard conversations on the bus. Utterances coded in this category included:

‘I wish I was a monkey – monkeys are cool – we were monkeys – what if we ate bananas all the time?’

‘Guess where the moon actually is.’

‘I'm going to try and make a …’ (unclear)

‘Stop, I've got an idea – these blocks – use these, we'll use these.’

‘Way to do it: you could just count the bricks.’

‘Yes, there's a bend (she means curve) everywhere.’

‘I don't really know, I'm just randomly drawing. Where do they just go?’

‘I've realised the pattern that you're doing. It sort of goes across, line down, across.’

‘It's got a funny twist in the middle.’

‘Wait (discussing lifespan) – how would they continue – if they died? – if they died.’

‘You could just have one more in there, couldn't we?’

Change

This category incorporates all utterances which signal an awareness that concepts like ability, intelligence, smartness, etc. are malleable and improvable, or which suggest raised aspirations or enhanced academic self-concept – another dominant theme in the aims, claims and aspirations of TEP. No child utterances were coded in this category.

Learning-led, task-oriented interaction

This category incorporates all utterances which reveal clear evidence of sustained high-order thinking, analysis and argument, and/or of concept development during the course of dialogue or discussion – not simply atomistic examples of children ‘working things out’ as they undertake a set task. This category would represent an aspect of the first of Freeman’s three ‘most important’ enrichment goals (Freeman, 1998, 2001) – i.e. increased analytical and problem-solving skills. No child utterances were coded in this category.

Turning now to those categories which have a performance rather than a learning focus, we examine utterances coded under the additional categories – i.e. those which emerged from analysis of utterances extracted from TEP sessional transcripts (Table 2).

Performance-led, procedure-oriented interaction

This category incorporates all procedural utterances, including low-level questioning and collaboration over task requirements, and similar instrumental exchanges. A quarter of all utterances (122 in total) were coded in this category, including, by way of example:

‘What can we do?’

‘You check that on yours.’

‘That's how much – I worked out how.’

‘So – it's four 5s aren't they?’ (has miscounted a 5 by 5 square)

‘How much are in these?’

‘Let’s just have one.’

(To ED) ‘Are you trying one (dot to dot)? Can you tell me if you do it?’

‘Where do you want me to write it?’

‘[I’m] starting the pictures. Starting the doggy one.’

Procedural utterances such as these are arguably essential and inevitable staples in classroom discourse, so their prevalence in these transcripts is perhaps not remarkable: as ceilings and roofs require the support of footings and walls, so higher-level conceptual thinking is unlikely to emerge independently of the lower-level foundational discourse that precedes and surrounds it. Of greater interest is the relative absence of the higher-level utterances, and the observation that the lower-level utterances are fairly evenly distributed across all stages of the lesson transcripts – both at the beginning and end of tasks and sessions.

Performance-led, product-oriented interaction

This category incorporates all pupil utterances which seem oriented towards ‘getting the job done’ – i.e. the pursuit of closure and ‘success’ rather than incidental learning or revelling in the process of learning. A quarter of all utterances (123 in total) were coded in this category, including, by way of example:

‘We've got it (= the code). Good!’

‘I've done loads.’

‘I’ll fill all the space.’

‘John, what are you up to?

‘I've got up to ….’

‘Why are you only on 3, David?’

‘What number are you on?’ (They compare how far they have got)

‘I’ve already found out that one’

‘I'm on 20 now – finished.’

Social, non-task-oriented ‘drift’

This category captures all off-task utterances – i.e. those musings, comments, observations and anecdotes that seem to be unrelated to the sessional theme or activities. Only 3% of utterances were coded in this category – a far lower proportion than that usually identified in mainstream classrooms (Chen, 2012; Wragg, 1984; Edwards and Westgate, 1994). This could be attributed to the pace and energy of TEP sessions and the high helper-child ratio – TEP sessions are highly-engineered, possibly to make best use of the short contact time. Examples of utterances coded in this category:

‘Are you going on Moodle tonight?’

‘Which do you think is better – Grammar or school?’

‘Joe, do you want to sit next to me on the way back?’

Reassurance

This category captures all solicitations of support or advice – mostly from adults. There were 36 utterances (7% of the total) coded in this category, including:

‘Shall we write that down on our boards?’

‘Miss, how are we supposed to do this – shall we just count?’

‘Am I doing it right? I don't know what I'm doing.’

‘What shall we do when we've done it?’

‘Miss, how much are in this?’

‘How do you do the add sign?’

(To ED) ‘Would you be able to add …?’ (–unclear, showing me her pattern)

‘I’ll go and ask Miss Smith.’

(To ED) ‘Miss, do we need to join those five dots to numbers?’

‘Is that right?’ (to 6F).

Self-referential aggrandisement

This category captures all expressions of competitive point-scoring and of finding a task easy, and solicitations of praise. With this category there were many instances of utterances which could also have been coded as ‘Reassurance’. There were 37 utterances (7% of the total) coded in this category, including:

‘Miss, do you like mine so far?’

‘I know millions’ (= of onomatopoeic words)

‘I'm [only] Year 3. Was he eight?’

‘Miss, I'm already really good at drawing stars.’

‘I did do it the first time right!’

‘This is quite easy.’

‘Yeah. I've already got it.’

‘Lots of people are saying they can’t do it.’

‘Yeah, I’ve already done two and it’s been very easy.’

‘The challenges seem to be getting easier rather than harder as you go along.’

Helplessness

This category captures all expressions of despair and negative self-attributions in the face of perceived difficulty. There were 30 utterances (6% of the total) coded in this category, including:

‘It doesn’t tell you how to do it.’

‘I don’t get it.’

‘Miss – I don’t really know how to do it.’

‘This is going to be tricky – I can feel it.’

‘I can’t do this.’

‘Can you do me a favour? Can you wish me luck?’

‘I don’t know how to start.’

‘OK, now I actually don’t know what to do.’

‘I don’t get this” (many examples)

‘I want to put my head in freezing water … and I want it frozen.’

Discussion

In allying itself so explicitly with the aims, claims and aspirations set out earlier, TEP represents a clear break from the dominant technical-rational discourses of the school system. Indeed, it seems actively to celebrate its affiliation to a very different, mastery-oriented and learning-led agenda. That said, the data obtained in this study do not provide significant evidence for the achievement of TEP aims, claims and aspirations or for the achievement of two of the three most important enrichment goals identified by Freeman in her international survey of the research, outlined earlier (the third, evidence of the development of profound, durable and worthwhile interests, fell outside the scope and timescale of this evaluation). Reasons for the apparent non-achievement of TEP aims remain speculative, but a few possibilities are advanced here:

• Relative to most conventional classrooms, TEP does achieve its aims: as stated earlier, the learning in TEP classrooms was not formally contrasted with that in a ‘control’ classroom. Such a study would be vastly more expensive and difficult to conduct, requiring a number of problematic variables to be controlled for – not least that of equivalence in available resources, tutor-child ratio and pupil/learner characteristics. If such data could be gathered, however, it is just possible that the

proportions of learning- and mastery-oriented utterances derived from TEP data, though low in comparison with performance-oriented utterances, might indeed be significantly higher than those obtained in an 'average' conventional classroom. This hypothesis remains untested.

• Flawed coding categories or inaccuracies in item attribution: we do not claim that our coding categories are definitive, and nor do we insist that our attributions of specific utterances to particular categories are always 'correct'. Given the subjectivity inevitably inherent in any coding activity, it would certainly be possible to challenge some formulations and some attributions, but we have sought to keep individual subjectivities and coding errors to a minimum through the checks built into the research design. Moreover, differences in coder judgments, where they did arise, overwhelmingly reflected potential overlaps between categories within Table 1 (learning-oriented categories) or between categories within Table 2 (performance-oriented categories) – but very rarely between categories located in Tables 1 and 2. In other words, whilst it was quite conceivable that an utterance coded as 'Enjoyment' (for instance, from Table 1) could reasonably be coded as 'Creativity' (also from Table 1), it is far less likely that an utterance coded as 'Enjoyment' could reasonably be coded as 'Helplessness' (from Table 2).

• Gaps between the desirable and the achievable: related to the next point below, it is tempting for the creators of highly-resourced and brand-distinctive 'programmes' to make considerable claims for what is achievable in a mere 12 hours. In pursuance of ambitious claims, sessional content and structure will tend as a consequence to nudge in the direction of an energetic, teacher-directed stance – the IRE cycle identified in the academic literature (cf. Watkins, 2005; Watkins et al., 2007) as 'teacher Introduces his/her session theme, students Respond, and teacher Evaluates'.

• The pervasiveness of dominant voices: it could be argued that the dominant product-, fact- and performance-oriented foci of contemporary (and traditional) schooling persists – even in privileged enrichment programmes which explicitly eschew the dominant voice in favour of process-, meaning- and learning-oriented foci (of the sort that are evident in well-facilitated Philosophy for Children sessions). Certainly in the TEP sessions observed, with their concentration on adult-conceived activities, content, themes, problems and challenges, there was limited opportunity for child-conceived learning activities and self-regulation processes to be pursued, let alone to prevail. These observed sessions were far more strongly characteristic of good (and in the old OfSTED framework, arguably 'outstanding') teaching and learning, using tools and techniques reminiscent of National Strategy-compliant classrooms – albeit with exceptional 'production values' (TEP's brand value is likely to be very high). Though this study did not focus on tutor utterances specifically, the following small sample of performance-oriented comments and instructions provides examples of this dominant voice.

Most of these are teacher utterances, but a few were made by the administrator or by a sixth form helper:

'Because some of these things that I'm going to ask you to do are really tricky. OK? But I'm going to help you do them and see how far you get with them.' (The phrase 'really really tricky' or 'really hard' appears extensively in the transcripts as a description of the task provided by the teacher. It is presumably intended to encourage toleration of error and persistence but it can equally easily be interpreted by children as a signal that success is not really expected – and assistance is guaranteed anyway (as in this example above). Moreover, for children who then do not find the task tricky it can

inadvertently nurture a fixed mindset ('it's actually quite easy – so maybe I'm smarter than others?') – witness the aggrandisement utterances in the samples analysed. Alternatively, it can convey to some children that the teacher has quite low expectations of them – a known consequence of being praised for effortless success (Marzano et al, 2001.)

'That's a good quick way of doing it, isn't it?' (Encourages the pursuit of product and task efficiency over process and deeper learning.)

'Wow, well done that was really super – super quick thinking.' (Encourages the pursuit of product over process, as above.)

'You will find it very tricky – because it is – but it's the kind of thing that if you practise and practise and practise you'll get better at, and it's really impressive if you then use it in school.' (The exhortation to achievement via practice is seriously undermined by locating the purpose of the achievement as being to impress an adult – intrinsic motivation is undermined by superimposing extrinsic motivators.)

'You know all these words are really good to get into your English at school. If you get these into your English at school, your teacher will be very impressed.'(As above.)

'I like that pattern you're making there.' (Distracts from intrinsic motivation in the learner – orients her to extrinsic motivators – impressing the adult.)

'You'll have to work it out though, so it doesn't need to be too difficult.' (In response to a child expressing a commendable wish to devise her own problem, the tutor response invites the setting of a lower-order challenge.)

'And it's a bit of a competition, let's see which group can solve this … quickest – and first.' (Collaboration and interdependent learning are not encouraged by appealing to competition and a rush to product.)

'We actually – you 3, OK, had a group that got the answer a little bit ahead of you. John and Michael here just pipped you to the post [expressions of disappointment from the 'rivals']. So they've come up with the right answer – and you've got it now – and you got it here … and you're getting there, all of you. OK.' (See above.)

'You've got to beat 76 – has [6th form helper] been helping you?' (As above.)

It should be pointed out that the transcripts also reveal evidence of tutor utterances which value and invite challenge, effort, persistence and collaboration, but in combination with performance-oriented utterances such as those listed above, and tasks which are teacher-designed and evaluated, the overriding effect on the children is likely to be in the direction of the traditional and dominant performance voice.

It should be stressed that these research findings and speculative explanations for the mismatch between TEP aims and evident outcomes are not intended to suggest that TEP confers no benefits to its participants. On the contrary, though these were not the specific focus of the evaluation, observational data led the evaluation team to identify some positive features of TEP, including the following:

• TEP is extremely well-resourced, both in terms of its enthusiastic, committed and passionate staff and in terms of its physical facilities and resources – classroom, transport, attractive website and moodle, take-home freebies (related to sessional themes and activities) for the children, etc.;

• TEP is efficiently organised and run, both during and between sessions;

• The sessions are tightly organised and focused (although this detracts from the learning outcomes, as evidenced earlier);

• Participants seem to enjoy attending the sessions, as evidenced by feedback obtained by TEP staff and by a survey of chatroom entries: although pupil-participation traffic in the TEP chatroom is relatively light, many entries suggest that the children see TEP as a positive and rewarding experience;

• Feedback from children and parents on open days is typically warm and positive;

• Participation and support from feeder primary schools is strong, and many schools have been sending pupils to TEP since its inception. Some value the experiences afforded to their pupils so highly that they purchase additional places for pupils who would not otherwise be selected for TEP;

• The host school is highly supportive of TEP and views it as an asset to its reputation, providing an opportunity for local outreach, and for breaking down, where they exist, parental perceptions that 'Grammar schools aren't for my child';

• Related to the previous point, there is some evidence that TEP is already leading to changes in the typical demographic of Year 7 entry to the host school – we are aware, for example, of instances in which the host school has made considerable efforts to expedite the successful integration of former TEP boys from disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances (e.g. through making boarding places and support available).

Although the focus of this evaluation study was effect of TEP on participant learning, the above mentioned positives should not be disregarded.

Recommendations

It is questionable whether TEP's highly ambitious mastery-oriented goals (which, incidentally, are strongly supported in the research literature – cf. Watkins, 2005; Nuthall, 1999, 2007; Watkins, 2010 for a comprehensive summary) are achievable over the course of a 12-hour programme, but if serious progress is to be made towards them, we would argue that TEP needs to see its participants as learners rather than as receivers of adult learning from the outset. Hattie (2009, 2012) neatly summarises this state as existing 'when teachers see learning through the eyes of the student, and when students are supported to become their own teachers'. This will necessarily have an impact on the TEP 'product' and even, potentially and initially, on the children's perceptions of enjoyment of sessions (because learning is not always fun, quick, zany and pleasurable) requiring enhanced communication with parents and schools as a consequence. It will require the learners to:

• Focus on their activity as learning (not performing) activity;

• Collaborate extensively in their activity, which helps them see each other as resources (not rivals) for learning;

• Make choices which drive the learning journey (high levels of learner autonomy);

• Experience failure as a necessary and useful part of the learning experience, putting process (learning) before product (performance);

• Tolerate uncertainty, mess, error and initial failure;

• Talk more – and adults talk less;

• Experience more open-ended activities – and create their own;

• Have greater freedom to spend longer on an activity, in keeping with their interest/engagement in it;

• Establish high-level goals for their own learning, based on challenge, quality feedback (especially via meta-cognition and meta-learning) and deep and surface learning;

• Have access to learning experiences which are under- rather than over-engineered, and which retain elements of ambiguity both in the processes by which the learning is experienced, and in the admissible outcomes;

• Narrate the best of their learning experiences, both in the programme itself and elsewhere.

Notes

1. Though there are plentiful examples of state-sponsored directions or encouragement to teachers in state schools to teach in particular ways, these pressures are rarely explicitly acknowledged. On the contrary, the illusion is maintained that there is no state-mandated connection between curriculum content as prescribed by the state and pedagogic practice as engaged in by professional educators. Consider, for example, injunction #111 in the current OfSTED school inspection handbook: 'Inspectors must not expect teaching staff to teach in any specific way or follow a prescribed methodology' (OfSTED, 2012) – an injunction which will lie uneasily alongside many teachers' perceptions of expectations of their practice.

2. As an interesting aside, these studies also often reveal how teachers utilise 'the processes of creative mediation, adaptation and resistance' (Wood, 2004: 361) when the dominant discourse conflicts with their personal and professional values, beliefs and expertise.

3. In order to preserve anonymity and to conform to the terms of the ethical approval granted to this research study, in this paper the programme is given the false name of The Enrich Programme. Certain other methodologically non-essential descriptors (such as the names of the children and other participants) have also been changed.

4. LVT is a constructivist tool for concept forming, meaning making and for giving structure to conversations which has its origins in, and draws heavily on, the work of John G Bennett (1897–

1974). Bennett pioneered structural communication – an interactive technique for aiding and expressing understanding (cf. Egan, 1972, 1976).

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Table 1. Coding of utterances for categories extracted from TEP aims.

Category	Number of occurrences	As a % of all coded utterances (n ¼ 506)
Self-regulation (pursuit of own excellence, persistence, self-criticality, confidence in own judgment)	37	7.31
Nature of learning (love of learning, valuing of failure, valuing of process over product)	0	0
Enjoyment (memorability, passion, pleasurability)	9	1.78
Creativity (speculation, exploring alternatives, connection-making, curiosity, exploratory self-talk)	77	15.22
Change (development of intelligence, raising of aspirations, raising of self-esteem)	0	0
Learning-led, task-oriented interaction (higher-order thinking, exploration of rich concepts and concept development during dialogue and argument)	0	0
TOTAL	124	24.51
(Contra-indications – utterances attributed to these categories, but representing their flipsides)	19	3.76

Table 2. Coding of utterances for additional categories extracted from TEP sessional transcripts.

Category	Number of occurrences As a % of all coded utterances	(n ¼ 506)
Performance-led, procedure-oriented interaction – between children or clearly on an equal footing if with adult (procedural questioning, low-level collaboration over task requirements, and other instrumental verbal exchanges)	122	24.11
Performance-led, product-oriented interaction (all pupil utterances with a perceived focus on achieving a given solution and resultant task closure)	123	24.31
Social, non-task-oriented 'drift' (off-task observations, anecdotes, musings, etc.)	16	3.16
Reassurance (soliciting support/advice substantially from adults)	36	7.12
Self-referential aggrandisement (expressions of competitive point-scoring or finding a task easy, soliciting praise, etc.)	37	7.31
Helplessness (expressions of despair and negative self-attributions in the face of perceived difficulty)	30	5.93
TOTAL	364	71.94