



## Education 3-13

International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education

ISSN: 0300-4279 (Print) 1475-7575 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rett20>

# Understanding and enhancing pupils' learning progress in schools in deprived communities

Ruth Dann

**To cite this article:** Ruth Dann (2016) Understanding and enhancing pupils' learning progress in schools in deprived communities, *Education 3-13*, 44:1, 19-31, DOI: [10.1080/03004279.2015.1122319](https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2015.1122319)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2015.1122319>



© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 20 Jan 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 444



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rett20>

# Understanding and enhancing pupils' learning progress in schools in deprived communities

Ruth Dann

Faculty of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

## ABSTRACT

This paper draws on data from the 'Raising Pupil Attainment in Key Stage 1 in Stoke-on-Trent' research project. The particular focus is on how teachers, head teachers and teaching assistants ( $n = 59$ ) articulate pupils' learning success in five highly achieving schools in deprived communities. Six key themes are highlighted which are identified by participants as influencing successful pupil learning and progress. These are analysed in relation to Biesta's theory on the parameters of 'Good Education' [Biesta, G. J. J. 2010. *Good Education in an Age of Measurement*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm] and within Bourdieu's understanding of 'distinction' [Bourdieu, P. 1998. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Oxford: Polity Press]. The research reveals that issues related to socialisation and subjectivity are presented as critical and foundational for the more formal measures of success in pupil learning.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 September 2015  
Accepted 14 October 2015

## KEYWORDS

Learning; attainment;  
deprivation; distinction

## Focus on pupil learning in the Stoke-on-Trent Raising Attainment in Key Stage 1 research project

An overarching concern in the construction and development of the Stoke-on-Trent research project was the importance of trying to ensure that all pupils fulfilled their potential. In this endeavour, the research project sought to capture how five successful schools, in disadvantaged communities, managed to respond to individual pupils' needs without accepting that lower outcomes could be explained and justified. Nationally in England, the inspection framework (Ofsted – Office for Standards in Education) clearly presented the expectation that:

Inspection is primarily about evaluating how well individual pupils benefit from the education provided by their school. It is important to test the school's response to individual needs by observing how well it helps all pupils to make progress and fulfil their potential. (2015, para. 129)

This was reinforced further by the head of Ofsted in a 'No Excuses' campaign specifically aimed at shattering the culture of low expectations often associated with more marginalised and deprived communities (Wilshaw 2012).

The flagship project, London Challenge, designed to raise the standard of education in London from 2003 to 2011 in its poorest communities, was used as an example of how transformations could be made, illustrating how underperforming schools in regions of high deprivation could succeed. With a project budget that peaked to £40 million per year, Inner London secondary schools changed from being the worst performing to the best. Following growth of this project

**CONTACT** Ruth Dann  [r.dann@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:r.dann@mmu.ac.uk)

© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

into two other English regions through 'City Challenge' in Greater Manchester and in the West Midlands ('Black Country'), evidence mounted to show that all schools could be highly successful no matter where they were or who attended (Kidson and Norris 2014).

In Stoke-on-Trent there were high levels of deprivation. In fact, Stoke was ranked the 16th most deprived Local Authority, from a total of 326, in England in 2011 (English Indices of Deprivation 2010). In terms of educational achievements, its Key Stage 1 (KS1) phase (age 5–7) was ranked at the bottom in national league tables for four consecutive years from 2008 to 2012. Research, which highlighted how schools in challenging circumstances became successful, had been well researched in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Cornerstone to this research was the National Commission on Education's publication *Success Against the Odds* (NCE 1996). This focused on challenging schools and built on the more general body of research which was centred on establishing and exploring issues related to school effectiveness and improvement exemplified by research such as Reynolds and Cuttance (1992) and Mortimore (1993).

More recent considerations of how challenging schools could become effective were seen as important for study as it became increasingly apparent that differences in context and culture could not be disregarded. Research such as that by Maden (2001), Keys et al. (2003), Muijs et al. (2004) and James et al. (2006), all sought to examine how schools in challenging circumstances could be (more) effective. Beginning to recognise that understanding effectiveness was less than straightforward, the school effectiveness movement remained influential in researching and promoting a body of evidence to help schools become and remain effective.

The wealth of research detailing what makes an effective school has been greatly critiqued and contested. Slee, Weiner, and Tomlinson (1998) and Gunter (2001) have both recognised that the effectiveness movement is firmly related to performativity and to instrumental and scientific structures designed for optimum effectiveness. It offers a very particular view of how schools might work and be recognised as 'achieving'. However, at the turn of the twenty-first century with the increasing influence of international competitiveness through global league tables such as of the Programme for International Student Assessment, Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study, and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, notions of instrumental and scientific approaches to effectiveness prevail. More recent national policy initiatives in Britain, through the call for evidence-based practice, based on a medical model of research, seek to embed further particular types of scientific evidence as the basis for practice and evidence in schools (Goldacre 2013, Education Endowment Foundation 2015).

## Theoretical positioning

The research in this study certainly recognised this effectiveness agenda. Ultimately, pupil learning measured by pupil outcomes was an essential focus. However, analysis in this paper looks beyond these regulatory measures. To some extent, the research echoed James et al. (2006) in their focus on primary schooling and on schools in challenging circumstances that were considered successful. However, the focus of the Stoke project was on KS 1 attainment (age 5–7). Accordingly, it looked at both the foundation stage (mainly the reception class (aged 4–5) as well as the two KS1 year groups (Year 1 and Year 2, aged 5–7). The early years and KS1 focus was significantly lacking in much of the 'effectiveness' research, hence this research project offers more specific and nuanced consideration of aspects of effective teaching and learning in this younger age group.

There was concern in the research project for exploring 'what works'. Therefore, to some extent, there was a commitment to gaining evidence, which was robust, relevant and useful. However, Farnsworth and Solomon (2013) call for some caution in considering the 'what works' agenda: 'research needs to be contextualised and systematic in order to identify the different layers at which resources might be relevant to promoting change' (2013, 5). Hence consideration of what works was not reduced to simple solutions or quick fixes. Particularly influential in the analysis of the data for this paper were the theoretical insights offered by Biesta (2007, 2010, 2013). Biesta (2007) recognised

that evidence-based practice in education was designed to help schools deliver what national policy required. In recent years, in England, this meant educational research, serving particular notions of practice. The underpinning values and beliefs of these practices were often not clearly articulated. Biesta questioned whether ‘what works’ was the right question. He suggested that such a stance failed to consider what does not work and for whom. Furthermore, it does not consider more fundamental questions of the purpose of education and who it is to serve.

As part of the analysis of the data in this paper, there is an attempt to ensure that theory is ‘context sensitive’ (Farnsworth and Solomon 2013, 7). Furthermore, Biesta’s consideration of the parameters for good education is helpful and is specifically drawn on later to help make sense of the data. Biesta (2010, 2013), in considering what Good Education might include, suggests three key components which form parameters for framing education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification (2010, 19–21). This paper thus seeks to explore the data from the project in relation to what promotes pupil progress and draws on Biesta’s theory of Good Education to help interpret the results.

The first parameter of good education he claims is ‘qualification’. This relates to learning knowledge and skills and is very much linked to learning something specific and might be considered a key purpose of education. It certainly underpins the accountability and performance priorities to which school effectiveness relate. All the schools in the first phase of the study, drawn on in this paper, performed well in external measures, which quantify pupil progress. However, there is a danger that schools often over-emphasise this element. Biesta claims that the intensity given to this element has led to what he terms ‘learnification’ which is an over emphasis on what is learnt and a simplistic notion of learning and learners (Biesta 2010, 18). This echoes Sfard (2013) who identifies the ‘objectification’ of education. Here notions of doing and being are changed to ‘having’. Education thus becomes removed from the individuals and located in the product and outcomes of education.

‘Socialisation’, claims Biesta (2010, 20), concerns how education enables individuals to become part of cultural, political and social orders or traditions. There is a particular concern to explore the ways in which these schools influence pupil progress through socialisation. The work of Bourdieu in relation to cultural and social capital and ‘habitus’ (1998) forms an important strand in this analysis.

Subjectification concerns how education nurtures the uniqueness of each individual. In essence, it is about human subjectivity and uniqueness (2010, 79). Insights from Bourdieu are considered in terms of his thinking around distinction and difference. What is of particular interest is how these five schools, deemed highly effective on performance measures (qualification), also can be seen to embrace Biesta’s other two dimensions as part of educating pupils. Drawing on Biesta’s theory has helped to shape the data analysis for this paper, drawing on data from phase one of the research project. The particular aspects of the project, its structure and data are outlined in the next section.

## Research context and methods

The focus in this paper on pupil progress is explored through the ways in which teachers, teaching assistants and head teachers articulated what happened in early years and KS 1, which they thought created their schools success. There were five schools in phase one of the project, four of which have been judged outstanding (by Ofsted) and one, which was awaiting an inspection and was considered ‘good’ with ‘outstanding features’. Four of the five schools were in a category of failure when their current head teachers were appointed. Accordingly, there was an element of exposing the journey to becoming outstanding within the recorded narratives. Four of the five schools catered for the 3–11 age range, whereas one was a 3–7 nursery/infants school. Three of the schools were in Stoke-on-Trent, and two were in different adjoining local authorities with similar local contexts of significant deprivation.

Part of the research project was focused on establishing how these successful schools, in challenging contexts, made sense of their successes in teaching and learning, highlighting the essential characteristics and practices in their schools. The data collected in phase one of the project were both qualitative and quantitative (Shain et al. 2014). Interviews and focus groups were loosely

structured around key headings, but were designed mainly as a space for participants to talk, offering some direction but mainly using open ended questions. A total of 5 head teachers, 3 assistant head teachers, 23 teachers and 26 teaching assistants were interviewed in phase one of the study and their narratives were specifically drawn on for this paper. In particular, this paper focuses on aspects of the research that were designed to examine dimensions of school practice considered pivotal to promoting pupil learning. One overarching theme, related to the shaping and framing of school culture and ethos, is presented in the next section along with five further key aspects to successful practices, which were considered to promote pupil learning.

## Dominant themes framing articulations of successful learning

### *Culture and ethos*

Even though these schools were highly successful in terms of current external measures of attainment and inspection, there was a sense in which these measures were put into a wider context of understanding success. The importance of the school's culture and ethos was paramount echoing James et al.'s (2006) finding that this is a 'central characteristic' upon which other more specific aspects of teaching and learn learning were built.

This was illustrated by one of the head teachers who stated:

if the children leave the school emotionally ready for the next phase in their education and feel confident about and excited about it, that's just as important as a level four. (Head teacher)

Although this was seen in terms of children leaving the end of the primary age phase, there was a clear indication that learning success was not solely considered in terms of measured outcomes. There was recognition that the pupils were far more than their scores in mathematics and English.

Another head teacher highlighted her view that the success of the school was underpinned by the way the children were valued by the school. This even led to the school purchasing a school uniform for every child through the 'pupil premium' funding (monies given to the school, by the government, for each child whose parental income was below a threshold level).

By actually investing in them and valuing them, you get your just rewards ... They love wearing the uniform, it's smart, it's provided for them, because I provide it I can say, 'You don't come to school unless you've got your uniform on'. (Head teacher)

Each school, in deciding to value its children in clearly demonstrable ways, and wanting the very best outcomes for them also had a driving sense of the challenge that this brought to their schools. There was a sense of urgency for learning and that there was no time to waste. One of the head teachers stated 'children only have today and you have to make a difference today'. Another of the head teachers spoke of the way she had to re-educate the staff so that they understood the children and community better:

Staff have to understand these children to teach them ... I think partly we wanted to change the hearts and minds of staff, so we used all sorts of mechanisms, didn't we? YouTube clips, all sorts of staff training tools, to get them thinking about our children's lives, and how it was our role not to say, 'What an awful child'. They're all our children and how do we tap into that? (Head teacher)

There was a driving sense pervading all these schools that these children could achieve to a high level, they could be encouraged to want to achieve and they could be successful.

Three key themes emerged from the interview data in relation to the learning cultures of the schools. These were significant in teasing out why these schools were so successful and were related to firstly, recognising each child within learning; secondly, investing in lives not just learning and lastly, making aspiration explicit.

With a culture of achievement embedded within the school, teaching and learning were built on this foundation. Although schools were aware that certain teaching practices had a positive impact

on learning, there was little notion that one or two practices could alone be ‘the answer’. There was no sense of ‘quick fixes’ and the transformation of each school had been over at least three years.

Practitioners identified five recurring aspects of practice that seemed to influence schools’ successes in promoting pupil learning. These were:

- assessing, tracking progress and providing interventions;
- teaching in a more structured way in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, aged 3–5);
- embedding clear messages to motivate learning and convey an ‘I can attitude’ within lessons;
- giving pupils a sense of ownership of their learning and progress;
- providing an enriched curriculum both in and beyond the school day.

### *Assessing, tracking progress and providing interventions*

The importance of assessing the children in order to establish their level of progress was fundamental in all five schools. It came through all interviews as the most important aspect of making teaching and learning effective. For each school, children were assessed in numeracy and literacy at least termly and sometimes half termly so that it could be determined whether or not each pupil was making ‘above’, ‘below’ or ‘expected’ progress. This was carried out by levelling pupils’ work in relation to specific criteria, which demonstrated specific steps of learning (sub-levels). The information gleaned from such assessment activities was shared across the whole school. Teachers spoke at staff meetings in which the progress of all pupils in each year were discussed so that the whole school took responsibility for progress. In one school, the progress of every child, in each year group, was condensed onto one A4 sheet given to all teachers.

In all five schools the children who were identified as not making sufficient progress formed the focus of discussion for interventions. The SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) usually took a lead in co-ordinating intervention programmes. There was no one intervention programme which was considered the answer to transforming learning. The schools sent teachers and teaching assistants on a variety of courses so that the school could draw on a vast pool of knowledge. Examples of intervention programmes used included Rapid Reading, Rapid Writing, Rapid Phonics, Rapid Maths, Every Child a Reader, Reading Recovery, Fischer Family Trust and Better Reading Partners. This allowed them to make bespoke packages of intervention for children. Each of these schools made extensive use of teaching assistants who were highly trained and very specifically assigned to interventions and aspects of teaching. There was a strong sense in which teaching assistants helped to deliver the outstanding outcomes in learning together with the class teachers.

Some of the interventions were carried out on a one to one basis for up to 20 minutes a day, others were delivered in small groups. These were carried out either daily or three times a week in regular fixed time slots. In most cases, they were led by teaching assistants although in some cases were carried out by the SENCo. In one school a speech and language therapist, employed by the school, was also involved in some delivery of interventions. The progress of the children involved in the interventions was closely monitored. This was usually over a half termly basis (6–7 weeks). Whether a child continued with an intervention, whether it was revised or discontinued was constantly being reviewed.

The focused assessments that were carried out on all children provided the baseline information for interventions. However, they were also used to determine the exact teaching content and best teaching approaches for each class. Furthermore, they informed how pupils were grouped for learning.

We had to identify the gaps, for me don’t teach a child anything they already know. You teach the gaps. You identify the gaps. You teach the gaps and move them on and you move them on not in a linear format sometimes for some children that’s appropriate, but it’s giving them opportunity to consolidate their learning and generalise

their learning before you move them on otherwise it could be a shallow progression. So you have to give them that breadth. So it impacts on teaching and learning. (Head teacher)

The assessment information about the children's learning was used for medium term planning but more importantly it was related to the focus of individual lessons. Pupil groupings were based on 'how they'd scored the previous week, and based on looking at the gaps that the children had got' (teacher). Even more specifically, lessons were shaped and changed on a daily basis so that they were finely tuned to pupil learning. This meant that in many cases whole year group planning and shared delivery of lessons across classes were not the best form of teaching. Teachers would have the scope to change lessons on a daily basis and in some schools there was flexibility, planned into a day to follow up with an additional lesson to address misconceptions or problems some pupils may have experienced with learning.

The strong link between formative assessment and teaching provided a genuine framework for recognising and accounting for children's progress. The structured bespoke interventions provided the vehicle for helping to ensure that those children who were not adequately learning through whole class teaching were catered for in measured and specific ways. There was no magic formula. A member of the senior leadership team at one of the schools commented 'there was nothing complicated about what they (teachers) do' (senior leadership team).

### *Teaching in a more structured way in the EYFS*

Teach from day one. (Head teacher)

All five schools indicated that in order to raise attainment in KS 1 the structure of EYFS (age 3–5) needed to change. Each school reported that the experiences of the children in EYFS was being altered so that there was more direction and focused teaching given to both literacy and numeracy. This was in contrast to the dominant discourse in early years education that learning should be mainly through play and child-initiated learning (DfE 2014).

In one school, the EYFS were using the same numeracy and writing exercise books for their work as those used across the rest of the school. Children were beginning to record work in these books. This was alongside specific teaching in numeracy and literacy each day, in line with timings across the rest of the school. Children in nursery were experiencing more formal interactive teaching in small groups as part of their day. The change towards more structured activities and teacher led work in the EYFS had been relatively new in these schools. None of the teachers offered any hint that they felt children were unable to cope with it. Rather, they suggested the children thrived and responded very well to the teaching being offered.

I think expectations in Reception and Nursery have been raised so greatly ... I'm going to push these children as hard as I can, or you can believe that they should play ... (Teacher)

One school had employed its own speech and language therapist as in recent years the standard of language at school entry had diminished. In this school, all early years staff had been trained on an ELKLAN programme in school (focused language development training commonly used by speech therapists). The speech and language worker and the SENCo had both become trained so that they could deliver the programme. Ensuring that all teaching and teaching assistant staff had this training enabled speech and language to be better supported throughout the EYFS. There was a shared understanding across all staff of how communication could be enhanced which could be embedded across the whole early years' experience. 'we embed it right into all of our planning and it's just made us think very, very clearly, not just about how we teach but how we speak to our children' (speech and language therapist).

The ways in which the EYFS was more focused and teacher had been reported by each of the five schools as a significant aspect of their current success. They had made a very conscious effort to make

changes that although might not be in line with established thinking, they believed had a very positive impact on pupil learning.

### *Embedding clear messages to motivate learning and convey an 'I can attitude' within lessons*

One of the schools had a particular motivation strategy that pervaded all KS 1 classes. It related to the acronym M.A.G.I.C. Each classroom had a display conveying this acronym and its meaning.

M is for Motivation, A for Attitude, G for Gumption, I for I Learn and C for Communication, and it's about promoting those different learning behaviours and it's about talking about them every lesson and saying which ones do you need to achieve today? (Teacher)

Lesson observations revealed that teachers used very clear positive language, including 'I can' statements and motivational language and actions, for example 'Pat your selves on the back'. Celebration assemblies reinforced a sense of whole school recognition of achievement. In many cases, these were opened up to the whole school community so that parents could attend. Children and their families were given clear messages about the life long impact of successful learning. One of the head teachers conveyed a typical conversation that she often had with children.

If you do that (get good levels/grades) you get off to university and you can engage in a really interesting degree and at the end of that what do you think you get, and the children used to say, 'money, Mrs xxx ...', absolutely. (Head teacher)

Another head teacher, during a celebration assembly attended by parents, made a deliberate point of saying that one child, who was receiving an award, had a fund that his father had started to save for him to go to university. The university link was further established through another school having bought into the 'children's university' so that children could gain accreditation in this scheme.

My 'children's university' uptake has gone from having the odd kiddie passing out, to ... I have to do a separate assembly for children's university, I can't do it in the main awards, because there are hundreds of them, because they are so involved ... , they engage within the university, yes, aspirations have increased massively actually. (Head teacher)

A significant part of motivating children's learning was through the use of school trips. Teachers conveyed the fact that often children had few experiences in other localities with their families. School trips were therefore considered essential. In one school these were at least one per half term. They were always at the start of a half term and were used as the foundation for the forthcoming topic work.

### *Giving pupils a sense of ownership of their learning and progress*

The five schools each gave views about how they empowered the children to understand and take ownership of their own learning. This was partly related to the shift in culture which provided the foundation for their whole approach to success. However, there were many more specific ways in which children were more specifically drawn into the cycle of teaching, learning and assessment.

It's all about the children knowing what they're good at and what their next steps are and knowing what their targets are and being aware of the targets all the time and making sure that every lesson they are addressing those targets, so if it's writing and their target is to use interesting adjectives, it's making sure that every lesson they've got the opportunity to go and do that, it's about them knowing what they need to do to be better. (Teacher)

Two of the schools had adopted 'assertive mentoring' strategies. As part of these strategies the pupils were involved in discussion about their progress. Each term children had a meeting with their class teacher about their progress in reading, writing, maths and science as well as attendance,



punctuality, behaviour, effort, homework and uniform. On a single sheet each child was shown to be 'above', 'below' or 'at' the expected level of progress. Other attitudinal and behavioural issues were shaded in red (not good enough), yellow (a little below expected) or green (no problems.) Targets for each term were also recorded. These sheets were held in a file with the child's name on the spine. They were stored on a shelf outside the classroom. There were no secrets about who was achieving and who was not. The children were very aware of the expectations for them and could talk about their feelings and difficulties. There was also a sense in which children were aware of how others were progressing.

The involvement of the children in a dialogue about their learning was evident across the schools.

Individually they know their next steps, don't they, they know their targets. Their targets are discussed continually with the children. The children know what they can do and what they need to do to get to the next bit level. (Teacher)

The importance of talking about and sharing achievement and progress also extended to parents. This is considered in more detail in Watt (2016).

Even within lessons, children were given responsibility for managing their learning. In one school, in lessons, one of the children was put in charge of each group and would ensure that his/her group was working well during a task. The child would wear a lanyard to indicate that they were the group leader so the other children would understand that they would refer any issues to this child in the first instance.

The schools tended to have 'working wall' areas that were clearly displaying key vocabulary to help the children be more independent in tasks. In addition, there were word mats on tables which helped the children with spellings and writing key words more independently. In enabling the children to have an ownership in their learning, there were clear structures and systems in place that helped the children understand how learning was organised across their school experience.

It's the same structure. It's the same presentation so everything is exactly the same for every single class. (Teacher)  
The children know the routines and structure throughout the school then so whichever class they go into they still know what's expected of them. (Teacher)

The format in which feedback was given to pupils on their work was uniform and time slots for addressing feedback allocated across the school at the same time each day. There were connected sets of actions in each school which revealed that children were being equipped to progressively become more independent in their learning throughout their journey through the school in planned and systematic ways.

### *Enriching the curriculum*

As previously indicated, all schools ensured that children had out of school trips as part of the curriculum. In most cases, these trips were used to motivate and excite the children in their learning. More interestingly, they were carried out near the beginning of a half term in order to provide real life experiences upon which the teaching could be built. One school had specifically planned for trips to start off in the locality, become national and then by the time they left the school have an international trip. One school had ensured that an overnight trip was planned within KS1. These trips were often full or partly funded by 'pupil premium' money.

Classrooms were visually themed with displays to develop the out of class visit and the topic. In one of the schools, there was a very deliberate policy to have a role play area in every classroom from EYFS to Year 6 which was changed every half term. Typically, role play areas were used mainly in the early years ages only. This was carefully linked to key areas of learning (often linked to a visit) and designed to enrich the use of language in learning.

Each school had a vast range of after-school clubs. Sometimes these were run by outside visitors. Often they were run by staff. One school had a policy that every staff member must run one after-school club. Another school had linked these into the 'Children's University'. Some of the clubs required payment and there was help for families who needed it. One of the schools had deliberately included quite 'middle class' activities such as horse riding and had extended opportunities for all children to visit the local dry sky slopes. It was also in the process of establishing a small farm with pygmy goats, ducks, chickens, rabbits and the possibility of micro pigs. The provision of these experiences was not considered a luxury or add-on but vital for the needs of the children. There was a sense in which children were encouraged to see learning as being available all around them. Such a view would equip them for lifelong learning.

Most of the schools indicated that they had developed specific strategies to engage boys, particularly in writing. One school even talked of a 'boys' curriculum'. This was particularly set in the community contexts in which it often seemed less acceptable for boys to aspire to read and write. However, the strategies developed had made a good impact and the curriculum with particular themes such as 'super heroes' had made a difference to boys' engagement with their learning. Using the outdoor environment had also helped, one of the schools having provided 'forest school' experiences for all the children.

### Further understanding teaching and learning

The discussion above teases out the key issues that teachers, head teachers and teaching assistants articulated as contributing to their successes in progressing pupil learning within their school in deprived communities. To some extent they help with understanding 'what works' to ensure that children learn. To this extent, the key characteristics of what is effective sit alongside previous studies (e.g. James et al. 2006; NCE 1996). However, there are some specific details of approaches which were in response to the more recent political climate in education as well as to the construction of 'effectiveness' linked to the prevailing characteristics of the inspection system.

What was clearly evident in the Stoke project was that considerable effort was given to education which reached beyond immediate learning outcomes (beyond 'qualification' in Biesta's theory). Biesta's remaining two parameters of education, 'socialization' and 'subjectification' seem to characterise aspects of the practice that were framed and articulated in these five schools.

Ways of socialising in these schools were explicit. There were clear, visible ways of helping the children (and their families) understand and become part of the values and priorities of the school. Perhaps one of the most poignant and perhaps contentious was the decision in one of the schools to purchase the school uniform for all pupils. All the schools had very clear uniform rules, which were tightly enforced. It was a particular example of the school imposing a specific identity on the pupils through the sameness of the uniform. The difference between being asked to wear it and being given it is significant. As the head teacher commented, it is a clear visible message that the child belongs to this school community, we have invested in you as we know that you are part of this community. Instead of the families 'buying' into this school through purchasing uniform the school 'buys' into them. This is a significant message, which could be considered as a clear use of power to shape the pupils' identity. Yet it could be seen as signalling a much bigger commitment, indicating that the school invests in them so much, they matter.

The 'socialisation' aspect of these schools permeated whole school structures and systems in ways that were designed to help pupils understand and be a part of their learning. This was not incidental, resting only on the thoughtfulness and insight of individual teachers, but embedded across all classes. What all five schools demonstrated was that they were seeking to influence the child as a learner across all elements of the school. Bourdieu's understanding of social space perhaps offers some helpful insights into the processes and contexts being developed. In recognising school as a social space (*field of power*), teachers and pupils (and parents) have different 'dispositions' (*habitus*) within this space which relate to their positioning in that space (Bourdieu 1998, 7).

Furthermore, there may be differences (*tastes*) within each habitus. For pupils, when they first come into school in the EYFS, they will have little notion of being a pupil as they will bring different experiences (*capital*). Part of the task of the school is to help the pupils understand what being a pupil demands. What is their place in the social space of the school. To some extent, habitus is a 'generative and unifying principle' (Bourdieu 1998, 8). Hence, these schools were offering very specific attempts to unify school structures and systems with consistent approaches across year groups in order to incorporate the pupils into being actively engaged in these. Furthermore, there were deliberate attempts to include parents in understanding and being part of each child's education.

The process of socialization was also deliberate in giving the children particular cultural experiences, which it was believed they might not have access (or sufficient access) to at home. Thus, in helping the pupils gain the 'disposition' to take advantage of being a pupil, there needed to be more than classroom-based teacher–pupil encounters. They recognise that the desired learning ('qualification' in Biesta's terms) could not advance in the ways required without broader understandings, beyond the classroom. The process of socialisation was therefore not just about sharing values about the culture and social practice of being at school but about developing their understanding of culture, and society beyond school. These were measured and deliberate attempts were made to increase the pupils' cultural and social capital through the learning processes. The examples of out of class activities were significant here. Whether these were regarded as compensatory was not clear. What was clear, however, was that these schools were specifically articulating the priorities given to learning outside the classroom to their schools' successes. Good/outstanding classroom teaching alone would not gain the same results. The parameters for good learning outcomes were considered to rest partly in the way that the pupils were both educated and socialized. Some of these issues are further considered in Shain's paper (2015) in this issue.

In seeking to make sense of the ways in which the school (*field*) takes on the role of shaping pupil disposition, it is useful to consider Bourdieu's notion of the relational nature of the school as a social space. Rather than identifying the pupils as being in some kind of deficit, shaped by the deprived community they inhabit, the school was seen as a social space which was defined through its relational properties. Such properties were 'mutually exterior', in that they were defined by external factors which shaped what they needed to deliver and influence. Hence, they helped to define the space (the school) and also the habitus of those within it. Thus, although a unifying principle was included, so also were principles of difference. There was recognition that in addition to habitus, in a classificatory sense there was also a 'taste' sense-related to principles, preferences, vision and divisions (Bourdieu 1998, 25). This recognised the human distinctiveness of individuals and how they may, in practice, function within their habitus differently.

Bourdieu highlighted the importance of individuals' 'practical sense' in shaping their engagement within their habitus because of the differences in their 'capital'. More explicitly, he talked of how they use their practical sense to have a "'feel" for the game' (Bourdieu 1998, 25). This refers to how individuals anticipate the future, in this case their learning. From the research carried out in these schools, it was clear that key messages relating to aspiration and what future learning might be like were thoughtfully conveyed to help the children use the capital they had for the benefit of their learning, and to make choices to invest in new capital. Messages were designed to help pupils make choices, which would shape their learning and also their decisions related to their future cultural, social and economic capital. The conversation relayed by one head teacher about her telling pupils that if they worked they would ultimately be able to get a job and earn more money, as well as the message to parents about a father saving for his son's university education were examples of how these messages were deliberately and frequently built into conversations within school.

The schools were thus paying particular attention to socialisation in many ways, which reflected the importance Biesta (2010) gave to this parameter of 'Good Education'. Furthermore, the ways in which socialisation was framed and explained by participants in the school relates strongly to Bourdieu's theoretical thinking. However, there is an additional layer of practice in these school

which was a vital element that participants articulated in talking about the school successes. It relates very specially to Biesta's third parameter of 'Good Education' – subjectification.

A key dimension of success in these school related to understanding the uniqueness of each child and using knowledge of each child to help shape learning experiences. The uniformity required through the performativity agenda was therefore accompanied with a personalising approach which recognised and responded to difference. An important aspect of the success in these schools was highlighted, by the participants, as being the importance of assessing, understanding and tracking each individual pupil. The emphasis here was on making sure that each pupil's learning was assessed (in English and mathematics) every 6–7 weeks. The quality and consistency of this data across the whole school were crucial. This was echoed in comments from head teachers about the importance of understanding the pupils' learning gaps. (The difference between what pupils know now and what they need to know next.) Effective teaching, in these schools, was based on understanding the right next step for each pupil.

Attempts to better understand the learning gap and how both teachers and pupils construct it in the context of teaching and learning are complex and under researched (Dann 2015a, 2015b). It is clearly an important factor in the way teachers were seeking to make sense of teaching and learning encounters in these schools. Accordingly, in recognising that pupils' immediate learning needs would change across subjects and between topics and themes, pupil groupings were recognised as fluid and fluctuated according to the learning needs of the pupils in particular lessons and subjects. For children with distinctive needs specific interventions were planned. These were short term (in the first instance) and focused on their particular learning needs. The interventions were often planned and constructed drawing from a range of commercial packages. These tended to be monitored by the Special Needs Co-ordinator, though in one school, a speech and language worker was also involved. Who taught these interventions varied. In some cases, it was a qualified teacher and others it tended to be a range of highly trained teaching assistants. Contrary to evidence such as that in the Education Endowment Fund (2015)/Sutton Trust Toolkit, the impact of teaching assistants' role in supporting pupils learning effectively was regarded as very high in these schools. These teaching assistants knew the exact learning needs of the children with whom they worked, and were involved in monitoring and assessing pupil progress during interventions.

The importance of understanding each pupil's learning journey and capturing it at regular stages to record learning was therefore crucial. Recognising and capturing the uniqueness of each child were vital. However, the reason for this was to ensure a conformity of outcome in relation to specific national learning targets and outcomes. These schools also saw the importance of the uniqueness of each child in additional ways. This is perhaps where Biesta's notion of subjectification may be seen in action. Balanced alongside the consistent structures and systems, which were also important in helping to regulate the learning environment were a wide range of enriching experiences, which enabled the children to make choices about activities that were of interest to them through the extended curriculum. Theoretically, there are some interesting juxtapositions here. There was recognition throughout the school that each child was different and in order for children to be taught effectively recognition and understanding of difference was the basis for teaching.

These outstanding schools, in most deprived conditions, achieved the very best for children as defined by the regulatory body for English schools (Ofsted). There was a sense in which school communities were created so that children achieved and exceeded national benchmark targets. However, as Biesta comments, 'it is rather easy to make sure that uniqueness will *not* appear' (2010, 90) when the desired outcomes are about objective test results. The research from these schools suggests that in these schools, without understanding and responding to uniqueness and difference, the success in formal ('rational') objective terms would probably not have been achieved. The recognition of the uniqueness of the pupil within the formal curriculum, through the detailed, focused and regular assessment of progress and attainment, as well as through the enriched opportunities provided in and after school were not incidental or haphazard. They seemed fundamental to the formalised high standards of attainment gained. These were carefully planned and structured, yet specifically

bespoke for individuals. What resulted in these schools was that all those working with the children had made complex judgments about what would help each child. The successes in their learning and in their lives was not about following fixed recipes for success but recognising the importance of making ‘wise situated judgements about what is educationally desirable’ (Biesta 2013, 140).

## Acknowledgements

The views expressed in this paper are the author’s own and may not reflect the views of the research team or the funder.

## Funding

The paper draws on the ‘Raising Attainment at Key Stage 1 in Stoke-on-Trent’ project which was funded by Stoke City Council (2013–2016). The research team comprised: Farzana Shain (PI, Keele University), Ruth Dann (Manchester Metropolitan University), Laura Watt (Keele University) and Steve Cropper (Keele University).

## References

- Biesta, G. J. J. 2007. “Why ‘What Works’ Won’t Work: Evidence Based Practice and the Democratic Deficit in Educational Research.” *Educational Theory* 57 (1): 1–22.
- Biesta, G. J. J. 2010. *Good Education in an Age of Measurement*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Biesta, G. J. J. 2013. *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Bourdieu, P. 1998. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Dann, R. 2015a. “Developing Understanding of Feedback Using Habermas’s Notion of Communicative Action.” *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*. doi:10.1080/0969594X.2015.1056083.
- Dann, R. 2015b. “Developing the Foundations of Dialogic Feedback in Order to Better Understand the ‘Learning Gap’ from a Pupil’s Perspective.” *London Review of Education* 13 (3): 5–20.
- Department for Education. 2014. *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. London: Department for Education. Accessed October 10, 2015. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/335504/EYFS\\_framework\\_from\\_1\\_September\\_2014\\_\\_with\\_clarification\\_note.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335504/EYFS_framework_from_1_September_2014__with_clarification_note.pdf).
- Education Endowment Fund. Accessed August 5, 2015. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/toolkit-a-z/>.
- English Indices of Deprivation. 2010. Accessed July 24, 2015. <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/index-of-multiple-deprivation>.
- Farnsworth, V., and Y. Solomon, eds. 2013. *Reframing Educational Research: Resisting the What Works Agenda*. London: Routledge.
- Goldacre, B. 2013. *Building Evidence into Education*. Accessed August 6, 2015. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/building-evidence-into-education>.
- Gunter, H. 2001. “Critical Approaches to Leadership in Education.” *Journal of Educational Enquiry* 2 (2): 94–108.
- James, C., M. Connolly, G. Dunning, and T. Elliott. 2006. *How Very Effective Primary Schools Work*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Keys, W., C. Sharp, K. Greene, and H. Grayson. 2003. *Successful Leadership of Schools in Urban and Challenging Contexts: A Review of the Literature*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
- Kidson, M., and E. Norris. 2014. *Implementing the London Challenge*. London: Institute for Government.
- Maden, M., ed. 2001. *Success Against the Odds, Five years on: Revisiting Effective Schools in Disadvantage Areas*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Mortimore, P. 1993. “School Effectiveness and the Management of Effective Learning and Teaching.” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 4 (4): 290–310.
- Muijs, D., A. Harris, C. Chapman, L. Stoll, and J. Russ. 2004. “Improving Schools in Socio-economically Disadvantaged Area: A Review of the Research.” *School Effectiveness and Improvement* 15 (2): 149–175.
- National Commission for Education (NCE). 1996. *Success Against the Odds: Effective Schools in Disadvantaged Areas*. London: Routledge.
- Ofsted. 2015. *School Inspection Framework*. London: HMSO.
- Reynolds, D., and P. Cuttance, eds. 1992. *School Effectiveness Research Policy and Practice*. London: Cassell.
- Sfard, M. 2013. “Not Just So Stories.” In *Reframing Educational Research: Resisting the What Works Agenda*, edited by V. Farnsworth and Y. Solomon, 139–150. London: Routledge.
- Shain, F. 2015. “Succeeding Against the Odds: Can Schools ‘Compensate for Society?’” *Education 3-13* 44. doi:10.1080/03004279.2015.1122318.
- Shain, F., R. Dann, L. Watt, and S. Cropper. 2014. *Raising Attainment in Key Stage 1 in Stoke-on-Trent Phase 1 Report*. Keele: Keele University and Stoke-on-Trent City Council.
- Slee, R., G. Weiner, and S. Tomlinson, eds. 1998. *Challenges to the School Effectiveness and School Improvement Movements*. London: Falmer.

- Watt, L. 2016. "Engaging Hard to Reach Families: Learning from Five 'Outstanding' Schools." *Education 3-13* 44. doi:10.1080/03004279.2015.1122321
- Wilshaw, M. 2012. *High Expectations, No Excuses*. A Speech to the London Leadership Strategy's Good to Great Conference. Accessed October 9. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/high-expectation-no-excuses-sir-michael-wilshaw-hmci-outlines-changes-ofsted-inspection-drive-delive-0>.