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**Finding the Voice: Hearing the Voice
The Under-represented in the Reform
Movement**

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Context

A report from the Task Group for Assessment and Testing (DES 1987) set the scene for a sea of change in English primary education. The report outlined recommendations for teacher assessment, the reporting of assessments, records of achievement and implications for teaching and learning. It was given positive reactions from inside and outside the profession, and particularly welcomed by parents and school governors. The implications of the recommendations were further clarified in three supplementary reports. The Education Reform Act of 1988 was an Act of Parliament for England and Wales that heralded immense changes both in the content and delivery of the primary school curriculum. The National Curriculum (DES 1990) was created and implemented in schools a short time after the assessment of that curriculum was announced and a series of tests piloted and implemented. Since then the National Curriculum has itself changed in its implementation mainly due to the nature of the statutory assessment tasks and tests created for teachers to use yearly with groups of children who had reached the end of their 'key stage'. Before 1988 teachers were autonomous with regard to both curriculum content and its assessment, although the influence of the Local Education Authority, who held responsibility for in-service-training of teachers, was generally very marked. The National Curriculum was predicated on a criterion-referenced approach to learning, with associated 'statements of attainment' that were to be tested. This essentially competence-based approach was at odds with the developments elsewhere (Grimmett et al 1988, Mayer and Brause 1991, Pollard & Tann 1987) which were beginning to focus on constructivist theories and there had been a growth in self-assessment by pupils through discussion with the teacher. This discussion between teacher and pupil tended to focus upon attainments as defined by the National Curriculum content. There was no expectation that pupils would be capable of discussing process or learning style; however an inventory devised by Johnston and Dainton (1994), focused precisely on learning style, I was keen to discover how it would be approached by English pupils.

**Theoretical Basis and Underlying Assumptions Tested by
these Studies:**

Two assumptions underlie the five studies which form subject of this symposium:

1. A Learner learns most efficiently and successfully when allowed to use his/her

"stable over time" patterns of cognition (intelligence, aptitude, experiences, levels of abstraction), conation (pace, autonomy, natural skills) and affectation (sense of self, values and range of feelings) to engage in a learning task;

2. Learners learn best when given the opportunity to know their learning process, allowed to negotiate their learning environment, and provided the tools to strategize to meet the rigors of standardised and alternative methods of assessment and performance.

Editor's Note: This paper has been edited for brevity. For a copy of the entire text including a discussion of Methodology and Data Analysis, please contact the author directly. What follows is a discussion of the study's outcomes.

Comments on the Experience

Whatever the results as seen above, the experience had a massively positive effect on both pupils and teachers in the participating schools.

While filling out the inventory, the pupils worked in an interested manner either very quietly or by making lively comments to each other, depending on the style of teaching normally employed in their classrooms. At the end, they were all very excited at the new information presented to them, at the fact that they found a description of what they saw as themselves on a printed page and most of all at the fact that they had been enabled to articulate something of which they had previously been tacitly but not explicitly aware. In other words, they had been given a voice.

As soon as they were able, depending on time and situation, the pupils discussed the experience excitedly with their teachers. This was a new development for the teachers I worked with, since until this moment they had seen themselves as the only person with knowledge about how pupils learn. The new National Curriculum of England and Wales informs both teachers and parents about what the pupils should learn, but how "is a matter for the teachers themselves" (SCAA 1996). Since the advent of the National Curriculum and its assessment, there has been a growing recognition by teachers that pupils may be able to be involved in their own assessment and in target setting. In the last 20 years in English schools there has been a complementary development of the teaching of personal and social education which has increased the individual's personal knowledge through group interaction and exchange; enabling the process of making pupil views explicit. These initiatives have however focussed on the content of learning as opposed to the learning process. So, in a contradictory way, just when the curriculum is being most confined by the government and they have least autonomy, teachers have been giving certain freedoms and responsibilities to the pupils, beginning to listen to the wisdom that is within.

The teachers, who had been trained at a number of different points in time in the last 50 years, had been influenced in their personal theories and by the philosophical thinking at the time they were taught:

- didacticism and teacher centred education;
- child as learner and child centred approaches;
- teacher directing the learner and behaviourism;

- the competent learner and the reflective teacher;
- Constructivism and the learner informing the teacher.

Each teacher is working from personal theories developed at the time they began learning to be teachers, from the influence of their training added to their own school experiences and on which they build, via teaching experience and a range of other influences. Another source of influence is, of course, research that has grown over the last 25 years to combine in a view of the 'competent' child, research that began with the 'competent neonate' an idea that was discovered because of improving measurement ability via new technologies. Earlier on it had been difficult for researchers to measure the responses of neonates, since they could not talk, but the use of computers enabled small eye movements to be observed, or head directions to be monitored, giving us a new view of the baby's focus of attention. (Stone 1974) Many teachers - especially those whose in-service-training has left these theories unchallenged - retain a view that the teacher is the fount of all knowledge or insight and is always the instigator, the one who knows best what is in the interest of the child. Consequently many teachers tend to retain the basic philosophy with which they started unless their views are challenged (hence the usefulness of the Action Research movement) This may go some way towards explaining why in the classrooms I visited for this research, the idea that children could have a view of their own learning was a new one to the teachers.

The insights afforded to the teachers and children by the inventory opened up new avenues of possibility for dialogue.

The teachers whose pupils had been involved in doing the inventory felt that it had been a valuable thing for the pupils to do. 'The pupils enjoyed doing it and wanted to know if there were any more! For me, one particularly interesting result was that a high percentage of 7-year-old pupils in response to the essay question about how they would like their teacher to find out how much they know wrote that They would like the teacher to talk to them. This is important evidence at a time when some influences on the education system are suggesting that learners need computerised feedback or that large group situations are effective teaching situations. The older pupils on the other hand mostly responded in terms of written tasks and tests. Several pupils found the open questions really difficult to do - they had not previously ever considered the issue before.

The most common remark from teachers was that "we just don't talk to them about it". One teacher (teacher H) expressed openly what They all intimated "I was surprised at how definite some children were in their responses" and another (teacher F) remarked in some surprise "some pupils were very definite about the way they like to learn" All the teachers involved felt that it had taught them something new about the children. Teacher R said "I found the results fascinating, confirming my thoughts about some of the children, but revealing aspects of others I had not considered". The inventory had given support to two teachers who work as a team and who had together decided on a particular strategy with a pupil who was having difficulty with certain mathematical and scientific concepts. They had decided to give her challenges and time to work on them on her own. They found that in the inventory results this came out strongly as one of her preferences, which made them feel happier about their professional judgement which they felt was now justified empirically. These two teachers felt that the inventory gives the teacher a very clear indication of a preferred way of learning. They informed me that later on they also began to discuss together how they could help pupils to open up alternative ways of learning as well as the preferred way.

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