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‘If you don’t understand this don’t worry, for the rest of you I will go on’: Deconstructing children’s opportunity to participate in the classroom community of practice

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Reconceptualising learning: Legitimate participation in communities of practice, explaining transition from primary to secondary school

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The structural and pedagogical differences between primary and secondary school have been listed in a number of research studies, but not identified as one of the reasons for the difficult process of transition. However, to date these differences have been merely described (e.g. original ORA did not follow the 20 years on) and subsequent assumptions made about why they present difficulties. In this paper I will discuss a six-month research project which followed

children from primary school to secondary school. The outcomes demonstrated that primary and secondary school constitute two cultures so different that notions of smooth transitions are rendered an impossible dream. I will use the learning as participation literature to demonstrate how the learning and performance are embedded in the wider practices of the schools so that, in order to succeed, children need to re-evaluate and forget primary practices and involve themselves in a set of new procedures, which a significant proportion of schoolchildren will find because of the shift in emotional and motivational factors pursuant to the transition. I will use the data to challenge traditional notions of learning and to suggest how primary practices can address transition problems.

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A connectionist approach to teaching rhythm notation to three- to four-year-old pre-school children

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In many countries, including Britain and the USA, rhythm notation is traditionally taught utilising the mathematical mathematical symbols (e.g. quarter note values) (for example, one semibreve equals four crotchet). The purpose of this study was to investigate whether it was possible for young children to learn to perform from conventional rhythm notation without being taught such rules. Here the children were simply exposed to rhythmic phrases along with their correct performance. Subsequently they were able to accurately perform previously unseen phrases comprised of the learned note values (semibreves, minims, crotchets and quavers). The children (n=10) received a pre-test, 2010-minutes of intervention, followed by post-test. Pre- to post-test gains were significant (p<.005). Scores on a re-test administered seven weeks later were not significantly different from post-test scores (n=10).

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Agency: Measuring selfhood in toddlers’ social actions

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This paper presents a new measure of selfhood in two-year-olds – interpersonal agency – that quantifies the ability to act effectively upon the self’s goal and intentions. Using social play and interpersonal conflict as arenas of analysis, individual differences in interpersonal agency among toddlers are described and exemplified. It will be shown that as young as two years of age vary quite widely in their ability or willingness to affect the social environment, that this variation is consistent across a range of interactive contexts and is predicted by security of attachment such that securely attached children are more agentic than their insecure peers. Interactions of self-development play the explanatory role in both the home and the child’s history of social interaction. Hence, in an exploration of potential determinants, aspects of maternal interaction that may promote agency in toddlers will be highlighted, using videotaped examples.

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Academic achievement and social functioning of children with and without learning difficulties

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A academic achievement and social functioning of children with learning difficulties (LD), and high achieving (HA) children was examined. The children were seven- to 12-years-old (n=234, including 39 children without LD were assigned to the LA or HA category on the basis of attainment scores on exams for Mathematics and English. Sociometric and behavioural scores were also collected for each child. Findings indicated positive correlations between academic attainment and positive social behaviours; and negative correlations between academic attainment and negative social behaviours. Behavioural attributes accounted for greater variance in social preference than in academic achievement. HA children scored higher on social preference and positive behaviours than LA and LD children. Only help-seeking behaviour discriminated between LA and LD groups – children with LD scoring significantly higher. These findings indicate a relationship between social adjustment and academic achievement, and that intervention strategies need to target social relationship difficulties in LA children as well as children with LD.

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‘He takes after his father’: Children’s reasoning about parent-offspring and sibling resemblance


This study is part of a three-year longitudinal project funded by the Wellcome Trust examining the development of children’s intuitive inheritance concepts. It reports cross-sectional comparisons on a mother-bias task. Children (120, in four age cohorts of four, seven, 10 and 14 years; n=180) were interviewed individually using a forced-choice procedure about their perceptions of the biological father’s inheritance of different trait types (physical characteristics, personality traits and disabilities). They were presented with a photograph of the biological mother and father exhibiting variation in the feature at issue. Children were asked to select the most likely offspring out of four alternatives. The same feature as the mother, same feature as the father, combined features of mother and father, neither parental feature. Children then made judgements about the offspring of a more distant relative (n=234, including 39 children with LD) and both judged the child was required to provide an explanation of inheritance. The results showed significant age and feature differences in children’s beliefs regarding the inheritance of different trait types. Although younger children have a general understanding of parent-offspring resemblance, overall the results indicate that older children develop more complex conceptions of inheritance which include a recognition of multiple sources of inheritance, awareness of genes and genetic uncertainty.

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Emotion recognition by children with Down’s syndrome: Effects of varying emotion label and expression intensity


Socio-cognitive ability is often thought to be a relative strength amongst those with Down’s syndrome (DS). However, recent work suggests that some children with DS may experience difficulties with certain aspects of social cognition, including recognition of specific facial expressions. This study is part of a longitudinal study that explores this emotion recognition of children with DS (n=28), and compared DS performance with that of children with non-specific intellectual disabilities (n=25) and typically developing children (n=28) matched on age and cognitive level. The conditions (regular vs exaggerated emotions, emotion labelling vs generic task instructions) were used in an attempt to establish which emotion recognition task difficulties in DS relate to perceptual aspects of facial expression or to