
Conference '94 Symposia reports

Report on BERA Regional Seminar: Criteria, Standards & Judgement

A seminar organised by BERA's Assessment Policy Task Group was held on Friday, 18 November 1994 at the University of Cambridge Institute of Education. This attracted more than 50 participants from as far afield as Bath and Hull (expanding the notion of a regional seminar!) Schools, LEAs, NFER, SCAA, NCVQ, publishers, examinations boards and university departments of education were all represented. As a consequence of this diversity the discussion was both informative and interesting.

The seminar coincided with the publication of a letter to schools from the Chairman of SCAA and the Chief Inspector of Schools, setting out their view on the use of level descriptions by teachers in their assessment of children's work in relation to the National Curriculum. It was therefore timely that this seminar should begin with two brief papers, by Mary James and Wynne Harlen, on the role of teacher assessment and whether (and how) a formative purpose, in linking assessment to real learning, might be achieved. The contrasts between England and Scotland, in terms of statutory requirement, suggested that the situation is still more hopeful in Scotland. After discussion and coffee, Caroline Gipps took up the theme of teachers assessment again by looking specifically at the implications of the move from assessing individual pieces of children's work against statements of attainment, to judging 'best fit' in terms of level descriptions applied to the range of work produced by a child.

After lunch, the focus shifted to assessment in the 14 to 19 age range. Gordon Stobart examined the attempt to develop another criterion-referenced system within GNVQ. The motivational advantages associated with student initiative and active learning were set against the difficulties of developing a manageable and reliable system. The problems of operationalising criteria and standardising

judgement in GNVQ were taken up again by Alison Woolf and Tricia Broadfoot, drawing on the findings of the GARP Project.

In the final presentation, before John Gardner's summing up, Richard Daugherty speculated on the prospect of creating a coherent system for assessment at 14-19 and challenged the usefulness of criterion-referencing for all purposes and contexts.

Another regional seminar organised by the APTG will take place in Bristol on 12 May 1995. The theme will be 'Assessment and Learning'.

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Report of the Symposium on Teachers, Pupils and Primary Education Convened by Marilyn Osborn at the BERA Conference

Contributors: Edie Black, Patricia Broadfoot, Marilyn Osborn, Claire Planel (University of Bristol), Paul Cross (University of Reading), Ann Filer and Andrew Pollard (University of the West of England, Bristol)

The symposium was designed to examine the changing experience of teachers and children in primary schools in the context of educational reform and processes of multiple innovation. The first of the morning was devoted to a discussion of primary teacher perspectives and papers were presented which reflected different models of teacher response to educational change, a report of research on the changing nature of teachers' work at Key Stage 2, and a report on a comparative study of teachers responses to policy change in England in France.

Paul Cross's paper presented four models for describing and analysing the role of teachers in the formulation of educational policy and the resulting processes of change. It was argued that teachers might be seen as **partners** in educational policy making, as **implementers** of

change, or as **resisting** change. A fourth model of teachers as **policy makers in practice** was suggested to describe the way in which the reality of teaching situations can lead to the independent actions of individual teachers having systematic policy effects. The applicability of these models was considered in the context of contemporary educational research evidence, drawing in particular from the PACE (Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience) study of the implementation of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

The presentation by Marilyn Osborn and Edie Black drew upon interviews carried out with teachers and headteachers as part of a study of the changing nature of teachers' work at Key Stage 2. The paper focused particularly on changes in teachers' roles and in the ways in which they worked with colleagues. A significant increase in collaboration between teachers was noted although there were some limitations to how far this could be seen as a move to genuine collegiality. For many teachers the move towards a more collaborative professionalism was one of the more positive outcomes of the reforms, although there were losses as well as gains for some who regretted the disappearance of more relaxed, informal staff relationships and their replacement by more formal, structured meetings.

Patricia Broadfoot presented the third paper, written in collaboration with Marilyn Osborn, Claire Planel and Andrew Pollard. This drew upon an on-going comparative study of primary teachers in England and France following recent educational reform and policy change. In both countries changes had been imposed by central government on teachers and schools, but these policy changes had very different emphases - towards more decentralisation in France and towards much greater central control in England. The presentation focused on how far teachers' priorities and ways of working had been affected by the reforms and provided comparative insights into how teachers respond to imposed change which challenges their professional values.

In the second half of the symposium, attention was turned to children's experience of primary schooling and to pupil perspectives. Claire

Planel presented her findings from an on-going comparative study of children's experience of school in England and France. Her interviews and observation of children suggested that French children had a more clear-cut view of their schooling in which the school's main function was perceived as a learning one. They found it easier to define 'work' and saw work as useful to them. On the whole the teacher's authority was accepted as s/he was seen as there to help pupils. French children appeared to receive more encouragement to succeed at school both from within school and in society in general, but they were also expected to be more passive and accepting of the school system than English children.

Finally Andrew Pollard and Ann Filer presented some of their findings from a seven year longitudinal study of children in one case study primary school. Their work aimed to use a variety of qualitative research methods to monitor pupil careers and to trace the development of ten children with particular reference to their learning stances, perspectives and strategies. The presentation focused on a detailed case study of one child's primary school career in the context of home, school and playground. A model of the social factors influencing pupil learning was developed on the basis of the case studies and a typology of pupil career strategies was presented.

Copies of the papers are available from the researchers who are based at the University of Bristol, the University of the West of England and the University of Reading.

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Does research add value to the quality of educational processes?

This symposium brought together a number of research project reports drawing upon experience in a range of current projects in the Faculty of Cultural and Education Studies at Leeds Metropolitan University. The reports in turn formed the basis for process evaluation, through which the general hypothesis that 'research adds value to the quality of educational processes' was explored.

Horace Bennet's paper, 'Out of the blue' - *Apocalypse Now?: Some perceptions on the first cycle of teacher appraisal*, drew on case studies of appraisal systems in a primary and a special school to identify potential beneficiaries of the research and ways in which the research may add value to the quality of this particular process. He concluded that the research process in itself cannot add value except by subtle and intangible opportunities to influence opinion but it can, through a partnership with teachers and change agents in schools, raise awareness of the gap between the rhetoric and the reality, act as a catalyst to engender dissatisfaction with present achievement, and even form an actual agenda for the reformation of systems, though it has to be recognised that the scope and scale of the realisation of potential in any initiative is limited by the competition for infinite resources in the finite realities of an under-resourced educational system. How grateful will teachers be, having given of their time to the research process, to be told that they are only partially fulfilling the statutory obligations and that the research points to the need for a commitment to developing a process which they may perceive to be even more time-consuming, complicated and requisite of greater individual effort?

In marked contrast to school teacher appraisal, in which it is not difficult to identify the contribution made by research, in the broad sense of the term, to the development of an approach which takes some account of the distinctive culture of schools and the nature of teaching as a profession, Chris Metcalfe, in *Inspection and quality: the contribution of research*, argued that the introduction of Ofsted inspections has been rapid in the extreme, that research has contributed little to the setting up of the system, and that it is legitimate to ask whether research into its operation is likely to offer anything in terms of 'value added' as far as educational processes are concerned. He nevertheless goes on to discuss some of the themes emerging from the School Inspection and Teacher Effectiveness Project, the overall aim of which is to identify models of good practice in managing school inspection, as practised under the regulations of the Education (Schools) Act 1992, both within the schools and on the part of the inspection team,

which enhance the usefulness of inspection to individual teachers and which minimise any impairment to their effectiveness. Specific themes emerging from the research relate to preparation for inspection, interaction between teachers and inspectors, the giving of feedback and follow up. A tension clearly exists within inspection between its summative intentions and the formative opportunities that it provides and research may offer possibilities, if not of resolving this tension, of helping both schools and inspection teams to maximise learning opportunities within the constraints imposed.

Malcolm Shaw and Claire Stoney, in *Some observations on factors influencing the realisation of value in an educational research project*, reported on a small evaluation project designed to develop methods for assessing the enterprise capabilities of students in Higher Education. Students' positions were measured over time in relation to the four dimensions of the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire. In a limited view of this project, value is primarily located in the observed/measured outcomes - changes in or value added to the students - and the insights that these might give in relation to the nature of students on entry and as they progress through their courses. Value might also be located in the research process itself - to the extent that this process could be shared with the subjects of and other stakeholders in the research. In relation to the latter, the importance of identifying the value systems and utility aspirations of the different stakeholders, and of managing the tensions that may arise among them and/or between those of a particular stakeholder group and the research project specification, were discussed. In addressing the question of whose value is added by the research, its political implications were clearly identified.

The remaining reports were of 'insider' research projects whose explicit intention was to add value to the educational processes in which the researchers were, together with others, engaged. The paper by Eric Roper, *Generating insights into action learning group processes through action research*, was a report of an action research case study of his role as an Action Learning Group adviser in the PGDip/MEd. Research findings

were presented and analysed and the impact of the research on both the adviser and Action Learning Group members discussed. The paper demonstrated how the action researcher/adviser had been able to clarify and re-focus his felt unease and to explore contradictions and dilemmas in his practice on three levels (intra-personal/experiential, inter-personal/attributitional and institutional/theoretical). It also demonstrated how psycho-dynamic theory can shed light on the Action Learning Group process and generate insights into action research methodology. It illustrated how actions are better understood by paying greater attention to feelings and to apparently irrational responses, and argued that triangulation is a live process, most effectively undertaken in the flow of the social situation itself.

In *Can courses assist students in becoming 'reflective practitioners'?*, Sue Welch outlined changes that had been introduced into the Primary Modular B.Ed. that were intended to assist students in becoming 'reflective practitioners'. She used data collected through her work with her own students over the course of an academic year to draw some tentative conclusions about students' use of reflection and suggested further changes in the course that might be needed. It was also suggested that, whilst changes in course structure and implementation may encourage students to reflect, students need to be aware of the 'uncomfortable' nature of reflection if it is to produce change, and tutors need to be able to support them in this potentially difficult process.

Sue Warren, in *Using mentor's voices to improve mentor practice*, provided an interim report on issues, particularly of power and ownership, arising in the context of her work, together with a group of primary teachers, trying to investigate their learning and practices in order to develop their model of good mentor practice. She discussed the use of a collaborative action research strategy to create and interrogate data, to validate meanings being made in undertaking the writing of a collaborative autobiography of the group, and the use of the data to give expression to the 'voices' of the teachers and herself. She reports beginning to feel schizophrenic in attempting to combine the researcher and other roles, and her concern that

she 'may be colluding with others in the group to enable the collaboration to slip into a type of researcher reporting mode which disempowers me as a group member, taking away any right for my voice to be heard - or for me to be silent'.

Alex Sharp, in *Attending to tension in the research process: an account of experiences in a consultative role*, illuminated some experiences in the context of a Research Group, comprising university- and school-based teacher educators, which had been formed with the intention of undertaking collaborative research work. The intended 'research partnerships' however failed to come into existence. Having acted as research consultant to the group, the author discussed some of the problems encountered in trying to help group members understand their difficulties. A tentative model for offering process interventions was proposed, and some of the broader issues concerning the experience of 'failure' in professional activities were discussed.

Although the positive impact of the research was identified, discomfort in the researcher role was reported in many of the papers based on 'insider' research. When one's identity is so closely tied up with what one is researching it is difficult not to be judgemental about the findings or to construe them as 'negative', especially when they reveal an apparent mismatch with the way we see or would like to see ourselves, with a detrimental effect on one's sense of professional self-worth and capacity to act in the social situation. Similarly, the sharing of highly personal research data with our 'subjects' or collaborators can enhance their sense of exposure and the degree of threat perceived in the social situation. In reflective research activity, we are enjoined to attend to our experience in order to identify that which we do not know or do not understand; therein its challenge, its difficulty and its value.

Copies of the symposium papers can be obtained by writing to the author(s) at the following address:

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