Comparative, International and Global Perspectives on Education

The Weaponry of Language Assessment: what are the threats?  
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Professor Michael Crossley, 9 February 2006
Sharpe, K. (1997) The Protestant ethic and the spirit of Catholicism:
ideological and institutional constraints on system change in English and French primary schooling, Comparative Education, 33, pp.329-348.


Tight, M. (March 2002) ‘Where are we now in our thinking about Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society?’ Seminar given at the University of Bristol, Graduate School of Education.

Part of this lecture is based on findings from the ESRC funded ENCOMPASS project, Education and National Culture: a comparative study of pupil attitudes to secondary schooling. ESRC’s continuing support for this work is gratefully acknowledged.

The ENCOMPASS project team were: Birte Ravn and Thyge Winther-Jensen, University of Copenhagen; Olivier Cousin, CADIS, University of Bordeaux II; Marilyn Osborn, Patricia Broadfoot, Elizabeth McNess, Claire Planel, Pat Triggs, University of Bristol.
according to their educational values and their particular contemporary and historical contexts. A number of French post-docs are looking at related questions. This body of research shows how much of what it means to be a teacher or a pupil is socially and culturally constructed and how teacher identity and learner identity becomes defined and re-defined in different settings. Most recently, with a team from the Home/School Knowledge Exchange Project (Jane Andrews, Elizabeth McNess, Andrew Pollard, Vicki Stinchcombe and Wan Yee), I have been exploring how the experience of transition, of moving from one educational setting to another, in particular the transfer from primary to secondary school can lead to shifts in learner identity, but that is another story and perhaps another lecture!

Recent government directives in England raise the question again of how far we are moving to a common notion of the ‘European teacher’, and perhaps, by extension the ‘European pupil’. Teachers’ work in England has already changed dramatically as a result of the school workforce agreement, signed in Jan 2003 and looks set to change still further, bringing their work closer to the French model, which is similar to those in Belgium, Italy, Spain and Portugal. By contrast, in Denmark and in other Scandinavian countries (and to a lesser extent in the Netherlands) teachers still have a wider range of duties and take a “holistic” approach. Our research suggests that, in spite of these pressures to Europeanisation and globalisation, and increasingly common educational policies and pressures towards a ‘performance’ culture for teachers and pupils, there are distinctive cultural and historical traditions which will lead to policies being interpreted and mediated differently by teachers and to pupils.

The European teachers studied were not simply the passive victims of imposed educational reform. They had the potential to actively, and creatively, mediate policy change and, in some cases, to adapt, change or subvert it. Both these and other studies suggest that teachers’ response to imposed policy change and young peoples’ perceptions of learning are multi-faceted and complex. We need to understand the importance of this in any policy change. We need to think more carefully about the characteristics of a ‘learning individual’, who is ready, willing and able to go on learning throughout life, and whether current policy changes look likely to achieve this. Significantly we have to decide what we want our teachers to be and what kind of learners we want to develop, and to work with, not against schools to achieve this. There is still a choice!

A World of Difference? The social and cultural construction of the European teacher and learner

Introduction

Recent education reforms within Europe and beyond have had a profound effect on the way in which teachers’ work and pupil experience are defined by government policy directives. However, as many of us know there can be a considerable gap between what governments say is going to happen and how individual teachers and pupils interpret, mediate and experience changes. In this lecture I try to look beyond the rhetoric of policy at the actual impact of change on teachers’ work and learners’ experience in three European countries. I will explore how global educational reform pressures intersect with different cultural contexts and school settings to produce varied learner experience. In particular I will draw upon individual profiles of teachers and young learners in three countries to pose the question ‘what makes a successful lifelong learner’? and ‘what can comparative research help us to understand about the learning cultures in which a “learning individual” is likely to thrive and develop.

My own interest in comparative education research must have started at a relatively young age. At the age of 10 I moved with my family to Canada where we moved about quite frequently at first. By the time I went to university I had been to 10 different schools in at least three educational systems and had learned that things worked very differently in many of them, that, although all teachers had a certain number of things in common, they could also have very different expectations and priorities that seemed to be partly related to the place and the education system we were in. I had learned to shape my own behaviour and learning priorities, my “learner identity” according to these differences, while at the same time bearing in mind that it was possible for things to be done differently elsewhere!

After two years at a Canadian university, I moved back to Britain and later, as a young sociology student at LSE wrote my undergraduate dissertation on the motivation of young people in Britain, Canada and the US and speculated on how the many different education systems of North America “warmed up” young peoples’ motivation while the English one “cooled them out”. Much later, I became a researcher here at the Graduate School of Education in Bristol on an ESRC comparative research project directed by Patricia Broadfoot which looked at the different contexts of teachers’ work and professional identity in England
and France. I soon became totally “switched on” to comparative research and have been ever since. In particular I was inspired by the way in which it allows us to “make the familiar strange” and the “strange familiar” and to see afresh much of what we take for granted in our own schools and education systems. In many ways comparative studies provide an ideal “educational laboratory” for investigating “what works and does not work in education” (Green et al. 1999). Comparative research allows ethnocentric assumptions about what is ‘normal’ to be identified and challenged by the existence of alternative practices. Such educational practices in other countries are often just as deeply rooted in their own cultural context as our own assumptions are in ours! As I hope will be apparent from the account which follows, such in depth international comparisons can provide a unique set of insights and can yield contrasts that are the basis for developing new perspectives and new ways of looking at the world.

Thus a fundamental underpinning of the research I have conducted over more than twenty years with colleagues is that the social and cultural context in which teaching and learning take place can have a profound effect on how they are perceived by those experiencing them and on attitudes to, and outcomes of, learning. Learning and teaching is always ‘situated’ within a particular setting and there is a symbiotic relationship between schooling and culture or society. This is an argument put forward by many comparativists since the first half of the last century, beginning with Michael Sadler’s often quoted insight that ‘in studying foreign systems of education we should not forget that the things outside the schools matter even more than the things inside the schools, and govern and interpret the things inside’. (Sadler 1900).

It is still an important argument because in recent years there has been a growing tendency to ‘borrow’ educational policies and practices from one national setting where they appear to be effective and to attempt to transplant these into another. Often such transplantation does not work because little attention has been paid to the cultural context into which they will be imported. Thus international comparisons have been used to make claims about the condition of national systems of education and to justify radical changes in educational policy (Alexander 1999). Many of the studies which have been used in this way have employed large-scale survey methods and international studies of educational achievement which seek to measure the efficiency and value of different education systems by attainment outcomes as defined, largely, by one-off academic achievement (OECD 2001, 2004). Such studies often assume that culture and education systems can be treated separately or compartmentalized (Bonnet, 2002, Goldstein, 2004). By their very nature such studies have been unable to fully take culture into account.

Gender differences and differences in social inequality were reflected in pupil perceptions, but these were mediated differently within the three educational systems. The study suggests that the often publicised and significant differences (between boys and pupils of different social backgrounds and ethnicity) in English pupils’ attitudes to achievement appear to be far from inevitable since, in different ways, they are much less marked in the other countries studied.

Notably there was a relative absence of the problem of adolescent disaffection with school in Denmark and a relatively high level of disaffection in France. Thus the study highlights the institutional and cultural, rather than biological origins of youth disaffection. For us in England it suggests that we need to understand more about how schools develop a positive learning culture, to counter-act peer group pressure and create a climate where it is ‘cool’ to learn.

Part of the value of cross-cultural research is the extent to which it is able to identify both constants (or universals) and contexts in educational experience (Broadfoot and Osborn 1988, 1993). Cross-cultural comparisons of teacher and pupil experience identify teacher and pupil responses to teaching and learning which are more universal to the situation of ‘being a teacher’ or ‘being a secondary school pupil’ from those which may be more culturally specific. As we have attempted to show in this research pupils in England, Denmark and France experience school contexts and teacher mediations which relate to cultural, philosophical, political and historical differences between the three countries. These, in turn are mediated by pupil concerns and perceptions of schooling and learning and will ultimately affect behaviour and learning outcomes.

For various reasons, some of which I identified at the beginning, we chose to research teachers and learners in these three European countries. Other researchers who have worked with me as research students or post-docs have taken up this theme slightly differently and in a different context. For example, recently, Claire Poppy has been investigating how educational choices are structured for young learners in Norway and England. Maroussia Raveaud has focused on the socialisation of young children entering reception classes in England and France, Elizabeth McNess has conducted in-depth case studies of primary teachers and education reform in Denmark and England. Angeline Barrett has shown how teachers working in the low-income context of sub-Saharan Africa construct their professional identity and how, like teachers in many high income countries, they will mediate and adapt the implementation of new policies and educational ideas.
organising their own learning.


Conclusion

The question I want to pose but not necessarily to answer, is to what extent do the characteristics of learner experience outlined in the first part of this paper reflect these dimensions. How do the education and learning cultures in these three different European countries vary in their capacity to foster the learning individual? What are the constraints and opportunities provided within each educational system which influence young adults’ strategic decisions about learning and how do these relate to their disposition to lifelong learning e.g. how ready, willing and able they are to undertake further learning (Carr and Claxton 1999).

All three countries are concerned about standards, efficiency and accountability. In England, this concern has taken the form of reforms emphasising a ‘performativity’ culture and a quasi-market in education in which young people experience almost constant assessment. In Denmark, where we found the most positive dispositions towards learning, there is a relative lack of pressure from high stakes assessment but increasing government concern about the under-performance of their young people in international tests. In France there are concerns about the flexibility and adaptability of those leaving the education system and concern about violence in, and out of, school.

Ideally the next phase of our research should investigate the extent to which the attitudes identified in the earlier study are translated into adult life and into readiness to participate in lifelong learning. It needs to continue to identify the complex interplay of factors at national, institutional and individual level which influence adults’ engagement with learning.

What is clear from our current research is that French, English and Danish pupils could be located on a continuum according to the following: the extent to which they were seen within the educational system as ‘pupils’ or as ‘persons’; the degree of distance seen as desirable in the teacher-pupil relationship; the nature of the inter-pupil relationship and the balance of pupils’ negative or positive feelings about school. It was striking that difficulties in maintaining a balance between a learner and a social identity were most marked in the English system with a culture characterised by the most fragmentation and differentiation in school.

and there are ‘burning questions of comparability’ (Simola 2005). Yet such an understanding of educational perspectives and practices within their cultural context is fundamental to understanding how learning takes place.

In this lecture I re-assert this concern of current, as well as past generations of comparativists, for identifying contextual sensitivity when comparing education systems. I take Bruner’s (1996) thesis as central i.e. that ‘culture shapes mind, that it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct, not only our worlds but our very conceptions of our selves and our powers. (Bruner 1996 px). I seek to understand through cross-cultural comparison the relationship between national context (educational systems), institutional ethos (schools) and classroom practices in mediating the development of a learner’s identity.

In particular I focus on the development of ‘learner identity’ and attitudes to ‘lifelong learning’ young people (we studied) in the three European countries with distinctive and very different educational systems and priorities: England, France and Denmark. I pose three closely related questions. These are:

What makes a successful lifelong learner?

What does comparative research say about the learning sites in which the learning individual most rapidly emerges?

How do education and learning cultures in different European countries vary in this capacity to foster the learning individual?

I propose to do this by looking briefly at the context for learning in three European countries and by drawing upon a twenty year comparative research programme of UK Economic and Social Research Council funded projects conducted by myself and colleagues which linked systems, schools teachers and individual learners in comparative study. The studies were international collaborative ones involving teams of researchers in England (at the University of Bristol), France (at the University of Aix-Marseille, and later at the University of Bordeaux II) and more recently, Denmark (at the University of Copenhagen and the Danish University for Education).

Having explained the aims and rationale of these studies, and described the context for learning in the three countries, I will draw upon case studies of young learners carried out as part of this research. In the second part of the lecture I suggest some characteristics of the ‘learning individual’ and discuss the implications for educational policy and
Comparative research on systems, teachers and pupils

These comparative studies sought to understand both how teachers define their work and how pupils experience school, and the effect such experiences have on their attitudes to teaching and learning. Beginning in 1984 and ending in 2003, we showed first through a comparison of primary teachers in England and France the extent to which the construction of primary teachers’ professional identity and hence, their priorities and what they define as their responsibilities, are a function of the national cultural context and national educational traditions in which they work. Using a comparison of two national contexts with very different traditions – England and France – we were able to document, both before and after significant educational reforms, the way in which teachers in both countries mediated the external requirements placed upon them, filtering them through the lens of their own professional values and understandings. This produced interpretations of both their priorities and classroom practices which were often very different from those intended by government policy (Broadfoot and Osborn 1993, Broadfoot et al 1996, Osborn et al 1997). The following comments on education policy change illustrate this in different ways in the two countries:

Les ministres passent, les enseignants restent et évoluent à leur rythme.
Ministers come and go: teachers stay and change in their own time.
French primary headteacher

Il y a les belles idées; et il y a ce qui se passe en classe.
There are beautiful ideas and there is what happens in class.
French primary teacher

We have tried to be true to our own philosophy. We do not want to change our basic system which works well. It has been possible to keep our basic approach.
English headteacher

Provided it (National curriculum reform) is used as a tool which I think perhaps we do here, it can actually release you…you can relax more because you know that you’ve got things keyed in at the planning stage…provided that you use it as a tool, and you don’t change what you believe is the best way children learn.
English primary teacher

Meaning Making. Effective learners are on the lookout for links between what they are learning and what they already know. They get pleasure from seeing how things fit together’. They like it when they can make sense of new things in terms of their own experience and when they can see how learning relates to their own concerns.

Resilience and Robustness. Effective learners like a challenge and are willing to ‘give it a go’ even when the outcome and the way to proceed are uncertain. They accept that learning is sometimes hard for everyone and are not frightened of finding things difficult. They have a high level of ‘stickability’ and can readily recover from frustration. They are able to ‘hang in’ with learning even though they may, for a while, feel somewhat confused or even anxious. They don’t mind making mistakes every so often and can learn from them.

Creativity. Effective learners are able to look at things in different ways and to imagine new possibilities. They like playing with ideas and taking different perspectives, even when they don’t quite know where their trains of thought are leading. They are more receptive to hunches and inklings that bubble up into their minds and make more use of imagination, visual imagery and pictures and diagrams in their learning. They understand that learning often needs playfulness as well as purposeful, systematic thinking.

Relationships/Interdependence. Effective learners are good at managing the balance between being sociable and being private in their learning. They are not completely independent, nor are they dependent. They like to learn with and from others and to share their difficulties, when it is appropriate. They acknowledge that there are important other people in their lives who help them learn, though they may vary in who those people are, e.g. family, friends or teachers. They know the value of learning by watching and emulating other people, including their peers. They make use of others as resources, as partners and as sources of emotional support.

Strategic Awareness. More effective learners know more about their own learning. They are interested in becoming more knowledgeable and more aware of themselves as learners. They like trying out different approaches to learning to see what happens. They are more reflective and better at self-evaluation. They are better at judging how much time, or what resources, a learning task will require. They are more able to talk about learning and about themselves as learners. They know how to repair their own emotional mood when they get frustrated or disappointed. They like being given responsibility for planning and
For all these young people then, there were marked variations in the way the schools system enabled them to deal with difference. Our evidence suggested that the experience of those young learners in situations of the greatest social disadvantage had much in common. In particular the lower achieving pupils in each country, who lacked the necessary social and cultural capital, and who had not developed the strategic identities necessary for successful school life, shared similar experiences. This suggests that those most marginalized and excluded within each system may share more in common than higher achieving and more privileged pupils whose perceptions are more likely to reflect the differing priorities mediated to them through the school system.

**Seven Dimensions of Learning Power**

In this part of the lecture, I draw upon a study carried out by colleagues at the University of Bristol, Ruth Deakin-Crick, Particia Broadfoot, and Guy Claxton, on the characteristics of effective learners, individuals who are likely to gain or learning throughout life. As I go through these I would like you to reflect on these characteristics and on the differences in the experience of learners in England and Denmark which may be likely to support or constrain lifelong learning. Their factor analyses of the questionnaire responses of 1604 learners aged between seven and twenty-five indicated the presence of seven key overarching themes, or dimensions, which were suggested to facilitate or inhibit learning.

The following dimensions were identified as the components of Learning Power as they emerged through the factor analytic studies. They include beliefs, values attitudes, dispositions, feelings and motivations:

**Growth orientation.** Effective learners know that learning itself is learnable. They believe that, through effort, their minds can get stronger, and they have energy to learn. They see learning as a lifelong process and gain pleasure and self-esteem from expanding their ability to learn. Having to try is experienced positively: it's when you are trying that your 'learning muscles' are being exercised. A growth orientation includes a sense of getting better at learning over time and of growing and changing and adapting as a learner in the whole of life.

**Critical Curiosity.** Effective learners have energy and a desire to find things out. They like to get below the surface of things and try to find out what is going on. They value 'getting at the truth' and are more likely to adopt 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning strategies. They are less likely to accept what they are told uncritically, enjoy asking questions and are more willing to reveal their questions and uncertainties in public.

More recently, through a comparative study of primary and secondary pupils we demonstrated the way in which the national cultural contexts and educational traditions of England and France led to significant differences in the way in which pupils defined their relationship to school and how they felt about their teachers and about learning. The latest study in this programme of research, the Encompass study (Education, National Culture and Attitudes to Secondary Schooling), included a third national context, Denmark, with its distinctive and very different educational system and educational priorities, in order to study pupils in early secondary education, focusing on the relationship between the national context, the school context and the nature of pupils' school experience. This is the context for the research to which, for ease of reference, I refer to as the Encompass programme of work.

**The Encompass research**

The Encompass project built upon the earlier ESRC-funded comparative research outlined above on teachers and learners in primary and early secondary education. In this study, led by myself with Patricia Broadfoot, the team tried to overcome problems of ethno-centricity and in-built cultural assumptions by combining insider and outsider perspectives (Schratz 1992) within a multi-national research team representing all three of the countries under study. This also helped to avoid the trap of the “oh fancy that, they do things differently!” approach to comparative research. The team debated meanings and concepts, developed the research design and carried out and interpreted the research using these multiple perspectives. In order to increase the validity of the findings we used multi-layered methods which included an analysis of policy documents, questionnaires, teacher discussions and pupil individual and group interviews, case studies and classroom observation – to provide a comprehensive picture of the values, understandings and institutional traditions that influence the teachers and learners within each of the three education systems. But also to highlight the way in which these participants mediate or interpret these in developing their own particular perspectives as learners. The aim was to take into account both social structure and agency and to look at how a "learner identity" is developed in three European countries with distinctively different compulsory and post-compulsory educational systems and objectives.

Thus the study contained extensive quantitative and case study data on the learning experiences and learning orientations of a sample of young people aged 12-14 in the three countries. 1800 pupils were studied by questionnaires and then a smaller number were interviewed individually and in groups. Their teachers and headteachers were also interviewed.
The research also aimed to evaluate similarities and differences in attitudes to learning in England, France and Denmark. We wanted to know how social and family background, gender and ethnicity influenced these attitudes to learning in each of the three countries and whether teacher and learner experience was becoming more similar or “converging” in the context of Europeanisation, globalization, and the internationalisation of adolescent culture.

It also aimed to contribute to national and international policy debates about the effectiveness of different organisational and teaching approaches in developing the skills and attitudes needed for lifelong learning;

The context for learning in England, France and Denmark

Thus the research identified the broad cultural traditions of the three education systems of England, France and Denmark. In England a strong tradition of voluntarism, local autonomy and differentiated provision has promoted an individual, child-centred pedagogy which has, historically, regarded pupils as having individual needs and abilities which required different types and levels of schooling.

By contrast, education in France has been organized according to the republican ideal, which sees the state as having a duty to provide a universal education which provides equal opportunities for all. To treat pupils differentially has traditionally been regarded as morally unacceptable and also illegal. The French system is underpinned by a notion of citizenship and the promotion of national values and social solidarity. Its aim is to absorb and integrate difference rather than to allow it to co-exist; in other words to produce conformity to an ideal of the ‘young French citizen’ (Raveaud 2003).

Different again is the Danish system with a strong tradition of communitarianism which relies on a powerful folk tradition of local democracy and social partnership. It has traditionally integrated with, and been accountable to the local community. The emphasis is on the importance of the group rather than the individual and high value is placed on the affective dimension encapsulated in the close relationship between the ‘class teacher’ and one group of pupils.

These different national cultural traditions are reflected in the organisation and practices which characterise each of the education systems. In particular they are reflected in the balance of emphasis fitting in with the group at least as much as academic achievement.

Most of her friends at school, both boys and girls, are accepting of people who achieve academically but they are also concerned with social behaviour. As one of her friends put it ‘you are allowed to do well and be a bit of a “keener” but you also have to be nice towards others.’ Rather than academic achievement, it is personal interests, fashion and the degree of freedom allowed to pupils by their parents which dictates which friendship group she belongs to.

In spite of these differences the young people in all three countries valued certain similar things about their schooling. These included the importance of teacher ‘respect’ for pupils, that learning should be active and teaching should be interesting and that lessons should have an element of ‘fun’ or humour.

These three vignettes do not fully reflect the differences between girls and boys or between children of different backgrounds or ethnicity which we found in the study. Gender differences and differences in social inequality and ethnicity were reflected in pupil perceptions in all three countries, but were dealt with differently by the three education systems and led to different experiences by pupils. In France, and to some extent, Denmark, government policy discourse denied the significance of difference particularly of ethnic identity, within the educational system, seeing difference as undermining of social cohesion and national identity. Issues such as the banning of the wearing of headscarves in France derive directly from this non-recognition of ethnicity and difference. English policies, on the other hand, acknowledged diversity but paid relatively little attention to equity (Osler and Starkey, 2001).

Our findings suggested that, in the English schools, where the school culture was the most characterised by fragmentation (in the sense of movement of pupils between groups) and differentiation between pupils, those in disadvantaged circumstances had to devote the most energy to maintaining a balance between a social and an academic identity. This was particularly marked for boys. In France, to be successful, pupils often adopted a ‘strategic response to a school system which did little to take home experience, adolescent life, or interest into account. Some of the most disadvantaged and lower achieving pupils simply rejected school as irrelevant. In Denmark to be successful, pupils often had to ‘play down’ intellectual effort and achievement, even with their teachers, but most pupils did seem to enjoy school and to have a relatively happy experience of learning. A few lower achieving pupils, however, simply avoided learning situations as much as possible.
pupils often for the entire period of their schooling (Grade 1 to 9/10), though there was flexibility within the system for a change in Grade 5 or 7 if the teachers wanted it. These two elements of the teaching role were not divided, as in England and France, but were considered to be intimately related in all that they did. The classes in the study normally consisted of approximately 18–20 pupils of mixed ability and a great emphasis was put on the cohesion of the group and their ability to work together both academically as well as socially. Use of the ‘hour of the class’ as either a separate, timetabled period or integrated into other lessons, enabled the class teacher to build up close relationships between themselves and their pupils and to investigate issues of concern within the class group.

However, similar to their English colleagues, there was pressure for klasselærer to use this time to catch up on missed teaching. Policy initiatives meant that teachers were under pressure to develop cross-curricular project work and provide for a differentiated curriculum within their mixed ability groups. The class teacher also had specific responsibility for links between home and school. Teachers, generally, felt free to interpret the national curriculum framework in a way that supported the needs of their pupils by introducing themes which had a direct relevance to their lives outside school.

Lina experiences continuous formative assessment but will not be given individual marks for her work until she is 14 or 15. After this she will receive a proficiency mark twice a year which will be discussed at pupil-parent-teacher meetings. Lina is very positive about her school and her teachers and feels that she would like to make the most of school. She does not see it as a place where you have to learn to obey rules but she has strongly internalised the norms of her group and there is a lot of discussion about issues in her classroom and an emphasis on fitting in with the group. She has considerable choice over the content and organisation of her lessons and feels that this helps her learning. She is concerned that her teachers be relatively young and up-to-date and wants ‘modern teachers, fairly young teachers who have modern views on teaching and learning’. She does not want to have such a close relationship with teachers that they influence her private life but she expects that her teacher will be ‘not a real friend, but someone who knows something about you … with whom you feel good.’

However, she would like her teacher to do more to show her how she can improve her work. Although she is against tests and grades she would like more focused and more stringent feedback from her teachers. She feels that her teacher is sometimes too easily pleased with what she does and that her teacher values class solidarity and placed on the two central roles of formal schooling systems, namely the inculcation of knowledge and skills on the one hand (the ‘cognitive function’) and on the other, the shaping of values and attitudes in preparation for the future role of citizen (the affective function). In England, there is an attempt to promote both cognitive/academic and affective/social and personal development goals and an emphasis on differentiation and individualisation (Best, 1998, DfEE, 1997). In France, the main focus is on the academic rather than the affective aspects of education and an emphasis on republicanism and universalism (OECD, 1997, Sharpe, 1997, Osborn 2001). In Denmark, there is still a strong emphasis on the group rather than the individual and a high value placed on the affective dimension, encapsulated in the close relationship between the ‘class teacher’ and one group of pupils.

More recently, tensions within all three systems and concerns over standards, efficiency and accountability have driven many of the policy initiatives in all three countries. In England, recent reforms have combined increasing central regulation over curricula and assessment with greater school autonomy, at least in financial terms. A quasi-market has been established which defines education as a consumer service. The emphasis has shifted somewhat towards cognitive, rather than affective concerns.

In Denmark recent reforms have retained local power, within a national framework and have encouraged the ideal of school democracy and the importance of student rights and parental involvement within education. There is still a strong emphasis on affective concerns but increasing concern about Danish schools’ performance in international tests. In France, a growing awareness of social pluralism within French society has resulted in reforms which have begun to create the opportunity for some, limited devolved power. The increasing incidence of violence in some French schools has also prompted calls for the enlargement of the role of the teacher to include affective concerns.

What about post-school learning? Here once again, global pressures to develop a learning society have resulted in very different strategic emphases and organizational structures. In England and Wales, a relatively narrow, training-related definition of lifelong learning predominates in government discourse (Tight 2002), as exemplified in the government’s white paper Learning to Succeed (1999). In France, also, ideals of widening access to lifelong learning and personal emancipation have been hampered by the traditional importance given to qualifications and by the priority given to economic requirements. Thus, post school learning has been closely linked with changing economic and vocational requirements (‘education continue’ rather than
‘education permanente’) and lifelong learning is more likely to be the result of a company’s needs or a State vocational programme rather than the initiative of an individual (Green et al 1999).

In Denmark, by contrast, a view of learning influenced by the Danish philosopher Grundtvig has continued to flourish. This emphasizes “independence, independent thought, ability to co-operate and communicate, and a desire for learning throughout one’s life” and has shaped educational provision (Berg et al. 1995). Choice for the 16-19 age group remains relatively open and flexible with a large degree of negotiation and student influence (Hummeluhr 1999).

As a result, the structures for both secondary education and post-16 education are significantly different as are aspects of pedagogy and learner experience. Although we know that learner identities can shift and change in response to a myriad of influences through the life course, there is plenty of evidence that the early experiences of students in education will have a strong influence on their subsequent attitudes to learning later in life and on their dispositions to lifelong learning eg. how “ready, willing and able” they are to undertake further learning (Carr and Claxton, 1999).

**Young Learners in England, France and Denmark**

Thus all systems aim to produce the ‘learning individual’ but, as we have seen from the comparison of just three educational systems, the structures they put in place to do this are very different. So what did our study discover about the impact of this on young learners?

Our findings suggested that young people’s views of themselves as learners were greatly influenced by their educational and cultural context and that this, in turn, has an impact on their life chances. Of course, personal biography and family play a highly significant part as well. But when we examined the perspectives on learning and schooling of young people in the three countries we found marked differences in their attitudes to learning and schooling reflecting the national priorities I identified earlier. Thus, for example, the Danish focus on collaboration and the concern with education for citizenship and democracy were reflected in the students’ responses. Danish students were in general the most positive towards schooling, towards learning and towards teachers. They saw school as helping them to fit into a group situation rather than emphasizing the development of the individual. However, they did not feel that they were getting the detailed feedback needed from teachers to help them improve.

Hanne: The class teacher should be engaging, able to understand their pupils’ concerns and problems and live and grow together with their pupils …. the better children get along with each other the more power and energy they are able to use on learning. Learning will be hampered if you feel socially insecure.

Hanne teaches at a Folkeskole which takes pupils from 7 to 16-years of age. She has been the class teacher of her 7th Grade class since they began at the folkeskole over six years ago. She teaches 10 lessons a week to the class in Danish, geography and biology. She also teaches history, social studies and art to classes higher up the school. She has 18 pupils in her class and feels that she knows both them and their families very well.

She considers her role as klasselærer to be an integral part of her extended role as teacher and considers that her responsibility to her pupils and their families extends outside the school premises into the community. Her approach to teaching is that she should include the knowledge and experience which pupils bring with them to school and that she should encourage them to work together effectively. The need to get them to respect decisions made in class by the majority is an important element in creating future democratic citizens.

Hanne wants her pupils to enjoy coming to school and she is open with them and allows them, especially on activity camps and outings, to get close to her and understand her attitudes and values. She supports the new Act of the Folkeskole and considers that it is only a statement of what good teachers have been doing for a long time. She likes the idea of cross-curricular themes and pupils working collaboratively on projects. She wants her pupils to reach a high academic standard but also thinks that it is important for her pupils to be excited and engaged by her teaching. She emphasises the need for the pupils to learn to communicate, to express themselves, to become independent and responsible.

Most teachers within the Danish sample were klasselærer, and had a special responsibility for a particular class of pupils, together with organizing the team of teachers who taught them. This involved a combined academic and pastoral responsibility for a single group of...
their work as well. Then there’s people who smoke, drink, bully, get on report for being late and bad behaviour.

As a boy, it is particularly difficult for Richard to gain acceptance with his friends if he is seen to work hard. The negotiation of his social identity requires him to be ‘one of the lads’ to make people laugh, mess around or confront teachers at least some of the time. He and his friends believe that this is a particular asset for boys who wish to make themselves attractive to girls.

Girls would say they liked a hard worker but they would really like one who had a laugh.

Later, in Year 10 he looks back on this period and begins to reflect that he has got to change if he wants to go on to university as his mum wants.

I’ll have to start working harder, doing my work, reading books. Can’t go out as much. I could work harder in another group. It will pay off in the future.

Lina: Denmark

Lina attends a folkskole in a suburb of Copenhagen where she has been since the age of 6. Her class of about twenty children has a class teacher (klasseloerer) who is responsible for the same group of pupils for the whole of her primary and lower secondary schooling (until the age of 16). As well as having a responsibility to teach them several of their academic subjects her teacher has a clear pastoral responsibility which includes creating a group unity within the class and liaising closely and regularly with the parents of their pupils.

The short extract below gives a pen-sketch of Lina’s class teacher, Hanne:

English students were far less positive about schooling and learning. They were the most likely to want to leave school as soon as they could and to feel that school got in the way of their lives. However, they also emphasized their teachers’ concern with pupils expressing their own ideas and with pupils as people. Encouragingly, they also felt that they had good feedback from teachers about their work and that teachers made them work hard. Their responses also echoed both traditional English educational concerns with the development of the whole person and the current policy emphasis on individualization and differentiation.

French students reported a lack of a personal and social dimension to their school experience, a relatively formal distant classroom and teacher relationship and an overwhelming emphasis by teachers on cognitive goals. Yet, like the Danes, they did not feel they were getting the guidance they needed from teachers to improve their work. There was a large gap between boys and girls, with French boys being the least positive about school or teachers than any of the other national groups. In spite of the emphasis on universalism and on all children being treated equally, pupils nevertheless had strong concerns about teachers who do not respect pupils and who do not explain things properly.

The three case study vignettes which follow are of young learners in the three countries. They identify some common themes which were context specific to the national situations in which the young people and their teachers found themselves. They serve as useful templates against which to discuss more complex findings related to the discourse of individual learners and their teachers (full details of actual case studies are to be found in the book “A World of Difference: comparing learners across Europe” (Osborn et al 2003). Much more complex issues of gender, ethnicity and social class are thus dealt with in actual case studies rather than in these composites.

Isabelle: France

Isabelle attends a French college (secondary school) for eleven to fifteen year olds in the outer suburbs of Paris. In accordance with the republican principle that this stage of schooling should offer equality of educational opportunity for all, grouping of pupils by ability is, in principle, forbidden by law. However, to adapt to the rates of learning of each child, the amount of time spent in each stage or cycle can be reduced or extended so that some of Isabelle’s class-mates are up to two years older. Unlike the English school described later, Isabelle’s school is not particularly concerned to establish a school identity or ethos and pupils are not particularly encouraged to identify with the
school in this way. Responsibility for the pupils and their behaviour is seen as ending at the school gates.

The short extract below gives a brief profile of the teacher who is her class group teacher (professeur principale):

Monsieur Leprof: *It is important that the pupils know something...his or her socialisation is not my priority, all that matters is my subject.*

Monsieur Leprof teaches in a French College for 11-15 year olds, although some of the pupils in his classes are in fact one or two years older than the rest of the class. He is very clear about his teaching contract and appreciates that he can increase his earnings by carrying out extra duties to his 18 hours of contact time. He hopes with length of service that he will be able to group his teaching hours together and get an afternoon or two away from school.

Monsieur Leprof enjoys his subject and likes the autonomy of his own classroom. He considers that his main priority is the academic progress of his pupils and is clear about where his role ends and that the social and personal aspects of pupils’ learning is the concern of his non-teaching colleagues. He appreciates the support he gets from these staff.

He considers that it is important for all pupils to receive the same knowledge and experience and is against selection, despite some difficulties in teaching heterogeneous groups. His own specific objective is to get as many of his pupils to the correct academic level for the following year, however he knows that some of his colleagues have wider objectives.

Thus the French teachers in our study demonstrated a more focused and circumscribed perception of their role in line with their civil service status. Typically, they maintained a certain professional distance from the parents of their pupils, reflecting the strong distinction between the private and public sphere made by the republican-derived French education system. Their focus was their subject teaching and their aims concentrated around encouraging pupils to be inspired by their subject and ensuring that they got as many pupils as possible to the correct level for the following year. They were generally clear about where their professional role ended and where the school’s non-teaching staff should take over with regard to the social and emotional needs of their pupils.

Thus, in addition to her subject teaching, Mrs Dixon has a responsibility as ‘tutor’ for a particular group of pupils. This role is largely pastoral and requires her to look after the social and emotional needs of her tutor group and act as the initial contact with parents and home. Richard’s contact with his tutor is usually for a short period, about ten or fifteen minutes at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session when she takes the class register, hands out notices and deals with any matters concerning pupil behaviour. This leaves little time or space for engagement with issues to do with the affective aspects of teaching and learning; to explore issues or build relationships in spite of the responsibility she is supposed to have for pupils’ personal, social and health education. Increasingly his teacher’s time is constrained by a highly prescriptive curriculum, which include study skills as well as issues to do with personal development. She feels under increasing pressure to raise standards and meet government targets. This, together with an intense inspection system often leaves her feeling overworked and stressed.

Richard has already experienced external assessment at age 7 and 11. He will experience further high stakes assessment at 14 and 16 but is also assessed regularly with tests and marks by his teachers. Richard expects to have an individual relationship with at least some of his teachers but would not go so far as to identify any of his teachers as “a friend”. His ideal teacher will respect pupils, explain things well and give interesting lessons and be firm but fair. He particularly likes teachers who are funny and can “have a laugh”.

On the whole, Richard likes his teacher and school although he is not so positive about it as many Danish pupils. He is very aware of the importance of education in a future job or career. He sees school as a place where there is a high premium on obedience to institutional rules but still feels that he gets a chance to express his own ideas and opinions. The social function of school is very important to him and he expects to be able to socialise, meet his friends and “have a laugh”. It is sometimes difficult for him to balance the need to be popular and fit in with his friends with the need to focus on academic work. The negotiation of this balance takes quite a lot of his time and energy. He sees his fellow pupils as falling into three groups:

There’s boffins – really brainy, always quiet, always answer the question, always do their work. They know what they’re doing; they push hard with their work....Don’t talk when they are working, never stop to enjoy themselves, put their heads down in their books even when everyone else is laughing. Some other people talk and mess about in lessons but they still do...
The short extract below gives a brief pen-sketch of the teacher who is his group tutor:

Mrs Dixon: They think I’m a bit strict [in my subject lessons] but the very same kids can also sit down and have a good laugh with me [outside lesson time]. As a tutor, you need to be sensitive to children’s needs, as very distinct from academic needs.

Mrs Dixon teaches in a state comprehensive school which takes pupils from eleven to 18-years of age. She teaches twenty-nine, 45-minute periods a week to classes throughout the school. She enjoys being able to teach her subject not only to the younger pupils in Year 7 but also to Advanced Level students in Years 12 and 13. She has six ‘free’ periods a week when she can catch up on preparation, marking and any pastoral issues she may need to deal with. However, this is never enough time to complete all she has to do and so she works every Sunday and most weekday evenings during term time to catch up. She appreciates the close working relationships she has with colleagues in her Subject Department, supporting each other with regard to curriculum planning and staff development.

As well as being a subject teacher, Mrs Dixon is also a group tutor for one of the six parallel Year 8 classes. As well as registration, both mornings and afternoons, this role gives her responsibility for the personal and social problems of her group. However, lack of time means that this role is largely administrative.

Mrs Dixon enjoys both the subject and pastoral sides of her role but she does experience a tension between the two. She considers that she must take a different approach to pupils when they are in her teaching groups. Here she needs to maintain a strict discipline and ensure that they cover the necessary work to enable them to achieve well in their regular tests. However, when she deals with the same pupils in her tutor group she considers that she needs to be more approachable and sympathetic to their worries and concerns both inside and outside school.
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‘education permanente’) and lifelong learning is more likely to be the result of a company’s needs or a State vocational programme rather than the initiative of an individual (Green et al 1999).

In Denmark, by contrast, a view of learning influenced by the Danish philosopher Grundtvig has continued to flourish. This emphasizes "independence, independent thought, ability to co-operate and communicate, and a desire for learning throughout one’s life" and has shaped educational provision (Berg et al. 1995). Choice for the 16-19 age group remains relatively open and flexible with a large degree of negotiation and student influence (Hummeluhr 1999).

As a result, the structures for both secondary education and post-16 education are significantly different as are aspects of pedagogy and learner experience. Although we know that learner identities can shift and change in response to a myriad of influences through the life course, there is plenty of evidence that the early experiences of students in education will have a strong influence on their subsequent attitudes to learning later in life and on their dispositions to lifelong learning eg. how "ready, willing and able" they are to undertake further learning (Carr and Claxton, 1999).

**Young Learners in England, France and Denmark**

Thus all systems aim to produce the ‘learning individual’ but, as we have seen from the comparison of just three educational systems, the structures they put in place to do this are very different. So what did our study discover about the impact of this on young learners?

Our findings suggested that young people’s views of themselves as learners were greatly influenced by their educational and cultural context and that this, in turn, has an impact on their life chances. Of course, personal biography and family play a highly significant part as well. But when we examined the perspectives on learning and schooling of young people in the three countries we found marked differences in their attitudes to learning and schooling reflecting the national priorities I identified earlier. Thus, for example, the Danish focus on collaboration and the concern with education for citizenship and democracy were reflected in the students’ responses. Danish students were in general the most positive towards schooling, towards learning and towards teachers. They saw school as helping them to fit into a group situation rather than emphasizing the development of the individual. However, they did not feel that they were getting the detailed feedback needed from teachers to help them improve.

Hanne: The class teacher should be engaging, able to understand their pupils’ concerns and problems and live and grow together with their pupils .... the better children get along with each other the more power and energy they are able to use on learning. Learning will be hampered if you feel socially insecure.

Hanne teaches at a Folkeskole which takes pupils from 7 to 16-years of age. She has been the class teacher of her 7th Grade class since they began at the folkeskole over six years ago. She teaches 10 lessons a week to the class in Danish, geography and biology. She also teaches history, social studies and art to classes higher up the school. She has 18 pupils in her class and feels that she knows both them and their families very well.

She considers her role as klasselærer to be an integral part of her extended role as teacher and considers that her responsibility to her pupils and their families extends outside the school premises into the community. Her approach to teaching is that she should include the knowledge and experience which pupils bring with them to school and that she should encourage them to work together effectively. The need to get them to respect decisions made in class by the majority is an important element in creating future democratic citizens.

Hanne wants her pupils to enjoy coming to school and she is open with them and allows them, especially on activity camps and outings, to get close to her and understand her attitudes and values. She supports the new Act of the Folkeskole and considers that it is only a statement of what good teachers have been doing for a long time. She likes the idea of cross-curricular themes and pupils working collaboratively on projects. She wants her pupils to reach a high academic standard but also thinks that it is important for her pupils to be excited and engaged by her teaching. She emphasises the need for the pupils to learn to communicate, to express themselves, to become independent and responsible.

Most teachers within the Danish sample were klasselærer, and had a special responsibility for a particular class of pupils, together with organizing the team of teachers who taught them. This involved a combined academic and pastoral responsibility for a single group of
pupils often for the entire period of their schooling (Grade 1 to 9/10),
though there was flexibility within the system for a change in Grade 5 or 
7 if the teachers wanted it. These two elements of the teaching role 
were not divided, as in England and France, but were considered to be 
intimately related in all that they did. The class in the study normally 
consisted of approximately 18–20 pupils of mixed ability, and a great 
emphasis was put on the cohesion of the group and their ability to work 
together both academically as well as socially. Use of the ‘hour of the 
class’ as either a separate, timetabled period or integrated into other 
lessons, enabled the class teacher to build up close relationships 
between themselves and their pupils and to investigate issues of 
concern within the class group.

However, similar to their English colleagues, there was pressure for 
klasseleærer to use this time to catch up on missed teaching. Policy 
initiatives meant that teachers were under pressure to develop cross-
curricular project work and provide for a differentiated curriculum within 
their mixed ability groups. The class teacher also had specific 
responsibility for links between home and school. Teachers, generally,
felt free to interpret the national curriculum framework in a way that 
supported the needs of their pupils by introducing themes which had a 
direct relevance to their lives outside school.

Lina experiences continuous formative assessment but will not be given 
individual marks for her work until she is 14 or 15. After this she will 
receive a proficiency mark twice a year which will be discussed at pupil-
parent-teacher meetings. Lina is very positive about her school and her 
teachers and feels that she would like to make the most of school. She 
does not see it as a place where you have to learn to obey rules but she 
has strongly internalised the norms of her group and there is a lot of 
discussion about issues in her classroom and an emphasis on fitting in 
with the group. She has considerable choice over the content and 
organisation of her lessons and feels that this helps her learning. She is 
concerned that her teachers be relatively young and up-to-date and 
want ‘modern teachers, fairly young teachers who have modern views on 
teaching and learning’. She does not want to have such a close 
relationship with teachers that they influence her private life but she 
expects that her teacher will be ‘not a real friend, but someone who 
knows something about you … with whom you feel good.’

However, she would like her teacher to do more to show her how she 
can improve her work. Although she is against tests and grades she 
would like more focused and more stringent feedback from her 
teachers. She feels that her teacher is sometimes too easily pleased 
with what she does and that her teacher values class solidarity and 
placed on the two central roles of formal schooling systems, namely the 
inculcation of knowledge and skills on the one hand (the ‘cognitive 
function’) and on the other, the shaping of values and attitudes in 
preparation for the future role of citizen (the affective function). In 
England there is an attempt to promote both cognitive/academic and 
affective/social and personal development goals and an emphasis on 
differentiation and individualisation (Best, 1998, DfEE, 1997). In France, 
the main focus is on the academic rather than the affective aspects of 
education and an emphasis on republicanism and universalism (OECD,1997, Sharpe, 1997, Osborn 2001). In Denmark, there is still a 
strong emphasis on the group rather than the individual and a high 
value placed on the affective dimension, encapsulated in the close 
relationship between the ‘class teacher’ and one group of pupils.

More recently, tensions within all three systems and concerns over 
standards, efficiency and accountability have driven many of the policy 
initiatives in all three countries. In England, recent reforms have 
combined increasing central regulation over curricula and assessment 
with greater school autonomy, at least in financial terms. A quasi-
market has been established which defines education as a consumer 
service. The emphasis has shifted somewhat towards cognitive, rather 
than affective concerns.

In Denmark recent reforms have retained local power, within a national 
framework and have encouraged the ideal of school democracy and the 
importance of student rights and parental involvement within education. 
There is still a strong emphasis on affective concerns but increasing 
concern about Danish schools’ performance in international tests. In 
France, a growing awareness of social pluralism within French society 
has resulted in reforms which have begun to create the opportunity for 
some, limited devolved power. The increasing incidence of violence in 
some French schools has also prompted calls for the enlargement of the 
role of the teacher to include affective concerns.

What about post-school learning? Here once again, global pressures to 
develop a learning society have resulted in very different strategic 
emphases and organizational structures. In England and Wales, a 
relatively narrow, training-related definition of lifelong learning 
predominates in government discourse (Tight 2002), as exemplified in 
the government’s white paper Learning to Succeed (1999). In France, 
also, ideals of widening access to lifelong learning and personal 
emancipation have been hampered by the traditional importance given 
to qualifications and by the priority given to economic requirements. 
Thus, post school learning has been closely linked with changing 
economic and vocational requirements (‘education continue’ rather than
The research also aimed to evaluate similarities and differences in attitudes to learning in England, France and Denmark. We wanted to know how social and family background, gender and ethnicity influenced these attitudes to learning in each of the three countries and whether teacher and learner experience was becoming more similar or “converging” in the context of Europeanization, globalization, and the internationalization of adolescent culture.

It also aimed to contribute to national and international policy debates about the effectiveness of different organisational and teaching approaches in developing the skills and attitudes needed for lifelong learning;

The context for learning in England, France and Denmark

Thus the research identified the broad cultural traditions of the three education systems of England, France and Denmark. In England a strong tradition of voluntarism, local autonomy and differentiated provision has promoted an individual, child-centred pedagogy which has, historically, regarded pupils as having individual needs and abilities which required different types and levels of schooling.

By contrast, education in France has been organized according to the republican ideal, which sees the state as having a duty to provide a universal education which provides equal opportunities for all. To treat pupils differentially has traditionally been regarded as morally unacceptable and also illegal. The French system is underpinned by a notion of citizenship and the promotion of national values and social solidarity. Its aim is to absorb and integrate difference rather than to allow it to co-exist; in other words to produce conformity to an ideal of the ‘young French citizen’ (Raveaud 2003).

Different again is the Danish system with a strong tradition of communitarianism which relies on a powerful folk tradition of local democracy and social partnership. It has traditionally integrated with, and been accountable to the local community. The emphasis is on the importance of the group rather than the individual and high value is placed on the affective dimension encapsulated in the close relationship between the ‘class teacher’ and one group of pupils.

These different national cultural traditions are reflected in the organisation and practices which characterise each of the education systems. In particular they are reflected in the balance of emphasis fitting in with the group at least as much as academic achievement.

Most of her friends at school, both boys and girls, are accepting of people who achieve academically but they are also concerned with social behaviour. As one of her friends put it ‘you are allowed to do well and be a bit of a “keener” but you also have to be nice towards others.’ Rather than academic achievement, it is personal interests, fashion and the degree of freedom allowed to pupils by their parents which dictates which friendship group she belongs to.

In spite of these differences the young people in all three countries valued certain similar things about their schooling. These included the importance of teacher ‘respect’ for pupils, that learning should be active and teaching should be interesting and that lessons should have an element of ‘fun’ or humour.

These three vignettes do not fully reflect the differences between girls and boys or between children of different backgrounds or ethnicity which we found in the study. Gender differences and differences in social inequality and ethnicity were reflected in pupil perceptions in all three countries, but were dealt with differently by the three education systems and led to different experiences by pupils. In France, and to some extent, Denmark, government policy discourse denied the significance of difference particularly of ethnic identity, within the educational system, seeing difference as undermining of social cohesion and national identity. Issues such as the banning of the wearing of head scarves in France derive directly from this non-recognition of ethnicity and difference. English policies, on the other hand, acknowledged diversity but paid relatively little attention to equity (Osler and Starkey, 2001).

Our findings suggested that, in the English schools, where the school culture was the most characterised by fragmentation (in the sense of movement of pupils between groups) and differentiation between pupils, those in disadvantaged circumstances had to devote the most energy to maintaining a balance between a social and an academic identity. This was particularly marked for boys. In France, to be successful, pupils often adopted a ‘strategic response to a school system which did little to take home experience, adolescent life, or interest into account. Some of the most disadvantaged and lower achieving pupils simply rejected school as irrelevant. In Denmark to be successful, pupils often had to ‘play down’ intellectual effort and achievement, even with their teachers, but most pupils did seem to enjoy school and to have a relatively happy experience of learning. A few lower achieving pupils, however, simply avoided learning situations as much as possible.
For all these young people then, there were marked variations in the way the schools system enabled them to deal with difference. Our evidence suggested that the experience of those young learners in situations of the greatest social disadvantage had much in common. In particular the lower achieving pupils in each country, who lacked the necessary social and cultural capital, and who had not developed the strategic identities necessary for successful school life, shared similar experiences. This suggests that those most marginalized and excluded within each system may share more in common than higher achieving and more privileged pupils whose perceptions are more likely to reflect the differing priorities mediated to them through the school system.

Seven Dimensions of Learning Power

In this part of the lecture, I draw upon a study carried out by colleagues at the University of Bristol, Ruth Deakin-Crick, Particia Broadfoot, and Guy Claxton, on the characteristics of effective learners, individuals who are likely to go on learning throughout life. As I go through these I would like you to reflect on these characteristics and on the elements of learner experience in England and Denmark which may be likely to support or constrain lifelong learning. Their factor analyses of the questionnaire responses of 1604 learners aged between seven and twenty-five indicated the presence of seven key overarching themes, or dimensions, which were suggested to facilitate or inhibit learning.

The following dimensions were identified as the components of Learning Power as they emerged through the factor analytic studies. They include beliefs, values attitudes, dispositions, feelings and motivations:

**Growth orientation.** Effective learners know that learning itself is learnable. They believe that, through effort, their minds can get stronger, and they have energy to learn. They see learning as a lifelong process and gain pleasure and self-esteem from expanding their ability to learn. Having to try is experienced positively: it's when you are trying that your 'learning muscles' are being exercised. A growth orientation includes a sense of getting better at learning over time and of growing and changing and adapting as a learner in the whole of life.

**Critical Curiosity.** Effective learners have energy and a desire to find things out. They like to get below the surface of things and try to find out what is going on. They value 'getting at the truth' and are more likely to adopt 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning strategies. They are less likely to accept what they are told uncritically, enjoy asking questions and are more willing to reveal their questions and uncertainties in public.

More recently, through a comparative study of primary and secondary pupils we demonstrated the way in which the national cultural contexts and educational traditions of England and France led to significant differences in the way in which pupils defined their relationship to school and how they felt about their teachers and about learning. The latest study in this programme of research, the Encompass study (Education, National Culture and Attitudes to Secondary Schooling), included a third national context, Denmark, with its distinctive and very different educational system and educational priorities, in order to study pupils in early secondary education, focusing on the relationship between the national context, the school context and the nature of pupils' school experience. This is the context for the research to which, for ease of reference, I refer to as the Encompass programme of work.

The Encompass research

The Encompass project built upon the earlier ESRC-funded comparative research outlined above on teachers and learners in primary and early secondary education. In this study, led by myself with Patricia Broadfoot, the team tried to overcome problems of ethno-centricity and in-built cultural assumptions by combining insider and outsider perspectives (Schratz 1992) within a multi-national research team representing all three of the countries under study. This also helped to avoid the trap of the “oh fancy that, they do things differently!” approach to comparative research. The team debated meanings and concepts, developed the research design and carried out and interpreted the research using these multiple perspectives. In order to increase the validity of the findings we used multi-layered methods which included an analysis of policy documents, questionnaires, teacher discussions and pupil individual and group interviews, case studies and classroom observation – to provide a comprehensive picture of the values, understandings and institutional traditions that influence the teachers and learners within each of the three education systems. But also to highlight the way in which these participants mediate or interpret these in developing their own particular perspectives as learners. The aim was to take into account both social structure and agency and to look at how a "learner identity" is developed in three European countries with distinctively different compulsory and post-compulsory educational systems and objectives.

Thus the study contained extensive quantitative and case study data on the learning experiences and learning orientations of a sample of young people aged 12-14 in the three countries. 1800 pupils were studied by questionnaires and then a smaller number were interviewed individually and in groups. Their teachers and headteachers were also interviewed.
Comparative research on systems, teachers and pupils

These comparative studies sought to understand both how teachers define their work and how pupils experience school, and the effect such experiences have on their attitudes to teaching and learning. Beginning in 1984 and ending in 2003, we showed first through a comparison of primary teachers in England and France the extent to which the construction of primary teachers’ professional identity and hence, their priorities and what they define as their responsibilities, are a function of the national cultural context and national educational traditions in which they work. Using a comparison of two national contexts with very different traditions – England and France – we were able to document, both before and after significant educational reforms, the way in which teachers in both countries mediated the external requirements placed upon them, filtering them through the lens of their own professional values and understandings. This produced interpretations of both their priorities and classroom practices which were often very different from those intended by government policy (Broadfoot and Osborn 1993, Broadfoot et al 1996, Osborn et al 1997). The following comments on education policy change illustrate this in different ways in the two countries:

Les ministres passent, les enseignants restent et évoluent a leur rythme.
Ministers come and go: teachers stay and change in their own time.
French primary headteacher

Il y a les belles idées; et il y a ce qui se passe en classe.
There are beautiful ideas and there is what happens in class.
French primary teacher

We have tried to be true to our own philosophy. We do not want to change our basic system which works well. It has been possible to keep our basic approach.
English headteacher

Provided it (National curriculum reform) is used as a tool which I think perhaps we do here, it can actually release you...you can relax more because you know that you've got things keyed in at the planning stage....provided that you use it as a tool, and you don’t change what you believe is the best way children learn.
English primary teacher

Meaning Making. Effective learners are on the lookout for links between what they are learning and what they already know. They get pleasure from seeing how things fit together’. They like it when they can make sense of new things in terms of their own experience and when they can see how learning relates to their own concerns.

Resilience and Robustness. Effective learners like a challenge and are willing to 'give it a go' even when the outcome and the way to proceed are uncertain. They accept that learning is sometimes hard for everyone and are not frightened of finding things difficult. They have a high level of 'stickability' and can readily recover from frustration. They are able to 'hang in' with learning even though they may, for a while, feel somewhat confused or even anxious. They don't mind making mistakes every so often and can learn from them.

Creativity. Effective learners are able to look at things in different ways and to imagine new possibilities. They like playing with ideas and taking different perspectives, even when they don’t quite know where their trains of thought are leading. They are more receptive to hunches and inklings that bubble up into their minds and make more use of imagination, visual imagery and pictures and diagrams in their learning. They understand that learning often needs playfulness as well as purposeful, systematic thinking.

Relationships/Interdependence. Effective learners are good at managing the balance between being sociable and being private in their learning. They are not completely independent, nor are they dependent. They like to learn with and from others and to share their difficulties, when it is appropriate. They acknowledge that there are important other people in their lives who help them learn, though they may vary in who those people are, e.g. family, friends or teachers. They know the value of learning by watching and emulating other people, including their peers. They make use of others as resources, as partners and as sources of emotional support.

Strategic Awareness. More effective learners know more about their own learning. They are interested in becoming more knowledgeable and more aware of themselves as learners. They like trying out different approaches to learning to see what happens. They are more reflective and better at self-evaluation. They are better at judging how much time, or what resources, a learning task will require. They are more able to talk about learning and about themselves as learners. They know how to repair their own emotional mood when they get frustrated or disappointed. They like being given responsibility for planning and
organising their own learning.


Conclusion

The question I want to pose but not necessarily to answer, is to what extent do the characteristics of learner experience outlined in the first part of this paper reflect these dimensions. How do the education and learning cultures in these three different European countries vary in their capacity to foster the learning individual? What are the constraints and opportunities provided within each educational system which influence young adults’ strategic decisions about learning and how do these relate to their disposition to lifelong learning e.g. how ready, willing and able they are to undertaking further learning (Carr and Claxton 1999).

All three countries are concerned about standards, efficiency and accountability. In England, this concern has taken the form of reforms emphasising a ‘performativity’ culture and a quasi-market in education in which young people experience almost constant assessment. In Denmark, where we found the most positive dispositions towards learning, there is a relative lack of pressure from high stakes assessment but increasing government concern about the under-performance of their young people in international tests. In France there are concerns about the flexibility and adaptability of those leaving the education system and concern about violence in, and out of, school.

Ideally the next phase of our research should investigate the extent to which the attitudes identified in the earlier study are translated into adult life and into readiness to participate in lifelong learning. It needs to continue to identify the complex interplay of factors at national, institutional and individual level which influence adults’ engagement with learning.

What is clear from our current research is that French, English and Danish pupils could be located on a continuum according to the following: the extent to which they were seen within the educational system as ‘pupils’ or as ‘persons’; the degree of distance seen as desirable in the teacher-pupil relationship; the nature of the inter-pupil relationship and the balance of pupils’ negative or positive feelings about school. It was striking that difficulties in maintaining a balance between a learner and a social identity were most marked in the English system with a culture characterised by the most fragmentation and differentiation in school.

and there are ‘burning questions of comparability’ (Simola 2005). Yet such an understanding of educational perspectives and practices within their cultural context is fundamental to understanding how learning takes place.

In this lecture I re-assert this concern of current, as well as past generations of comparativists, for identifying contextual sensitivity when comparing education systems. I take Bruner’s (1996) thesis as central i.e. that ‘culture shapes mind, that it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct, not only our worlds but our very conceptions of our selves and our powers. (Bruner 1996 px). I seek to understand through cross-cultural comparison the relationship between national context (educational systems), institutional ethos (schools) and classroom practices in mediating the development of a learner’s identity.

In particular I focus on the development of ‘learner identity’ and attitudes to ‘lifelong learning’ young people (we studied) in the three European countries with distinctive and very different educational systems and priorities: England, France and Denmark. I pose three closely related questions. These are:

What makes a successful lifelong learner?

What does comparative research say about the learning sites in which the learning individual most rapidly emerges?

How do education and learning cultures in different European countries vary in this capacity to foster the learning individual?

I propose to do this by looking briefly at the context for learning in three European countries and by drawing upon a twenty year comparative research programme of UK Economic and Social Research Council funded projects conducted by myself and colleagues which linked systems, schools teachers and individual learners in comparative study. The studies were international collaborative ones involving teams of researchers in England (at the University of Bristol), France (at the University of Aix-Marseille, and later at the University of Bordeaux II) and more recently, Denmark (at the University of Copenhagen and the Danish University for Education).

Having explained the aims and rationale of these studies, and described the context for learning in the three countries, I will draw upon case studies of young learners carried out as part of this research. In the second part of the lecture I suggest some characteristics of the ‘learning individual’ and discuss the implications for educational policy and
and France. I soon became totally "switched on" to comparative research and have been ever since. In particular I was inspired by the way in which it allows us to "make the familiar strange" and the "strange familiar" and to see afresh much of what we take for granted in our own cultural context as our own assumptions are in ours! As I hope will be apparent from the account which follows, such in depth international comparisons can provide a unique set of insights and can yield contrasts that are the basis for developing new perspectives and new ways of looking at the world.

Thus a fundamental underpinning of the research I have conducted over more than twenty years with colleagues is that the social and cultural context in which teaching and learning take place can have a profound effect on how they are perceived by those experiencing them and on attitudes to, and outcomes of, learning. Learning and teaching is always "situated" within a particular setting and there is a symbiotic relationship between schooling and culture or society. This is an argument put forward by many comparatists since the first half of the last century, beginning with Michael Sadler's often quoted insight that "in studying foreign systems of education we should not forget that the things outside the schools matter even more than the things inside the schools, and govern and interpret the things inside". (Sadler 1900).

It is still an important argument because in recent years there has been a growing tendency to 'borrow' educational policies and practices from outside the schools matter even more than the things inside the schools, and govern and interpret the things inside'. (Sadler 1900).

Gender differences and differences in social inequality were reflected in pupil perceptions, but these were mediated differently within the three educational systems. The study suggests that the often publicised and significant differences (between boys and pupils of different social backgrounds and ethnicity) in English pupils' attitudes to achievement appear to be far from inevitable since, in different ways, they are much less marked in the other countries studied.

Notably there was a relative absence of the problem of adolescent disaffection with school in Denmark and a relatively high level of disaffection in France. Thus the study highlights the institutional and cultural, rather than biological origins of youth disaffection. For us in England it suggests that we need to understand more about how schools develop a positive learning culture, to counter-act peer group pressure and create a climate where it is 'cool' to learn.

Part of the value of cross-cultural research is the extent to which it is able to identify both constants (or universals) and contexts in educational experience (Broadfoot and Osborn 1988, 1993). Cross-cultural comparisons of teacher and pupil experience identify teacher and pupil responses to teaching and learning which are more universal to the situation of 'being a teacher' or 'being a secondary school pupil' from those which may be more culturally specific. As we have attempted to show in this research pupils in England, Denmark and France experience school contexts and teacher mediations which relate to cultural, philosophical, political and historical differences between the three countries. These, in turn are mediated by pupil concerns and perceptions of schooling and learning and will ultimately affect behaviour and learning outcomes.

For various reasons, some of which I identified at the beginning, we chose to research teachers and learners in these three European countries. Other researchers who have worked with me as research students or post-docs have taken up this theme slightly differently and in a different context. For example, recently, Claire Poppy has been investigating how educational choices are structured for young learners in Norway and England. Maroussia Raveaud has focused on the socialisation of young children entering reception classes in England and France, Elizabeth McNess has conducted in-depth case studies of primary teachers and education reform in Denmark and England. Angeline Barrett has shown how teachers working in the low-income context of sub-Saharan Africa construct their professional identity and how, like teachers in many high income countries, they will mediate and adapt the implementation of new policies and educational ideas.
according to their educational values and their particular contemporary and historical contexts. A number of French post-docs are looking at related questions. This body of research shows how much of what it means to be a teacher or a pupil is socially and culturally constructed and how teacher identity and learner identity becomes defined and re-defined in different settings. Most recently, with a team from the Home/School Knowledge Exchange Project (Jane Andrews, Elizabeth McNess, Andrew Pollard, Vicki Stinchcombe and Wan Yee), I have been exploring how the experience of transition, of moving from one educational setting to another, in particular the transfer from primary to secondary school can lead to shifts in learner identity, but that is another story and perhaps another lecture!

Recent government directives in England raise the question again of how far we are moving to a common notion of the ‘European teacher’, and perhaps, by extension the ‘European pupil’. Teachers’ work in England has already changed dramatically as a result of the school workforce agreement, signed in Jan 2003 and looks set to change still further, bringing their work closer to the French model, which is similar to those in Belgium, Italy, Spain and Portugal. By contrast, in Denmark and in other Scandinavian countries (and to a lesser extent in the Netherlands) teachers still have a wider range of duties and take a “holistic” approach. Our research suggests that, in spite of these pressures to Europeanisation and globalisation, and increasingly common educational policies and pressures towards a ‘performance’ culture for teachers and pupils, there are distinctive cultural and historical traditions which will lead to policies being interpreted and mediated differently by teachers and to pupils.

The European teachers studied were not simply the passive victims of imposed educational reform. They had the potential to actively, and creatively, mediate policy change and, in some cases, to adapt, change or subvert it. Both these and other studies suggest that teachers’ response to imposed policy change and young peoples’ perceptions of learning are multi-faceted and complex. We need to understand the importance of this in any policy change. We need to think more carefully about the characteristics of a ‘learning individual’, who is ready, willing and able to go on learning throughout life, and whether current policy changes look likely to achieve this. Significantly we have to decide what we want our teachers to be and what kind of learners we want to develop, and to work with, not against schools to achieve this. There is still a choice!

A World of Difference? The social and cultural construction of the European teacher and learner

Introduction

Recent education reforms within Europe and beyond have had a profound effect on the way in which teachers’ work and pupil experience are defined by government policy directives. However, as many of us know there can be a considerable gap between what governments say is going to happen and how individual teachers and pupils interpret, mediate and experience changes. In this lecture I try to look beyond the rhetoric of policy at the actual impact of change on teachers’ work and learners’ experience in three European countries. I will explore how global educational reform pressures intersect with different cultural contexts and school settings to produce varied learner experience. In particular I will draw upon individual profiles of teachers and young learners in three countries to pose the question ‘what makes a successful lifelong learner?’ and ‘what can comparative research help us to understand about the learning cultures in which a “learning individual” is likely to thrive and develop.

My own interest in comparative education research must have started at a relatively young age. At the age of 10 I moved with my family to Canada where we moved about quite frequently at first. By the time I went to university I had been to 10 different schools in at least three educational systems and had learned that things worked very differently in many of them, that, although all teachers had a certain number of things in common, they could also have very different expectations and priorities that seemed to be partly related to the place and the education system we were in. I had learned to shape my own behaviour and learning priorities, my “learner identity” according to these differences, while at the same time bearing in mind that it was possible for things to be done differently elsewhere!

After two years at a Canadian university, I moved back to Britain and later, as a young sociology student at LSE wrote my undergraduate dissertation on the motivation of young people in Britain, Canada and the US and speculated on how the many different education systems of North America “warmed up” young peoples’ motivation while the English one “cooled them out”. Much later, I became a researcher here at the Graduate School of Education in Bristol on an ESRC comparative research project directed by Patricia Broadfoot which looked at the different contexts of teachers’ work and professional identity in England.
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A World of Difference? The social and cultural construction of the European teacher and learner

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