

## Dipping into Year 3

*Researching pupils' perspectives on the first Key Stage transition:*

*summary of the project (supported by Ofsted), "Sustaining Pupils' Progress with Learning at Year 3".*

Year 3 marks the step-over point between the first two Key Stages of the National Curriculum when pupils and teachers have to adjust to a new set of teaching and learning demands. In some cases, year 3 can also be a point of transfer where pupils move from infant to junior school with all the attendant excitements and uncertainties of becoming part of a new physical and social environment.

In 1993, Ofsted first reported that national inspection data indicated a dip in pupils' performance in Year 3, and the picture has remained fairly stable. The basis of the judgement was the lower percentage of *individual lessons* observed in Year 3, compared with similar figures for other years, in which pupils were judged to be making acceptable progress. The extent to which judgements about progress in individual lessons can be used as proxy for overall pupil progress has been questioned; nonetheless, the Ofsted data highlighted an issue that warranted a more detailed investigation.

In 1998 a team based in Cambridge led by Chris Doddington launched an interview-based investigation. The aim was to open up the factors behind the so-called 'year 3' dip through the perspectives of those most closely involved – pupils and teachers. Working with schools in two local education authorities, the project built up an extensive database of interview evidence.

*What have we learned from pupils?*



Pupils were keenly aware that the move to year 3 was important. They talked about their

'advancement' in social as well as academic terms, and the transition to 'being more senior' was recognised and appreciated:

*In year 3 you can do more things, you're not treated like little kids, you're treated more grown-uply and you don't have to be shown about because we can look after ourselves. (y3, b)*

*I've noticed something – in Year 2 we didn't count up to 100 because she thought it was too hard and in Year 3 I just sort of learned it straight away. (y3, g)*

*Now we're juniors, we have to call our speech marks just actual speech marks now and in the infants we could call them 66 and 99's but we have to use the proper word now ... (y3, b)*

Teachers were clear that the work *was* more demanding in year 3 and pupils' comments bore this out:

*Well, you have loads more writing than in year 2. (y3, g)*

*The thing I don't like about one of my lessons is the maths because we always have to do like complicated things and it's a bit awkward. (y3, g)*

*Sometimes I don't like English because bits of it are too hard – everyday it gets a tiny bit harder. There's too much writing. (y3, b)*

The strain may reflect the pressure on year 3 teachers who see their task as very different from that of year 2 teachers, in terms of both academic and personal development:

*In year 2 they're molly-coddled and they can get a lot of attention whereas now, in year 3, they have to cope on their own more. (y3 teacher)*

Teachers are aware of the difficulties that some of their pupils are experiencing in adjusting: 'They get worried and say that they "have a lot of work" ... we expect more sustained pieces of writing and some of them find that a bit daunting'. But the learning curve may be too steep for some young students.

Another factor in the fall-off in progress may be, as we learned from the interviews, that parents who hear that pupils must be more independent in year 3 and that the work will be harder may offer less support – either because they feel the content is beyond them or because they feel that pupils should be learning to work without their help. Pupils, however, want their parents to be involved. There is also the question of teaching: some headteachers in the project acknowledged that year 3 was where they 'hid' their less experienced teachers. But the dip in progress cannot just be attributed to a more variable quality of teaching. As we have seen, the situation is more complex than that and needs to be looked at and understood taking into account the perspectives of the pupils themselves.

Schools which have a clear awareness of what the transition can mean for pupils can plan support strategies to help them cope with the new demands. For example, the team found that where schools gave

careful consideration to introducing and explaining new aspects of learning required by the Key Stage 2 curriculum, pupils across the ability range were more confident. In contrast, where liaison between year 2 and 3 teachers was less well developed and there was no systematic preparation for what lay ahead, less confident learners could easily lose ground in the face of new expectations about the quantity and quality of their work. Some pupils, at this early stage in their school careers, were already

beginning to see learning as a struggle.

As Woods (1987, p20) points out, negative views of learning, acquired early on in pupils' school careers, can have serious, long-term repercussions:

*"Life-chances are determined or constructed for many people in the early years. ... The 7-8 age group is a crucial one in the development of those*

*attitudes, abilities and relationships that go into the making of educational success at that level. In this sense the transition is not only of infant to junior. Like joined-up writing and the second set of teeth, there are other ultimates here, and they lay down the means for the next transfer to secondary, and indeed for later life."*

(‘On becoming a junior’, in Pollard’s book, *Children and Their Primary Schools.*)

### Listening to what pupils had to say about their experiences as learners enabled us to construct this chart of the pros and cons of year 3:

<i>Progress Dips - with examples of negative outcomes</i>	<b>Themes</b>	<i>Progress Sustained - with examples of positive outcomes</i>
<i>Feelings of anxiety or insecurity during transfer / transition heightened by loss of friends</i>	<i>Importance of Friendship</i>	<i>Encouragement and support from peers helps pupils to cope with transition and to work collaboratively</i>
<i>Pupils find difficulty in coping with the expectation of working more independently</i>	<i>Independence and Responsibility</i>	<i>Pupils enjoy new approaches offering greater independence and responsibility</i>
<i>Increased curriculum demands lead to pressure and can result in some pupils falling behind</i>	<i>The Curriculum</i>	<i>The new phase offers challenge and enhances motivation for learning</i>
<i>Pupils are unfamiliar with new ways of working and have difficulty in coping with them</i>	<i>Ways of Working</i>	<i>New ways of working offer variety and help pupils to develop useful skills for collaborative learning</i>
<i>Pupils' anxiety about assessment can depress self-esteem and lead to a loss of confidence</i>	<i>Monitoring and Assessment</i>	<i>Effective monitoring highlights problems so that they can be quickly addressed</i>
<i>A fall-off in parental involvement in yr3 means some pupils receive less support</i>	<i>The Home Dimension</i>	<i>If parents are given information on yr3 and KS2, they can offer appropriate support</i>

(This chart is adapted from Doddington et al, 2001, p.14.) A fuller account of the study, *Sustaining Pupils' Progress at Year 3* (by Christine Doddington and Julia Flutter, with Eve Bearne and Helen Demetriou) is available free to Network members. If you would like a copy, please send an addressed label and four first-class stamps to: Nichola Daily, Research Unit, University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education, (Homerton Site), Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 2PH. See also the article on the project by Eve Bearne, ‘A good listening to: Year 3 pupils talk about learning’, in *Support for Learning*, Vol. 17, Number 3, August 2002 and ‘Testing,testing,testing...can you hear me?’ Can year 3 pupils tell us anything we don't already know about Assessment? Doddington et al in *Education* 3-13 Vol 29 No 3 October 2001.

# The Ladder of Pupil Participation

## - how students see it

*Pam Black is the co-ordinator of a group of volunteer year 12 and 13 student researchers at a Cambridge secondary school. The group plans to design, deliver and evaluate a 'Learning How to Learn' workshop to a pilot group of year 8 students. As part of their preparation, the group discussed the Ladder of Participation (from our Newsletter 1; adapted from Hart 1992).*

### They saw that participation is different in schools in other countries:

The sixth form here is at level 2 in most lessons, whilst in Russia, in at least the better secondary schools, it is similar to level 3. There is a Governor and sub-Governor elected in each class for the School Student Council. Students are involved in the running of the school. Teachers seek students' opinions. There is discussion between them. The School Student Council has two students from each year; they meet every week. Students are responsible for keeping the school as a school, for maintaining relationships. Teachers are responsible for teaching, certainly, but also for the social development of their students. All work together. The Principal has the final say.

### They recognised the challenge for teachers and students of moving to levels 3 and 4:

If we move up to level 4 some teachers may not like it, some students won't like it. Some like to come to school and just be told what to do.

There are huge leaps between each rung of the ladder – like from 3 to 4.

Moving up the ladder is possible. It would take time, increased pupil confidence and teacher acceptance.

### Interestingly, they tended - as we all do - to underestimate the capabilities of younger pupils to manage consultation:

It would be very difficult to do effectively and in a worthwhile way with younger children.

Do not expect younger ones to be active in decision making. They have no experience.

Year 7 are thinking about and are concerned about fitting in, they are accepting.



**4. pupils as fully active participants and co-researchers**  
*pupils and teachers jointly initiate enquiry; pupils play an active role in decision making; together with teachers, they jointly plan action in the light of data and review the impact of the intervention*

**3. pupils as researchers**  
*pupils are involved in enquiry, and have an active role in decision making*

**2. pupils as active participants**  
*teachers initiate enquiry and interpret the data, but pupils are taking some role in decision-making*

**1. listening to pupils**  
*pupils are a source of data  
 teachers respond to student data, but pupils are not involved in discussion of data; there may be no feedback to pupils  
 teachers act on the data*

**Although they were enjoying their own experience of consultation and participation, they were realistic about the problems:**

If you are trying to enhance pupil participation and someone's ideas are not listened to then these people may feel bad and they probably would not want to participate again.

Students may feel their ideas are not good enough to be accepted by the group. It needs to be democratic.

If there were more participation there might be too many different views to cope with.

# Order! Order!

## It's Headteacher's Question Time

*Joan Negrine, Assistant Head Teacher at Sweyne Park School, Rayleigh, Essex, writes here about the school's use of a Student Parliament in year 9 PSE.*

What we are trying to achieve is to raise pupils' awareness of the workings and role of Parliament. More significantly, it also fits into our wider citizenship strategy to encourage pupils to understand and become involved in the democratic process.

To enable the pupils to access the complex concepts and the decision making processes involved, a Headteacher's Question Time, based on Prime Minister's Question Time, is held. This involves pupils submitting primary questions such as "Will the Headteacher please state her engagements for today" of which the Headteacher is informed in advance. Pupils are then allowed to ask a supplementary question which the Headteacher does not know in advance. However, the head of PSE, Horace Letchford, co-ordinates these supplementary questions based on a representative sample of pupil concerns which have been put forward via PSE lessons, even to the extent that some "soft" questions are included.

During the actual event pupils are seated in the school hall in two opposing blocks, as MPs are in Parliament. Parliamentary language and procedures are followed. Pupils are issued with an order paper and a member of staff acts as the Speaker of the House. Obviously, prior to the event, work is done in PSE lesson to explain the workings and procedures of the House of Commons.

The range of questions and quality of the subsequent debate have been most impressive. Questions have included:

*'What can be done to relieve congestion in the corridors?'*

*'How much money is spent by the school each year?'*

*'I have been told in my science lessons that we should drink a pint of water a day. Why then are the water fountains not working?'*

*'What were the criteria for setting next year's groups?'*

Pupils have found the event extremely informative and enjoyable. One pupil commented, 'I really enjoyed it because we got to ask the questions we wanted to and you had to give us real answers'.

Both the Headteacher and Deputy Headteachers have been involved in fielding questions and have found the experience to be genuinely nerve wracking but very exciting and rewarding. Headteacher, Kate Spiller, commented,

*'With good preparation, pupils can really use the forum to reach high*

*levels of debate and understanding of some of the complexities of school and organisational management'.*

From the PSE perspective, the event involves a great deal of planning but the ensuing debate is well worth it. The Head of PSE feels that pupils get a great deal of satisfaction from seeing how decisions are made regarding the management of the school and being able to hold SMT to account.

Clearly it is important that the pupils' concerns are followed up where appropriate and thus any issues raised are addressed via SMT meetings, for example the fixing of the pupils' water fountains or leading an assembly to raise pupils' awareness about why we group pupils in sets. Pupils are already consulted as part of the annual school development plan process and therefore the parliament event fits in very neatly with our ethos of pupil consultation.

This event has been so successful that pupils have requested that the same model could be used to facilitate a school council parliament event this year involving pupils on all 5 year councils. This will allow pupils to become even more involved in the school's decision making processes and thus foster a genuine sense of pupil ownership of the school.

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