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Understanding metacognition through the use of pupil views templates: Pupil views of Learning to Learn

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ABSTRACT

As part of the Learning to Learn Phase 3 Evaluation [for full detail see Higgins, S., Wall, K., Baumfield, V., Hall, E., Leat, D., Moseley, D., et al. (2007). *Learning to Learn in Schools Phase 3 Evaluation: Final Report*. London: Campaign for Learning. Available at: www.campaignforlearning.org.uk; Higgins, S., Wall, K., Falzon, C., Hall, E., Leat, D., Baumfield, V., et al. (2005). *Learning to Learn in Schools Phase 3 Evaluation Year One Final Report*. London: Campaign for Learning. Available at: <http://www.campaignforlearning.org.uk>; Higgins, S., Wall, K., Baumfield, V., Hall, E., Leat, D., Woolner, P. et al. (2006). *Learning to Learn in Schools Phase 3 Evaluation: Year Two Report*. London: Campaign for Learning. Available at: <http://www.campaignforlearning.org.uk>] teachers across three Local Authorities in England were supported in using an approach fitting ideas of professional enquiry through action research [Baumfield, V., Hall, E., & Wall, K. (2008). *Action research in the classroom*. London: Sage]. In this complex project, teachers have explored different innovations that they believe to fit under the umbrella term of Learning to Learn, implementing and investigating approaches ranging from cooperative learning [Kagan, S. (2001). *Cooperative learning*. Kagan Publishing. www.Kaganonline.com] to Assessment for Learning [Black, P. J. & William, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education*, 5, 7–73] to Thinking Skills [Baumfield, V. & Higgins, S. (1997). 'But no one has maths at a party: Pupils' reasoning strategies in a thinking skills programme. *Curriculum*, 18(3), 140–148]. As part of these enquiries teachers have increasingly involved pupils and their perspective for providing critical insight to processes associated with Learning to Learn. This corresponds to debates around pupil voice [for example, Flutter, J. & Ruddock, J. (2004). *Consulting pupils: What's in it for schools?* London: Routledge Falmer], and also the fact that teachers in the project see pupils as having characteristics that can support the development of a Learning to Learn philosophy [Hall, E., Leat, D., Wall, K., Higgins, S., & Edwards, G. (2006) Learning to Learn: Teacher research in the zone of proximal development. *Teacher Development*, 10(2)] This paper will use the method of pupil views templates [Wall, K. & Higgins, S. (2006). Facilitating and supporting talk with pupils about metacognition:

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A research and learning tool. *International Journal of Research and Methods in Education*, 29(1), 39–53] used by teachers as a pragmatic tool [Baumfield, V., Hall, E., Higgins, S., & Wall, K. (2007). Tools for enquiry and the role of feedback in teachers' learning. *Paper presented at the European Association for Research in Learning and Instruction Conference*] to research pupils' perspectives of Learning to Learn and the processes they perceive to be involved. It will use an analysis frame to examine and explore data about pupils' declarative knowledge of the process of learning and therefore aspects of their metacognitive knowledge and skilfulness [Veenman, M. V. J. & Spaans, M. A. (2005). Relation between intellectual and metacognitive skills: Age and task difference. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 15, 159–176].

1. Introduction

The Learning to Learn in Schools Phase 3 Evaluation was a research project funded through the Campaign for Learning (CfL) and supported by the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching at Newcastle University. The project involved 33 primary and secondary schools across three Local Authorities (LAs), representing a wide range of socio-economic contexts across England (for further details see Higgins et al., 2007, 2006, 2005). The study extended over four years, ending in 2007 and during this time teachers undertook three annual cycles of research using Stenhouse's (1981) model of 'systematic enquiry made public'. This process was supported by the University team (Wall & Hall, 2005), described more fully elsewhere (Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2008).

All of the schools implemented interventions under the general heading of 'Learning to Learn' (L2L) drawing on ideas of metacognition, thinking skills, self-regulation, self-efficacy and self-esteem (see for example, Claxton, 2002). However, within the project the definition remained relatively fluid and flexible since the teachers themselves were creating new understandings of what L2L is in practice through the process of research and through the connections made as part of the project. The actual interventions investigated by the teachers varied depending on their own understandings of Learning to Learn and how they believed they fit with the context of their classroom. Teachers have innovated with approaches ranging from Cooperative Learning (Kagan, 2001) to Assessment for Learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998) to Thinking Skills (Baumfield & Higgins, 1997) and more. The locus of control for these decisions has always been with the teachers and, from the project perspective this diversity has been embraced as a necessity of the professional enquiry approach (Wall & Hall, 2005). It is enough to say that across all of the approaches used there have been a priority placed on pupil talk about learning and that the Campaign for Learning's definition has been consistent as a starting point:

... a process of discovery about learning. It involves a set of principles and skills which, if understood and used, help learners learn more effectively and so become learners for life. At its heart is the belief that learning is learnable. (Higgins et al., 2007, p. 13)

Participant teachers produced a case study at the end of each of cycle of enquiry, at the end of each school year. Within these reports the involvement of pupils and the inclusion of their perspective have been very apparent. Indeed, this has become an increasingly privileged element of the teachers' evaluation and data collection (Higgins et al., 2007). The teachers have indicated that the role and characteristics of pupils in a L2L school or under a L2L philosophy are important. Themes which have emerged from interviews with the teachers include that a L2L pupil:

- has awareness of the processes of learning;
- is psychologically prepared for learning;
- is a good communicator (Hall, Leat, Wall, Higgins, & Edwards, 2006).

This growing appreciation appears to reflect a more general shift nationally and internationally in education discourse (c.f. Article 12 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, 1989), but also a changing understanding within the project of what L2L represents.

This paper will focus on and explore data collected using the method of pupil views templates (Wall, Higgins, & Packard, 2007). An example of a completed template can be seen in Fig. 1. This was a method used by many of the teachers to gather the pupils' perspective and in some contexts seemed to fit with teachers' beliefs about what is embodied by the philosophy of Learning to Learn. Teachers have described the tool:

The use of pupil views templates enables children to provide their own views on a variety of issues—some have to be pre-planned (the more specific templates) but others are good as a quick snapshot done at random (usually a blank template that can be adapted). (Teacher of Year 2)

These templates have been developed over a number of different research projects, fitting with ideas associated with psychological or semiotic tools (Vygotsky, 1978): the templates mediate pupils' thinking about cognition and metacognition and support them in expressing their learning. In addition, the templates fulfil a parallel purpose by acting as a pragmatic 'bridge' across the research-practice divide for teachers (Kuhn & Dean, 2004). The templates do this by acting as an empirical research tool for exploring pupils' beliefs about metacognition as well as a pedagogical tool for facilitating dialogue about learning in the classroom (examples of teachers using the templates for both purposes can be seen in Wall et al., 2007). The power of the templates within L2L lies in the fact that regardless of the research agenda of the project,

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