

# **The construction of the ‘ideal pupil’ and pupils’ perceptions of ‘misbehaviour’ and discipline: contrasting experiences in a low and a high socio-economic primary school**

Amelia Hempel-Jorgensen\*

Institute of Education

## **Introduction**

This paper explores how pupils with similar social class backgrounds and prior attainment on test scores view themselves and their classmates as learners in schools of different socio-economic composition. The paper seeks to make a contribution to the debate about the effects of the social class composition of schools on pupils’ learning by examining how composition and context affect their view of the ideal learner. How they view themselves as learners in relation to what they consider the ideal learner may have a significant impact on their educational motivation and aspirations.

Previous qualitative work in this area (e.g. Thrupp 1999) has focused on pupil subcultures and peer relations in schools with different compositions but has not examined how these have an effect on learning identities. The work of Bernstein (2000) suggests that to understand the formation of learner identities and how pupils conceptualisations of the ‘ideal learner’ form, it is necessary to examine the pedagogical relationship between teachers and pupils. Furthermore, it may be that the regulation of pupils’ behaviour, as a significant aspect of pedagogy, provides a significant insight into the formation of how pupils perceive themselves. This may particularly be the case in low socio-economic schools, where issues of discipline and control are +more widespread (see e.g. Maxwell 1987, Weishew and Peng 1993, OFSTED Chief Inspector’s report 2003).

The question of discipline and social control with respect to working class students

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\* Social Sciences Research Unit, Institute of Education, London, WC1H 0AL, UK. Email: A.Hempel-Jorgensen@ioe.ac.uk

has almost exclusively focused on secondary schools, such as Willis' (1977) study of working class resistance where different working class responses to schooling were examined. The most significant exception was Sharp and Green's (1975) study of the formation of pupil identities in primary schools. Here the role of pedagogy is considered in the context of social forces within and beyond a working class school, which help to shape teachers' perception of the ideal pupil type.

However, these traditions of qualitative research have not examined the question of how pupils conceive of the ideal learner or how they view their classmates as learners. Consequently, they have tended to overlook the role of pedagogy, the curriculum and assessment in the way pupils respond to schooling. In this respect the work of Bernstein provides a helpful theoretical resource in understanding the way power relations in a classroom may help to shape pupils' pedagogic identities.

### **Performative pedagogy**

Bernstein (2000) identified two types of discourse: instructional and regulative. The former refers to the transfer of knowledge and skills, but also the way pupils are organised in relation to learning, e.g. prior attainment grouping. Regulative discourse relates to a school's values and beliefs, for example, in relation to discipline and how 'misbehaviour' is understood and dealt with. Regulative and instructional discourses interact in, for example, the way pupils are grouped in class because there may be more children in lower prior attainment groups who 'misbehave'.

These two concepts are brought together in Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse which is embedded in specific contexts. For schools today this context is shaped by what he calls a performative pedagogy which will provide a framework for the construction of the notion of the 'ideal pupil'. In the performative pedagogy children's orientation to learning is strongly linked with performing academically (e.g. through tests) in the instructional discourse accompanied by good behaviour in terms of conforming to the behavioural rules laid down by teachers in order to achieve in tests. High stakes testing has a significant impact on pedagogy and as

Bernstein has noted assessment is the 'purest form' of pedagogic control (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2006). Given that in England aspects of teaching for the literacy and numeracy hours are mandated, as is the curriculum, the focus of the performative pedagogy is on 'the strong structuring, sequencing and pacing of curriculum content and the strong control over the selection of knowledge and the explicit promotion of specialised subjects and skills' (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2006).

A question that remains to be answered of Bernstein's theory is whether such a performative pedagogy explains pupils' understanding of learning and informs the construction of the ideal pupil. It is open to interpretation as to whether the theory determines children's understanding of themselves as learners or whether it provides a framework within which this is constructed. In some instances, Bernstein seems to indicate the former. For instance, he talks of the pedagogic device as the 'symbolic ruler of consciousness –the fundamental system for both creating and controlling the unthinkable' (1996:50). However, it can be argued that the effects of a pedagogic discourse, such as that of the performative pedagogy, are a matter of empirical investigation of which this paper is an example.

In order to develop an empirical methodology that enables an understanding of pupil's responses to the performative pedagogy the concept of the ideal pupil is introduced. Here the question to be raised is, to what extent are teachers' and pupils' constructions of the ideal pupil, particularly in relation to 'misbehaviour', informed by the performative pedagogy? In particular, a construction which emphasises meeting academic attainment targets by keeping up with the pace of lessons prescribed and the associated behaviour expected of pupils.

This paper will use the above approach to examine the construction and use of the 'ideal pupil' concept in one low and one high SES school at year four. The key ways in which the concept of a performative pedagogy can be utilised in this research is through the constructions of ability hierarchies through attainment grouping and of pacing. However, while the performative pedagogy frames pupils' understanding of learning and classroom processes, the actual ways in which the 'ideal pupil' is

constructed and impacts on pupils' learner identities needs to be understood from the pupils' perspective through the processes of pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil relations. The result of these processes will then be considered in terms of the options pupils have as active agents in responding to how they have been defined by others and themselves in relation to the 'ideal pupil'.

### **The 'ideal pupil'**

The 'ideal pupil' concept was first used by Becker (1952) in his study of how teachers perceive pupils in relation to their socio-economic background. Becker shows that teachers base their perception and treatment of pupils on a model of how a pupil should respond to their teaching. From the view of the teachers in the school in which his research took place, none of the pupils fitted the ideal mould. Nevertheless, pupils from the higher and middle socio-economic groups were considered far closer to this than those from the low SES group. Yet, this ideal remained the standard for a teacher's judgement of the quality of children as pupils.

While Becker's focus was exclusively on the teachers' role in instrumentalising the 'ideal pupil', more recent work has understood the construction and application of the 'ideal pupil' as arising out of the interaction between pupils and teachers (Youdell, 1993; Laws and Davies, 2000). The labelling of pupils in relation to the 'ideal pupil' concept is central to this relationship and between pupils themselves. As Laws and Davies argue, there is seen to be something 'wrong' with a pupil who has behavioural problems, which in teachers' perceptions is related to the child's psychology and/or deficient background. The labelling of pupils is therefore closely followed by blaming; it is seen to be the fault of pupils if they do not conform to the classroom standards of the 'ideal pupil'. However, as this paper will show, labelling is not only perpetuated by teachers but also by pupils.

As Sharp and Green (1975) show, the school's ethos and consequently teachers' pedagogic style contribute to the social structuring of pupils' identities. In their study, teachers' perceptions of their interactions with pupils are dependent on how positively

pupils respond to their ‘child centred’ pedagogic style, thereby judging and labelling individual pupils’ in relation to an ideal type. Therefore, this paper will also include some examination of teachers’ and the schools’ approach to managing behaviour, within the context of the performative curriculum which requires a different type of pedagogy from that observed by Sharp and Green.

## **Methods**

The data used for this analysis is derived from one aspect of the Hampshire Research with Primary Schools (HARPS) project which aimed to uncover the effect of SES on school processes and pupil attainment. A year was spent conducting ethnographic fieldwork in 12 Hampshire primary schools, of which this paper focuses on two (one high and one low SES school). The SES composition of schools and of individual pupil background was classified on the basis of a survey conducted by the HARPS team of parents of children in year four in the schools, prior to fieldwork.

To facilitate comparison between the schools up to four “matched pupils” (depending on the school size) were identified in each school. These pupils were all in year four at the time of the fieldwork, had average prior attainment scores and were of average socio-economic background within Hampshire. These children (there were four in low SES and two in the high SES school) were each interviewed in groups with their friends and in pairs with each other (semi-structured interviews). The pupils were asked how they perceived their teacher and their relationship with the teacher and what characteristics they thought their teacher would like in a new pupil if one was to come into the class. Children were observed in their classrooms during many literacy, numeracy and non-core lessons throughout the year. The researcher also observed and conversed with children in the playground, at assembly and around the school building and lunch area. Teachers and members of the school management committee were also interviewed using a semi-structured method.

### **The schools: Aspen and Rowan<sup>1</sup>**

Aspen junior school, classified as low SES, was located close to the centre of a large town in Hampshire. It was surrounded by council housing and had been described as a very run-down area, especially in the past, by school staff. The school's ethos was viewed by the Head as follows:

I want the kids to feel they are valued - that is the bottom line because I don't think a lot of them are at home. They're shouted and bellowed at and left to run riot and do what they like. So I want the children to feel valued – I want them to feel like they've got potential because some parents will say to them 'he's not capable of that' or 'oh, he'll just go on the dole'. (Head teacher, Aspen)

The Head believes that pupils required nurturing and that the home was generally not supportive of children's educational aspirations. These views were translated into practice with respect to the school's formal regulative discourse on behaviour. The school's behavioural management policy was based on 'positive re-enforcement' and encouraged teachers to use a comprehensive rewards scheme for 'positive' behaviour, which operated in and outside the classrooms. A 'house point'<sup>2</sup> system was widely used where children in the winning house were taken on an excursion. When the reward system failed there was a sanctioning system including time out from class or break times, and for more serious incidences parents were involved. Despite a general school policy concerning discipline, the two year four classes were managed very differently as will be seen below.

Behaviour management was described by staff as a major concern at the school. Much time and effort was invested in preventing and dealing with 'misbehaviour'. A number of initiatives had been implemented to help shape behaviour and encourage 'constructive play' among children. During the lessons observed, there were almost always disruptions due to discipline problems. While the frequency varied between lessons, it was often a significant component of a lesson and children were often seen seated outside the staffroom in 'remand' for their behaviour. In an informal conversation the head teacher explained that due to continually having to attend classrooms to address behavioural issues, management work was constantly interrupted. This observation is consistent with Thrupp's (1999) point that much

management time in the working class school that he studied was given over to disciplinary matters. The types of classroom ‘misbehaviour’ observed or spoken about in interviews ranged from physical violence to displays of physical aggression, to classroom disruptions due to pupils’ non-compliance such as: refusing the teacher’s instructions, swearing, shouting, talking loudly and/or at inappropriate times, throwing pens or paper and leaving seats when asked not to.

Issues of discipline have to be set *alongside* a performative curriculum for which attainment targets have been set by the local authority. The latter was a major issue. The school had been targeted by the local education authority due to its failure to meet these targets and therefore needing special intervention to raise pupils’ attainment scores. The head teacher noted this as a concern for the school as a whole but one of the year four teachers also explained the pressure this placed on her class; a tension between teaching children who were falling significantly behind ‘the basics’ and ensuring that National Curriculum targets were met at each stage. The behavioural problems in the class further exacerbated this tension, as will be seen, in that it contributed to hindering progress in reaching targets.

In year four, pupils were grouped on the basis of prior attainment within the class for numeracy and literacy. Occasionally, the class was split for some subjects where the two top prior attainment groups worked in a separate room from those in the bottom two groups. Apart from these occasional lessons, the classes almost always worked with their registration class teacher. Each class also had a full time Learning Support Assistant. While they were meant to assist pupils in terms of their learning, in practice they spend most of their time dealing with behavioural issues<sup>3</sup>.

Mrs Grey, the class-one teacher, used a variety of methods to encourage ‘positive’ behaviour as well as exercises to maintain focus in the class. These included activities, games and physical exercises; e.g. the class had a ‘behaviour thermometer’ on which the behaviour of the class was constantly monitored. Also, pupils were appointed as behaviour monitors and were invested with the power to reward other children. Despite the teacher being very experienced, there were regular episodes of

'misbehaviour' in most lessons and a good proportion of lesson time was regularly spent on classroom control. Nevertheless, the teacher reported that the class had improved since the beginning of the year when she had to draw lines on the floor for children to sit between to prevent them from poking and hitting each other during lesson time. Thus, behaviour management and the issue of 'misbehaviour' was a significant one in this class which the teacher characterised as 'very challenging', both in terms of behaviour and the spread of 'abilities' which ranged from children working at year one level to those working at the level of year five or six.

The two matched pupils in this class were Jack and Callum, both quiet and relatively high attaining. Perhaps predictably, they were rarely, if ever, reproached by the teacher for their behaviour. Callum was interviewed with his friends Daniel, Chloe and Joshua. Jack was interviewed with Jasmine, Katie and Tracey.

Class two was similar to class one in terms of disciplinary issues. However, here the teacher used a much less structured sanctioning and reward systems, although an equivalent if sometimes not a higher proportion of time and energy was spent on dealing with behavioural issues. The range of rewards was more limited and generally the class was given treats as a whole (such as watching a film) and there were none of the games and exercises present in class one. There was slightly more emphasis on the sanctioning system in this classroom, where bad behaviour was monitored on the white board. Children were often engaged in off-task activities and behaviours which were not accepted in the other classroom were often left unchecked here. This included children talking about off-task topics or leaving their seats for prolonged periods of time when they should be working.

The matched pupils here were Ben and Daisy. Both were considered by their teacher to be well behaved and average attainers. Ben was interviewed with James, Callum and Joseph. Daisy was interviewed with Katie, Lauren and Charlotte.

## **Rowan Primary School**

Rowan was a single entry high SES school situated near a small affluent village outside a large town. Its ethos was similar to Aspen in placing great emphasis on meeting children's individual needs. The school's intake was mainly mid and high SES, although there was also proportion of children with Special Education Needs, although this was primarily at Early Intervention stage<sup>4</sup>. The school had very few children with discipline problems and in year four there were few disruptions in the classroom. While the school's behaviour policy was also based on positive reinforcement, the reward system (which was scaled down in comparison with Aspen) was not used within the classroom as it was unnecessary. Significantly, the wealth of game and activities aimed solely at ameliorating children's behaviour in Aspen were absent in Rowan.

The class teacher at the time of the research seldom spent time in class dealing with discipline issues other than occasionally reprimanding specific pupils for minor incidences. The year four teacher characterised the class as *'a bit dim, but nice overall. But there are a few boys and other individuals who are very bright'*. Regarding the one pupil who regularly 'misbehaved', and who had a special needs statement, this was largely dealt with outside of the classroom, either directly with the child or the parent. Keeping up with government set attainment targets was not an issue in this school as attainment scores were sufficient.

The two matched pupils in this school were interviewed in the same group (as they were friends) with two other girls; the two matched pupils were also interviewed separately as a pair. A group of four boys (not matched pupils) were also interviewed as a group to maintain the sample's gender balance.

### **The 'ideal pupil' at Aspen – 'being an angel'**

Pupils at Aspen, who were interviewed, shared a clear view of the 'ideal pupil'. The concept centred on pupils being quiet and staying out of trouble. It very much focused on not 'misbehaving' and implied an ideal of a more passive pupil who 'does as they're told'. Also, when asked what they thought of their teacher, the first responses

of most children related to their teacher's reactions to children in the class misbehaving, by for example, shouting, banging a book or fist on the table, or being 'stroppy' or 'scary'. Secondary to this, in terms of the order of children's responses, focus was placed on being hard working, polite and helpful to the teacher. As Daniel, one of the interviewed pupils, described it, the ideal pupil had to be angelic:

When she [the teacher] looks at him, he has like angel rings...like an angel thing around his head... [she] gets sort of stuff out for the teacher instead of sort of like everyone just rushing to the door like that just pushing everyone out of the way. She'll like one of them. (Daniel, Aspen, class one)

I think he would be really happy with someone who was good and did what they were told and is quiet... (Daisy, class two)

Amelia: if a new boy or girl came into your class, how do you think your teacher would like them to be?

Chloe: she probably would like the new boy or girl to be, like, sensible, calm, good, listens good, well behaved...concentrates a lot and doesn't mess around on the carpet when they, like, get into school. (Aspen, class one)

While it was the case that most children placed emphasis on the behavioural characteristics of the 'ideal pupil', two Aspen pupils did emphasise other attributes, for example: *'You'd probably like them to be kind, caring and smart. That's what I think a teacher would like'* (Jack, Aspen, class one). These two pupils were both higher attaining pupils who were rarely pulled up for their behaviour. In general, however, the pupils interviewed emphasised the importance of good behaviour in which the ideal pupil was largely passive, doing what the teacher expected of them.

### **Rowan: being good – but not too good**

At Rowan, the high SES school, the concept of the 'ideal pupil' was not dominated by 'misbehaviour' as was the case at Aspen. While it did share some characteristics with the low SES school – being a hard worker and well behaved were also important here – the emphasis in Rowan was different. At Rowan, it was seen as desirable to be a

‘good, quiet, worker’ but also to be ‘clever and funny’. However, this had a gender dimension. For girls, being considerate was seen as an important characteristic of the ‘ideal pupil’ – helping others and being polite. Also, being well behaved although not being ‘too shy’, like Leah, was associated with the feminine ‘ideal pupil’. Some of the boys in particular saw themselves as closer to the ‘ideal pupil’ – being clever and relatively well behaved (but sometimes being told off) and the ability to ‘make funny banter’ (like Pollard’s (1985) ‘jokers’).

Alice: he’d like someone who’s polite

Leah: someone who’s not shy

Ellie: who takes care of other children...

Leah: not like me, because I’m extremely shy..

In our work he [the teacher] allows us to not make fun [of others] but do friendly banter  
(Mickey, boys group interview, Rowan)

William: it would be like a combination of someone like maybe me because I’m good at maths, English and someone who’s good at all subjects ... But like, we’re good at work, but we sometimes get told off

At Rowan, in contrast to Aspen, the ‘ideal pupil’ was more focused on pupils’ personality characteristics and the possession of qualities such as being ‘funny’ and ‘not too shy’ rather than their ability to simply behave well. The picture painted by Rowan pupils was of an ‘ideal pupil’ who was less passive than the Aspen equivalent. At Rowan the ‘ideal pupil’ showed a degree of humour and boisterousness, especially among the boys, whereas at Aspen, this concept was more about not being ‘naughty’ and not ‘misbehaving’.

The contrast between the constructions of the ideal pupil in these two schools is interesting when placed against the background of performative pedagogy, in that the testing culture has brought about tension and pressure at Aspen which is not at present at Rowan. This enabled a space to be created where there was the possibility for fun and in which pupils could express themselves.

## **The effects of regulative discourse and classroom cultures**

In order to understand the effects of the regulative discourses in the two schools it is important to contrast their differing cultures. In order to do so, three particular concepts helped to make the comparison: *blaming*, *labelling* and the *focus on time and time wasting*.

### **Blaming**

All our teachers are nice, it just depends on whether you're good (Chloe, Aspen, class one)

In Aspen, pupils perceived their teacher's treatment of them and other pupils to depend on their behaviour which pupils saw as having a direct influence on the teachers' mood and the way in which they spoke to pupils. From the perspective of pupils it was seen to be the sole determinant of how the teacher related to children, creating the possibility for a culture of blame.

Amelia: ... can you tell me what [your teacher] is like?

Joshua: sometimes she's a bit, like shouty...But other times, if you don't get on her nerves, she's a bit nice.

Daniel: it depends, if you're sort of like annoying people and that lot, she's really, really annoyed and she shouts a lot...

(Group interview, Aspen, class one)

However, the idea of blame was re-enforced through the effect of episodes of 'misbehaviour' in the class. In children's perception, the teacher became cross if there was an episode of 'misbehaviour'. In class one where there were four in-class prior attainment groups, the two most able groups C and D occasionally worked in a separate room to the two lower attaining groups, A and B. In one particular lesson groups A and B had been doing ICT (Information and Communications Technology) and C and D were taken out for phonics.

One day, erm last week I think it was, we was all like...gonna learn about Narnia...And we was on this website...and then people that came back...who ruined it for the people that was already in the class. 'Cos Miss Grey had to shout...Before they came in...It was really nice. (Chloe, Aspen, class one)

We're all working really nicely and quietly and then they [group A and B] just come in an make it all horrible... (Callum, Aspen, class one)

There are two significant points about these episodes. As the pupils describe it, they themselves are active agents in the process of placing blame. However, the structural source of this blame is a grouping policy which leads to divisions between pupils and resentment. It is an example of the interrelationship between the regulative and instructional discourse within the context of the performative pedagogy.

In contrast, at Rowan the teacher was characterised by pupils in very different terms because of the differences in the importance of behaviour as an issue compared with Aspen. Here, the teacher was not seen as being in a bad mood (as described by interviewees in class two), but rather as 'funny' and 'not too strict' (see below). Seen in the light of the comparative lack of constant behavioural issues and disruptions at Rowan this is perhaps unsurprising. However, the way the teacher treated pupils was not seen by Rowan pupils as a direct result of their behaviour as at Aspen. The teacher was not seen to be prone to moods, as a reflection of how the class behaved, but rather was seen as having his own personal characteristics (similar to the 'ideal pupil) – e.g. being funny. There was, then, a quite different basis to the relationship between teacher and pupils.

Amelia: can you tell me what your teacher is like?

Leah: very strict, just like last year

Alice: and funny ...

Amelia: how about how he talks to the children in the class?

Sophie: In a funny way, sometimes when he is happy. And just when he is teaching in a normal voice ...

Ellie: when were doing fractions we had to look on the times-tables on the board and when he got the answer he said something really funny like 'praise the lord for learning my times-tables'!

Given the understanding that forms the basis of this relationship, pupils felt they could influence the teacher by making him happy, by displaying good social skills or co-operating with other pupils. Doing well academically also featured more prominently in these pupils' perceptions of pleasing their teacher. This is different to the sense of blame Aspen pupils felt in that Rowan pupils were able to actively influence their teachers as opposed to apportioning blame onto themselves or others.

Amelia: what pleases your teacher the most?

William: good work and good humour

Mickey: good behaviour and good work

(Rowan)

What makes your teacher happy?

Daniel: she's really happy when sort of like we get on with each other... and we don't sort of like fight in school

Joshua: she's really happy when me and Daniel just stay away from each other

Chloe: she's really happy when we're like all calm and we listen to what she's saying...

(Aspen, class one)

There was also a difference in the way the effects of misbehaviour were perceived by pupils in Aspen and Rowan. In the latter, children were shouted at or told off when 'misbehaving' as at Aspen, but this is where the similarity in perceptions end. While at Aspen, children saw an episode of misbehaviour as having the potential for setting off further episodes of misbehaviour followed by a change in the teacher's mood and hence treatment of pupils in both the short and long term, this did not seem to be the case at Rowan as exemplified in these exchanges:

Amelia: so what if someone has been naughty or has misbehaved, what happens then?

Ellie: they get shouted at

Leah: yeah

Amelia: and what about the rest of the class?

Ellie: they just sit there looking at it

Leah: staring off into space (Rowan)

Well, it's not all that bad when he shouts at people.. once he's been mad at someone, he usually counts to 20 – or 10 – and then he cools down and then he goes over to other people and helps them...he doesn't go over and shout at another kid (Mickey, Rowan)

The picture that emerged from Rowan is that pupils saw themselves and teachers as more autonomous in terms of issues related to misbehaviour and social control. The 'ideal pupil' concept was about personality and 'ability' rather than being a 'non-misbehaving' pupil as at Aspen. This was reflected in how Rowan pupils saw their relationship with the teacher. For example, one of the boys said he felt the teacher treated pupils as equals rather than as subjects:

He [the teacher] talks to us as if we were his equals...like if he was a governor he would talk to all of us as if we were also governors...(William, Rowan)

He felt the teacher would always speak to pupils as equals and allow them to express aspects of their personality – in the form of being a bit chatty and witty. However, this doesn't mean that the 'ideal pupil' concept was any less powerful at Rowan. Rowan pupils were just as aware of their perceived need to be 'funny' or 'not too shy' in order to be more of an 'ideal pupil' as Aspen pupils were of 'being an angel'.

While blame was attributed by and to the children at Aspen in these accounts (it may fall on their parents and home background in the view of teachers) a different locus of interpretation is possible, when placed in the context of the pressures placed on pedagogical interactions between pupils and teachers. This is particularly poignant considering the contrast between the different pressures that the low and high SES schools face in terms of testing and target setting.

## **Labelling**

In Aspen, there was a strong relationship between in-class grouping and behaviour in both classes. It is here that instructional and regulative pedagogy became particularly visible in the way that the perception of 'misbehaviour' was transformed into labelling of pupils. While children were not strictly seated in their prior achievement

groups, there was a tendency for misbehaviour to occur in the same part of the classroom where many children from the lower prior attainment groups were seated. In both classes, there were between four and six boys, all in the two lower prior attainment groups in literacy and numeracy, who consistently caused disruptions in the classroom. In class one, some of these pupils in the lowest prior attainment group, were often taken out of the classroom to work with the Learning Support Assistant, although this arrangement often had to be abandoned due to this type of behaviour<sup>5</sup>. Otherwise, children were seated in a horseshoe configuration and the frequently misbehaving boys were seated primarily along one side. In class two, children were seated in small groups, primarily based on friendship, where the frequently 'misbehaving' boys were spread between two or three groups, which also corresponded to the lower prior attainment groups.

This convergence between behaviour and in-class grouping was also evident in children's perceptions of their classmates. For example in relation to the split of ICT and maths, Jack and Callum in class one both spoke about the two lower prior attainment groups as containing 'all the naughty people'. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, Jack preferred the class when the 'naughty people' were taken out. Labelling was also re-enforced by differential rewards which pupils were acutely aware of. 'Good' children, primarily those in the two higher attainment groups, were rewarded by being allowed to bring toys in to the class. The 'naughty people' were rewarded, when they had not misbehaved, with stickers and money which was furthermore re-enforced by pupils acting as behaviour monitors.

If we want to give, like, the bad people stickers when they're being good, we're allowed. (Callum, Aspen, class one)

...You can say, Miss Grey, I think so and so should get a sticker because they've been really good and haven't been naughty most of the time (Jack, Aspen, class one)

Pupils are given an active role in labelling pupils according to behaviour and 'good' pupils are afforded privileged status in the labelling process. They not only reinforce who is a well behaved pupil, but also re-affirm their own status in light of the 'ideal

pupil' concept. Therefore, pupils are also active agents within Bernstein's regulative and instructional discourses; it is not only the teacher who decides what is 'good behaviour' and who is well behaved.

Labelling of pupils in relation to behaviour is also re-enforced through how teachers deal with 'misbehaviour'. A common story from pupils at Aspen was that the teacher would shout at the class when there had been disruption during a lesson. Because pupils who had not been involved had to endure this the teacher would either ask these pupils to cover their ears or apologise to them afterwards.

When like half of the class have been naughty, she tells the other half to like cover their ears, so that she doesn't shout at them (Chloe, Aspen, class one)

Again, this allowed both teachers and pupils to re-affix labels of 'naughty' and 'good' to themselves and others. Similarly, pupils from class one spoke of how their teacher apologised for having to stop the class to address behavioural issues: '*She [the teacher] sometimes says, "Sorry class I'm going to have to stop our lesson because some people are being really naughty..."*'. This is not only a process of labelling but also one of blaming with potential to engender feelings of unfairness on the part of children who have not been reprimanded for their behaviour for disrupting the lesson.

### **The focus on time and time-wasting**

Blame is also packaged as 'wasting time' because misbehaviour is seen as a disruption to time keeping. This relates to Bernstein's (2000) notion of 'pacing'. Here, the need for pupils to reach attainment targets according to the National Curriculum requires that a set timetable for learning is adhered to and constant disruption to it is seen as a threat. This was seen as a particularly imminent threat at Aspen where many year 4 children were not reaching the required targets for their age group. This pressure was expressed by teachers in their reprimanding of 'misbehaviour' and has from there been incorporated into pupils' perceptions of 'misbehaviour'.

Like when we're in ICT, say like if she lets erm C and D stay in, and A and B have to go

back...he like erm, A and B, they'd like moan and all that lot and then Miss Grey shouts at A and B and that wastes some of C and D's time...

In the following account of watching a film, this time in class two, the merging of blame, time wasting and unfairness can be seen.

Lauren: today he made us line up three times when we went to see the video ... first loads of people who weren't meant to stand next to each other stood next to each other

....

Katie: and he got in a strop

Amelia: so what do you think of that, having to line up three times?

Katie: Really, really annoying

Lauren: Really, really boring

Katie: and we do miss some of our playtime if some of the other people are being naughty

...

Katie: and it's just boring because we don't talk and everyone else does and we have to sit back down... we missed lots and lots of the film because we wasted time.

It is significant that the culture of labelling and time wasting and their relations to blame were present at Aspen in a way in which they were not Rowan. The relative lack of concern over issues of discipline meant that the pacing of lessons could keep up with that the teacher thought was demanded by the National Curriculum. How then did these cultures translate in pupils' views about whether it was impossible to approximate to pupils' views of the ideal pupil?

### **An impossible ideal**

It is questionable whether the pupils at Aspen actually thought it possible to approximate to the 'ideal pupil'. On the one hand, the concept was based on an almost perfect 'angel-like' personality of someone who is always quiet and keeps their head down, and on the other, even when pupils did primarily behave in this way, such as Daisy and Jack, the teacher sometimes reacted negatively towards them. They felt that no matter how 'good' they were, because of other children's bad behaviour, causing

the teacher to be angry or shout, they were not treated as if they were conforming to their perception of what an 'ideal pupil' is.

If someone was shouting and then Jack comes up with the register and said "Mrs Victor, here is the register, she'll be saying like "Don't show me it! I'm really furious now!"  
(Jasmine, Aspen, class one)

Most of the pupils interviewed did not see themselves as an approximation to the 'ideal pupil' either because they 'misbehaved' regularly (such as Ben's friends) or because they were 'not *always* quiet', such as Daisy (even if they were a lot of the time). These pupils had a very clear and mostly shared idea of what an 'ideal pupil' was, yet they knew that they did not match this, albeit to varying extents. This was with the exception of some of the boys at Rowan, the high SES school, who felt that they did fit the mould of their perception of the 'ideal pupil'. This was to be intelligent, mostly well behaved and with the ability to 'do funny banter'. It is unclear from these interviews whether the other pupils still strive to fit the 'ideal pupil' mould or whether they had 'given up'.

Conversely, some of the boys interviewed at Aspen were regularly in trouble for 'misbehaving' in school. These were the friends of one of the matched pupils, Ben, in class two. While they had a strong image of what the 'ideal pupil' was, they were not deterred from not conforming to this idea. The punishments for misbehaving were seen to be insufficient in terms of modifying behaviour and encouraging pupils to conform to the 'ideal pupil'. This suggests that pupils are conscious of not conforming and perhaps even making a decision not to (as in Willis' 'resistance'). This is possibly another reaction to not fitting the image of the 'ideal pupil'.

When [a new pupil] has been in the school a bit longer, they know the punishments and they probably won't really take any notice cos they can just be silly...'  
(James, Aspen, class two)

This raises the question: what effect does the feeling among pupils that they cannot meet the standards outlined in their perception of the 'ideal pupil' concept, have on

how they see themselves as pupils and their orientation to learning? This question will need to become the focus for future research to explore the full impact of 'misbehaviour' and discipline on pupils' learner identities.

## **Conclusion**

In theoretical terms this paper raised the question as to how Bernstein's notions of a performative pedagogy is to be understood: whether in structural terms such that it determines teachers' and pupils' responses or whether it provides a framework within which they can respond. Here, in order to make sense of the data, the mediating cultural concepts of blaming, labelling and time wasting were introduced and the way that pupils' and teachers' perspectives in the two schools related to these issues were analysed. A question for further research is whether low SES schools have similar cultures with respect to blame, labelling and time wasting or whether they can be different. A similar question can be asked of predominantly mid or high SES schools: is there generally an absence of disciplinary problems and accordingly of blame cultures? The school effectiveness literature suggests that such cultures can be transformed, however further research would be required as to whether this is the case and within the framework of a performative pedagogy.

Finally, as the construction of the 'ideal pupil' in the high SES school is markedly different to Aspen, it would seem that the SES composition of a school is likely to have a major impact on the construction of pupils' learner identities in the context of a target driven curriculum.

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## **Notes**

1. Pseudonym
2. Each child in the school is allocated to one of four 'houses' (teams) for which they can win points
3. From interview with Head Teacher and Class Teachers and classroom observation notes
4. Early Intervention refers to pupils who have very early stages of special education needs which are not severe enough to warrant a special needs statement
5. From class observation notes, literacy and numeracy lessons

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