DECP Trainee Education Psychologist (TEP) Conference 2016

Helping secondary school teachers to strengthen relationships with students

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HELPING SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

FROM A DECPsy THESIS, UCL, 2012-2015

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DEFINING TPRS

Hinde (1997 p.7): ‘A relationship makes it unnecessary to think too much about how you should behave’

Closeness and conflict (Pianta, 2001)

Proximity and influence (den Brok et al., 2010)

Empathy, warmth and encouraging pupils to think (Cornelius-White, 2007)
SIGNS OF SUCCESS?

…from the student-teacher relationship scale (Pianta, 2001)

• when I praise this pupil, they beam with pride
• dealing with this pupil [doesn’t drain] my energy
• the child will seek comfort from me when upset
• it’s easy to tune in to what the child is thinking
• the pupil openly shares feelings and experiences
TPR BI-CYCLE: EXPERIENCE GUIDES EXPECTATION

Teacher expectation about future interactions

Teacher-pupil interactions

Pupil expectation about future interactions
Brion-Meisels and Jones (2012, p. 55) ‘Every major theory of human development identifies human relationships as central’

Let’s think about the A B C

Affect - Learning is an emotionally testing process (Rustin 2011)

Pupil TPR ratings and anxiety (Murray & Greenberg, 2001)

Anxiety, heightened limbic activity, loss of executive functioning (Blakemore and Frith, 2005)
SIGNIFICANCE OF TPRS?

Behaviour - TPR = behaviour management (headteachers)
Teacher TPR ratings and behavioural adjustment, bidirectional relationship for better or for worse, especially worse (Murray & Murray, 2004)

Cognition - Well summarised by Martin & Dowson (2009), TPRs have been linked to a range of cognitive processes attributions, goals, self-efficacy (response to adversity) self-worth motivation (acting to promote or defend self-worth e.g. do I want praise?)

Attainment - Murray-Harvey 2010, Pianta et al., 2008, Hattie, 2009
WHOLE-CLASS APPROACHES

Context 1: Literature review suggested that interventions to improve TPRs were at a targeted, pupil-specific level.

Context 2: Literature review also found that there were fewer interventions in secondary schools despite evidence that they are poorer in secondary schools (e.g. Midgley, Feldlaufer & Eccles, 1989).

Context 3: Although no whole-class interventions were returned by the LR, a range of factors have been associated with the quality of TPRs...
FLUID PREDICTORS OF TPR QUALITY

Teacher-pupil relationship

- Individual contact
  - Quantity
  - Quality
  - Availability
  - Within teacher
- Group contact
  - Strong discipline
  - Consistent praise
  - Within pupil
  - Behaviour

Beliefs about pupil
Stress level
Teaching hours
WHOLE-CLASS APPROACHES

I used these factors as the basis of different TPR-building strategies for teachers to select based on their needs.

The critical realist view of causation (Sayer, 2000)
ACTION RESEARCH COMPONENT

DIAGNOSING
Teachers prioritise a relevant ‘fluid factor’

SPECIFYING LEARNING
Teachers reflect on aspects that they might take forward

ACTION PLANNING
Teachers plan how to target that factor

EVALUATING
Using the diary and the interviews to reflect on what worked and why

TAKING ACTION
Using the strategy long enough to effect change

(Susman: 1983)
PROcedure in a Nutshell

1. I did the literature review and prepared teacher notes
2. I recruited 2 schools via headteachers and pitched to staff
3. I met participants (7) for Q and A sessions (January)
4. Some participants used diaries to help themselves
5. Visit 1 unstructured observation, semi structured interview (March)
6. Visit 2 structured observation, interview 2, pupil focus group (using vignettes) in each school (July)
7. Data analysis (Applied thematic analysis- Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011) cross-reference findings with school documents
8. Write-up and offer of member check…
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1: What teaching practices do UK secondary school teachers and pupils find support positive TPRs?

2: What institutional, classroom and individual factors influence the suitability of approaches to build positive TPRs?

3: Do teachers and their pupils share similar opinions about practices that are intended to improve TPRs?

4: To what extent do the findings above appear to differ at the school level rather than between individuals?
RQ1: TPR BUILDERS BY TIME COST

Estimated teacher time demand

- Structured 1:1 contact in lessons
- 1:1 opportunities outside lessons

- Personalising interactions
- Collaborating with pupils
- Incorporating ‘fun’ in lessons
- Managing stress levels

- Enabling positive verbal balance
- Humour
- ‘Picking your battles’
- Praise
- Communicating expectations
- Transparent practice
- Openness about self
- Showing interest in pupils
TEACHING AS PARENTING?

Unclear boundaries and expectations

Positive and warm interactions

Positive TPR building

Risk of low pupil respect for teacher

Risk of pupils feeling harshly treated

Risk of pupils feeling hurt and confused

Clear boundaries and expectations

Negative and cold interactions
RQ2: INFLUENCING FACTORS

...as a teacher’s ecosystem.
RQ 3-4: TEACHER-PUPIL AND BETWEEN SCHOOL CONTRAST

1. Teachers were more likely to endorse approaches if they made less demand on their time (and attention)

2. Pupils were more likely than teachers to favour autonomy-supporting approaches (e.g. collaboration) or methods that increased the quantity of 1:1 contact

3. Pupils were equally aware as teachers (or more) of why good approaches could fail in the wrong classroom

4. The selective, suburban school had a more individualistic and academic ethos, which needed to be accounted for

5. Selective school pupils liked more personal engagement with staff, less harsh discipline and strict meritocracy

6. Non-selective school teachers did not attempt to increase the quantity of individual contact with pupils
FINDINGS IN A NUTSHELL

1. TPR interventions *can* be whole-class in secondary schools
2. They do not *necessarily* demand much teacher time
3. They do all require instinct / reflection / judgment
4. Some may work best at the request of pupils
5. Some teachers need leadership support to prioritise TPRs
6. “OFSTED should be given a copy of the signs of success” (view of one participant)

Without consistent, active prioritisation by leaders, the steps that may improve teacher-pupil relationships are unlikely to be viable for most secondary teachers.
1. *Plan, do, review plus?* Action research model could be used to support teachers develop TPRs or work towards other changes.

2. *Importance of making suggestions to school leaders.* Although EPs may feel more secure recommending targeted interventions to SENCOs and CTs.

3. *TPRs as a focus risk and resilience factor in casework.* If TPRs are as influential as research suggests and can be improved, they should be a focus during information gathering and outcome planning.

4. *Pupil focus groups to inform policy?* Could we suggest focus groups as a method for making sure school policies are tuned in to what secondary school children need? Pupils may be more aware than adults think.

5. *Informing the OFSTED agenda:* Are psychologists doing enough to connect our research with the practices used to judge and advise schools?
THOUGHTS FOR TEPS

1. Pick a subject close to your heart, even if you’ve studied it before or think you might have nothing to add

2. Be reasonable with yourself and your participants in terms of the scale and feasibility of your design

3. Try to find at least one interesting nugget about concepts within your study (e.g. topic, analytical method) that you could discuss socially (at a push)

4. Leave extra time for data analysis, especially qualitative. The insights that you have about your findings can grow over time, and you can test out different conclusions

5. To save time formatting, learn how to use styles, tables of contents and lists of figures in Word and consider buying software for managing references (but check the lists!)

6. Generally nerve-wracking, viva and corrections are also an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the work
for references, questions or general conversation about teacher-pupil relationships: wflb22@gmail.com
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