Research

Fractured Identities: Exploring engagement and disengagement in the process of lifelong learning

Kym MacFarlane & Karen Noble, Griffith University, Australia

Abstract

In early childhood education and care, research indicates that quality experiences for young children are a result of the partnership between committed professionals who facilitate collaborative, high-quality programs and dedicated parents who are interested and involved in their child’s educational development (Stonehouse, 1994; Hutchins & Sims, 1999; Carr, 2003; Moss, 2003). Parent involvement in schooling is considered in post-modern times to be an antidote to failure, i.e., children are more likely to succeed if parents are actively involved (Ball & Vincent, 2001; Popkewitz, 2003). It is reasonable to argue that children’s disengagement can be a result of lack of interest by parents (Limerick, 1988; Education Queensland, 1999). The authors question this point arguing that, while effective partnerships are important, they do not always result in positive experiences for children in the schooling process from infancy to adulthood. In this paper, the authors examine the relationship between parent engagement in schooling and children’s success or failure as lifelong learners. The authors also use aspects of post-structuralist theory - particularly notions of problematisation, categorisation and thinking otherwise (Foucault, 1984c) - to argue that how children are produced as learners exerts a greater influence over their engagement or disengagement in the process of formal learning. Furthermore, it is argued that there are many other factors to consider when examining engagement of learners in the schooling process (MacNaughton, 2003). Narratives of children’s experiences are used to illustrate the formation of their identities as learners and the way in which these identities contribute to engagement, or otherwise, in the lifelong learning process.
Introduction
Currently, in schooling in Queensland, there is discussion about the disengagement of adolescents from the learning process (Education Queensland, 2003a, 2003b). This issue of disengagement has caused concern, as it is feared that for individuals to become lifelong learners who participate as ethically responsible members of the community (Rose, 1999, 2000), positive schooling experiences are crucial (Education Queensland, 2003a). At present, this issue of disengagement is being addressed within the focus on the middle years of schooling. It is believed that intervention at this time may have a positive impact on the disengagement process (Education Queensland, 2003a). Moreover, it has been argued previously that parent engagement in the schooling process affects the ability of children to succeed in schooling (Ball & Vincent, 2001; Bourdieu, 2001; Popkewitz, 2003). To assume this is to contend that effective parent engagement in the schooling process is a necessary component in relation to the engagement of children. Thus, parents who are interested and involved in their children’s schooling pave the way for their children to engage and succeed in the process.

The authors of this paper argue that this is not necessarily the case. While it is clear that effective parent engagement in the schooling process does affect the engagement of children to some extent, parents’ participation in relation to their children does not necessarily equal success. The authors also contend that addressing the issue of disengagement during the middle years of schooling denies the possibility that disengagement occurs at a much earlier stage for many children. It is possible to argue that the disengagement of children from schooling can begin during early childhood and that disengagement can occur regardless of the participation and interest of parents.

Formation of identity
In order to illustrate the significance of the above issues, a narrative approach is used to highlight how disengagement can occur. Two stories are used to contest how the present understanding of disengagement is produced. The two stories used in this paper depict children at different stages of the schooling process. The journeys of these two children act as a means of exploring some of the consequences that can result for parents and children in relation to disengagement in the schooling process.

Maddison’s story
Maddison is eight years of age and is in Year 3 at a small, regional school in Queensland. She is one of six children in her family, with three older and two younger siblings. Her mother works full time to support her family. Maddison’s mother did not have the support of an extended family, due to demographic

---

1 The authors wish to highlight that the notion of parent engagement is of high priority in this article. We acknowledge that it is not the only focus of the article, but would like to point out that it exists in research as a major contributor to children’s success and failure in the schooling process (Ball & Vincent, 2001; Popkewitz, 2003). As such, parent engagement deserves considerable mention in this paper.
isolation. From an early age, Maddison has attended childcare along with her siblings and so has had a significant amount of experience in care and education contexts. Our attention to Maddison’s story begins with her attendance at a state preschool.

As an independent child, Maddison demonstrated engagement in the learning process from the outset. She was a self-directed learner, who was able to plan, develop and implement her ideas in a constructive and positive way. She also had the ability to connect her learning experiences in order to build upon existing knowledge and experiences. For example, Maddison was very interested in print and readily drew on this knowledge in her play. In an example of such interest, Maddison was engrossed in developing a hairdressing experience with a group of children. Her attention was drawn to the fact that ‘clients’ were phoning for appointments but these were not being recorded. She immediately rectified this by going to the resource room and acquiring a diary. Being aware of the date she proceeded to find the corresponding ‘number’. Very quickly she realised that there were many numbers the same, so she then asked an adult to tell her the relevant month. On receiving the information, she then acknowledged that that particular month started with ‘M’ and began to look for that letter. From then on, all appointments were recorded on the appropriate day. She used her knowledge of time to work out corresponding days and times for each client. Additionally, in order to record the names of the clients, she again used her phonetic awareness to identify each child’s name on the wall and then copied these names into her diary. She was not happy for the other children to simply scribble names into the diary, so she demonstrated the process that she was following many times, in order that others should also implement her process. She not only ensured that the process was followed, she also explained the way in which she was able to identify each child’s name to the others, so in this way she was able to externalise and articulate her understanding.

This example is an illustration of Maddison’s engagement in the learning process. Here, she shows that she is a self-directed, interested and involved learner (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1996; Vygotsky, 1987) whose cognitive development indicates that she can transfer knowledge from one experience to another. She can also teach others and scaffold their development (Vygotsky, 1987) to achieve desired results. Maddison is demonstrating strong verbal, linguistic, interpersonal, logical-mathematical and intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1983, 1995, 1999). This incident occurred in March, indicating that her cognitive and interpersonal abilities were well developed and progressive for this stage in her schooling.

Maddison’s involvement in this experience was pleasurable, both for her and for the other children. She could engage other learners with enthusiasm, even encouraging less interested participants to engage at a higher level. Clearly, then, Maddison is demonstrating engagement in the learning process. She appears intrinsically motivated and seeks new knowledge to further her own learning. These characteristics suggest that Maddison has been highly supported in her learning and has experienced learning environments that have
encouraged the development of independent, free-thinking skills.

It would not be unreasonable to assume that Maddison comes from a family that encourages her learning and exploration and, consequently, furthers her development. However, this is not the case. While Maddison’s mother obviously cares for her children, she admits to spending very little time with her younger children, due to a very demanding schedule. Maddison’s mother not only works full time, but also has heavy sporting commitments with her older children. This leaves her very little time to interact with and support Maddison in her learning. In fact, Maddison tends to organise and supervise her younger siblings. Research suggests that such a situation would not necessarily be viewed as optimal for Maddison to develop highly effective cognitive and interpersonal skills (Gardner, 1999; Moss, 2003; Vygotsky, 1987). In fact, this example suggests that Maddison’s mother could not be categorised as engaged with her child’s learning, yet Maddison is a highly engaged learner.

It could be argued that Maddison is engaging in learning as a result of her experience in a high-quality learning environment. However, Maddison’s progression into schooling does not necessarily bear this out. Maddison’s childcare experience was mixed, in that continuity of care was problematic. High staff turnover and high numbers of casual staff were a constant issue in her experience of childcare (Hutchins & Sims, 1999). Additionally, Maddison’s progress into formal schooling was not highly successful. In Maddison’s first year of schooling, successful engagement was produced in terms of formality and propriety (Macfarlane, 2004). As such, Maddison was required to approach her learning in a more formal and instrumental manner (Prout, 2003), engaging ‘successfully’ via normalised, discursively produced notions of ‘success’ and ‘failure’. Macfarlane (2004) argues that such proper engagement is necessary in order to achieve success in the schooling process. Children who are unable to develop the necessary skills to achieve success in predetermined, normalised categories (Foucault, 1979) cannot engage positively with the schooling process (Popkewitz, 2004). Thus, Maddison’s learning environments were not necessarily promoting the open, self-directed and active learning that suited Maddison’s preferred learning style.

Popkewitz’s (2000) work is useful here in providing an understanding of how children such as Maddison engage in the schooling process. Popkewitz (2004) speaks to this point in terms of the ‘cosmopolitan child’. According to Popkewitz, the cosmopolitan child is a ‘problem-solver’ and is ‘unfinished’ - produced by the rhetoric of the lifelong learner who is ‘flexible, continuously active, and a person who works collaboratively in a decentralised world’ (2004, p. 198). Popkewitz’s (2004) understanding of the cosmopolitan child derives from the US context, but its relationship to the Australian context cannot be underestimated. In Australia, or in like countries, where micro-economic and market forces align with proper or quality schooling (Ball 2003; Meadmore & McWilliam, 2001), the importance of teaching generic skills and neo-liberal notions of success are part of rhetorical shifts that produce community understanding of what constitutes proper
schooling (Macfarlane, 2004). In this way, children’s success in the schooling process is produced in terms of these notions. Thus, Maddison - who has well-developed problem-solving capabilities - learns quickly that to achieve success she must perform in particular ways and at particular levels (Meadmore & McWilliam, 2001; McWilliam, 2002).

For Maddison, however, this success comes at a cost. From early in her first year of schooling, Maddison began to visit her preschool on a daily basis. Each morning before going to school, Maddison would call into the preschool for a ‘cup of tea’. During this time, she would interact with the teacher and teacher aide and tell them about the previous day at school. She would also take the opportunity to creatively experience the learning she had previously enjoyed in this environment, sometimes carrying these ideas over for extended periods of time. Maddison would sometimes relate these experiences to what she was learning in the classroom and would creatively express her learning in ways that were not permitted in the classroom, as they did not represent proper learning. Thus, Maddison needed to repeat her preschool experience where self-directed and child-initiated learning was negotiated in order to cope with the ‘formal’ schooling experience that represented proper learning.

Additionally, as Maddison’s mother was not engaged in her learning, Maddison had no other avenue to explore her experience in schooling. The preschool, then, became a vehicle for dealing with the difficult process of constraining her preferred learning style. For Maddison to achieve success in schooling and to limit the stresses associated with the experience, she needed to engage properly in the formal schooling process. Maddison’s identity as a learner, then, was produced by an ability to achieve success according to normalised understandings. To do so, she needed to curb her preferences and perform in areas that were accorded value. At this stage (in Year 3), Maddison still goes to the preschool on most days and is negotiating the schooling process successfully, using the strategies she has employed. However, not all children are able to negotiate this problem successfully.

Liam’s story

Liam is currently 14 years of age and in Year 9 at a private boys’ school in a metropolitan area in Queensland. He is the last of five children who are reasonably close in age. He lives with both parents who are working professionals. From the age of three, Liam attended quality early childhood centres, eventually moving to a multi-aged government school with a strong reputation for individualised learning. Both Liam’s parents were highly involved in his schooling. Liam’s mother was particularly involved in the school as president of the Parents and Citizens Association (P and C) for six years. In addition to normalised categories of support, Liam’s mother fostered, within the P and C, alignment to the ethos and principles of the school and its administrative staff. As such, Liam’s mother was highly engaged in his schooling to the point of seeking out preferred methods of teaching that allowed him to negotiate his own learning to some degree. In Popkewitz’s (2002) 2

2 It is clear that Maddison is going back to pre-school for reaffirmation and acknowledgement of her learning style.
terms, Liam’s mother was successfully ‘pedagogicalised’ i.e., she was in harmony with the values and ethics that were espoused by the staff of the school. These values and ethics privileged social democratic approaches (Karmel, 1973) that highlighted child-centred pedagogy and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 1995, 1999). Thus, Liam’s identity as a learner was produced by an individualised program that allowed for multiple understandings of success, as defined by social democratic discourse:

Better ways will not necessarily be the same for all children or for all teachers. This is an important reason for bringing responsibility back into the school and for allowing it to be exercised in ways that enable a hundred flowers to bloom rather than wither. All-round improvements are more likely to emerge from the experimentation with different approaches than from centralised manipulation of change. (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1981, para 2.10)

However, from an early age, Liam did not engage successfully with the schooling process. He did not achieve success according to normalised, neo-liberal or social democratic understandings. For Liam, school was a place he needed to go, rather than a place where enjoyable learning occurred. Reports from teachers indicated that Liam was not focussed on his work and tended to be distracted easily. Liam’s mother addressed this issue several times with teaching staff. As Liam tended to excel in bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 1999), his mother asked for his program to reflect this. However, the school was unable to accommodate this request, as this type of ability was catered for in older grades only.

Consequently, Liam’s parents re-evaluated their decision, based on his performance and enjoyment of sport. Even though Liam had the opportunity to engage in sport outside of school, his parents decided to send him to a school where sport could be a large part of his schooling experience. Prior to entry at Year 5, Liam was required to undergo a testing procedure to ascertain how he was developing overall. This procedure indicated that Liam’s skills of focus and concentration were strong, explaining his ability to participate successfully in particular sports. He scored very poorly in literacy though.

While Liam’s initial experience of this new school was pleasurable and successful, slowly the situation began to deteriorate. By the end of Year 7, Liam was disengaging from the schooling process. In Liam’s terms, the work was ‘too hard’ and he did not see himself as able to achieve high grades. Although Liam was able to achieve reasonable success by his admission to high level sporting teams, his identity as a learner was once again affected by his inability to achieve normalised success in the classroom. His success as a sportsman did not replace the kudos gained from normalised success in the formal schooling process.

Once again, Popkewitz (2004) adds a dimension to this point in terms of the ‘alchemy’ of school subjects. Popkewitz (2004) describes this process as the movement of school subjects from discipline to pedagogy. Curriculum decisions within the schooling process are produced by discourses that constitute ‘true’ science and maths,
according to pedagogical - not disciplinary - understanding (Macfarlane, 2004). As Foucault (1980) attests, discourses produce objects and subjects in terms of propriety, leading to ‘regimes of truth’ that govern the behaviour and performance of individuals. Popkewitz’s (2004) view aligns with Foucault’s (1980), as he refers to the two social spaces - the disciplinary and the cultural - in which the disciplines engage and interpret their ‘truth’. Popkewitz (2004) states that these two spaces are ignored as school subjects are ‘alchemised’ from discipline to pedagogy. Thus, normalised understandings of what constitutes these subjects are presented as pedagogy and, consequently, are represented as truth in relation to the disciplines (Macfarlane, 2004).

Children are expected to engage with this truth and their success or failure is constituted in relation to the pedagogical content of the subject and not the understandings of the discipline. Success is related to pedagogical truth. In this understanding, the child exists as ‘unproblematised’. That is, the child exists as always able, regardless of circumstance, distinctions and differentiations between families, which are not taken into account (Popkewitz, 2000, 2004). All children are produced as ‘able’ and thus have the ability to achieve success regardless of personal circumstances, interest, competence or pedagogical relevance (Macfarlane, 2004). The categories by which children achieve success are not neutral but divisive, positioning children on a ‘continuum of value’ between ‘success’ and ‘at risk’ (Popkewitz, 2000, p. 22).

In Liam’s case, successful engagement in the schooling process was still produced in terms of normalised understandings, regardless of his experience of child-centred pedagogy and the successful engagement of his parents in his first school. At this stage (in Year 10), Liam has almost completely disengaged from school. He does not consider learning a pleasurable experience. When asked why he does not enjoy reading, he responds, ‘It takes too long. I can watch a movie and that only takes a couple of hours, why do I need to read a book’? Such disengagement has now extended to his sporting participation, making him unwilling to participate in some instances and affecting his performance significantly in others.

It should be noted that issues of gender might well affect Liam’s disengagement in the schooling process. There is substantial research concerning the differences between genders in engagement processes (Davies & Banks, 1995; Spender, 2004). As a result of this research, efforts are being made to develop strategies to assist boys to engage more successfully in the schooling process, as it is feared that they are not as proficient as girls, particularly in the area of literacy.

However, Spender (2004) provides a different perspective on this issue. Spender (2004) attests that boys are doing better today with respect to literacy than they were thirty or forty years ago. Additionally, Spender (2004) states that boys’ underachievement in schooling contrasts with their successes in other areas of endeavour. Spender attests that, ‘…the further boys leave school behind, the greater their levels of success’ (2004, p. 21). Spender
(2004) argues that rather than being behind girls in engagement and in literacy skills, boys are ahead; and that ‘the problem’ is with educators, rather than the boys. For example, boys (like Liam) are often very skilled in digital literacy and their teachers not always acknowledge sufficiently that this is a useful skill. Digital literacy differs from the print literacy that is tested in the school setting; and the behaviour that accompanies digital literacy is different from that which accompanies print literacy. As Spender states:

the Net kids don’t sit still, they aren’t quiet and they aren’t ordered and disciplined. Their computer behaviour is seen by many teachers as a discipline problem, and their noise and activity as a lack of concentration. For these young people are not only ‘taking in’ information, they are constantly ‘sending it out’. The key difference between print and digital is that the computer is interactive (2004, p. 21).

Thus, the culture of school is not attractive to the ‘Net generation’ (Spender, 2004, p. 21), as their digital literacy is generally not valued and they are forced to conform to traditional styles of learning. The reality of the classroom for boys is that they can, ‘hardly wait to get back to the real thing – doing the digital’ (Spender, 2004, p. 21). Spender’s (2004) interpretation may well be relevant to Liam’s engagement in the schooling process. According to his parents, Liam is heavily focussed on computer games and digital literacy in general. Engaging with traditional literacy holds no appeal for Liam. Consequently, school is seen as irrelevant and boring.

As a consequence of Liam’s disengagement, his parents have also disengaged with schooling. This is evidenced by a type of ‘parent fatigue’ (Macfarlane, 2004) that has resulted from continued high-level engagement in the schooling process over an extended period of time. Liam’s parents no longer engage with schooling in a pleasurable way. They are ‘unfree’ to disengage completely, in that particular forms of engagement remain necessary, but they are nonetheless tired of trying to encourage Liam to achieve in school, in a normalised way.

**Fractured identities: exploring consequences**

For both Maddison and Liam, there are significant consequences to participating in schooling on an engagement continuum. Both children are experiencing lack of interest and fatigue; schooling is hardly a pleasurable experience; and both children are experiencing significant stress (Macfarlane, 2004). For Maddison, this stress is evidenced by her need to continue to engage in ‘preschool experiences’ in an effort to reconnect with some of the pleasure she associated with learning. For Liam, his inability to achieve normalised success has led to feelings of failure that affect his ability to engage in lifelong learning (Falk, 1999; Meadmore & McWilliam, 2001). The present focus on lifelong learning in schooling makes failure much ‘more damning for those who choose not to engage in it’ (Meadmore & McWilliam, 2001, p. 41). As such, Liam’s
lack of pleasure in the learning process may well create negative effects on his self esteem in further and later learning experiences.

Maddison’s categorisation as successful in formal schooling is contingent upon her ability to ‘think otherwise’ (Foucault, 1984c). While Maddison can maintain her strategy of seeking pleasure in her learning outside of the boundaries of the classroom, her success will possibly continue. However, if this strategy proves to be unsustainable, then disengagement is a possible response. Liam’s parents’ strategy around sport has proved unsuccessful. Additionally, Liam has not achieved success as he has managed the process of his schooling by ‘playing the same game differently’ (Foucault, 1984b). Liam cannot opt out, so disengagement becomes a way of playing the schooling game differently.

Current responses to this issue of disengagement are positioned in the middle schooling arena, yet Maddison’s and Liam’s stories show that disengagement in schooling can occur much earlier. To address the problems that their stories illustrate during middle school is to do ‘too little, too late’.

**Research questions**

These narratives illustrate that there are significant questions about disengagement in schooling that have not yet been well researched. While the authors acknowledge that inherent differences (i.e. gender and age) between the two subjects might well contribute to differences in their engagement, other significant issues arise as a result of this careful examination.

**Issues of context**

Effective partnerships between parents and educators are clearly not sufficient or determinant. Children may engage or disengage at various stages of their schooling, regardless of significant cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 2001). Additionally, partnerships need to focus on context, i.e. position in family, family circumstances and demographics. Such partnerships in schooling are produced currently in terms of propriety, i.e. proper parents engage in the schooling process as ‘ethically responsibilised’ members of school communities (Rose 2000). In this way, ‘effective’ or ‘proper’ parents align harmoniously with the values and ethics that determine membership of the school community. Thus, in an effort to be categorised as ‘good’, parents become ‘pedagogicalised’ (Popkewitz, 2002) as they endeavour to ensure their children’s successful progress in the process of schooling. The expectation is that parents can engage in the process of schooling in ways that are deemed proper, i.e. in ways that are always already framed without reference to other circumstances. As such, context is not always considered sufficiently.

Furthermore, parents’ engagement in schooling signifies particular levels of performance. At present, success and failure in schooling are produced by discourses that privilege corporate, managerial and market approaches, as well as discourses of micro-economic reform. Thus, to be an ‘interested and engaged’ parent, one must be sufficiently corporate, i.e. one must accept the present discursive organisation of schooling, which privileges competition and performance, as proper. To do so, parents must engage sufficiently to
ensure that children are performing well, particularly in relation to the instrumental components of the curriculum that signify ‘real’ success.

The consequences of such high levels of engagement can be viewed in terms of parent fatigue (Macfarlane, 2004). If higher and higher levels of performativity are required to be a ‘proper parent’ or an ‘ethically responsibilised community member’, then these categories may prove difficult to maintain. As parents are required to engage in ways that signify increased levels of competence and performance, then this delimits how they may engage. As such, engagement in schooling both constrains and enables (Foucault, 1979, 1984b) parents; and both constraint and enablement may cause fatigue (Macfarlane, 2004).

Liam’s story illustrates such parent fatigue. Liam’s parents are fatigued due to prolonged periods of high-level engagement that did not produce the desired results. Additionally, as Liam is the youngest of their five children, this high-level performance has taken its toll. Liam’s parents are resisting ‘proper’ engagement, i.e. they are resisting notions of propriety in relation to their parenting and their engagement with the schooling process. Thus, Liam’s parents are engaging-in-resistance (Macfarlane, 2004). For them, disengagement is not possible, and opting out is a form of resistance (Foucault, 1984b). However, Liam’s family context is not accounted for in accounts of his and his parents’ engagement.

**Issues of intervention**

Interventions need to focus on context. Thus, an individualised approach is necessary to address some of the aspects of what is understood to be disengagement. Clearly, blanket approaches cannot address fully the issues of time or space that contribute to perceived disengagement in learning. While it may not be possible to completely individualise intervention, insufficient attention has been paid to this significant issue across the years of schooling. Concentrating on the middle years of schooling may miss some children.

**Issues of equity**

The discursive organisation of schooling that privileges corporate, managerial, market and micro-economic approaches produces, in turn, notions of success and failure that contribute to inequity. The instrumental approaches (Prout, 2003) privileged by such neo-liberal responses to schooling do not allow for multiple opportunities for measuring success. Instead, such approaches assume that all children are able to achieve success, regardless of circumstance (Macfarlane, 2004). This contention does not take into account the effect of social and cultural capital on successful performance in schooling. As Bourdieu (2001) attests, cultural capital can be misrecognised as competence. Thus, children may appear incompetent when they are actually ‘unfree’ to achieve success within the current discursive organisation of schooling.

**Issues of propriety**

Normalised constructions of propriety are aligned with particular levels of performance. As such, performativity (Ball, 2003) relates to engagement in the schooling process. In the context of the
‘alchemy’ of school subjects (Popkewitz 2004), certain levels of performativity may determine pedagogical success, yet be unrepresentative of disciplinary understanding. Thus, success in schooling may not necessarily lead to success in higher education or in expert fields.

Issues of lifelong learning

The current discursive organisation of schooling produces particular constructions of lifelong learning. In corporate, managerial and micro-economic terms, lifelong learning is a necessary task, rather than a pleasurable experience. Falk (1999: p. 7) attests to this, referring to lifelong learning as, ‘largely a project of economic, social and epistemological recuperation dedicated to delimiting rather than expanding the subjectivities of learners who are exposed to it’. Falk states that the corporate focus on lifelong learning produces learning as an attractive commodity, disassociating it from the process of schooling, to ensure that individuals participate in it to exist in the category of ‘ethically responsibilised’ community members (Rose, 2000). However, this disassociation does not necessarily extend to children’s view of themselves as learners. As schooling is produced as a place where normalised learning occurs, failure in schooling can be produced as failure in learning. Children who experience failure in the process of learning as produced by normalised understandings of success, may regard ‘lifelong learning’ as lifelong failure unless they can somehow use other successful experiences with learning to reconceptualize this notion.

Issues of resilience

Further research is necessary with to understand how resilience contributes to success in the schooling process. That is, how do some children succeed where others do not? As we saw, Maddison is able to develop strategies to enjoy learning and still succeed in the process of schooling; but Liam does not appear motivated to engage in this way. Thus, research needs to explore how children can become better learners. Claxton (2004, p. 2) suggest that children need to be taught ‘learnacy’; and that;

- growing more intelligent is not just a matter of learning a few techniques, or even mastering some new skills, like ‘critical thinking’. It is as much to do with attitudes, beliefs, tolerances and values. And these change more slowly. You can’t change someone’s interest in learning, or their ‘stickability’, overnight. But, schools and classrooms have systematic, cumulative influences, as surely as rivers wear away their banks.

Claxton (2004) states that our view of intelligence tends to lead people to feel ashamed when they find things difficult. Thus, children’s understanding of themselves as learners can be negative if they are ashamed, rather than challenged, when they do not know an answer. The development of resilience, then, is an important influence on how children understand themselves as intelligent. Claxton states that intelligence should be defined in Piaget’s terms as, ‘knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do’ (Claxton, 2004). Understood in this way, intelligence is a function of resilience and determination, rather than of success in schooling. As
such, resilience can be viewed as a skill that can be taught in terms of ‘attitudes, beliefs, emotional tolerances and values’ (Claxton, 2004, p. 2).

Conclusion
The above-mentioned issues highlight the need for further research about how children engage in the process of schooling. Maddison’s and Liam’s stories illustrate inconsistencies in how successful engagement in the schooling process is perceived and understood at present. It is evident that ‘learning is a much more complex and variegated process that schooling has traditionally assumed’ (Claxton, 2004, p. 4). Thus, present understandings of success and failure in the learning process need to be reconceptualised and deconstructed in order to tease out some of the issues and consequences for children’s and parents’ engagement in the schooling process. The authors of this paper argue that these issues - context, intervention, propriety, lifelong learning and resilience - are not considered sufficiently in present attempts to understand how successful engagement in the schooling process by parents and children is produced.

References


Falk, C. (1999). Sentencing learners to life: retrofitting the academy for the


