

SECTION FOUR: THEMES

Having set the scene for our thematic analysis through case studies of selected children and accounts of the three schools in which we conducted research, we begin the ‘Themes’ Section by looking more closely at numeracy practices at school. In keeping with the general principle running throughout this book, we will keep in mind home practices as we look at school and then, in Chapter 7, keep in mind school practices as we look more closely at homes. Chapter 8 then focuses on the relationship between schools and homes. In the concluding Chapter 9 of the book we set out possible explanations for low achievement in numeracy that have emerged from the research.

In the Case Study Chapters we focussed on three children, one from each of the schools we researched: Seth from Mountford, Kim from Tarnside and Anne from Rowan. In the Themes Section we will call further upon the information we have from these children and to some extent count upon the readers’ acquaintance with them. But in addition, we will bring in examples from other children in the study. From Mountford we will draw especially on evidence from Kerry, a girl from a relatively poor family, who was ranked lower in her class in both literacy and numeracy than Seth and was seen by the teachers across the three years of our visits to be not very ‘engaged’; Lenny, a boy who was in a higher band according to the teacher’s baseline assessments and whose family seemed to have more financial resources, providing him for instance with a computer and elaborate software on which we comment; and Kay, a middle attainment child whose family had been through a rough patch but whose desire to please her teachers and to relate well to her parents was of particular interest.. At Tarnside, in addition to Kim, the focus of the Case Study in Chapter 4b, we have already discussed Darris, who was successful in school, and her mother, Ruby, who had developed a good relationship with some of Darris’ class teachers; and Rick who was one of the ‘unsettled’ children we noted, and whose mother Maureen’s response to teachers was different than that of Ruby, but who was doing well in literacy and numeracy. We also provide a telling example from the home background of Aaysha, a young girl of Pakistani origin whose parents had recently sought asylum in England and had temporarily at least shifted from middle class relative affluence to a state of poverty and who were struggling to find appropriate work. From Rowan, we have focused on Anne in the Case Study (Chapter 4c) and here we also draw upon material from Darianne, a child listed as average in numeracy for her class and who incorporated into her play features of formal education; and Eve, a friend of Anne’s and whose mother, Jo, was active in the Parent Teachers Association.

The implications of all of this for policy, pedagogy and curriculum might, we argue be considerable and we draw some of these out more explicitly in the Conclusion. But, before addressing these issues we feel it is important for those engaged in such decisions to understand from within the complex relationships, meanings and social practices in which pupils, carers and teachers are engaged. The combination of the detailed case studies in Chapter 4 and of thematic analyses building on such data in Chapter 5 will, we hope, provide a sounder basis on which to develop such policy discussion.