

CATECHETICS OBSERVED IN MATHEMATICS CLASSROOMS

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During an audit of the teaching of mathematics within a group of schools spanning the age-range 4 to 16 years, attention was paid to observing the 'catechetics' of the lesson, i.e. the use of question-and-answer interactions as a means of teaching, and its inverse, the students' use of question-and-answer with their teacher and their peers in order to enhance their learning. The incidence and significance of catechetic interactions in 12 mathematics lessons is the basis for this paper.

THE LESSONS OBSERVED

Lessons seen ranged from those with students aged 4 to 14 years, across 12 schools, all but one of which was implementing the English 'National Numeracy Strategy'. By then NNS had been in place for 4 terms, and the focus of much professional development for all of the teachers observed. Lessons lasted 45 minutes or so and were observed throughout, incidents being noted on a proforma derived from observable processes and from modes and styles (ref. Gardner, 93).

Each teacher interpreted the NNS' 3-part lesson differently. The 'mental/oral starter' sometimes involved high concentrations of catechetic teaching, sometimes almost none. In only a few lessons was the inverse-catechetic form observed: students leading question-and-answer episodes with their teacher, or with their peers.

DISCUSSION

Much emphasis has been given to such interactions within NNS, so it might be assumed that this aspect of lessons would play a significant part in observed teaching. This study suggests that a rather more complex set of practices is in use. Prior practices seem more enduring than out-of-classroom discussions would indicate. All these teachers seemed prepared to use NNS approaches in prior conversation and lesson-planning documents. There were catechetic-rich episodes in 3 teachers' lessons, but almost no catechetic activity in 3 lessons. Yet the latter teachers self-evaluated their lessons as following the NNS approaches as planned.

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