

# Issues affecting teaching and learning



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*The purpose of this assessment is to demonstrate an understanding of pupil learning in relation to learning theories and establish links between effective pupil learning and teaching strategies.*

In this essay, I will address the key issues that impact on effective teaching and learning strategies for learners of business studies in secondary school. In doing this, I will refer to my own experience and observations in the classroom and to lessons given as well as to objectives and evaluations. I will also refer to learning and pedagogical theories, curriculum, standards and policy documents that inform practice. I will use examples from two specific lessons, on profit and loss and personal budgeting and, from these examples, establish links between theory and practice. It is first of all useful to begin with an understanding of the curriculum expectations of the teaching of business studies and the changes that have occurred over the past thirty years and also in light of recent reforms that aim to “ raise the education and skills levels of students by delivering a curriculum which gives life and social skills,” and prepares students “ for a fast-changing world” (Department for Children, School and Family, 2008). Curricular knowledge, as well as subject and pedagogical knowledge are the “ three important

aspects” (Hammon, 2005, p. 26) a teacher needs to understand and master. The aim of recent reforms in the education of young people is to make “ education more relevant to today’s world.” As such, business studies and the core skills of ICT have become a priority in preparing young people for higher study and employment. This strong shift towards education as preparing students for employment, further study, and becoming citizens in a globalised world, demands that secondary education be used to foster the development of students in terms of their practical and vocational potential. This shift raises, yet again, all the great pedagogical questions (Jephcote and Abbott, 2005) which teachers may not be able to answer, but will nonetheless help in understanding the purpose of teaching business studies in the way informed by government policy and to guide teachers – both experienced and novice – in understanding why and how to best teach their subject. These pedagogical questions concern whether business, career and work-related education in schools should meet the demands and needs of the individual learners or of “ society and economics” in general. These questions also consider whether schools should be concerned with changing society or “ preserving the social order,” whether career and work-related education should be a vehicle for preparing good and morally responsible social individuals, and whether education should prepare learners for their life after school or simply teach students how to successful learners (Jephcote and Abbott, 2005, p. 6). These questions seem to raise conflicting ideas and goals, but they are mutually supportive: learners who enjoy the learning experience for its own sake will also be able to better employ the concepts, facts and skills learnt beyond their schooling.

In any case, the very basis of career and work-related education is founded on instrumental value, regardless of whether or not students find any intrinsic value in it, any value in learning for the sake of learning, that is. In terms of instrumental value, employers have expectations that career and business education will provide them with a capable and skilled workforce. Students need to gain knowledge and skills that will make them somehow useful in society. Hence the strong shift in policy focus: in 2005, employers were less than satisfied with the level of business awareness that school leavers and graduates had brought to the workforce (Kelly, 2005, p. 21). But apart from employers, both parents and students themselves also hope to gain some instrumental value from their study of career and work-related subjects: they want to become successful at finding jobs.

As far as the school's part in all of this, and by extension the teacher's, there is a "legal responsibility" to provide opportunities for "careers education, work-related learning and enterprise and financial capability" at key stages 3 and 4 (Department for Education and Employment and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999).

By thus understanding the focus of government policy and curriculum expectations teachers then need to find their own ways of improving student outcomes, all the while working within their preferred ideological or pedagogical frameworks and holding their personal beliefs about education and their role as teachers, while taking into account the preferences of students. In light of all this policy change and reform, teachers effectively become "agents of" decisions made by others, instead of controlling decisions that will impact on their classrooms (Cohen, 2005, p. 16).

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Teachers, instead of feeling threatened by this, find comfort and confidence in knowing exactly what is expected of them and their students. Policy, frameworks and standards provide an excellent scaffolding for teachers to develop their own teaching objectives within the strict framework. After all, when it comes to teaching, “ the way you do it is just as important as what you do” (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 31).

It is an acknowledged pedagogical trait that effective teaching of a given subject is influenced by a teacher’s confidence in the chosen teaching method and resources used as well as a clear understanding of the principles behind lesson objectives, just as much as it is the teacher’s subject knowledge and expertise. Similarly, effective learning is influenced by student confidence in the teacher and knowledge taught, as well as the freedom to learn via different learning strategies and the ability to control their learning process. A confident teacher will have a clear understanding of pedagogical frameworks and curriculum expectations and also be sensitive to student needs and preferential learning styles (Kyriacou, 2001).

When it comes to teaching and learning business awareness, learners will often have to master quite new concepts, such as profit, cost, revenue and budget. As such, teachers might intuitively respond to this need by understanding their role as one in which they must “ impart” or “ transmit” the knowledge that they have about the subject to the students who do not yet have this knowledge. In fact, this understanding of teaching is in line with Wood (1997) who offers four ways of teaching in a type of hierarchy. The first, that of teaching as imparting knowledge, fits into an objectivist (Fox, 1983) understanding of knowledge as something that exists independently

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of the knower. The process of acquiring knowledge then, is simply one which involves learning something that already exists. According to Wood, as a teacher becomes more experienced, so too will their chosen mode of teaching become more complex. From the understanding of teaching as imparting knowledge, the teacher develops that understanding to teaching as preparing students to use knowledge, teaching as providing opportunities for students to explore different perspectives, and finally, teaching as preparing students to be reflective (Davies and Brant, 2006, p. 182).

In the case of teaching profit and loss, a teacher, especially a novice teacher, might well see that these concepts already exist in the world business and the best way to deliver this knowledge to students is when they act as experts who impart this knowledge. This understanding of teaching was observed in a lesson on profit and loss (Appendix I). The lesson objectives were stated as thus: Students should be able to define profit and loss; Students should be able to explain the relationship between turnover, cost of sales, gross profit and net profit; Students should be able to calculate net profit and gross profit and make assumptions about the profitability of a business (Salbstein, 2001). The lesson aimed to impart information, facts and definitions about key concepts in profit and loss, via a traditional method of introducing the language and definitions on the classroom board for students to record in their books. Methods of calculation were also introduced. The teacher's role in this lesson was a central role as the main expert facilitator of the knowledge of profit and loss. Once the concepts had been given and discussed, students were directed to study in pairs on the computers by

accessing an online lesson of profit and loss, which included an online quiz (Salbstein, 2001) to test student understanding of the concepts taught.

This method is a type of information-processing method, whereby learners are presented with information and then asked to manipulate it, in this instance by quiz work, but also by re-wording learnt definitions and discussing concepts. According to Davies and Brant (2006, p. 121) this theory of learning is based on the idea that when learners learn new information is “ processed and stored in the mind.” While this is suggested as an effective method for applied learning, this method is limiting because it treats all learners in the same way, disregarding individual preferences and learning styles. Another method, which is classic but limiting, is the method based on an understanding of learning as a behaviour that changes in response to environmental factors, such as positive reinforcement. This is Skinner’s behaviourist model. Learning based on this method suggests that each stage of learning be broken down into parts or steps and rewards given following successful completion of each step. Davies and Brant (2006) suggest that this method is useful in teaching vocational and ICT-related tasks and skilled, but is limited because it does not provide a holistic view of learning and knowledge acquisition.

The lesson outlined above, while presented in a comparatively limiting way, was not unsuccessful. This is because of the appeal of the ICT element in teaching, when students worked through the online tutorial. In evaluating the success of the lesson it was noted that students remained on task longer and were motivated to learn about the subject. ICT is an important and necessary element in career and work-related education when used to “

complement teaching” (Jephcote and Abbott, 2005). ICT is more than merely a teaching tool and has the potential “empower” students by “liberat[ing] users from routine tasks” and also by making “accessible vast amounts of information” (Leask and Pachler, 1999, p. 4). In fact, current education policy in the UK stresses the importance of ICT in the classroom, simply because the increased use of technology “in all aspects of society makes confident, creative and productive use of ICT an essential skill for life...ICT capability is fundamental to participation and engagement in modern society” (Department for Education and Employment and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999a, p. 1).

As seen in the above lesson on profit and loss, students were able to locate further information in order to extend and consolidate their newly acquired knowledge of the subject being taught and were able to gain rapid and direct access to ideas and experiences from a wide range of people. In this case, the online tutorial was devised and designed by a teacher from another school.

The results of this rather simply designed and planned lesson on profit and loss were positive and showed agreement with findings by Tomlinson (1981) who found that ICT increases motivation in students and increases their commitment to learning their subject. In fact, Tomlinson found that ICT enhanced the confidence and self-esteem of learners, as well as stimulating student determination to learn the subject, the amount of time spent on task, and the level of control over their own learning experience. All of these factors were seen in this lesson on profit and loss.



But ICT is not just a beneficial tool for students, it is also a tool that the Qualified Teacher Standards expect teachers will use (Training and Development Agency for Schools, 2007) because it also “ raises the profile” of teachers, makes teachers refresh their perspective on what they are teaching, and offers the potential for a variety of individual and group activities (Leask and Pachler, 1999, p. 5). Teachers should try to vary their teaching style as often as possible and exhibit “ a knowledge and understanding of a range of teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies and know how to use and adapt them” (Training and Development Agency for Schools, 2007, p. 8) Teachers should bring in new tools and new ways to present information, and giving students as many opportunities to learn facts and skills in a variety of ways (Davies and Brant, 2006, p. 142) and this is because within any given class a teacher will encounter students with various learning styles. For example, visual learners, who enjoy learning with pictures, graphs, artefacts and videos; auditory learners, who enjoy discussion and listening to tapes; and kinaesthetic learners, who enjoy simulations and role play. Ideally, a subject will be approached using all of these methods in the classroom.

Moving away from the information processing models which are learning theories that tend to attract teacher-centred learning styles, there are the learning theories that are more student-centred, and these are called experiential learning theories. The theory underpinning this experiential model is one that stresses the relationship between experience and learning. Each individual student, it is theorised, has collected a range of experiences about a phenomenon and it is this range of experience that is called upon to

introduce a new topic. Davies and Brant (1999) discuss Kolb's learning cycle and note that lessons informed by the experiential theory begin with student experience and examples instead of teacher-imparted principles and concepts. Kolb's learning cycle begins with the teacher calling on student experience as a way of introducing a new subject. Next students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences, to make generalisations from their experiences and, finally, to act on this new knowledge (Davies and Brant, 1999, p. 168).

This theory of learning was implemented in a lesson on budgeting (Appendix II). This lesson aimed to introduce the concept of budgeting and the wide range of costs that might be involved in advertising and promoting a product (which the students had designed in a previous lesson). The learning activity was to plan a promotional event to advertise and promote their product to the public. Students were expected to investigate the costs involved, generate data and produce a projected budget for the event.

The role of the teacher in this lesson was to motivate students to discuss their own experiences of budgeting before they began the learning activity. As such, the teacher led a discussion about student's spending habits over a typical week. The leading questions were: a) What do you spend your money on in a typical week? b) Do you spend more money during some parts of the week than others? Are there more expensive periods of the week? c) Do you keep track of your spending habits? Or do you just spend until your money runs out? d) Do you feel that you miss out on things you'd like to spend money on because you have run out of money? (Appendix II; Mark Your Challenge 2008).

It was after this discussion that the actual lesson activity was introduced. Students were asked to investigate where money might be spent in organising a promotional event. The teacher introduced the idea that an effective budget means that one must have good and clear knowledge of where the money might be spent. Students were directed to use the Internet, newspapers and magazines in order to gain background information about what such organising such an event might demand and were asked to present their prospective budgetary conclusions in a format they chose. The lesson ended with group discussion following presentation of student-group findings.

This lesson was particularly successful, as students responded confidently. The underlying theory behind this method is strikingly different to the information-imparting and information-processing theory that informed the lesson on profit and loss. Here, knowledge was not understood to be something that the teacher had and that the students did not have, but rather, that the students themselves already knew something about the subject and could further their knowledge with teacher-led guidance.

This understanding of knowledge is social constructivist one. Some factors involved in understanding this approach is that learners are essentially being introduced to new ways of “ interpreting the world that has been constructed by academic disciplines or communities of practice.” For these new ways to become meaningful, the students needs to actively construct or reconstruct the knowledge in their own way, and this usually occurs by linking new knowledge to the real world, and to some real context, so as to bridge the gap between what is considered “ school knowledge” and “ everyday

knowledge” (Davies and Brant, 2006, p. p. 170). Moreover, students need to do this via dynamic and meaningful social interaction. In fact, it is not enough to simply provide access to the environment about which they are learning, that is, through work placement or even business-related simulations and role-plays, but through authentic interaction with teachers and other students, as well as with experts in the subject they are studying. It was Piaget (1968) who stressed the importance of social interaction, because when students participate in discussion with others – peers or experts – Piaget found that they become stimulated to express content in their own language. By re-evaluating content on their own terms and with their own language, they are able to further develop their understanding of the subject taught. It is this social interaction, that enables them to process information learnt and make sense of the subject in an dynamic way, using their own language to articulate and reformulate what they have learnt. In this way, they are not just mimicking concepts, definitions and strategies learnt in the classroom but integrating what they have learnt about knowledge already constructed by a particular community – in this case the business community – and the success of this occurs when learners have experienced positive interactions.

This understanding of the learning process also links to into what is called the “ zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). This idea refers to the understanding that what we already know gives us “ access” to things we do not yet know, so long as there is some help from a guiding expert. In the case of the lesson on budgeting, students already had some knowledge of money spent and the practical use of budgeting to make sure that money

does not run out. From this personal knowledge, a teacher can guide learners towards more complex knowledge about a business situation. In evaluating the success of the lesson on budgeting, this social constructivist approach proved to be very useful.

In conclusion then, and in light of the importance placed on teacher's having "high expectations" of their students (Training and Development Agency for Schools, 2007, p. 7), when designing lessons informed by various pedagogical theories and curriculum expectations, teachers can foster successful learning outcomes when they integrate their own knowledge of pedagogy, curriculum and subject and their own beliefs and expectations about the teaching and learning experience to produce successful educational experiences. The teacher's high expectations of students were met with both lessons discussed above: the lesson on profit and loss with key concepts being delivered and then students encouraged to approach the subject using ICT activities, but also the lesson on budgeting which encouraged students to use their own personal experiences as a way into the lesson. Both lessons met the high expectations the teacher had of the learners and both teachers and students participated in a fully educational experience which fostered an environment of trust and a strong commitment to learning.

## **Appendix I**

Lesson plan: Profit and Loss

Learning intentions: To introduce the concept of profit and loss and the related concepts of revenue and costs. To introduce simple verbal definitions

and a mathematical equation in order to calculate and use the ratios of gross and net profit to understand a company's profitability.

Resources: Teacher's guided worksheet, and Internet tutorial and quiz (Salbstein, 2001).

1/ Lesson content: INTRODUCTION

Time: 5 mins.

Teacher: Teaching role, teacher-led.

Begin lesson with a story to introduce topic of class lesson and to engage student. The topic is the concept to be learnt – that of profit and loss – and why it is important for business.

The story: A business person runs a company which produces mp3 players. These products are sold so that the company makes more money than what the company spends. When a company makes more money than what is spent, we call this profit. Ask the question: Why would profit be an important concept in business? Students give their answers. Teacher confirms: Profit is an important idea in business because it shows us whether a business is successful (Salbstein, 2001).

2/ Lesson content: DEFINITIONS

Time: 10 mins

Teacher: Teaching role, teacher-led.

Introduce key definitions and mathematical equations: Profit, Gross Profit, Net Profit, Revenue, Cost, Ratios.

### 3/ Lesson content: MAIN PART OF LESSON

Time 35 mins.

Teacher: Teaching role, guide. Student: In pairs, computer activity, student-led.

Students now go to computers to proceed in pairs to complete an online tutorial on Profit and Loss Accounts (Salbstein, 2001). Each student pair is asked to check, compare and rewrite the definitions given by the teacher earlier with definitions given in the tutorial. Students complete the challenge quiz – record answers and any concepts or ideas to be clarified.

### 4/ Lesson content: CONCLUSION

Time: 10 mins

Teacher: Teaching role, teacher-led.

Student: group discussion activity.

Students are asked how they well they participated in the online quiz and which questions they found challenging or sought clarification about.

Students were asked if they reworked the definitions of issued at the beginning of class and asked to consolidate their ideas about why profit is important in business.

## Appendix II

Lesson plan: Understanding budgeting.

[This lesson plan is devised from, with slight adaptations, from the Mark Your Challenge 2008 Money Matters Lesson Plan].

Learning intentions: To introduce the concept of budgeting and to understand the variety of costs involved in planning a promotional event to market a student-devised product.

Learning activity: To plan a promotional event to market a student-devised product and investigate the overall costs involved. To produce a budget for the project.

Resources: Internet, teacher's notes, personal experience.

1/ Lesson content: INTRODUCTION

Time: 10 mins.

Teacher: Teaching role, teacher-led. Student discussion activity.

Begin lesson with a discussion about student's general spending within a given week. Leading questions: What do you spend your money on in a typical week? b) Do you spend more money during some parts of the week than others? Are there more expensive periods of the week? c) Do you keep track of your spending habits? Or do you just spend until your money runs out? d) Do you feel that you miss out on things you'd like to spend money on because you have run out of money?



Students respond with their own knowledge based on personal experience.

## 2/ Lesson content: MAIN PART OF LESSON

Time: 40 mins

Teacher: Teaching role, teacher-led. Student group work.

Teacher introduces learning activity.

Students meet in groups to discuss the planned event and potential costs that might be incurred. Students are encouraged to think about all the ways in which money might be spent and to organise expenses into main areas of expenditure. Students are asked to present their data in their own format.

## 3/ Lesson content: CONCLUSION

Time 10 mins.

Teacher: Teaching role, guide. Student: In pairs, computer activity, student-led.

Students present and discuss their findings and compare to other group findings. Students are encouraged to question their results and data and to compare and contrast differences with other groups.

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