

Effective learning and teaching: a personal evidence based perspective



Introduction

Effective teaching is essential to effective learning, but what constitutes best practice remains highly debated and the subject of extensive research (Mujis & Reynolds, 2010). There are many documents outlining what equates to best practice, including qualities such as, strong subject knowledge, behaviour management skills, assessment for learning and teacher instruction. However, as with the parenting of one's own children, I've come to find that there is no, one rule fits all here. Professor Graham Donaldson's views, as outlined in his report 'successful futures', support this. (2015) Donaldson firmly believes that the teacher in the classroom is the best person to decide what constitutes good practice in their given situation. Good practice comes from knowing your children and what they need. This will inevitably change from one class to another and this has been my own experience thus far.

I've decided to look at two concepts that have led to a lot of reflection during my time on the PGCE. When writing my philosophy of teaching and learning (Philosophy of Teaching and Learning 11. 09. 16), at the beginning of the course, behaviour management, my first focus area in this assignment, was a concern for me and I fully engaged with Patch 1 to address it. Many of my initial observations focused on effective strategies to deal with low level disruption and ensuring that I set boundaries early on in terms of what kinds of behaviour were acceptable. Rogers (2012), believes that the initial meetings with your learners set the stage for a learning environment which is based on co-operative behaviour in the classroom, allowing effective

teaching and learning to take place. With this in mind I set out to establish a learning environment based on mutual respect.

The second focus of this assignment looks at the importance of assessment for learning, a concept I did not fully understand for quite some time. During university lectures, we were introduced to the term AFL, but in my limited experience this for me was something entirely different to what I went on to experience. Indeed, during my own education, assessment for learning was a combination of red tick or a cross in your book, sometimes followed up by a short comment and then ultimately, progress was measured by yearly tests. Even after much engagement with the topic during university sessions I failed to grasp how limited my knowledge of this concept was and how deeply embedded it would need to become in my own pedagogy.

Behaviour Management.

As mentioned above, behaviour management was a key concern for me going into my first school experience and as such I was committed to engaging with the tasks in the learning packages to address any shortcomings in my approach. As a mature student (with two children of my own) I believed that behaviour management, although a concern as it is for most students entering this profession (Broadhurst, Owens and Keats, 2009), would not be something I would struggle with. My own two children had presented me with the need to adapt my approaches in dealing with unwanted behaviour and I was confident that I would be able to apply this in the classroom. I had not considered that I would need to do this whilst maintaining the focus of 29 other children and ensuring that my teaching

and the children's learning didn't suffer as a consequence. Having complied with instructions to consult the school's behaviour management policies from university lectures, I was relatively confident that employing their tried and tested methods would have the desired effect.

I spent a lot of time during my observation weeks focusing on the strategies employed by my mentor to deal with low level disruption and the children's mostly easy compliance. Tri, dai, un was a recognised command, as was the teacher raising her hand and waiting for the expected mimicking of the action. I had identified individuals who may present problems during my lessons and felt that this was enough to prepare me for dealing with them when they arose. My experience however, was very different. Behaviour management requires that the teacher not only addresses the disruptive behaviour of the offending child but that they manage the classroom to lessen the opportunity for disruptive behaviour to arise. This view is supported by Kyriacou (2001) in his research into behaviour management and teacher stress, whereby the promotion of prevention of disruptive behaviour is key. This approach is also favoured by the Welsh Government (2012) who say it is far more effective to plan for an occurrence of disruptive behaviour than to demonstrate a response which is 'emotionally laden.' I was initially very overwhelmed by this and had many learning conversations with my mentor on the subject. These conversations informed the strategies I employed with my learner, identified in Patch 1.

Very early on I began experiencing issues with low-level disruption. Visser (2015) notes the effect low level disruption can have on the free flow of a lesson is substantial. This is supported by Ofsted (2005), who cite low level <https://assignbuster.com/effective-learning-and-teaching-a-personal-evidence-based-perspective/>

disruption as, the most common form of classroom disruption and as such it must be effectively planned for. I had expected as a student teacher that the children would test the boundaries and I knew that I would have to make clear very quickly that this would not be tolerated. Here in lies the problem. I was waiting for this to happen. I was prepared to react to the behaviour. An effective teacher, based on my growing experience and engagement with educational literature, manages the classroom to limit the occurrence of unwanted behaviour in the first place. The responses of the children to my mentor were not simply reactionary to her commands, but were the result of everything she did throughout her lessons to minimise unwanted behaviour. This was achieved by keeping learners on task and subtly reminding them of her expectations.

I had already recognised that learner A would cause me problems and in doing so I should have planned effectively to minimise the disruption instead of simply being prepared to react. Initially, my strategy was to make Learner A see that his behaviour was not acceptable by verbalising this assertion in front of the class, so that both he and the class would see I would not tolerate disruption to my lessons. This of course was unsuccessful as I had not minimised the possibility of the disruption in the first place and I was still considered a new face in the classroom. Being a new face in the classroom I had not yet been assigned the children's respect in the way my mentor had and thus I had to work a lot harder to gain the same response. As learner A continued to disrupt my lessons I spent more time with him, compiling focused observations (20. 10. 15) to inform both the first learning package enquiry and my own practice in dealing with his behaviour. In doing so, I

came to realise that I was dealing with a boy whose behaviour stemmed from a need for praise and recognition. He was socially awkward, spending his break-times with children at least 2 years younger than himself and was always trying to impress them. His behaviour was exacerbated during times table testing, something he excelled in. Learner a's actions clearly aggravated his classmates and although he was aware of this, there was no malice or intention to do so, he simply craved attention in any form it was given. A young learner seeking praise will often do so, even if it comes with a negative feeling attached for recognition is simply that, no matter its origin (Welsh Government 2012). Based on further learning conversations with my mentor I decided to implement behaviour management by way of challenge.

With a view to stopping Learner A continually approaching me during testing, I introduced a multiplication loop game during the input allowing him to demonstrate his ability in a positive manner. I also devised a times table task (learning and teaching plan 03. 11. 15) to be completed whilst children waited to be tested. The task was suitably challenging for the MA and learner A (who didn't need or appreciate practise time), whilst also being competitive and fun. Daniel *et al* (1998) cited in Visser (2015), recognises that 'on task behaviour is not challenging behaviour.' Therefore, good planning and task setting is key in creating an environment for good teaching and learning to take place. Per the Welsh Government (2012) challenge by ways of a mean to succeed will be welcomed by a child seeking attention, maintaining a positive teaching and learning environment. The task did challenge learner A, engaging him in good natured 'on task' competition with his classmates. Through my engagement with enquiry one

of the learning packages, I realised a bank of strategies would be needed to help me deal with disruptive behaviour and it was crucial that I continued to minimise disruption to my lessons by combining behaviour management techniques.

My mentor advised (comments log 23. 20. 15) that instead of identifying bad behaviour, I could focus on rewarding good behaviour by praising those who demonstrated my expectations. Somewhat surprisingly, children who exhibited the most fussy and rebellious behaviour, competed with those receiving positive attention from me (learning and teaching plan 24. 10. 15) According to Capel *et al* (2010), a teacher must use a positive teaching approach by way of positive and constructive feedback to pupils, this is supported by the research of Kerry Whitehouse, in the same publication. Whitehouse says, a teacher's ability to promote positive relationships with her pupils is crucial to enhancing pupil learning. Identifying children displaying the wanted behaviour during carpet sessions and main tasks, allowed me to build positive relationships with the children whereby the unwanted behaviour was addressed indirectly and prevented negative words and feelings being attached to individual children. This is the simplest strategy I have in my armour and has perhaps become the most effective. From this point forward I began to embed multiple behaviour management techniques into my lessons and overall disruption did lessen. Planning for disruption is almost as important as planning the lesson itself as one is conducive to the others success. (Rogers 2012)

My second, and current, placement is in a more affluent area of Cardiff. The behaviour issues here are much more understated and tend to be a class
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fussiness. Having engaged with conversations with my mentor and other colleagues at the school, it seems this is a behaviour they have presented throughout their schooling. During my observation week, I was keen to engage with the school's behaviour management policy to address this. I found that each class implemented the policy in very different ways. This approach conflicts with the advice given by The Association of Teachers and Learners, who state that schools need to be consistent in their approach in order to promote and maintain standards as children progress throughout the school. In my current placement, I found some classes had class dojo by way of reward, the supply teachers gave out points related directly to the agency they were employed with (and didn't seem to equate to anything) whilst other classes, like mine, had nothing at all. Following on from my first school experience and armed with my bank of behaviour management strategies, I was determined to lessen disruption before it began. I knew that I was dealing with different children and my approach would have to be tailored to their needs. As with my first experience, I began by observing the strategies used by mentor assessing which were most successful. However, my mentor it seemed did not employ any particular strategy and it took merely a look or a slightly raised voice to achieve the desired effect. Not having the same experience and respect as my mentor, I knew it would be crucial to introduce my own strategies very early on so that children were aware of my expectations. I was also very aware that despite my teachers position and authority, there remained a low hum of noise and activity throughout lessons that had to be carefully controlled.

The first thing I did was to introduce a new action, that told the children I expected their undivided attention (comments log 03. 10. 16). The children seemed to enjoy this (it's a bit silly) and my mentor commented that this was having the desired effect. I also continued to employ the countdown and positive praise techniques (comments log 03. 10. 16) which had been effective during SE1. Being a year 4 class, a year younger than my previous class, it was clear that praise was a huge incentive to most of the children. After several weeks, in consultation with my mentor, I implemented class dojo (07/11/16). Initially we didn't even discuss what the points would mean, yet the children were still completely on board competing with their classmates. Within a week, the children entered the classroom sensibly and sat waiting for instructions, something they had rarely done previously without adult intervention, my mentor commented on the positive change to the classroom. During lessons, I would award dojos to the first three children who were on task and as recognition for anyone working especially hard throughout. There were a few setbacks where children would exhibit the required behaviour and then fail to maintain it after the dojo was awarded. This was quickly addressed by explaining that I would compile a list of names and then award dojos later in the lesson dependent on maintaining that behaviour and the resulting effect on their learning. This reflects Bruner's resistance to extrinsic rewards, wherein he feels that it is prudent that children benefit from intrinsic rewards (learning), rather than a reward given by the teacher. (Sukumar Gowda, 2015) Although I see the validity in this thinking I have found the use of extrinsic rewards to promote positive behaviour effective in establishing a positive learning environment.

During my first tutor observation (17. 10. 16), the general fussiness of the children was commented on as was improvement needed to my 'teacher voice'. I knew myself that this needed to be addressed as I found that my voice was growing louder (which I mentioned to my mentor) and I was sometimes counting twice before getting the children's attention which would eventually result in the strategy becoming ineffective. After this observation, I began counting down more quietly (as per tutor's advice) and waiting for the children to stop rather than raising my voice. Having gained more confidence in my role as class teacher, I began expressing my disappointment when the children had to be asked to do something more than once. This had the desired effect and was evident in both my senior mentor/mentor obs and second tutor observation (23. 11. 16) where my behaviour management was praised.

Assessment for learning.

My second focus area is Assessment for learning. There are two main forms of assessment, these being formative assessment and summative assessment. Formative assessment is continuous whereby the teacher constantly assesses and re-assesses the needs of the children in their classroom and then plans to address those needs during the next lesson. Summative assessment is a 'high value' form of assessment based on the child's knowledge at the end of a topic. This may take the form of an end of term test or a final piece of work which is assessed against a benchmark. Harlen and James (2006), say that these two processes are often confused and as such they lose their productivity as assessment tools. I was very much of the schooling that national tests (SAT's) were the basis of

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assessment and ability settings and had little knowledge of formative assessment and the crucial part it plays in effective teaching and learning. According to Nfer (2012), neither form is correct nor incorrect, both play an important role in assessing a child's knowledge and moving their learning forward. I will be focusing on the use of formative assessment, as during my time on the PGCE I've really developed my own understanding of this area and agree that it is a crucial element of any teacher's pedagogy.

Assessment for learning (AFL), is key in determining, where a learner is now, where they are going next and how you as the teacher are going to get them there. These words were repeated by all lecturers during my university sessions. Despite this, it took me some time to truly understand it as an effective teaching and planning tool and to embed it into my pedagogy in any meaningful way. This demarcation is given clarity by Black and William who define assessment for learning as the gathering of evidence based on the child's achievement. Assessment becomes formative and thus meaningful, only when it is used to inform teaching based on the evidence, allowing the planned next steps to be better founded than they would be in the absence of said evidence (2009, p. 9).

When I began SE1, AFL was perhaps worryingly not my biggest concern. In my naivety, I believed that my limited understanding of this part of my practice was developed enough for me to make informed decisions based on lessons and marking of tasks, to inform planning. I was keen to embed the AFL practices used by the school, but initially I was not using them effectively. My mentor was impressed by the reflective element of my teaching practice very early in the course. At the end of a lesson, I was able <https://assignbuster.com/effective-learning-and-teaching-a-personal-evidence-based-perspective/>

to identify where I could make improvements to my teaching and I could pinpoint individuals and/or groups who had failed to understand a particular aspect of the learning and why. However, I often failed to take this forward and plan effectively to address it in my next session. Sometimes this was due to a lack of understanding on my part, others times it was due to the fast-moving pace dictated by the current National Curriculum. Positive comments from my mentor, unintentionally allowed me to wrongly assume that I was fully utilising AFL strategies, when in fact I was not.

A moment of clarity came during my tutors obs (26. 01. 16) when it was noted that I could be using AFL strategies more effectively. My mentor really liked the whiteboard activity I did with the children during the input, but felt I didn't fully utilise the opportunity to advance or clarify understanding of the subject. During discussions with both my tutor and my mentor after my lesson, I took on board the comments made and did some reading around the subject to develop my knowledge. The most poignant quote I came across was this, " The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly" (Ausubel, 1968 p. vi). It was here that I began to really assess the learning in my classroom, taking the evidence forward in my planning. However, it was during my second (and current) placement that my understanding really formed.

My second teaching practice is in an extremely AFL rich school. Before I began, the teachers had attended a conference by Dylan Williams which concentrated on this element of pedagogy. Williams (2016) identifies four progressional steps needed to achieve effective AFL; design ways to get <https://assignbuster.com/effective-learning-and-teaching-a-personal-evidence-based-perspective/>

evidence relevant to student learning, collect evidence, interpret the evidence and use the evidence. AFL was identified as part of the school's previous year's school improvement plan and it was clear that the knowledge imparted at the conference had been taken on board.

Following on from my previous school experience I continued to use partner talk and whiteboard activities to allow me to assess the children's knowledge and understanding during my lesson input. My mentor was quick to point out however, that these strategies were a waste of time if I wasn't then using them to take my teaching and the learners understanding forward, immediately and in future planning. I was almost by rote asking learners to write on their whiteboards something that would allow me to assess their knowledge and understanding during the input so that I could check I was differentiating work correctly, but I did not then use this information to influence the day's task, instead sticking to the ability groupings. In view of Ausubel's comments, I was not teaching the children accordingly. In effect, I was putting a lid on the pupil's learning. This was a huge learning curve for me, as this was something that went against the part of me that wants all children to achieve and my reason for wanting to teach. How could a child have that moment of clarity and that euphoric feeling of achievement if I was effectively subduing it?

My mentor went on to explain that despite ability groupings, the school, had a classroom ethos whereby children decided where to pitch their learning. The teacher would make clear where the progression was in terms of a task, but allowed the child to pitch in where they felt confident. Where the need arose, the child's decision would be guided by the teacher based on the <https://assignbuster.com/effective-learning-and-teaching-a-personal-evidence-based-perspective/>

evidence gathered prior to the main task, by virtue of AFL strategies. This relates back to Vygotsky and his 'zone of proximal development' as cited by the Welsh Assembly Government (2010), whereby teachers effectively plan for achievement, through small progressional steps within the setting of a task.

Further clarity came, again from tutor comments (comments log 18. 10. 16), following on from targets set by tutor (Form A 17. 10. 16) regarding the development of AFL strategies as a teaching and learning tool. Here I am going to focus on the use of whiteboards and partner talk to inform formative assessment. Whiteboards are by no means the only form of assessment but seem to be favoured by schools generally. My practise to this point had been to use the children's whiteboards to check understanding and address it on a very basic level with, well done if you have xyz, or Charlie you should have x instead of y because of z. I would then plan to target those children for support during the main task.

I came to see during SE2 how whiteboards could be a great tool for offering immediate verbal feedback, allowing the child to recognise their own mistake. My teacher suggested asking those with the correct answer to lower their boards so those who had made errors were more visible. In doing so, I could more easily identify patterns in misconceptions and address them prior to beginning the main task. This freed up time during the main activity to initially support the least able and to then to approach the more able with a view to progressing their learning further. Mistakes are celebrated in the classroom as teaching points for everybody to learn from. Ken Robinson says,
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“ what we do know is, if you’re not prepared to be wrong, you’ll never come up with anything original”.

I try to foster this thinking in the classroom to promote the growth mindset that is crucial not only in the classroom but for lifelong learning.

Another strategy adopted from SE2, was to take the whiteboard of a more able child and present it to the class. Instead of pointing out why it was good, I would ask the children to assess the example against the SC generated as a class. This focused the children’s attention and allowed them to progress their own understanding. Shute (2008) feels a less able child benefits from immediate verbal feedback and this has certainly been my own experience thus far. Since employing this strategy I have seen a clarity in the work of the LA in particular, that was sometimes previously missing. Adams (2009) also advocates this approach, believing that a practical model of work that meets or does not meet the success criteria allows for a much clearer understanding of what is expected. In demonstrating the success criteria, the children can see how we are achieving the LO and for me it has given clarity to the skill being taught.

I have clearly entered the school at a time of transition and forward planning in terms of AFL which has been a great advantage to my own learning. At present teachers from both keys stages have decided it is imperative to agree on a shared language in the classroom. Anagrams for the learning objective range from LO to LI to WILF which seemingly isn’t allowing for a seamless transition through age groups. This quest for clarity reflects the opinion of the Welsh Assembly Government (2010) who say that for a child

to be able to use assessment effectively, they must understand what they are aiming to achieve and this is achieved more effectively when the child is involved in generating the success criteria. My mentor is a great advocate of this and always ensures the SC is available on the white board (after being agreed upon) or as a table to stick in the child's books as a means of reference throughout the lesson. In my previous placement, I had always taken care to share the success criteria with the children but I developed this in SE2 by following the example of my mentor. This had particularly good results when using peer or self-assessment. A point of reference for assessment, combined with clarity of what each criterion meant by generating the SC together, allowed learners to focus their comments appropriately. Admittedly student assessment is still in its developing stages but this is another focus of my placement school, whereby they are using twilights directed by the year 6 teachers to develop this crucial skill.

Although I have focused on my attention on specific areas of AFL and just a few strategies, there are many more that can be used in the classroom to affect real change and progression in terms of both learning and teaching. Alongside whiteboards, I have developed my understanding and use of peer and self-assessment (written/verbal where task appropriate), lolly-sticks, partner-talk to name but a few. Formative assessment, when used effectively and in combination with summative assessment, allows teachers a full picture of the child and their learning. This means we are the best person to assess how to best get them there and we must then plan to ensure it happens. We must also remember that what works with one classroom, or indeed with one child, will not necessarily work with the next and that as

teachers the responsibility to recognise this sits firmly with us. As mentioned previously, this is a view supported by Donaldson and hopefully the changes to and recommendations for, the new curriculum will support teachers in doing so.

As teachers, I believe best practice for teaching and learning is a willingness to be wrong, to be able to recognise that something is no longer working and be willing to adapt our practice accordingly. At the beginning of this journey I heard the word reflection a lot and it is only now I'm coming to see just how crucial this is when going into teaching and in fact how important it is to retain the ability to reflect throughout our careers. My teacher recently told me that having a student in the class gave her a fresh perspective, it offered her the opportunity to really reflect on her own practice. I realised that it is this quality that allows a teacher to remain effective, even after twenty-five years. As the job and the needs of the children continue to evolve and change, we must also. My journey on the PGCE may be coming to an end, but my lifelong learning journey to becoming an effective teacher is essentially just beginning.

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