

Critical Reflection

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Becoming a competent teacher does not occur overnight. Successful educators embark on a journey of self-improvement through continuous self-reflection. Brookfield (1995) implies that reflection is transformative for the schooling system as it allows the redirection of practice from assumptions and preconceived ideas. This journey of unearthing the extent of one's professional capacity begins during the Professional Teaching Experience (PTE). The purpose of this assignment is to critically reflect on the progress made implementing three pedagogical principles found in Professor Graham Donaldson's Successful Futures report (2015). From this, I will be able to identify the appropriate next steps to enhance my professionalism.

Donaldson's report (2015) has shaped an education reform in Wales. Successful Futures bases the purpose and structure of the new curriculum on the application of the twelve pedagogical principles that aim to refine teaching and learning to ensure that educators in Wales maximise opportunities for children. The holistic development of each child will be the focus of this educational reform, as supported by Education Minister Kirsty Williams. For this assignment, the three principles that will be assessed are as follows:

- Good teaching and learning means employing assessment for learning principles
- Good teaching and learning regularly reinforces Cross-curriculum responsibilities
- Good teaching and learning means employing a blend of approaches including direct teaching

This assignment will embark on an in-depth analysis of each principle, referring to my implementation during my PTE. In order to evaluate how well each principle has been implemented, links will be made to the literature surrounding each concept and the possible obstacles that may interfere with the inclusion of the principles will be discussed. Finally, I will reflect on the findings and assess the most appropriate means of reaching professional teaching standards.

Successful futures informs us that assessment for learning (AFL) is pivotal in providing practitioners with insight into the effective pedagogy. The Welsh Government (2010) defines AFL as strategies employed that identify a student's position on a learning continuum. Once identified, a review of where they need to go and how best to get there is established. AFL contrasts assessment of learning, as many forms of assessment of learning encourage surface learning with the aim of passing a test being at the forefront of the pedagogy. AFL, as Gardner (2006) exclaims, is used to improve performance through both formative and summative assessment. Sadler (1998) implies that formative assessment refers to the deliverance of feedback to enhance performance and accelerate learning. Harlen and James (1997) highlight the purpose of summative assessment as being a method to categorise learning at a particular point in time, for the purposes of producing reports for stakeholders such as school governors' local authorities or parents. Essentially, summative assessment sums up learning, however, both forms of assessment are valuable in determining student potential (Black et al, 2003., Wallace, 2015., Williams, 2018).

When AFL strategies are successfully implemented, learners develop the ability to positively articulate knowledge, making teaching and learning explicitly visible within the classroom. This is essential at my placement school, with one of the 5 signs of

excellence being 'visible progress'. In addition, AFL coincides with social constructivist theory as there is a heavy focus on collaboration and co-operation with the teacher facilitating learning. Learners are sufficiently scaffolded to take ownership of their education. Moreover, evidence suggests that successful implementation of AFL strategies is more beneficial than reducing class sizes and increasing subject knowledge. Wiliam (2009) researched into the professional development of teachers and found that AFL gives you an extra 8 months teaching time, this is 4 times the teaching time of reducing class size, and twice the teaching time of increasing teacher subject knowledge. However, Spence (2015) found that AFL is generally underdeveloped in schools. Thus, the extent of its power cannot be reliably measured. Furthermore, While Wiliam (2018) can appreciate the benefits of AFL, he is not ignorant to the negative impact of assessments on learner's self-esteem and mental health. Spence (2015) supports this by stating that assessments merely highlight weakness. Nevertheless, the new 2022 curriculum will focus on children reaching their personal potential and Dweck's (2006) growth mindset theory can be instilled to banish the negative impact of the self-fulfilling prophecy on those who doubt their capabilities. Black and Wiliam (2002) found that GCSE attainment is improved by an average of half a grade when AFL is utilised. This evidence is imperative for key marginal students who require subtle but effective support to secure their deserving grade.

Relating to my PTE, a continuing professional development session I attended with a middle leader at my placement school shared AFL expertise. The two fundamental concepts that influenced my pedagogy from this session are; the importance of metacognition, and attribution theory.

Much of the CPD session concerned the overlap between metacognition and AFL. In simple terms metacognition refers to the process of thinking about thinking, or higher-order thinking (Hattie, 2009). Metacognition corresponds with AFL as the questioning techniques must encourage the learner to investigate their response further, to truly comprehend the basis of their knowledge. Likewise, the practice of metacognition develops independent learning and self-assessment skills. Hattie (1996) evidenced that learners who think about their learning attain better grades. Hence, thinking about why or how you reached a conclusion, or why you did not, improves the quality and criticality of one's academia. However, Billings and Roberts (2008) note that teaching students to think is the most challenging literacy skill to grasp. This understanding of the links between AFL and metacognition has led me to reevaluate my questioning style; am I looking for a correct answer? Or am I looking for a learning narrative? This level of critical thinking encompasses Blooms Taxonomy which Gershon (2015) promotes for stretching and challenging students. A pragmatic and natural questioning style is to be developed over time. Since beginning my PTE, I have had the opportunity to refine my questioning, with improvements being made. However, the CPD session on AFL has taught me that maintaining the flow of metacognition is advanced through excellent questioning. Also, I have come to realise the importance of wait times in questioning. Smith et al (2009) found that allowing time to compose an answer, generally improves the depth and understanding as the students have been afforded time to practice metacognition. By giving thinking time, the feedback I deliver is more rewarding. This inflicts growth mindset. The wait time and positive praise results in the development of logic, reasoning and language skills (Rowe, 1974).

The CPD session also highlighted the influence of attribution theory, meaning the casual beliefs of teacher and pupil behaviour. A study by Weiner and Kukla (1970) found that weaker ability learners who display high levels of effort are given more positive praise over high ability-high effort learners. This illustrates how teachers are more willing to reward effort over attainment, reiterating the growth mindset. This encouraged me to reflect on the distribution of praise and positive feedback I give during my lessons. I have realised that I am more favourable of positive behaviour and effort from students who do not usually exhibit these characteristics. Using my

metacognition, I have questioned why I do this, and I have concluded that to respect the Donaldson review and the four purposes that are the umbrella of the new curriculum, the holistic development must be paramount. Therefore, those students who try hard even if they do not reap the benefits will still feel appreciated. My aim as a teacher is to ensure no student falls into the trap of 'learned helplessness' whereby those who receive lower attaining grades cannot comprehend that effort will impact outcome (Maier et al, 1968).

Furthermore, progress checks have massively influenced my pedagogy. I strive for a learning environment that is safe, constructive and reflective so mistakes can be made without embarrassment or a knock to self-esteem. This stems from the Ginott (1972) behaviour model that discussed the importance of positive relationships, encouraging interaction and quality communication. Progress checks assess learners understanding at a particular point. This could be at the start of a lesson with tasks such as think-pair-share, which is supported by Harvard's project Zero, or at a midpoint throughout the lesson with the use of hinge questions. This unearths misconceptions, allowing the teacher to reflect on their own deliverance of content. Any errors can be dealt with effectively before the basis of a whole topic is compromised. Progress checks can also be encompassed in a plenary through having the students to self-assess their progress against the lesson objectives. Students can identify their own next steps and use their metacognition to self-regulate and excel.

While my AFL strategies are improving and my level of understanding is reaching new depths, one aspect of AFL I need to utilise is feedback. AFL principles suggest that learners vest effort into a task if they believe progress can be made. Research conducted by Butler (1988) conveyed that comment only feedback can improve attainment by an average of 30%. This recognises the importance of effort and reflection. Sadler (1998) also endorses the impact of feedback suggesting that it has the ability to inspire confidence and the hope for success.

Some academics view AFL as the balance between surface learning and deep learner, referred to as strategic learning (Marton et al, 1984). Deep learning can be time consuming and impractical when delivering a syllabus under time restraints. Likewise, surface learning ignores the ability to apply knowledge. Strategic learning appreciates the need for application of knowledge in various contexts, while also respecting the requirements for specific content being taught. AFL strategies aid the development of strategic learning through encouragement of ownership of one's education.

Cross curricular responsibility refers to learning that incorporates several disciplines to enhance understanding and skills in the application of knowledge. Donaldson (2015) acknowledges that cross curricular responsibility is a key feature in successful pedagogy. 2013 saw the introduction of the statutory literacy and numeracy framework across Wales (Welsh Government, 2013). This framework was embedded across schools to improve the poor literacy and numeracy PISA scores (National Assembly for Wales, 2013). Under the new educational reform, digital competency framework will be enforced to ensure children are receiving adequate intervention to engage with the modern technological world.

The implementation of the DCF framework has received much support from academics (Pluss, 2018., Burnett et al. 2019). The requirement for learners to be sufficiently educated to ensure they are digitally competent is vital for working life. A possible issue with implementing DCF, is the requirement of staff professional development. The intensification and complexity of a teacher's workload is already strained. The Department of Education (2018) released a tool kit containing methods for organising and balancing current workload, without the need for personal development on digital competency. Inevitably, to inspire the next generation of children in Wales to become ambitious, capable learners; digital competency must be instilled throughout the curriculum.

There is also the concern that the statutory requirements placed on literacy, numeracy and DCF will result in forceful and unnatural links being established. However, the Welsh government recognises the difficulties in implementing disciplines such as numeracy into highly academic areas such as Humanities. Therefore, only naturally occurring links that enhance learning are deemed necessary (Welsh Government, 2017b).

Contrary to the criticisms, an Estyn (2017) report illustrated the advantages of cross curricular responsibility with the improved literacy and numeracy statistics since the frameworks has been made statutory.

During my PTE, I have made a conscious effort to incorporate these responsibilities where appropriate. Although cross curricular responsibilities extend to including any discipline outside of one's own specialty, I have decided to focus upon the three statutory requirements in my review. While the inclusion of history and geography has aided my teaching in delivering a thorough narrative of religious studies, the inclusion of literacy; numeracy and digital competency has tested my ability to cultivating skills.

In reference to the evidence supplied on Literacy, I decided to focus on a starter activity I created based on the investigation of a poem to comprehend meaning of key terminology. The learners were provided with instruction to aid their analysis and individual thinking time. Learners were then encouraged to collaborate, and I facilitated the discussion through questioning. Once a strong understanding of the poem was held, the learners were required to apply this understanding to the key term in an attempt to create a definition. This task promoted problem solving, creativity, collaboration and literacy in both reading and oracy. I was pleasantly surprised when all three of my year 8 classes succeeded in defining the term incarnation.

With regards to the numeracy framework, I have evidenced the inclusion of pie charts within an RS lesson. First and foremost, the learners had a comprehension task to retrieve information. From this, the learners had to categorise their findings. The learners exhibited their choices on a pie chart and used the lines provided to demonstrate their justification. This was a positive way of helping to visualise opinions to spark debate. In reflecting on the use of the pie charts, I was pleased with the response they had. However, it was evident that the resource sheet needed to be made more professional to ensure learners had clarity on expectations; the improvement is evidenced.

I then decided to broaden the learner's creativity. Learners were grouped and given the task of creating a PowerPoint presentation depicting the crucifixion and who they would hold on trial for the death of Jesus. This task required software knowledge, imagination, collaboration and digital literacy. Once the presentations were completed, each group had to email them across. I created a Padlet page and uploaded each presentation. The page was converted into a QR code and stuck into each student's book for them to access to assess one another's viewpoints, or to revisit at a later date when their knowledge has expanded.

Importantly, my PTE placement school is situated in an affluent area and I have access to the equipment and resources that enriches my pedagogy. Not all schools have this luxury and so it is vital that I am able to adapt tasks to fit within my environment. The Education Endowment Foundation 2019 favour of the expansion of literacy skills across all areas of learning, implying that it is fundamental for the success of students. To abide by this, my aim during the remainder of my PTE is to encourage the development of independent reading and language skills through extension tasks and homework.

The school environment facilitates and enrich learning. To do this successfully, Jonassen and Land (2012) suggest a repertoire of techniques should be explored. Hence, the inclusion of a blend of teaching approaches (Donaldson, 2015).

Educators must nurture learners critical thinking skills and creativity. Within my subject specialism, this encourages children to view a variety of perspectives, comprehend the strengths and limitations of their own views as well as other peoples, and to aid the formation of innovative solutions. The transmission of these skills can be fostered in all disciplines through the inclusion of appropriate tasks (OECD, 2019).

The blend of approaches principle promotes the use of direct teaching where appropriate. Direct teaching is considered the traditional teaching method, with some academics referring to it as direct instruction (Hattie, 2012. Rosenshine, 2008).

There is a suggestion that to competently implement direct teaching, strong subject knowledge is required (Coe et al, 2014). This could limit the quality of teaching as many practitioners deliver content outside of their specialism. Hattie (2012) implies that the biggest impact on learning is knowledgeable teachers. This is, however, disputed by Wiliam's (2018) ideologies on AFL implementation as having the most profound impact on pedagogy. The EEF debate the usefulness of direct teaching on developing critical thinking skills (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). Instilling critical thinking requires teachers to divert from traditionally 'safe' methods of practice such as direct instruction. Wiliams (2016) questions the ease at which a teacher can differentiate direct teaching strategies, leading to more complex workload. However, direct teaching is required in any schooling environment especially when new information is taught (Westwood, 2008).

The evidence I have supplied includes a research project, the use of lead learning, and direct teaching. The research project was inspired by the notion that children are 'lone scientists' and absorb knowledge through interaction and dialogue (Fosnot, 2013., Vygotsky, 1978). Mercer (1995) highlights that social learning influences higher order thinking skills, or as previously discussed metacognition. Therefore, I took the opportunity to implement a research project with my year 7s. The learners received thorough instruction on what was required, and I scaffolded their research by providing information packs. Once the research was completed the learners had to present their findings to the class, building health and confident individuals. My experience backed the findings of Cowie and Van der Aalsvort (2000) in that learners of a similar ability could collaborate to progress learning, challenging the need for a more knowledgeable other. The learners had support from myself, the TA and one another to clarify understanding. All the learners conducted themselves professionally and maturely, exceeding expectations with the level of detail in their presentations. This solidified the efficacy of how research projects can advance learning.

Moreover, the evidence supplied concerning lead learning changed my mindset on the degree of teacher influence within a classroom. Barnes and Todd (1995) found that for learning to occur, the teacher does not always need to present or the one facilitating conversation. Due to these findings, I utilise learners to embark on tasks more commonly suited to the teacher. The tasks include freedom to gather information on live learning boards as the learners see fit. This results in each pair or group displaying excellence in a variety of forms. The use of lead learners to assist in many ways such as writing on the interactive board, reading to the class and partaking in the teaching responsibilities through helping classmates with understanding and presentation. The use of lead learning also promotes good classroom behaviour and effort. Although effective in this particular setting, lead learning may inhibit learning in schools whereby the children are not conditioned or motivated to play an active role in their education.

Finally, I have provided evidence of elements of direct teaching during my PTE. Direct teaching is the process of delivering new information, illustrating a criterion for success, modelling expectations, gaging understanding through progress checkers and repetition of knowledge (Hattie, 2009). Westwood (2008) reiterates that direct teaching includes structured discussion, feedback and scaffolding. Scaffolding

cultivates learners to independently apply knowledge in several contexts (Donaldson, 2015). My evidences depicts efforts to deliver instruction and cognitively support learners in problem solving that would difficult to accomplish without teacher facilitation (Bruner, 1987).

Current professional teaching standards exemplify the importance of reflective practice for quality pedagogy (Welsh Government, 2019). This is not a recent discovery, with academics preaching the vitality of reflective practice for decades. Harrison (2004) suggests it is imperative in advancing professional learning and development.

Through the reflection of my implementation of these principles, I am aware of how interdependent the principles are upon one another. For instance, direct teaching is scaffolding, this cannot be separated from AFL in its principles of delivering feedback, quality questioning and providing accurate information of how to succeed (Fernandez et al, 2015)

To strengthen my professionalism, I will work in accordance with the new curriculum. I will continue to broaden my AFL strategies. Even though the impact is difficult to measure for reasons such as the possible inconsistency between teachers in secondary settings. This may result in survival habits being adopted by students according to D. Royce Sadler (1998). Consequently, I will abide by the school policy adopting their approach in my teaching. I will embark on challenges to promote critical thinking and creativity at any given opportunity to ensure the leaners of Wales meet the Donaldson expectations.

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