

Critical reflection

Pedagogical principle: Good teaching and learning means employing assessment for learning.

At the beginning of my professional teaching experience I realise now that when carrying out a lesson, I wasn't very good at explaining the learning objective and when it came to marking the children's work, it was actually my fault that they had not met the success criteria. I noticed this quite quickly in my first few lessons and this is shown in illustrative example one.

The learning objective and the success criteria is essential for carrying out a successful lesson. Hattie (2012) explains that the learning intentions describe what it is that we want students to learn and their clarity is at the heart of formative assessment. Unless teachers are clear about what they want students to learn (and what the outcome of this learning looks like), they are hardly likely to develop good assessment of that learning. (WAG,2010) states that research in assessment for learning usually shows the most significant gains for the learners with low basic skills. This may be partly because traditionally they have not known explicitly what will make their work good.

I realised after the first couple of lessons that I had taught, whilst walking around the classroom and assessing the learning, the children seemed to ask a lot of questions about what and how they would carry out their task set to them even after I had explained it to them. I clearly had not explained the learning objective well enough and then quickly changed how I would introduce my lesson the next day. This is also shown in the feedback from my class mentor that I was quick to realise that the children had not quite understood the work I had set for them therefore, the way in which I introduced the lesson had to be changed.

The following day I introduced my lesson in much more depth, I ensured that the learning objective was written on the board and also showed the children an example of what would be expected of them. I ensured that the children knew the success criteria and found that when walking around the classroom I had a much more reliable assessment of the children's learning. I realise now that success criteria used within assessment should be well-defined, appropriate for the task and achievable, yet challenging, for all learners involved in the activity (WAG,2008). On my next placement I will ensure that when introducing a lesson, I will explain the learning objective more thoroughly and make the children very aware of the success criteria in order for them to know exactly what is expected from that lesson.

I feel that at the beginning of my placement, it was hard to understand where the children were in terms of their learning and abilities. Although I had spent some time looking through the children's books and becoming aware of the different ability groups prior to my placement during the observation week, I can now see that even with children being in different groups, for example a higher ability, middle ability and lower ability, there are always going to be those children who will need extra support or one to one guidance and this is something that needs to be taken into consideration when planning and explaining a lesson to a class. This is when I realised that the tasks that I was setting for the class had to be differentiated to suit each child's ability. I found that once I had started to do this, the children were beginning to meet the success criteria for the lesson and whilst walking around the

classroom assessing the learning of the children, I felt as though the children were far more focused when having their own specific and achievable target.

Hattie (2012) summarises the importance of knowing what the children are able to achieve, he explains that before the lesson is planned the teacher needs to know what a student already knows and can do. This allows the teacher to tailor the lesson, so that the student can bridge the gap between his or her current knowledge and understanding, and the target knowledge and understanding. As a student teacher I feel this understanding of the children's abilities got better as the placement developed and therefore the way in which I assessed the children's learning was more specific to each child.

During our read write inc lesson every morning, I became more aware of which children needed a little more extra support and which children really enjoyed and worked better when being able to help their partner. I ensured in the mornings when setting out the children's books for the lesson that I would put the more able child next to one who may need a bit of support. I started to use the assessment for learning 'think pair share' strategy when discussing how to structure a sentence with punctuation for example. Think pair share is a collaborative learning strategy where the children are able to work together to solve a problem or answer a question. This allowed the children to engage with one another and I found that the discussion with a partner maximised participation especially amongst the children who sometimes needed that bit of support. I will try to carry out the think pair share strategy on PTE 2.

At first, I also became aware that whilst carrying out my introductions for the lessons, the children could get quite easily distracted and sometimes lose attention. My mentor reminded me in my feedback about the random dojo selection which chooses children's names at random on the screen in front of them, I realised once I had started doing this that it was also a good tool for developing assessment for learning within this group. The children were focusing much better as they knew that they could be selected to answer a question at any time so they would need to be ready to answer promptly. I have also seen this done before where children's names are selected at random using lollipop sticks, I really liked the idea of the random dojo and will be using it again in my next class.

Throughout my time in year 2 our theme was stickman by Julia Donaldson. In example 2, it shows one of my lessons on 'hot seating.' This activity allows children to assume the role of a character and then be asked questions relating to the story by the other groups of children. The children had previously read the stickman book and carried out a number of activities relating to the book so I thought it would be a good idea to suggest that we do a hot seating challenge where one of the children would dress up as a character from the story and the others would ask questions. WAG (2010) explains that hot seating works extremely well for emotive ideas when linked with prior research.

The lesson previous to this we thought of some questions we would like to ask the different characters during our hot seating challenge. The first lesson on hot seating that we carried out, I identified that when explaining to the children what types of questions we could ask the character, I found that a lot of the children copied what I had said and were then unable to think of their own questions. As a crucial feature of AFL, effective questioning techniques play an important part in student learning to enhance executive function ability to develop reasoning, challenge students' beliefs and background knowledge, and strengthen their arguments. Once I had realised that the children were relying on my examples to make their own, I changed how I explained the activity to them in the next group. According to Scoboria & Fisico (2013) questions asked by teachers can be lower cognitive questions that include closed, knowledge, factual and recall questions. This will require students to give short responses based on what they have learned previously and higher cognitive questions that are also referred to as referential, interpretive, evaluative and open-

ended questions and require students to create their own answers and help them promote higher order thinking skills and teachers need to encourage them explicitly. I realise now that whether it is the teacher or the learner who poses the questions, they should be open ended wherever possible, and lead to discussion. I feel like this activity was such a great way to assess what the children had learned in detail about the story we had been focusing on during my time with them and it also links to Donaldson's (2015) pedagogical principles 'setting tasks and selecting resources that build on previous knowledge'. I will definitely try to incorporate hot seating into PTE 2.

Looking back on my time in my first placement although I did (sometimes unknowingly) carry out some assessment for learning techniques I will ensure on my next placement that I will employ a much more varied amount of AFL strategies in order to assess the children's learning and where they need to go next with their learning. For example, using ongoing feedback throughout the lesson, Hattie & Timperley (2007) state that the main purpose of feedback 'is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings and performance and a goal' therefore feedback throughout a lesson allows children to see what they are doing right or wrong and where they need to go next. I could also use peer and self - assessment or use PMI diagrams which allows the children to be active participants in the learning and assessment process, taking ownership of their own learning. I will also focus on explaining the lesson in more detail and I am now more aware of how important the learning objective and the success criteria are to a successful lesson.

Pedagogical principle: Good teaching and learning regularly reinforces cross curriculum responsibilities, including literacy, numeracy, and digital competence, and provides opportunities to practice them.

Although literacy and numeracy have already been given priority through the literacy and numeracy framework (LNF) within the welsh curriculum, Donaldson (2015) explains in his report that digital competence is increasingly fundamental to learning and life and that it should have similar status to that of Literacy and numeracy. The review of the new curriculum therefore recommends that these three things should be cross curriculum responsibilities for all teachers and people who work with children.

Being a student teacher, at first, I found it difficult to think of lessons that would cover a variety of areas of learning. As a teaching assistant you are given specific tasks to focus on such as reading with children or carrying out a specific group work activity. I realised quickly that I needed to be imaginative and develop a more holistic approach to teaching in order to catch the attention of the children and really allow them to enjoy their learning experience.

With the curriculum evolving I feel as though teachers have more flexibility when teaching and more room to be innovative and imaginative, however I also feel that in order to be able to carry out a successful cross curricular lesson then certain skills are needed from a teacher and as a student I am still developing these skills. (Kerry, 2010) suggests that to teach an integrated curriculum effectively there are some basic essentials in the teacher's armoury for example, classroom management, skills in explaining and questioning, skills in task setting and differentiation and also skills in assessment. Although I feel I already acquire some of these skills, I will further develop them as I carry on with my teaching experience.

I studied a diploma in ICT at college, so I acknowledge the importance and understand that the ability to use digital technology skills creatively is an increasingly

common feature of the modern world. In an article on Estyn (2019) it explains that the development of pupils' ICT skills continues to be a priority area for many schools and pupils' ICT skills are not as well developed as those for literacy and numeracy. The importance of developing these ICT skills as well as literacy and numeracy is highlighted in 'Successful futures' written by Donaldson (2015). He states that full participation in modern society and the workplace already demands increasingly high levels of digital competence and that process can only continue into a future that we cannot imagine. Although I understand the importance of including digital competence as a cross curricular responsibility, being a student and on my first placement I found it hard at first to implement it within my lessons. To begin with I was guided by my mentor and I found myself being put with groups to carry out specific activities, for example working with numicon in maths or taking groups out for reading.

As placement went on and I was given more of a voice and became more independent with planning lessons and setting up tasks for the children I was able to carry out lessons that were more holistic. In illustrative example 1 for this pedagogical principle you will see one of my first lessons I planned and carried out was a treasure hunt to find stickman. The children were given clues that they had to decode in order to get to the next clue, these clues also had bar codes which they had to scan using their I-pad to reveal the clues which eventually led to finding the stickman. Within this lesson the children had used numeracy, literacy and digital competence and I feel as though this lesson went very well and will definitely consider carrying out a lesson like this again in my next class.

During my time in Year 2 I was responsible for planning and setting up the enhanced provision for the class. The class would get together and decide what activities they would like to have for the following week (relating to the theme). I found that these activities were easier to plan for cross curricular.

In illustrative example 2, it shows an enhanced activity I had planned. Focusing again on the theme of stickman, the children were given a sheet with the characters from the book, they had to go around the classroom and ask each other what their favourite character was, record it with a tally and then go to a computer to create a graph (pictogram). The digital competence framework states that at Year 2 children should have the experience to collect and organise data into groups, extract information from simple tables and graphs, and also record data collected in a variety of suitable forms. Donaldson (2015) states that the intention of the curriculum should be to broaden children and young people's horizons, stimulate their imaginations and promote enjoyment in learning. The education of children and young people should include rich experiences that are valuable in their own right.

The children in this lesson I had carried out had gained skills in literacy, numeracy and digital competence. I would definitely do something like this again but maybe next time I could make it so that the children got to decide their own characters in order to make the activity more child initiated. I realise now that learning about teaching involves learning about things such as cross-curricular responsibilities and for PTE part 2 I recognise that there is a need to plan lessons or activities that have more of a cross curricular approach, however I do also feel this will come with experience.

Good teaching and learning sets tasks and selects resources that build on previous knowledge and experience and gain interest.

At the beginning of Professional Teaching Experience part 1, selecting resources

that build on previous knowledge and experience was quite challenging to begin with as I did not have a deep understanding of what the children had learned previously and what interested each child. The Welsh Assembly Government documents (2010) suggest that different children respond differently to learning styles. Some children learn best if they have a visual stimulus, others if they have an auditory one or practical task. Being a student and only spending a few days with the children prior to teaching them, it was difficult to know exactly how specific children preferred to learn or what interested them. Hattie (2012) stresses the importance of knowing the children's trajectories of learning, the current learning strategies used, and how willing the child is to invest in learning. Although I had spent a few days prior to the PTE looking through children's work and observing the children, it was hard to remember the specific needs of each child and what learning groups they were in. I realise now that I could have considered working more closely to children during the observation phase of PTE and maybe written down some specific areas that needed to be focused on with certain children. I will ensure I do this on PTE part 2.

At the beginning of placement, I was planning lessons that tended to be as a class as a whole and found it hard to adapt differentiation into my lessons as I was still unsure of the children's specific needs. WAG (2015) emphasises that teachers will need to set tasks and select resources that build on previous knowledge and experience and engage interest. Children and young people arrive at school with different aspirations, interests and experiences and so will approach learning in their own particular way. A one-size-fits-all approach to learning will not meet this wide range of needs. At the same time, however, we must be careful not to assume too much about our ability to identify such needs and wants and be alive to the danger of separating children into potentially superficial groupings. I found this as a student, one of the hardest things to do.

One of our lessons was to create stick man using materials the children had brought in as part of their homework. The results of these creations are shown in figure illustrative example one for this pedagogical principle. I realised quickly that when sending children off to groups a few of the children really struggled with making stickman independently. For example, one boy did not like the feel of the wet sticks and leaves and therefore needed one to one support in order to complete the task. I also realise now that I could have shown the children an example of what was expected. I had not planned for these issues and therefore our lesson took longer than expected. Next time I will ensure I have provided resources for all needs of children and will ensure to show an example. Although the lesson took two days to complete, the children really enjoyed this activity and I will definitely like to do something like this again.

Jerome Bruner stressed the importance of adult intervention to support or 'scaffold' learning and enable a child to make progress. Olsen, D (2014) explains that the teacher constructs a scaffold that could be used to support the efforts of the learner to construct his or her own understandings. Once complete, the scaffold could be removed, and the learners own mental structures would sustain understanding and enquiry. I found it hard at first to use this 'scaffolding' in regard to prior knowledge of the child or ability and interest. Each child needed different amounts of support and I feel as a teacher, this is something that you learn to get right with experience and knowledge of the abilities of the children in your class.

One aspect that I have considered further is the relationship between interest and involvement. Ferree Leavers introduced the term 'involvement' to describe the deep concentration that children demonstrate when they are engrossed in an activity. According to Bertram, T. & Pascal, C (2014) there is evidence to suggest that an 'involved' child is gaining a deep, motivated, intense and long-term learning experience. Towards the end of my PTE when I had become more familiar with the children and their interests, I was more able to make better judgements as to what would interest certain children.

We needed to carry out a scientific experiment. I was aware that a lot of the children liked activities which involved them being outdoors. We concluded that we were going to carry out a sink or float experiment this is shown in illustrative example 2 for this pedagogical principle. I explained to the children that they could decide themselves which objects they would like to investigate would sink or float. I created specific tables for groups of children who chose certain objects and they carried out the experiment in their groups. I was surprised to see how involved the children who were not usually as engaged as others and I believe this is because they chose the activity and they were excited to test the objects they had specifically thought of. In the future I will try to plan activities which are of interest to the children and provide opportunities for them to make choices according to their preferred style of learning.

To conclude, I have most definitely learned a lot from my first teaching experience. I will now use what I have learned in my next teaching experience and hopefully be able to incorporate the recommendations and targets I have set for myself.

Chapman, P (2006) explains that teaching and learning are seen as being linked in powerful and important ways such that the intention implicit in the use of the term is that teaching purposely influences learning and vice versa. Therefore, pedagogy is not the action of teaching, it is about the relationship between teaching and learning and how together they lead to growth in knowledge and understanding through meaningful practice.