

# Exploring Pedagogies Assignment : 2133347

*anonymous marking enabled*

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**DEPARTMENT: Social Sciences**

**STUDENT NUMBER: 2133347**

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**ASSIGNMENT TITLE: Critical reflection on the implementation of an innovative teaching intervention with student evidence of effectiveness /impact.**

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**LECTURER/TUTOR: Dr Alex Southern (the person who will mark your work)**

**DEADLINE: 6/1/2022 (12:00pm)**

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**Student Number: 2133347 (in place of signature)**

Critical reflection on the implementation of an innovative teaching intervention with student evidence of effectiveness /impact.

## Context: The impact of Poverty on Pupils

11-16 Comprehensive School.  
Approximately 500 pupils.  
Over 50% of pupils are Eligible for Free School Meals.  
2/3 of pupils have a reading age at least 2 years below their chronological age.

Pupils in general have heightened experiences of poverty and 'adverse childhood experiences'. Which have an impact on their self-esteem and ambition in school.

There is a wealth of research evidencing that poverty has a huge impact on children's learning at school and consequent educational attainment levels. Pupils from low income and disadvantaged families are more likely to:

- Have poorer physical health
- Experience mental or emotional health problems
- Have a low sense of well-being and life satisfaction
- Underachieve at school
- Have poorer prospects in work
- Experience social deprivation
- Feel unsafe
- Experience stigma and bullying at school

Martin and O'Neil 2019, p.8

It is commonly discussed amongst teaching professionals and politicians that many children in the UK experience poverty to the extent that they are underfed, lacking basic uniform and equipment and regularly experience extreme stress in a large variety of circumstances. It is also evident that poverty has a significant impact on pupils' wellbeing, confidence and success in school (Martin & O'Neil 2019, p.8). However, the cultural poverty and narrowed experiences, vocabulary and confidence that comes with being a young person in that context also has a significant impact on pupil attainment in school (Webb 2019 and Sherrington 2019).

When learning went online across the world in the last two academic years, my pupils did not engage with online learning. Following the return of 'normal teaching' the deficits students presented were even more pronounced: economically, socially, emotionally and culturally. This has meant teaching Literature GCSE at Key Stage 4 has become a joyless struggle to achieve GCSE grades in a reduced amount of time, with a reduced amount of understanding, cultural experience and with pupils who have disassociated from their learning. For this intervention, I chose a class where these factors are particularly noticeable in terms of attainment and attitudes to learning and also where there are extreme limits on time in the curriculum, to ensure they have covered the course content before their GCSE exam in May.

## Curriculum Aims and a Constructivist Approach

### Recommendation

3. The purposes of the curriculum in Wales should be that children and young people develop as:
- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
  - enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
  - ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
  - healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Donaldson 2015, p.29

**“Teaching requires learners to be independent thinkers and to critically examine the procedure of knowledge construction.”**

Brant 2004, p.4

Both the new 'Successful Futures' Curriculum and the Constructivist approach aim to develop learners who are independent, confident and develop skills that can be applied to be successful and fulfilled adults.

Biesta (2012) states there are three broad aims of education: qualification, socialization and subjectification. He further states that often the aims of education overlap and are 'multidimensional', meaning that the teacher not only directs the purposes of learning, but is also directed towards certain purposes by social expectations, governmental directives, school policy and individuals' needs. For my 'innovative pedagogy' I started with governmental initiatives, aiming to develop pupils' creativity and independence, (Donaldson 2015) as well as hoping to instill 'habits of mind' (Richardson 2003) for pupils to apply to their GCSE Non-Examination Assessment (NEA) i.e. qualification (Biesta 2012), thus attempting to tie some of the aims of education together in my practice with a broadly constructivist approach.

The Successful Futures Curriculum (Donaldson 2015, p.29) aims to ensure that pupils are 'lifelong learners', 'confident and resilient' but also that they are able to be 'ready to play a full part in life and work'. Within the context of teaching Literature, this creates a conflict. Pupils need to obtain at least a C in GCSE English Language and Literature to access many avenues of higher and further training, education, and employment. However, the time and freedom to explore literature, create meaningful learning opportunities and instill a passion and appreciation for literature that will help them become life-long learners, is simply not available within the curriculum (and especially following the Covid-19 Pandemic and subsequent loss of learning). This juxtaposition is echoed in the ongoing debate between proponents of 'direct instruction' and those who favour a more 'social constructivist approach'. Broadly speaking, those who favour direct instruction believe that it allows more effective learning and recall which would aid pupils during exams or testing (Kirshner et al., 2006 p.75,84), whereas

constructivists consider a holistic approach to the child's development, and the importance of discovery, or learning by doing, to develop more robust thinking skills (Vygotsky 1987).

Lawson states that "the central goal of American education is to teach students how to think" (2010, p.20) this is supported by Brant's (2006, p.4) concept that a social-constructivist approach to "teaching requires learners to be independent thinkers and to critically examine the procedure of knowledge construction." Fostering independent, resilient learning is certainly a desire of my own school setting and recent INSETs have focused on Bloom's Taxonomy and Rosenshine's Principles of teaching and also concepts of metacognition. All of these aims ultimately link to the fact that many of our pupils underachieve and this is likely linked to poverty and the implications discussed above. Constructivism, as supported by Lawson (2010) feels like a 'quick win' to address expectations of the Successful Futures Curriculum, as well as the perceived inertia and under-confidence of many pupils and their outcomes.

Kirshner et al. (2006, p.75) state that discovery based learning is "intuitively appealing" due to the belief that this type of learning allowed "learners [to] draw on their unique prior experience and learning styles to construct new situated knowledge that will achieve their goals (p.76). They further imply that the drive for educational reform leads teachers to swing towards constructivist approaches to teaching (p.84). Taber (2011, p.4) also states that constructivism is regarded as "progressive" in countries engaged in educational reform such as "Turkey". I would further argue that this is also currently the case in Wales, where constructivism links in well with the 'four purposes of learning', specifically creating confident, enterprising and ethically informed citizens and also where educational outcomes are now measured in subjective 'progression steps' (Donaldson 2015).

My personal desire for a shift towards a more 'constructivist' mode of teaching, where "teachers can support and facilitate student learning" (Biesta 2012, p.37), stemmed from the desire for pupils to be more independent and to engage with their work on a more meaningful level than the previous term, where they were encouraged to learn essentially by rote, following the copying of annotations. Something that emotionally, both the students and myself, felt was educationally bereft and left morale and classroom behaviour in shreds. However, as Kirshner (2009) suggests, effective teaching cannot be entirely 'constructivist' nor 'didactic', as experienced in the previous term, but rather a compromise between the two. Therefore, I ensured that there were clear parameters for the task, a model of what their end task should look like and scaffolding to support the task (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

## Part 1: Pupil Voice

"It is important to create learning environments that allow students to express and elaborate their opinions, so that they become aware of their beliefs."

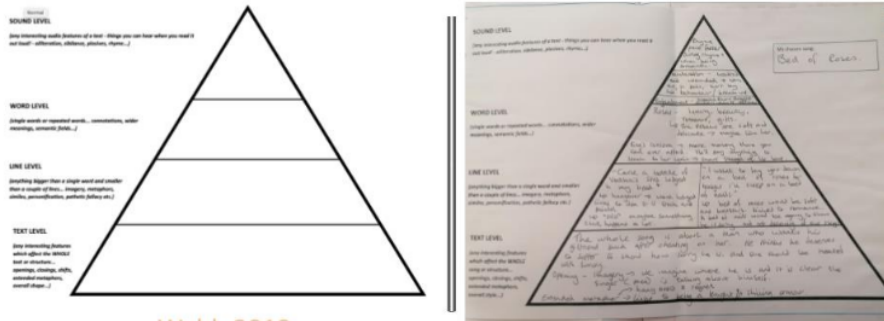
Vamvakoussi and Vamvakoussi  
2004, p.466

The images show two pages of a questionnaire. The left page has handwritten responses in blue ink. The right page also has handwritten responses in blue ink. The questionnaire is titled 'Pupil Voice' and contains several sections with questions and checkboxes for 'Yes', 'No', 'Maybe', and 'Don't know'.

"Out of school I'm not going to use it at all."  
"No point... boring."

Having recently completed the Shakespeare NEA, pupils now needed to prepare for a poetry comparison. Pupils completed a pupil voice questionnaire, where they rated their confidence before and after the first assessment and stated what they liked and did not like about how they learned in the previous term. The majority of pupils said they did not like the amount of copying and writing they had to do and also did not like working from booklets. About a third of the pupils asked to take part in more 'exciting' activities (although they were not able to specify what these might be) and felt poetry was 'pointless'. This further supported my decision to allow a more experience-based learning activity to engage pupils, make the content meaningful and hopefully show them what I already knew – they could be successful at poetry analysis based on their NEA grades from the previous term – even though pupil voice showed they were underconfident in their ability to study poetry.

## Part 2: Scaffolding and Modelling



To do this I felt that I needed to take a step back and allow the pupils to work more independently. The concept of teachers as facilitators is by no means new and was explored by Plato in *Meno* (Plato, trans. 2008) which discusses the notion of the teacher acting as a midwife, and only guiding a natural process. This links to the concept of constructivism, and the belief that pupils can find the correct answer or develop understanding, if they are asked the right questions has influenced social-constructivist pedagogy. Furthermore, it supports the notion of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (Vygotsky, 1978) and the need for teachers to create scaffolding to enable students to use their pre-existing knowledge (or schemas) to learn something new, whether that is a piece of information, or a new skill.

Fisher and Fray (2013) support the notion that "learning requires interaction" between the teacher and the student and that the amount of knowledge and skill built by the pupil influences the amount of support required from the teacher before being expected to work independently. The shift from teacher responsibility to student responsibility is known as 'gradual release' when the content is new and unfamiliar, the cognitive responsibility is primarily the teacher's. As the learner acquires knowledge, the intellectual weight shifts towards the pupil (Fisher & Fray 2013, P.2). Baring this in mind, I aimed to structure the task for pupils to build fluency and also to apply skills and concepts that they had previously learned (Fisher & Fray 2013, p.7). Specifically, selecting and analysing quotes, which they had done for their previous NEA.

This year, the poems for the NEA were on the topic of relationships – mostly adult relationships discussing marriage, sacrifice, sex, some heartbreak and often death. As most of the pupils in the class are only 14 years old and culturally deprived, many of these themes are completely out of their realms of experience. Webb (2019) argues that pupils from deprived backgrounds not only lack personal experiences, but more frequently don't have cultural capital from watching a broad range of films, soaps, reading novels or listening to a wide range of music. Their cultural experiences are often dictated by social media algorithms, or very limited and specific interests and experiences. Due to this, I felt strongly that pupils needed to begin by developing their 'schemas' around key themes of romance, and to have the opportunity to discuss with their peers, to share ideas and experiences in order to broaden their understanding, starting with something they were confident in expressing and sharing – music.

The first aspect of the intervention was simply for pupils to work in small groups to create spider diagrams of word associations for key words 'marriage' and 'romance'. Many pupils generated words such as 'sex', 'dating', 'teddy bears', 'toxic', 'break-up' or 'my parents'. Class feedback generated words and phrases, that we used to create a class diagram. I accepted all suggestions as, "It is important to create learning environments that allow students to express and elaborate their opinions, so that they become aware of their beliefs" (Vamvakoussi & Vosniadou 2004, p.466).

However, it was clear that individually, pupils were not able to generate many words, so I gathered feedback from the class so that there was a much larger visual representation of a 'schema' for them to work from in subsequent lessons. Another concerning factor was that pupils were reluctant to extend or justify their choices. For example, one pupil offered 'cooking' when linked to relationships and when I asked to explain why he chose that word he replied, "Um, well... yeah. My mum and dad, yeah." Leading me to heavily prompt for a more insightful response. This mirrors Sherrington's (2019) experience of oracy amongst disadvantaged students and furthermore, Aulls (2002, p.533) who noted that teachers who attempt constructivist-based learning must heavily structure and adapt content during the lesson for pupils to be successful.

The next aspect of the intervention aimed to allow pupils to link to their own experience of love and romance through song lyrics. This was the main aspect of the intervention. Pupils were required to complete an 'analysis pyramid' of a love song of their own choosing. Before they did their own, I had chosen a song, modelled the process of creating the pyramid and gave each pupil an example of a completed piece of work or 'WAGOLL', for them to refer back to when completing their own in an attempt to reduce the strain on working memory, and enable more effective discovery based learning (Kirshner et al., 2006, p.80-81), as well as ensuring that pupils had appropriate support to be successful (Fisher & Frey 2013), such as access to their class generated word diagrams and prompts on their pyramid analysis as "instructional guidance can act as a substitute for missing schemas and, if effective, act as a means of constructing schemas." (Sweller et al., 2003, 24).

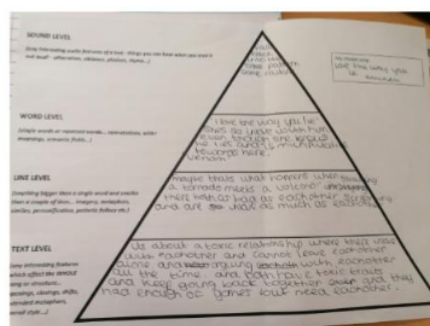
I also wanted to ensure that pupils had the opportunity to ask me questions should they want clarification, linking to the concept of the teacher as 'the more knowledgeable other' (Vygotsky, 1978). I chose to circulate the room during the

activities so that I could use specific questioning to help develop pupils' understanding of their chosen song and help to develop their analysis through questioning (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

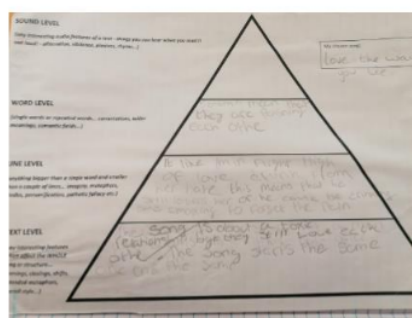
My hope was that by choosing songs that they had a personal connection to, and having a model of what the analysis should look like, that pupils would come to a deeper understanding of the song, and also have developed their skills of analysis with lyrics that they enjoyed and were meaningful to them, as they had taken responsibility for their learning (Bjork & Bjork, 2011). I further hoped that this would increase their confidence, as they'd be able to see what they were capable of when working with a text of their choosing.

## Pupil Impact

Areas of 'expertise' - more detail and appropriate selection of quotes.



'Novice' - shallow analysis, lack of detail.

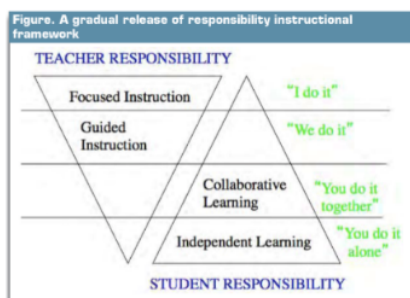


After marking the pupil's books, the outcomes can be generally divided in to two: those who chose a suitable, meaningful song to analyze (for example, Thinking Out Loud by Ed Sheeran) and were therefore able to complete the work meaningfully, finding metaphors or key words linking to their schema/ spider diagram and those who 'couldn't think of a song' on their own song and therefore were prompted by me to choose Love The Way You Lie by Eminem Feat. Rhianna. The others in this group chose inappropriate songs (for example Bound 2 by Kanye West) which were mostly literal or overtly sexual, meaning the analysis could only be shallow. These two categories can be divided in to two general categories – high and low attainers, or as Sweller et al. (2003) refer to: 'experts and novices'.

The 'experts' of the classroom were able to make interesting and detailed analysis, used the model they had been given, and did not rely too heavily on verbal support from myself. They appeared to enjoy the lesson, work independently, rely on their own problem-solving mechanisms and in subsequent lessons, were able to ask valid questions about the poems we were studying and make insightful links during lessons and in their writing. The 'novices' on the other hand found the task difficult, to some extent demoralizing and either did not complete the task at all or did so on a very superficial level – suggesting that they had not developed their skills of analysis during the lesson. These pupils also relied heavily on scaffolding and asked much more basic, 'what do I do now' or 'what quote do I use' type of questions in the following poetry lessons.

My evaluation of the intervention falls broadly in to two parts. Firstly, the effectiveness of the design of the task – the use of modelling and scaffolding and the concept of gradual release (Fisher & Fray, 2013). Secondly, a discussion of the value of using a discovery based task at all, given the assumption that many pupils were not sufficiently skilled to be successful at the task.

## Gradual Release



The scheme of work and innovative pedagogy should have focused more on 'guided instruction', before developing towards 'independent learning'.

Following the intervention, I returned to 'guided instruction' to ensure that pupils had secure knowledge of the poems required for the NEA.

Upon reflection, it is important to distinguish between pupils not taking responsibility due to inability and not taking responsibility to do apathy.

Fisher and Frey 2013, p.2

Upon evaluation, it appears many pupils were not sufficiently prepared to move from focused, or even guided instruction, to independent learning (Fisher & Fray, 2013). This may have been because I did not model effectively possibly as I did not spend enough time modelling actively in front of the class, and "thinking about loud" but rather talked pupils through a pre-prepared model (Fisher & Fray, 2013, p.4). Secondly, the task may not have been designed with appropriate scaffolding and prompts – so whilst there were scaffolding and prompts in place to support learners – it is possible that

these were not specific enough. One of the reasons for this may have been because pupils were choosing their own song lyrics to analyse – so it would have been challenging to create appropriate prompts that would cover up to 28 different song choices. A second reason is that at the time I felt my prompting through circulating the room, and pupils being able to collaborate would have been sufficient. Whilst Bjork and Bjork (2011) state the importance of pupils taking responsibility for their own learning, and the importance of teachers to consider carefully how to “introduce desirable difficulties”, it appears that I set the level of challenge at an inappropriate level for at least half of the pupils in the classroom.

### Experts Vs. Novices

Experts' schemata are much more evolved, detailed and numerous, meaning that their ability to use schemata is more meaningful, faster and more effective, than novices.

Kirshner 2006

“Inadequate practice and elaboration” may result in lack of task completion, frustration and poor application in future lessons.

Klahr and Nigam 2004, p.661

Secondly, Piaget (1955)'s view of cognitive development relies on children being able to assimilate new information into existing schemata, in order to create new meaning and acquire new understanding. Initially, I believed that by guiding pupils towards song lyrics that they enjoyed, they would more easily be able to build upon their schemata and have a deeper understanding of those songs and the figurative language within them, which they would then be able to apply to Welsh poetry about relationships. However, there is a wide range of research, including that of Glaser and Chi (1988) and Schneider and Shiffrin (1977) that suggests that experts' schemata are much more evolved, detailed and numerous, meaning that their ability to use schemata is more meaningful, faster and more effective, than novices (Kirshner, 2009). This is supported by Brant (2006, p.22) who discusses that “pupils' thinking is directly shaped by their experiences of life, but only in so far as this experience has influenced their perceptions of the world.” Therefore, pupils who have weaker schemas are likely to be less effective when attempting tasks. Moreover, Klahr and Nigam (2004) state that pupils taking part in experienced based learning are more likely to encounter

"inadequate practice and elaboration" and also that the shortcomings of learning in this way outweigh the positive aspects of discovery based learning such as "ownership and authenticity" (p.661). As experienced with my 'novices' and lack of task completion, frustration and poor application in future lessons. The impact of this for a broadly 'constructivist' approach to teaching English Literature (and possibly teaching in general) is that there needs to be more secure understanding of key knowledge, and that pupils' experiences and schemata need to be both deeper and broader, for the learning experiences to be effective.

Kirshner et al. (2006, p.79) state that comparisons of experience and instruction based learning dating from the 1950s, have consistently found that instruction based learning is much more effective than experience based learning. They argue that constructivist approaches ignore the limitations of working and long term memory when in fact the need for recall and relying on retrieval from the long term memory is essential to complete discovery based tasks. They also imply that whilst it may be possible for a 'learning task' to be completed in an experiential way, this task will not lead to a change in long term memory – thus the pupils have not learned anything new and therefore it is possible to argue that they have not achieved anything valuable during that lesson (2006, p.77).

"Teaching which does not change what students think is unlikely to have a lasting impact" (Brant 2006, p.22) Therefore, discovery based learning, where ineffective, only re-confirms what pupils already believe or know, and does not allow deeper understanding of the topic or ideas. Unfortunately, for this intervention, I believe that 'expert' pupils had beliefs of success, confidence and enjoyment of Literature confirmed, whereas the 'novice' pupils had their negative beliefs about themselves, their ability and their enjoyment of Literature emphasised.

To improve the task and the outcome, I would spend significantly more time building up schemas through a wider variety of 'low stakes' tasks, testing and explicitly teach, through more effective modelling of my own thought processes, how to select quotes and analyse song lyrics before asking pupils to take part in discovery based learning. I would use testing more effectively to check for understanding throughout a longer series of lessons, ensuring that the 'gradual release' was appropriate, and that pupils were confident and capable before completing independent tasks (Fisher & Fray 2013).

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