

Module 6007 Who Am I Teaching?

Assignment: A critical evaluation and the identification of next teaching steps focusing on a case-study of an individual or group of learners, based on an observed critical incident.

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Introduction

In this assignment, I will use a case-study to focus my educational research on an example of current practice observed in a cooperating educational institution. The intention of this study is derived from the *Professional Standards for teaching and leadership* (Welsh Government, 2019) which requires that the newly qualified teacher maintains proactive and reflective professional learning of pedagogy. The purpose-driven manifesto *Successful Futures* sets the expectation that the needs of the learning community shall “directly influence” the course of the curriculum (Donaldson, 2015, p. 23), placing the onus upon the teacher to respond to the uniquely contextual learning needs of their students by utilising relevant pedagogy to deliver suitably-tailored content.

Using the methodology of observation to identify a critical incident, I will acknowledge specific contextual details and apply analytical models, assessing their helpfulness in clarifying the possible diversity of student needs. I will synthesise expert academic sources within the focus areas of child development and wellbeing, as well as pedagogical theory and evidence, to examine the role of a teacher, and how these might help develop a potentially beneficial plan of next steps for teaching and learning.

Conclusions drawn from this work will reflect upon a hypothetical course of action in teaching and learning that will correspond with the four distinct purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020).

Context of Observation

School X, situated in the south-west of Wales, is a comprehensive state school with 1400 students aged 11-18. With 16.6% of students receiving Free School Meals the school intake is within 1% of the national average for Free School Meals subsidy. 6% of students live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Presently, School X is colour-coded Amber under the National School Categorisation System (Welsh Government, 2020) and is receiving guidance from Estyn the inspectorate body for Wales, though their next planned inspection was cancelled in 2020 due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Year 8 students (12-13 years old) in School X are arranged into general mixed ability forms with the addition of two separate forms created for pupils with additional learning needs. I was placed with a general mixed ability form which I trailed throughout four 60-minute lessons. There were no instances in which learning support staff were present and only the teacher in each lesson was fully responsible for the learning progress of this class of 21 students.

To explain briefly: the national response to the Covid-19 outbreak was to close all school buildings in Wales by 18th March 2020, reopening in September to all pupils, subject to a set of safety guidelines (Welsh Government, 2020) to be imposed by school leaders and adhered to by staff and students. It is a crucial caveat to this case-study to appreciate that the entire learning community has missed approximately four months of education on site and currently operates

under obligatory mask-wearing and social-distancing rules (which will be described later in the Critical Incident section).

In respect of an ethical approach to this study, it is essential to follow the guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2018) and maintain the anonymity of the school, teachers and pupils involved. Additionally, I undertook a non-participatory observation method to minimise the impact of my presence on teaching and learning.

Methodology

A case-study involves the intensive analysis of a unique event which may reveal qualitative data that informs the pedagogical and professional conduct of a teacher beyond the point of reaching critical conclusions (Cohen, et al., 2003). This concept adheres in particular to two of the standards as stated in the Professional standards for teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2019): those of Pedagogy and Professional Learning. In my position as a professional learner researching within a case-study model, I will thereby examine the pedagogy on display within a given contextual setting (School X) and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses with regard to the four purposes of the new curriculum (Donaldson, 2015).

As a trainee teacher in the early stages of an initial teaching training course, the opportunity to use observation as the means to compile a case-study provides access to both a real-life school environment and the expertise of

experienced teachers in practice. A non-participatory approach to observation is favoured by Estyn inspectors (Estyn, 2014), though they recommend a three-part approach to gathering data: coupling observations with non-simultaneous scrutiny of learners' hand-written exercise books and face-to-face learner interviews. Estyn's three-part strategy of watching, reading and listening is intended to penetrate deeper to find evidence of student learning than what might be purely superficial observation data; Fletcher-Wood (2016) points out that impressions may be misleading as the progress of learning is not always obviously perceptible, a sentiment that validates Estyn's robust three-part approach. It is therefore important to be respectful of the observed teacher's awareness of the student community, its diverse needs and of any pedagogical choices made in preparation to provide challenge. It is the case in School X that books must not be touched for 48-72 hours after student handling as a precaution against Covid-19 transmission, thus prohibiting any scrutiny of the students' written responses given that the one-day observation excluded any follow-up visit.

To focus this observation period into a meaningful and fruitful case-study, I have used a questionnaire format (see Appendices 1-4 for repeated use of this format) based upon an observation checklist published by Fletcher-Wood (*ibid.*, p. 125) which guides critical thinking toward aspects of "Classroom culture ... Objectives, ... Direction, ... Access and challenge, ...Assessment ... (and) Specifics,". The consideration of specific "telling moments" here relates directly to the theory of critical incident study.

Tripp (1993) asserts that incidents of a mundane nature are made critical by the process of analysis and diagnosis and that, by focusing critical thought upon a phenomenon, there is scholarly value in the discourse that may be generated. The most comprehensively detailed accounts, describing minutiae and wider context alike, provide the richest sources of interpretable data. Critical incident theory appears to offer a useful tool given how the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic has affected almost every aspect of normal school operation. As reflective practitioners in training, we are compelled to take into account these effects upon routine teaching and learning as the education system actively develops its recovery response.

Mohammed (2016) helpfully demonstrates strategies for critical incident analysis, of which the admittedly limited and potentially superficial data gained from a non-participatory observation lends itself to two processes:

1. “Plus, minus and interesting” (ibid., p. 26) – instructs looking with unbiased opinion at both the benefits and disadvantages of teaching and learning within the critical incident, whilst identifying an additional focus of interest which may be processed via lateral thinking.
2. “Alternatives, possibilities and choices” (ibid., p. 26) – would allow the observer to assume the pedagogical position of teacher and reflect upon individual research and practice in light of the specific critical incident to hypothesise an improved course of teaching and learning action.

The combination of these two strategies will pay due respect to those involved in the critical incident and allow for tentative speculation of next steps in teaching and learning.

Critical Incident

Lesson 1: History (Appendix 1)

The class is welcomed and seated in elongated rows. The teacher operates mainly from within a demarcated zone approximately two metres from the front row as suggested by the safety guidelines (Welsh Government, 2020).

Teacher asks, “Who can tell me what we said last time about “Why was Henry VII a gangster?” Voluntarily, students put their hands up to answer. Teacher poses further questions which probe the volunteers to develop thinking and clarifications. Ten of the twenty-one students volunteer, some of those repeatedly.

There are two more questioning sessions during this hour-long lesson: at the middle point and in the final plenary. The voluntary-answering strategy is repeated in both. All of the responding students are members of the ten who engaged in the first session. They are keen to show their developing ideas. Other students have not engaged at all. The class has been well behaved with

not one incident requiring a sanction. At the end the teacher explains to me that the students' written work during the lesson will be sealed in a plastic box for 48 hours before she may open it and assess their work, as a precaution against Covid-19 transmission.

The three lessons which follow (Appendices 2-4) occur in different rooms and comprise of Religious Education, Drama and Technology respectively. Over the duration, a pedagogical pattern becomes apparent which compounds the issue of the questioning sessions in Lesson 1. By the end of the fourth lesson, I have observed four teachers using the same voluntary-answering strategy without variation. The same ten students have answered all of the questions and there are eleven students in the class who have not engaged in the teacher questioning at all.

The lack of communication in evidence between a large proportion of this class and their various teachers raises concern in two respects: firstly, there appeared to be a lack of assessment opportunity; secondly, a lack of pastoral and social connection. It is arguable that the teachers, unconnected by subject, classroom and Area of Learning (Donaldson, 2015), could not have known what strategies each other was using; only I, as a class-trailing observer, had this valuable perspective. It could also be argued that this was a rare coincidence of pedagogical strategy, thereby indicating a weakness in the observation (and critical incident) methodology: if one constructs an argument based on a random and coincidental occurrence, to what extent can the subsequent analysis and conclusions bear relevance to common practice? Nevertheless, in this case, there was indisputable evidence that students can avoid contact and

accountability for their learning should they choose to behave evasively, depending on their internal motivations.

Donaldson (2015) recommends that the determination of the curriculum should grow from the students' needs, that pedagogy should stem from the four purposes. Given the context of societal recovery from Covid-19 related school closures, the disruption to both school life and home life is ubiquitous. Perhaps then, the most significant of the four purposes with links to this critical incident is the raising of "healthy, confident individuals who ... have the confidence to participate in performance ... (and) form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect" (Donaldson, 2015, p.30).

Literature Review

Considering the purpose paraphrased above, in this section I have focused my research on three linked concerns: the risks to well-being in disengaged students, the teaching and learning of oracy skills through pupil voice activity, and the solution to disengagement found via formative assessment strategies.

The Covid-19 pandemic may be considered as a threatening new element in Bronfenbrenner's "macrosystem", an event radically affecting all of society: government, law, healthcare; subsequently schools, safeguarding, family, friends; boring down to individual at the centre of the ecological theory model (Bronfenbrenner, 2018).

Ganim & Evely (no date) warn that disengagement from lessons can lead to a range of problems: low resilience, concealing learning difficulties, distracting peers, inappropriate behaviour, truancy and early drop-out of education. This raises the question: what techniques can the teacher deploy to help a student to succeed despite the pervasive consequences of the pandemic, or should the teacher perhaps do more, contribute more, make contact more with the individual student than they might have done prior to the restrictive conditions?

Kurt (2020) uses Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs model to suggest that distracted students likely have matters which prioritise their attention over learning. This hierarchy is discerning against the Covid-19 backdrop as its structure asserts that needs of safety and health override the need to gain self-esteem through social connections. Kurt (2020) postulates that schools can support safety needs with predictable daily routine, whilst teachers can provide an environment of healthy, measured risk-taking through questioning and discussion that builds trust in the class; an emphasis mirrored in Donaldson's "healthy, confident individual" criteria (2015).

The school as an organisation presently has a heightened responsibility to protect the biological health of the staff and students through measures such as sanitisation, all desks facing forward, restricting teacher's movement, one-way systems for movement between rooms, etc. (Welsh Government, 2020). The adjustments to routine were visible and full scale at School X and appeared to be successfully implemented. However, there is evidence emerging that these organisational adjustments are taking their toll on teacher wellbeing:

“nearly half of teachers are “drained and exhausted” while a third are “just about coping” and 15 per cent are “physically and mentally on the brink”” (TES Reporter, 2020). It would be reasonable therefore to infer that, due to external pressures, teaching and learning are suffering a decline in quality.

It remains important to be cautious in assumption of the reasons for such a high proportion of disengagement found in the critical incident, as in a case-study using only observation “one cannot infer cause from effect” (Cohen, et al., 2003). A closer inquiry into the wellbeing of each individual student becomes a valuable tool for the teacher, though not an option for the one-day-observing researcher.

The suggestion of building a sense of security through routine brings to mind the philosophy of behaviourist psychology. Spencer (2011) advises that students generally prefer clear, predictable routines in order to understand their role, and Bennett (2020) underpins the power of using routine to create positive habits, both of which theories concur with Donaldson’s (2015, p. 30) “healthy and confident individuals” purpose. Early behaviourists however, such as John Watson, suggested the notion that learners were passive and simply responded to external stimuli, learning through positive and negative reinforcement (GoodTherapy, 2015). This assumption of passivity seems unhelpful in the face of this critical incident’s disengaged students, although there is merit in the idea of positive reinforcement of active and social habits, for example: rewarding vocal contributions to class discussion with praise.

Laevers & Declercq (2018) assert that when the child is not forthcoming with information that reveals their wellbeing, a scanning of engagement in terms of body language may provide an insight, and a teacher may work towards building empathy with students through experiential learning strategies. The validity of this research to my study may be seen as questionable as it involved children aged 0-6, rather than the 12-13 aged students in this critical incident, although the methodology of the scanning procedure and measurement against the Leuven Scale would perhaps offer a useful accompaniment to the observational critical incident methodology. A teacher seeking to improve engagement might use such a combination of data collection to assess and diagnose levels of class wellbeing in the short term; the analysis of body language perhaps revealing something of the unconscious state of the child.

Conversely, students' conscious mind and self-awareness - connecting their emotional state to their attitude towards learning - may be productively investigated through pupil voice activities (not in evidence during this critical incident), which can have the added benefit of triggering revitalising learning experiences for the teachers themselves, potentially leading to empathy fuelled invention (Warwick, et al., 2019). This would certainly present an attractive outcome if indeed teachers are suffering as the TES survey (TES Reporter, 2020) claims.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) cemented the importance of listening to children voicing their needs, a concept supported by the work of both Vygotsky and Dewey who shared a belief that children ought

to think and learn through content based upon their social and cultural experience (Mayer, 2008):

Each (Vygotsky and Dewey) felt that the necessary quality of intellectual engagement could only be nurtured by giving children developmentally appropriate opportunities to make sense of their worlds in conversation with others. (Mayer, 2008, p. 8)

Prawat (2002) compares Vygotsky and Dewey's work similarly, and draws a conclusion that a student's motivation to learn - their call to action - should come through discovery of a communal and societal need, one which they lack the cognitive skills to process, and their teacher is ready and able to provide the education required for that progression.

These discourses of Mayer and Pravat combine thematically on progressive philosophy, implying that in 2020 the students' call to action might stem from engagement with the Covid-19 recovery, posing the question: to what extent should curriculum directly confront this context through teaching children how to discuss their personal experience of it?

We begin to see routine activities of pupil talk as a tool with a triple purpose: firstly, by improving wellbeing through socially supportive coping mechanisms, students become satisfied to transcend Maslow's (1943) tier of safety needs to a position where social belonging and esteem become the prevalent needs; secondly, cognition is developed through the discussion of ideas (Hughes,

2014); and thirdly, evidence of learning is accounted for through vocal performance (Kagan & Kagan, 2009).

The value of oracy appears high, but has oracy in Wales' schools been overlooked in recent years? Voice 21 (2019) argues that the existing national curriculum has a dearth of oracy content, without a focussed qualification or proactivity in teacher development, despite the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (Welsh Government, 2008) with its focused oracy strand approximating a third of the literacy skills curriculum alongside reading and writing. Perhaps though, the English Language GCSE specification (WJEC, 2019) confirms Voice 21's (2019) view: the full weight of the oracy coursework tasks equates to just 20% of the GCSE assessment.

During the critical incident there appeared to be a lack of pupil accountability for engaging with learning objectives, a situation caused by the deployment of only voluntary questioning. What strategies might be used additionally to maximise the engagement in oracy?

Formative assessment techniques offer a way of activating learners whilst simultaneously reducing the demand for teacher input (William & Leahy, 2015) and the strategy of randomly selecting students for questioning sets a tone of equality and the expectation that any student may be required to present their thoughts during the lesson, thus explicitly requiring students to be engaged and attentive. Activating students as resources for each other, through pupil talk and peer assessment, maximises the social interaction in a class. A "pair

and share” activity invites students to express ideas simultaneously and without the pressure of a large audience (Kagan & Kagan, 2009), potentially increasing the engagement to up to 50% as one child relates to another in each pairing - a strategy which teaches an inherent social skills curriculum.

The success rate of students in cooperative learning activities has been proven to outperform both individualised and competitive activity when it comes to review and retention of subject knowledge (Johnson & Johnson, 1979). In the selected critical incident, the teacher sought to elicit evidence of prior learning using a “hands-up”, voluntary method which is an implicitly competitive strategy method (Kagan & Kagan, 2009), so there is a strong argument that harnessing pupil talk in cooperative learning would improve progress, whilst the social skills development would build an environment of celebrated speaking and listening in line with the curricular purpose of forming “ ... positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect” (Donaldson, 2015, p.30).

Reflection, evaluation and next steps

At School X a brief cross-section of teaching and learning was observed. On reflection, I was distanced from the incident in three important ways: firstly, by physical proximity (Covid-19 social-distancing rendered students’ written work inaccessible); secondly, non-participant observation restricted my active engagement; and thirdly, the difference in experience between myself and the teachers practising.

The critical incident chosen provided undeniable evidence of students avoiding teachers' questioning over four hours. I was surprised not to have witnessed more of the formative assessment and engagement strategies evident in my reading. I was concerned that already-reluctant students were at risk of becoming further disengaged due to Covid-19 precautionary rules; worse still, that this may be happening nationwide.

The subjectivity inherent in this analysis must be conceded: the process magnified the observation, generating a host of notions around wellbeing, oracy and the social skills curriculum. Whilst this methodology satisfies the descriptor for Professional Learning (combining the latest research with existing knowledge and practice to develop one's pedagogy), my method was not "action research" (Welsh Government, 2019, pp. 47-51) but a non-participant form from which action may follow. Without professional experience, this non-participant method may be more useful to a trainee than to a seasoned teacher; an experienced practitioner might benefit more by observing their own teaching performance on video and reflecting on an incident to inform future planning.

There was inevitably potential for bias in my interpretations when measuring the real-life activities at School X against the critical opinions expressed in the relevant literature which promotes pedagogical solutions that might be considered idealistic. Real-life teaching and learning – unique, spontaneous and subject to unpredictable circumstance – can perhaps only hope and strive

to reflect such idealistic methods. My potential for bias, therefore, lay in the hope of seeing those ideal pedagogical solutions in action. This “reality check” highlights the importance of professional accountability standards, Estyn inspections and school governance at local and state level, which seek to promote and manage the effort towards best practice in teaching.

Further bias may be found in my reactive interpretation of the critical incident: wellbeing, pupil-talk, engagement and constructivism are central to my own interests as a novice practitioner. It could be argued that the system of secondary education is successful in providing students with a broad range of teachers, from whom students will experience a rich variety of teaching styles to learn from.

Adhering to the standard of professional learning, I will return to the two models of critical incident analysis suggested by Mohammed (2016) and apply them to this case-study demonstrating my own ideas for potential next steps in teaching and learning:

Plus, minus and interesting:

- **Plus:** teacher is directly questioning the students, through which they must recall prior learning to succeed – this is beneficial to embedding information into long term memory and an opportunity for vocal contributions to prepare the class for further learning.

- **Minus:** the competitive quality of voluntary answering (Kagan & Kagan, 2009) may account for only 10 of 21 students being motivated enough to participate.
- **Interesting:** the students who elected not to answer are passively engaged. We don't know to what extent they are benefiting from listening to this discussion. We can only speculate on the degree to which they:
 - a. had recalled the taught information
 - b. wanted to speak in front of the class
 - c. were interested to listen to classmates
 - d. were thinking about the topic.

Alternative, possibilities and choices

- **Alternatives** – the key question “*Why was Henry VII a gangster?*” may precede:
 - a. a pair-and-share activity
 - b. targeted individual questioning
 - c. random selection questioning.

Each of these are suggested by Wiliam & Leahy (2015) and demonstrably encourage students' preparedness to contribute.

- **Possibilities – instead of immediately embarking on the lesson content, carry out:**
 - a. an informal wellbeing discussion validating the emotional states of the students, as inspired by Laevers & Declercq (2018).
 - b. an opening gambit acknowledging the Covid-19 guidelines, followed by open forum, as in the democratic philosophy of **Dewey** (Prawat, 2002).

- **Choices** – offer students the choice of either reading their work from the previous lesson or discussing the taught content with a partner or group. This would give the teacher an opportunity to scan the class and measure physical signs of wellbeing against the Leuven scale (Laeyens & Declercq, 2018) and intervene with individuals if necessary.

Using those two models enables a range of potential next steps to be quickly generated. As regards my own professional development, this case-study has strengthened my conviction towards setting an expectation for oral contributions in lessons. Also, the incident has revealed, worryingly, that the fact that all teachers cannot monitor students across lesson periods (as I could) restricts awareness of how often learners interact with teachers, and therefore makes the teacher's efforts to communicate directly with every student more urgent. Acting on my experience of this critical incident, in the interest of addressing the diverse learning needs of my future students, I will endeavour to increase the amount of regular student-teacher dialogue in my classes, as well as encouraging interpersonal pupil discussion.

Conclusion

I will relate my conclusion in terms of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (Welsh Government, 2019), the most relevant of which I have listed in Appendix 5.

Through research into critical incident theory and non-participant observation I had opportunity to identify an event of concern and explore various elements of pedagogical and educational interest through wider reading.

Capturing the incident at School X in the questionnaire style (Fletcher-Wood, 2016) helped identify an issue of student disengagement during teacher-led questioning. It was possible to suppose that there existed a student need for confidence to participate in class activity, echoing Donaldson's purpose for creating "healthy, confident individuals" (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30).

By acknowledging the context of the Covid-19 recovery guidelines when generating a variety of potential next steps for teaching and learning, I have taken responsibility for my own professional learning, the development of future learners, and managing the learning environment.

Reading about formative assessment strategies has equipped me with questioning techniques that will be useful in creating effective classroom dialogue, from which assessing the students' knowledge and skills will serve as a platform to direct the progression of learning.

Researching the risks that prolonged disengagement poses to student wellbeing has highlighted the ways that pupil voice activities can support students. I have learned a number of strategies which set the expectation that students will contribute and be listened to respectfully in the classroom. I now feel it is crucially important for students to be given opportunity to express themselves using the authentic context of the Covid-19 pandemic as a topic for regular discussion. Not only will oracy activities contribute to the cross-curricular responsibilities of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (Welsh Government, 2008), but they may also maximise interpersonal classroom dialogue. It is my hope that a broader understanding of the diversity

of student needs can be developed through increased use of oracy activities and the prioritisation of the social skills curriculum as the national school system continues to adapt to these socially-distanced and disruptive circumstances.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES 1

(Questions adapted from Fletcher Wood (2016))

Date and time, year group: 29/9/20, 10:10 am, Year 8
Lesson details: (Context and focus -/AoLE/subject- is it near start or end of unit of study? Indoors/outdoors? Ability range? Any particularly relevant information). Topic: learning about King Henry VII. Within 6 lessons of Scheme. 3 lessons per fortnight. AoLE: Humanities - History. Classroom based. Teacher only present. Heterogenous ability, form-group arrangement, range of ability levels 4+. All students with significant learning needs are in two separate dedicated forms.
Classroom culture (What is the classroom 'vibe.'? What do attitudes, dispositions, behaviours towards learning seem like at this point in time?)

Quiet working throughout lesson: low level chat acceptable, rarely more than a whisper. Students appear comfortable and happy with content and tasks, no reluctance to engage or produce written work is visible. Student activity levels range from passive cooperation to highly engaged in questioning and teacher/student dialogue.

Objectives

(What happens in the environment that communicates the purpose of the experiences? What can be observed regarding the way lesson activities relate to these purposes?)

Teacher explicitly verbalises the thematic question for exploration *Why was Henry VII a “gangster”?*

Students are given a handout on which is printed a table to be completed with summarised evidence and their own critical opinions.

Table is replicated on electronic whiteboard screen and lesson objective of exploring Henry VII’s actions and character is implicit in the task instructions.

Direction

(What can be observed that helps learners understand what they are engaging in? What in the environment helps them understand how to achieve well?)

Phase 1: Teacher uses voluntary questioning to assess student’s progress three times during this lesson, before the task, after Task one and after Task 2 in the plenary.

Phase 2: Task

Teacher explains the requirements of the task and models an entry into the table using the whiteboard display. Teacher circulates and uses dialogue to guide students’ written responses and occasionally asks them to refine their responses verbally before writing their answer.

Phase 3: Teacher announces the end of task 1 time and questions for progress.

Phase 4: Teacher announces and models the second task, writing a summary of opinion formed on the evidence in the table.

Phase 5: Plenary - teacher ends task and questions again for assessment of developing opinions on Henry VII, returning to the main question *Why was Henry VII a “gangster”?*

End of lesson

Access and challenge

(What can be observed in the environment that enables engagement of learners? What can be observed regarding levels of challenge?)

Independent working for this task. Support through one-to-one dialogue is given on request from students with hands up. Students are allowed to discuss the task quietly as they work, informally and without explicit teacher encouragement.

At one point in the task explanation phase, the teacher points out that successfully answering in a particular column will achieve a Level 5. Teacher explains to me privately that each column represents an increasing level of challenge and is assessable using differentiation by task - students will progress as far as they are able.

Assessment

(Can anything be observed about how student's existing knowledge is used? Can anything be observed regarding the development of knowledge during or after the experience?)

Phase 1: Teacher asks for recall of prior learning on Henry VII using whole-class voluntary questioning with hands up. This process is not rushed and therefore, thinking time is given throughout the duration, around 3-6 minutes. I count overall that 10 students contribute voluntarily, some speak more than once in the exchange. The body language of these students is energised and keen. There are 21 students present in total.

Phase 3: post-task, further voluntary hands-up questioning is used to discover what children had learned and their new opinions on Henry VII as a "gangster". Students keep hands up and wait to speak whilst teacher responds to answers with praise and additional complementary information to deepen knowledge. I note that 4 students contribute to this session and all of these were in the same 10 that contributed in Phase 1.

Phase 5: teacher instigates Plenary phase by asking once more for students to contribute what they've learned, again using voluntary hands-up questioning. 2 students contribute to this and both have previously answered questions.

Specifics / Critical Incidents

(Are there moments which cause you to consider aspects of practice when you come across them in future teaching?)

The students contributing during the assessment for learning questioning phases are displaying a development of knowledge and interpretation of Henry VII that proves learning has taken place. Only 6 out of 21 students have taken this opportunity to communicate their progress verbally. The school rule, post Covid-19 lockdown, is that exercise books are collected in a plastic box and sealed for 48 hours at the end of the lesson before teacher may safely access them. I conclude therefore that the teacher's opportunity to assess that learning has taken place in the majority of the class is severely limited due to the combination of strictly voluntary questioning and the restricted access to students' written work.

The implications of this touch upon Assessment for Learning, teacher/student relationships, predicted grades and lesson planning.

Questions to be considered:

- How will the teacher build relationships with students who are not contributing verbally?
- How will the teacher gain insight on every student to make plausible, evidence-

based grade predications?

- Will there be sufficient time to access the students' written work and assess learning before the next timetabled History lesson?
- How might the teacher use a variety of questioning and engagement structures to ensure that every pupil contributes?
- How will students be held accountable for their efforts?
- How will the teacher adequately support any students who may be concealing their lack of understanding through reluctance to volunteer?

Appendix 2

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES 2

(Questions adapted from Fletcher Wood (2016))

Date and time, year group: 29/9/20, 11:25 am, Year 8

Lesson details: (Context and focus - /AoLE/subject- is it near start or end of unit of study? Indoors/outdoors? Ability range? Any particularly relevant information)

Topic: Exploring the question *Does God exist?* 4th lesson of Scheme. 3 lessons per fortnight. AoLE: Humanities - Religious Education. Classroom based. Teacher only present. Heterogenous ability, form-group arrangement, range of ability levels 4+. All students with significant learning needs are in two separate dedicated forms.

Classroom culture

(What is the classroom 'vibe.'? What do attitudes, dispositions, behaviours towards learning seem like at this point in time?)

Quiet and politely behaved in general, the class is mainly silent with occasional whispered chatter, both on and off topic during times when teacher is not addressing the class. No visible reluctance to work. A large proportion, around 50%, of students' body language suggests low energy, lesson is immediately after morning break time, students rest their heads on hands and lean low on desks. Less than half of the class respond to voluntary questioning and remain passively engaged.

Objectives

(What happens in the environment that communicates the purpose of the experiences? What can be observed regarding the way lesson activities relate to these purposes?)

Teacher writes the title of the lesson “*Does God exist?*” on the whiteboard and students are instructed to copy this into their exercise books.

The task implicitly presents the learning objective which is to encounter and critically consider several perspectives on this question from religious, theist and atheist subjects.

Direction

(What can be observed that helps learners understand what they are engaging in? What in the environment helps them understand how to achieve well?)

Phase 1: Assessment for Learning

Voluntary questioning is used to recall prior learning.

Phase 2: Preparation for task

The teacher presents a table on the white board which is to be drawn into student books. The task is explained, whilst students are still drawing their tables and only one or two students watch the teacher while explanation takes place. Videos will be shown for students to watch and consider.

Phase 3: Task

Videos are watched and teacher pauses occasionally during the videos to draw attention to information by summary and repetition. Class listens. After each of three short videos the students are asked to summarise what they have seen and understood in their tables. Teacher writes a model answer for each of these examples and it appears that many students are copying teacher’s model into their tables.

Access and challenge

(What can be observed in the environment that enables engagement of learners? What can be observed regarding levels of challenge?)

Learners display 100% visible engagement through clearly watching the videos presented. Engagement is also shown when drawing the tables into books. Teacher questioning is voluntary and a small minority, fewer than 10 students, respond with hands up throughout the lesson.

There is no visible differentiation by task or scaffolding explicitly given. Teacher remains at the front of the class throughout the lesson, within Covid-19 space restriction rules.

Students may choose to copy answers from the board as written by the teacher. Teacher reminds students that neatness is important as they will need to use these answers in their next R.E. lesson.

Assessment

(Can anything be observed about how student’s existing knowledge is used? Can anything be observed regarding the development of knowledge during or after the experience?)

Phase 1: teacher uses whole-class, voluntary questioning to instigate recall of prior learning. Students have had 2 previous lessons in this topic. This is lesson 3 and I note

that the students who are raising their hands to volunteer are the same students who did so during voluntary questioning in lesson 2 earlier today.

Phase 3: After giving the instructions on how to complete the task, teacher asks the whole class *Does that make sense?* There is no response, she carries on with starting the video. Later, following a video of a Muslim praying, teacher asks the question *Does anyone know how many times a day Muslims pray?* One student puts their hand up and is chosen to answer, “five” is given and the teacher responds “perfect” and writes this information on the board. The rest of the class copy the answer from the board into their tables.

Plenary: there is no plenary or assessment for learning, instead the teacher plays a clip from one of favourite films *Sister Act* for the children to watch some acts of worship.

Specifics / Critical Incidents

(Are there moments which cause you to consider aspects of practice when you come across them in future teaching?)

The teacher uses two methods which are questionable here:

1. Whilst offering only whole-class, voluntary questioning the teacher does not seek to check the understanding of the students who do not volunteer. They are safe in their refusal to volunteer and therefore not held accountable for their progress. When only a single member of the class volunteers for the Muslim prayer question, teacher does not address this apparent lack of majority understanding, she simply writes the answer down and moves on, giving hyperbolic praise.
2. By writing model answers on the board, the teacher enables the students to copy her model and minimises their cognitive interaction with the stimulus videos. Teacher has no opportunity to view the written work due to the Covid-19 social distancing rules. Therefore, evidence of learning is only available through bouts of voluntary questioning.

I am aware that the only students who have answered voluntary questions in this lesson are from the same 10 that answered during Lesson 1. There are over half of the class here that have not yet verbally interacted with a teacher in two hours of learning.

Questions that arise:

- Why does it matter that students in this class have not yet engaged a teacher in dialogue for a two-hour period?
- What methods remain at the close of this lesson for the teacher to assess the progress and understanding of students who have not volunteered to answer questions, and what might have been used for a plenary instead of watching another video?
- How might students be engaged in peer assessment in order to provide opportunity for all to verbalise their responses to the stimulus videos?
- How might the key question *Does God exist?* be explored in a kinaesthetic way through debate?

Appendix 3

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES 3

(Questions adapted from Fletcher Wood (2016))

Date and time, year group: 29/9/20, 12:25 pm, Year 8
Lesson details: (Context and focus -/AoLE/subject- is it near start or end of unit of study? Indoors/outdoors? Ability range? Any particularly relevant information) Topic: Introduction to soundscapes as a dramatic strategy. 4th lesson of Scheme. 2 lessons per fortnight. AoLE: Creative Arts - Drama. Drama studio. Teacher only present. Heterogenous ability, form-group arrangement. All students with significant learning needs are in two separate dedicated forms.
Classroom culture (What is the classroom 'vibe.'? What do attitudes, dispositions, behaviours towards learning seem like at this point in time?) Culture is maximum participation through kinaesthetic learning. Smiles and excitement are visible from the outset. Students sit in circle so that all are equally prominent. Behaviour is lively and respectful; noise of discussion and vocal ideas are acceptable. Off-task discussion and physical activity that is clearly off-task is challenged by teacher and redirected. Teacher projects voice powerfully and is physically active. Covid-19 restrictions, however, appear fully relaxed, although ventilation is assured through open fire door and classroom door.
Objectives (What happens in the environment that communicates the purpose of the experiences? What can be observed regarding the way lesson activities relate to these purposes?) Teacher communicates the topic verbally before kinaesthetic demonstration begins. During demonstration teacher points out what is and is not appropriate for this strategy, i.e. vocalised performance, non-moving, performed usually with lights off so invisible, all through sound.
Direction

(What can be observed that helps learners understand what they are engaging in? What in the environment helps them understand how to achieve well?)

Kinaesthetic demonstration engages 100% of students actively in creativity with thinking time provided. Teacher feedback and praise support and promote creativity and deter wayward behaviour.

Access and challenge

(What can be observed in the environment that enables engagement of learners? What can be observed regarding levels of challenge?)

Students are given opportunity to form friendship groups of maximum four students. Given early stages of year and lack of assessment data from previous year due to Covid-19 lockdown this seems a reasonable approach and produces 100% participation.

Assessment

(Can anything be observed about how student's existing knowledge is used? Can anything be observed regarding the development of knowledge during or after the experience?)

After topic voluntary question *Who can tell me what a "soundscape" is?* Voluntary answers are corrected by teacher who then instructs students to stand and they will create a demonstration as a whole group.

Class is interrupted by a fire drill approximately halfway through. The drill takes about 15 minutes and there is not enough time for students to perform their work upon returning to the classroom. Teacher allows students to continue creative process until the end of the lesson and announces that they will resume and perform work in next week's lesson.

Specifics / Critical Incidents

(Are there moments which cause you to consider aspects of practice when you come across them in future teaching?)

The use of a kinaesthetic demonstration involves every member of the class equally within 5 minutes of entering the room. This appears highly effective, particularly as it follows two classroom-based lessons in which students were only voluntarily active in dialogue with the teacher. All students take part, there is no visible reluctance, suggesting that this teacher is trusted and that a positive correlation is present in the students' attitudes to success. It is notable that there are 6 boys and 15 girls in this class. Behaviour is highly cooperative.

Questions which arise from this incident are:

- How comparatively effective are the voluntary questioning and compulsory kinaesthetic demonstration methods of engaging with learning?
- To what extent are Covid-19 social distancing rules affecting the teacher's

ability to maximise active participation?

- To what extent is a physically active drama task easier to assess for progress of learning than classroom-based written tasks under Covid-19 socially distanced rules?

Appendix 4

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES 4

(Questions adapted from Fletcher Wood (2016))

Date and time, year group: 29.9.20, 14:25, Year 8
Lesson details: (Context and focus -/AoLE/subject- is it near start of end of unit of study? Indoors/outdoors? Ability range? Any particularly relevant information) Topic: Designing a photo frame to be made from acrylic. Design and technology. Mixed ability class. Teacher only present.
Classroom culture (What is the classroom 'vibe.'? What do attitudes, dispositions, behaviours towards learning seem like at this point in time?) Positive and sensible behaviour, students are seated two or three to a table. No reluctance to engage in tasks is visible.
Objectives (What happens in the environment that communicates the purpose of the experiences? What can be observed regarding the way lesson activities relate to these purposes?) Students are working from a design project booklet, they are already aware of the next phase of their project, completing the design steps. There is little instruction given other than to continue with their designs. The relationship between the task and the final assessment outcome is clear: designs must be made before production of the physical item can begin.

Direction

(What can be observed that helps learners understand what they are engaging in? What in the environment helps them understand how to achieve well?)

Teacher tells students at the beginning of the lesson *I want good designs. I have a reputation to uphold.* This appears to promote effort and taking the task seriously.

The teacher fields questions continually throughout the design process, listening to and responding verbally describing acrylic materials.

The work booklets contain written instructions and a space in which to draw three designs which is the intended outcome for all students by the end of this lesson.

Access and challenge

(What can be observed in the environment that enables engagement of learners? What can be observed regarding levels of challenge?)

Two students have already completed their three designs in a prior lesson. They tell the teacher this at the beginning of the lesson and she sets them an extension task: choose a design you like from a catalogue, evaluate its properties and write down two features which are strengths; find another design and write two weaknesses of its design.

Two other students have missed the previous lesson and need to do preparatory research. Teacher arranges for them to sit in the adjacent classroom and use computers to research. They reappear twice asking for assistance and teacher leaves the room to offer support.

Assessment

(Can anything be observed about how student's existing knowledge is used? Can anything be observed regarding the development of knowledge during or after the experience?)

Teacher is engaged by active students who seek answers and reassurance for their creative ideas. There are two tables furthest from the teacher who do not make any requests and are therefore not engaged in conversation with teacher at any point during the lesson.

Specifics / Critical Incidents

(Are there moments which cause you to consider aspects of practice when you come across them in future teaching?)

Engagement is clear from all students in this class however, I notice that one student who is seated alone at a desk sits for long periods thinking and not putting pencil to paper. Teacher does not engage with this student and I wonder why.

Questioning in this fourth and final lesson of the day is, again, all voluntary. This leads me to conclude, based on the evidence and notes I have made, that there are members of this class who have not spoken directly or engaged in dialogue with a teacher through the duration of four consecutive lessons.

I learn, through conversing with the teacher before leaving this lesson, that this school was expecting an Estyn inspection before the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. This inspection was therefore cancelled.

This raises the question:

- Do teachers in areas of learning appreciate that perhaps all teachers are frequently using the same method of voluntary questioning?
- Am I experiencing standard practice or have the circumstances of the Covid-19 lockdown and subsequent social-distancing rules led teachers to relax their assessment for learning strategies?
- How does avoiding teacher-questioning affect the learning progress of reluctant students?
- Conversely, how significantly does the gap widen between the progress of the proactively engaging students and those who avoid teacher contact throughout the day?

Appendix 5

Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (Welsh Government, 2019) relevant to the conclusions drawn:

Pedagogy: Advancing the learning

- **Four purposes for learners**
- **Real life, authentic contexts**
- **Progression in learning**
- **Cross-curricular themes**

Pedagogy: Refining the learning

- **Managing the learning environment**
- **Assessment**

Pedagogy: Influencing the learner

- **Assessment**
- **Listening to learners**
- **Learning outcomes and well-being**

Professional Learning

- **Wider reading and research findings**
- **Continuing professional learning**

Leadership

- **Taking responsibility for self**