

Design, conduct and critically evaluate a close-to-practice research project (lesson study) focusing on the model of the transformative teacher in developing practice that has a positive impact on the learner.

Targed/Target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn. What I have done in this assignment.
Closer critical engagement with theory and its application in your own, unique classroom context is required. What are the limitations to the research literature that you have considered? How does this relate to events and processes in your practice when applying these principles?	I have considered the impact of literature on my own classroom and practice. I have discussed the limitations of this lesson study. I have considered how the results of this study can be applied in my classroom.

The aim of my research project is to assess the effectiveness of explicit vocabulary instruction (hereafter referred to as EVI) in allowing pupils to retain and use a new or unfamiliar word. The issue that interested me was the use of EVI as a method of supporting learner literacy and increasing vocabulary. In my school, methods to support learner literacy have already been researched and strategies implemented based on this research. This is due to a cross-curricular focus on a Literacy and Numeracy Framework (hereafter referred to as LNF). In my class, learners are mixed ability with some displaying very poor literacy skills. This research is therefore carried out with the purpose of supporting a very tangible learning target in the form of the LNF.

This research project took place at a mixed 11-18 comprehensive school in a suburban area of South Wales (Estyn, 2018). In accordance with BERA guidelines (2018) the school shall hereafter be referred to as School X. School X is a pioneer school for the draft curriculum for Wales 2022 (Welsh Government, 2020), based on recommendations made in *Successful Future* (Donaldson, 2015). My research partner and I were both in placement at School X. Our research question was:

“Does EVI (Explicit Vocabulary Instruction) have an impact on learners’ retention and application of a new word?”

The lesson study took place over two days in which my research partner and I taught a lesson centred around using EVI to teach the word “enchanted” to two comparable, mixed-ability KS3 classes (see Appendix B).

Literacy at school and beyond is arguably vital. It is recognised not simply as a technical skill, but a social practice, linked to culture, identity, knowledge and power (Soler et al, 2009). Research tells us that poor literacy correlates with lower life expectancies, poor mental wellbeing and poor performance in school (National Literacy Trust, 2017). It is perhaps because of this that literacy became one half of the focus of the National LNF when it was introduced in 2013. The purpose of the LNF was to formally embed and assess literacy and numeracy across all subjects in a school’s curriculum. National expectations for learner attainment would be published annually, and while no national level data collection would take place, learners would be assessed against these standards (Welsh Government, 2013).

The significance of literacy can perhaps be tied to its status as a benchmark for educational attainment and ability. E. D. Hirsch Jr. notes that vocabulary size is a useful proxy to measure not only attainment in literacy – be it reading, writing or oracy – but also general

attainment in subjects as diverse as science, humanities and the arts. A correlation between vocabulary before starting school and GCSE attainment later in life has also been uncovered. This seems to be tied to early exposure to vocabulary rather than other societal factors, with professional parents using 32 million more words in conversation with their children than parents from non-professional backgrounds (Quigley, 2018). Vocabulary and literacy are therefore gatekeepers to attainment throughout a learner's time in education. This evidence would indicate that active work to close the vocabulary gap between learners should be a priority in schools which might raise standards of academic achievement and increase social mobility. This can be a daunting prospect, as E. D. Hirsch Jr. estimated that learners need to learn an average of 43,000 words during their time in school in order to advance into higher education (Lemov et al, 2016). Despite the clear significance of vocabulary for literacy, evidence shows that 43% of learners begin KS3 with vocabularies so limited as to affect their learning. Furthermore, 60% of secondary school teachers reported that the proportion of children with low vocabularies remained the same or increased between the ages of 11 and 16 (Quigley, 2018).

EVI is one tool that teachers can utilise in the classroom for the benefit of learners' literacy. Evidence supports this, indicating that all children benefit in terms of vocabulary because of EVI. For children with reading difficulties, the benefit is tripled compared to those who do not receive EVI (Quigley, 2018). Despite the clear benefits of EVI, lessons planned around this method are rare, with new vocabulary often taught implicitly. Vocabulary is therefore *"caught, not taught."* (Quigley, 2018 p.15) This is an inefficient method of vocabulary instruction, with evidence suggesting that learners will only be able to infer the meaning of 15% of unfamiliar vocabulary when reading without direction (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2009). We can perhaps infer that such an incidental attitude towards the learning of new vocabulary will only serve to widen the gap of attainment between learners. It becomes clear that literacy is a critical social practice, and vocabulary instruction extends beyond simple comprehension of instructions or texts to become a potential agent for social development (Larson and Marsh, 2015).

Analysis of studies into methods of EVI indicated that the most effective method is two-fold. The learner must be introduced to the definition of an unfamiliar word, but also the contexts for appropriate use of the unfamiliar word (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2009). EVI focuses on depth of understanding of a new or unfamiliar word. This is contrasted against Implicit Vocabulary Instruction (hereafter referred to as IVI) which is concerned with broad word knowledge. IVI is often incidental and is typified by the example of a new word encountered in a text, at which point the teacher might provide a synonym or definition before moving on,

providing a shallow understanding of the new word. EVI is focused on providing context and defining the nuance of a new word through explicit focus and practice during a lesson. The main disadvantage of EVI is that focusing on one word per lesson simply cannot meet the demanding target for growing a learner's vocabulary. However, EVI is also a tool for developing a learner's ability to contextualise unfamiliar words. The most effective model therefore is a combination of EVI and IVI – as learners experience more EVI, their ability to effectively follow IVI increases, optimising their vocabulary development (Lemov et al, 2016). This transference of skills from one mode of instruction to another mode of instruction ties into the constructivist style of teaching. If EVI is modelled on a structure of explaining the definition of a word, modelling its use in contexts, scaffolding opportunities for learners to use it, and finally providing opportunities to practice independent use, learners will apply similar skills during IVI. Without EVI, they will simply learn the meaning of the word by rote, memorising the definition or synonym used by the teacher and therefore limiting the contexts in which they might use the new word (Didau, 2014).

The choice of word taught through EVI is also something that must be considered. It is common practice to divide words between the three tiers of vocabulary described by Beck et al in *Bringing Words to Life*. Tier 1 words are considered simple or conversational words, usually with a singular meaning and naturally learnt by even emerging readers. Tier 3 words are subject specialist words (e.g. synecdoche) which are usually covered in depth as part of other activities in the classroom. Tier 2 words are therefore the most appropriate for EVI, as these are complex or unusual words that can sometimes contain multiple meanings. Specifically, tier 2 words that are connected to the theme, subject or content of the teacher's scheme of work are most beneficial (Lemov et al, 2016).

Methodology

The methodology used is a lesson study, which is a form of practitioner-based or action research. This method of research is designed to focus on small-scale intervention or action in a real-world setting (Cohen et al, 2011). In this instance, the lesson study allowed myself and my research partner to carry out this lesson study whilst on placement at School X, completing a case study focused on learners from classes in which we acted as teachers.

As both my research partner and I are trainee English teachers, we felt that an authentic purpose for our lesson study would be a focus on learner literacy (Lewis and Hurd, 2011). This is a subject that interested us both and upon reading literature regarding current thought about literacy, it was determined that studying the efficacy of a strategy to support increase in learners' vocabularies would be appropriate.

EVI was identified as an appropriate strategy to employ during a lesson, and a six-step process of implementation was identified. The lesson plan was built around these six steps.

- *Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.*
- *Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.*
- *Ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representing the term or phrase.*
- *Engage students in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their vocabulary notebooks.*
- *Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.*
- *Involve students in games that allow them to play with terms.*

(Marzano and Simms, 2013 p.14)

As the research question focused on this strategy for teaching the word “enchanted”, the entire lesson plan focused on EVI (see Appendix B). This was developed using points taken from an EVI template (Zimmerman and Reed, 2017). Worksheets were developed to standardise the word carried out by both classes into specific tasks pertaining to the six steps of EVI (see Appendix C).

The decision was made to carry out this lesson study by teaching the same lesson to two KS3 classes of thirty learners, with changes made to the second lesson dependant on findings of the first lesson (Dudley, 2014). The two classes had the same number of learners and were both mixed ability classes, with learners in each class of estimable ability. For the purpose of observation and interview, three case study learners were identified in each class, meaning that the total number of observed learners was six. These learners were selected to provide a spread of ability in each class, meaning that one high-ability learner, one learner of average ability, and one low-ability learner was selected from each class.

My research partner and I would act as classroom teacher for one lesson study each, with the other taking the role of observer. Observations focused on learners selected for the case study as well as the classroom environment and lesson itself. The observation would remain non-participant, though learners would be made aware of the presence of the observer for the sake of transparency. The observation would be recorded systematically, and learner engagement measured on the Leuvan Scale of Engagement (Simpson and Tuson, 2003).

Directly following each lesson study, the case study learners would act as a focus group for an interview by the lesson study observer. As the study is small in scale, it was felt that the interviews should be semi-structured (Drever, 2003). To this end, my research partner and I agreed on a set of questions to direct the interview, while allowing time for further questioning based on apparent lines of enquiry that occurred during the interviews. While the observer conducted the interview, the classroom teacher transcribed the conversation.

Qualitative data was collected from the observation through a completed table. This was combined with further qualitative data in the form of an interview transcript (Coles and McGrath, 2010). This form of data is most appropriate given the small sample size and allows for deeper information to be gathered. Learners could also provide opinions and advice, which could then be applied immediately in further lesson studies (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Using this qualitative data, a reflection was implemented. In this instance, the reflection was captured through an Assisted Reflective Conclusions Model (hereafter referred to as an ARC Model) which allowed my research partner and I to reflect on initial feelings during observation and interview. The ARC Model then allowed for these feelings to be understood, evaluated and a conclusion drawn. This would then allow the observer to propose a transformed experience that would optimise learning. The lesson study method would therefore allow the first transformed experience to be implemented in the second phase of the lesson study. This allows for the impact of these suggestions to be assessed directly.

Prior to the lesson study being carried out, an ethics form was completed and submitted to the appropriate organisations (see Appendix A). Letters of consent were sent to learners' parents and letters of assent were supplied directly to the learners. It was decided that at the beginning of each lesson study, the class would be informed of the presence of an observer and that the lesson was being studied for the purposes of research.

When doing research in the classroom, certain ethical considerations must be made. Primary among these is the risk to participants, who are all KS3 learners and below the age of consent. It was identified that this lesson study could present risks in the form of emotional distress and safeguarding issues. To minimise emotional distress, learners attending the lesson were reassured by the classroom teacher that the decision of who would form the focus group for interview did not reflect on their ability or performance in class. This was true as the learners selected were chosen to provide an equal spread of attainment, though this fact was not disclosed. Learners selected for the focus group were assured that they would remain anonymous in any publications and that their input would not result in any

repercussions. Honesty was encouraged and learners were advised how to opt out of the lesson study. All information pertaining to participants was anonymised except for consent and assent forms, which had to be signed by the participants and their parent or carer. Consent and assent forms were secured in adherence to data protection policy.

To ensure that the lesson study was not compromised by sudden withdrawal of consent, outreach to the parents and carers of all learners participating in the lesson study was made. If consent was not forthcoming, the learner in question continued to participate in the lesson but no data was captured pertaining to them or their work. During interview, the interviewer and focus group were accompanied by the secondary observer, who recorded a transcript of the interview.

Lesson Study

For the first lesson study, I acted as secondary observer while my research partner acted as classroom teacher for the lesson (see Appendix D). I focused my observation on three learners of mixed attainment (hereafter referred to as Pupil A, Pupil B and Pupil C) who would also form the focus group interviewed after the lesson had taken place. Observations indicated positive engagement with the lesson and material, with Pupil A reaching 4 on the Leuvan Scale of Engagement, and Pupils B and C reaching 5. This ran contrary to my prediction, which was that the higher-attaining learners would remain fully engaged while lower-attaining learners would struggle. However, all pupils in the focus group remained engaged, with Pupil A receiving the lowest mark on the Leuvan Scale of Engagement. Pupil C, the low-attaining learner, fell behind on the activities for part of the lesson, but used the rest of the lesson to catch up with their peers. Of the activities that took place during the lesson, Task 7 required the most teacher-led support, and learners queried each other to determine what the task was asking for. However, all learners interviewed were positive about the purpose and the outcomes of the lesson, indicating a desire to receive similar lessons in future (see Appendix E).

The lesson was therefore very successful, and this was reflected in the workbooks completed by the focus group, with all activities completed. Pupil A completed the work but did not become fully engaged in the lesson. I theorise that this is because the work was not challenging enough for a high-attaining learner, and that further differentiation is needed to suitably challenge all learners. The subsequent interview was largely positive with the focus group unanimously deciding that a lesson focused on EVI would be beneficial in future.

The engagement of Pupils B and C was encouraging, as this indicated that the scaffolding was suitable for medium and low-attaining learners. For the second lesson study, optional activities would be included for higher attainers. Observation indicated that despite completing the work presented, Pupil A did not treat all tasks as serious learning opportunities, and instead decided to provide “silly” answers to some tasks. Task 7 would also be modelled to assist learners (see Appendix F). Evidence collected was largely qualitative, in the form of written observations, reflection and a transcribed interview. Due to the small sample size, the depth of information collected was considered appropriate and the same method was used for the second lesson study.

For the second lesson study, I acted as classroom teacher while my research partner acted as secondary observer. The class being taught was estimable to the first class as they were both mixed-ability KS3 classes. My research partner’s observation focused on three learners of mixed attainment (hereafter referred to as Pupil D, Pupil E and Pupil F) who would also form the focus group interviewed after the lesson had taken place (see Appendix G). Once again observations indicated that the learners were positively engaged. Pupils D and E reached 5 on the Leuvan Scale of Engagement, while Pupil F reached 4. This was more typical of my original prediction, as Pupil F was the lowest attaining in the focus group. However, despite this difference in engagement, all work was carried out and teacher-led support was lower than during the first lesson study.

The study was minimally disrupted due to a large proportion of the class arriving late to lesson after being held behind by their previous lesson’s classroom teacher. I compensated for this by reducing time for one of the activities and, despite the delay in starting, all the lesson’s objectives were achieved. The focus group completed their workbooks without issue.

The interview that followed largely followed the same questions, as it was semi-structured. The focus group responded positively to the lesson again, and expressed similar views to the previous focus group, including a desire for similar lessons in future. Pupil F suggested the inclusion of games to support EVI, which I feel would be worth considering as the differentiation of tasks to support high-attaining learners like Pupil D seems to have worked but at the expense of engagement by low-attaining learners like Pupil F (see Appendix H).

Task 7 was included as a form of learning game, though the ultimate learning goal of this task is perhaps lost at the expense of providing learners with a fun activity (see Appendix C). While Task 7 was scaffolded and designed with the idea that it might help to create a visualisation for the key word “enchanted”, this seems to have been more successfully

achieved by Task 6. The focus groups also seemed more enthusiastic about Task 6, so perhaps Task 7 could be replaced with a different activity (see Appendix I).

The research findings would seem to conclude that EVI is an effective strategy for enhancing learners' vocabularies, and that this style of lesson should be adopted more frequently in the classroom. Given the current literature and evidence supporting the significance of literacy and the effectiveness of EVI not only as a vocabulary strategy itself, but as a gateway to effective IVI, this is unsurprising (Lemov et al, 2016).

A pleasant finding during this lesson study was the unanimous enjoyment that the focus groups derived from the lesson. It quickly became clear that learners who developed a depth of understanding about an unfamiliar word could themselves understand the benefit of the lesson objectives. As one learner described during their interview, they felt that they would be more comfortable using the word "enchanted" in their work, and that further EVI would ultimately yield a better quality of writing.

Moving forward, I feel that this research has allowed me to build a model for an effective form of EVL suitable for approaching unfamiliar or new words in a way that engages learners of mixed ability. Specifically approaching a word that has a thematic link to a topic of learning can be used as a method of introducing ideas integral to a new topic while also teaching new vocabulary. Integrating this method for significant new vocabulary alongside an IVI approach during lessons focused on other topics might prove useful as a method of encouraging an enthusiasm for literacy that could help to redress the balance between pupils with large vocabularies and pupils with smaller vocabularies.

However, it should be noted that this is a snapshot of vocabulary development at work. Without further study, it would not be possible to see if the lesson study yielded a tangible result. It would be helpful, for example, to see if learners begin using their new word when speaking or writing. It would also be useful to test learners' understanding of the word and its use in coming weeks, months and years.

It should also be mentioned that learners' engagement with this style of lesson might be the result of novelty rather than a significant appreciation for the lesson objective. Learners may find the approach to a lesson unfamiliar and therefore exciting because it seems new and different. If learners were exposed to this variety of lesson once or twice a week, it is possible that they will grow bored with EVI. The choice of word may also impact this. For this lesson study, the word "enchanted" was chosen based on School X's scheme of work and suits themes present in popular children's literature and media. This may account for the

focus group's enthusiasm. It is worth noting that in the second focus group's interview, the learners were asked what books they were reading, and all provided examples of fantasy genre novels that could link thematically to the "enchanted" theme of the lesson study.

Conclusion

The use of a lesson study to optimise teaching practice focused on improving literacy and vocabulary through EVI is an effective choice. It has allowed for my research partner and I to produce a lesson and determine its strengths and weaknesses before amending it to enhance strength and diminish weakness. The involvement of learners in the process of reflection and amendment through focus groups means that they get a voice in how they learn at school. This experience has led me to conclude that lesson study can be an effective tool for improving theory-related teaching practice.

However, it is worth acknowledging the limitations of the lesson study as a research method. It is also worth recognising the limitations and shortcomings encountered during this lesson study. I feel that it would have yielded more conclusive results if this lesson study had focused on teaching the same class of learners at least twice, using an untested initial lesson (or lessons) as a baseline to determine the vocabulary, ability and engagement of the test group. As it stands, the two lesson studies took place with two different classes in different rooms on different days, taught by different teachers. While comparable it seems clear that the differences are numerous enough that they potentially nullify the validity of any data gathered. To minimise the impact of these variables, the two lesson studies that took place involved the EVI of the same word, "enchanted", which itself is problematic. What is ultimately being tested is not the efficacy of EVI, but its effectiveness when teaching a specific word.

The word "enchanted" itself might also be demonstrably flawed. This word was selected as a tier 2 word which tied thematically into the scheme of work taking place in School X, and yet also held multiple meanings. Despite this, all learners in the focus groups indicated that they had heard the word "enchanted" before. It is therefore possible that the lesson study only consolidated the meaning of the word, rather than introducing new vocabulary.

The short length of time to carry out the study meant that only two lesson studies could take place, when it is acknowledged that at least three should be carried out to achieve meaningful results (Dudley, 2014). Indeed, the usefulness of lesson study as a tool for benefitting learner outcomes is contested, with the Education Endowment Fund conducting a

trial that found lesson studies to yield no statistical impact (Teacher Development Trust, 2015).

Evidence collected in the form of observation, reflection and interview was valuable qualitative data providing insight into the behaviours and thoughts of the focus group. While workbooks were collected to check that work had been completed, no form of assessment was completed. I feel that the qualitative data collected might have been usefully supplemented by quantitative data in the form of a test. This test could potentially check for understanding of a new word or application in different contexts. Ideally, this would be completed a period after the lesson to check long-term retention. However, the timeframe for this study and small sample size would prevent very meaningful data from being collected.

This lesson study represents a snapshot of the usefulness of EVI as an educational tool, and in my position as a trainee teacher, it has provided valuable insight. For a study into EVI to have meaningful impact, it seems to me that more extensive, controlled measurement of EVI as a tool for vocabulary growth would be worthwhile. A sidelong study into IVI would also, I feel, create an important context for any study into EVI.

This lesson study into EVI has made me consider a valuable tool moving forward as a teacher engaging with learner literacy. I have been able to use this process to create a useful lesson structure for EVI that I will continue to employ and improve. I have also been able to share the lesson plan with staff in School X and my own colleagues.

If I returned to the subject of EVI in a further lesson study, I would seek to work alongside a larger group of peers focusing on one class of learners. I would carry out the study over a period of weeks, refining the structure of the lesson by using it to teach different tier 2 words. I would seek to collect a larger sample of evidence including statistical evidence, perhaps using vocabulary tests to measure meaningful development. A comparative study against other classes using both EVI and IVI might also be useful.

Vocabulary is inexorably tied to literacy, and this in turn can be a meaningful force for learner attainment and social mobility. This lesson study has allowed me to experiment with just one tool that I feel can help my learners to reach their potential.

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