

I chose to deliver my forty-five minute micro-teaching session on 'Voice: an introduction to resonance and projection' (A1, K1). I was observed by my fellow trainee teachers who acted as students, and my tutor Mark Flagg who assessed my performance. Following Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle, in this essay, I will be critically evaluating the experience and academically critiquing the contemporary pedagogies used, as well as the embedded enhancement theme I chose. Firstly I will need to define Contemporary Pedagogy. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2017), 'Contemporary' has various interpretations, but for the purposes of this essay, I will use the following definition: "Following modern ideas in style or design". Pedagogy is defined as "The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept." It is a broad and ambiguous concept, and perhaps more useful would be to define antiquated pedagogy. One definition states

Antiquated pedagogy refers to dated approaches to teaching and learning that are not designed to engage the learner—the teacher as pedant expounding knowledge in a space shared with students. ... The description suggests no intention directed at the learners; their role is to be a receptacle.

(Heidi Hayes Jacobs, 2017)

As opposed to pedagogy, or children's education, where the child is predominantly formally led by a teacher in a didactic classroom environment, andragogy, according to Knowles (Malcolm S. Knowles, 2014) requires a different approach, with the focus on facilitating adult learning in a context that is relevant to them and their own personal development. It seems to me that andragogy itself could arguably be considered a contemporary pedagogy, since our current understanding of the principles of adult learning come from Knowles' theory (Knowles, 1980) which was written in the twentieth century! With all of this in mind, I will look at Contemporary Pedagogies as non-didactic teaching methods, with student engagement and participation as the focus.

I introduced my class topic, aided by a power point presentation, and outlined the learning objectives (V1, V2, K4). My class was designed to be practical with elements of discussion, since Voice is a practical training and one which develops through practise alone. I chose to

teach this particular topic as I felt it was relevant to trainee teachers and therefore enabled me to embed an enhancement theme (K2, V3, V4). The themes I chose were communication and employability skills.

I specified at the outset that I would expect the students to participate in practical exercises during the class, and should they wish not to, to let me know (V1, V2), allowing me to commit to the training as I would other students. They were all happy to continue so we began a physical breathing exercise. This was to draw their attention and awareness to the support muscles used in breathing and projection. The restrictions of the classroom available to me meant that the exercises were limited, and had to be performed seated, which meant I was unable to assess the students physically, and they therefore could not be practised to their full extent. I also felt that it would be inappropriate to make physical contact with these students as they were participating in a teaching exercise (V1), rather than Acting or Voice students who would expect me to make physical contact to aid their development. This limited my class, and meant that I was able only to introduce the concepts of Voice training and projection, rather than actually begin training them. We practised several vocal and physical exercises during the session, and I wanted to encourage the students to think reflectively and creatively as I would expect that from acting students (A2). I asked them to listen to voice clips and describe the voices, as well as describing their own voices and observing where in the body they feel they hold tension or where they feel they speak 'from'. I intended for this to open into a shared discussion of vocal qualities (K3). Discussions are a very effective way of exploring diverse perspectives (Stephen D. Brookfield, 2005) and so I thought it would encourage them to speak freely and explore various ideas. However perhaps due to the fact that the students are from varied disciplines, few of which creative, they appeared reluctant to fully engage. Minton says that "discussion has to be deliberately organised" (Minton, 2002, p. 130), and therefore perhaps this is an area I need to work on for future classes; creating more structure with pre-organised methods to stimulate discussion and reflective thinking (A2, A4). As a result of this oversight, the students weren't fully committing to the reflective thinking I wanted to see from them. Reflective and creative thinking are key areas of focus in the development of the actor, and so I wanted to encourage this in my class. I feel I could have encouraged and stimulated more from them had I had more confidence in what I was asking, and had I persisted

through the moments of reluctance. I decided to encourage the students to work in groups, hoping that it would give them more confidence to share ideas on the different qualities of voices, and where in the body they feel they personally resonate from (K3, V3, A4). Group work is widely acknowledged to be an effective way of encouraging students to share and develop ideas, providing them with an “alternative access point for understanding, one that comes from another student” (Jeffrey L. Bernstein, 2017, p. 17). This did seem to give them slightly more confidence in discussing their voices, and they fed back a few descriptive words. Perhaps in retrospect, I could have offered more support, giving examples of vocal qualities or maybe, further justifying why I wanted them to feed this information back; emphasising that voice training is a personal experience, unique to the individual and therefore it is important to assess one’s own voice, and observe the qualities of others. I realise now that I could have used this opportunity to go around the groups and speak to the students individually to encourage more reflection from them. Working one on one would have allowed me to check that everyone understood, and would have given me an opportunity to pay equal attention to each student (Nicola Meldrum, 2017) (V1, A3).

I also asked the class to practise tongue twisters to aid diction, and exercises to increase resonance. They obliged me by following my example and practised the exercises briefly. I demonstrated each exercise to the class, to show them how they should be performed and also to be the first to look or sound potentially silly, to break any barriers they may have around performing these exercises (A2). According to Minton (Minton, 2002, p. 121) “All teachers are role-models”, and therefore I felt it my responsibility to not only demonstrate the exercise to instruct them on how they should be performed, but also to encourage them to break out of their ‘comfort zones’ and try something new. I continued to practise each exercise alongside the students to take any pressure off them. In these instances, we appeared to be working as a group, practising vocal exercises together. One of the benefits of working as part of a group is that no single person is necessarily held accountable (university, 2008), and so I took the lead to avoid any of the students having to do so (V1). This seemed to work, and they all participated, if slightly reluctantly! In a voice class with actors, I would expect the students to spend more time practising the techniques alone, until I felt they had developed. However in this semi-simulated classroom environment, I presented the exercises, which were only practised briefly.

This class seemed naturally to necessitate full contextualisation, and I found myself regularly justifying each element I prepared in the context of a Professional Voice user (K1, V4). I wanted the class to have an awareness of the voice as an instrument which for them, as teachers is extremely important to maintain. I emphasised the point that as teachers, they were all now deemed Professional Voice Users (Vilkman, 1999), which means that they depend upon their voices for their work. Some of the students had asked me about exercises for Vocal projection to assist with potential lectures in large theatres. I thought that this class would be of particular benefit to them. If they are able to project their voices well, and are clearly heard and understood, it would improve their employability for a number of reasons. Firstly, as I mentioned, they would be heard and understood clearly, which is, of course fundamental to their students' learning, and secondly, their voices would have more sustainability and longevity. According to a Scottish study on employability as an enhancement theme, "employability is- and should be- a key focus and concern for students and universities" (Sharp, 2006). This is clearly true, and so I chose this as one of my enhancement themes. When actors train, Voice work forms a major part of the training, as for actors they depend upon their voices for their work. With that in mind, it seems clear to me that it should also form a part of a teacher's training! Both careers are fundamentally based around communication, and so my other enhancement theme was Communication. In fact, the two themes are contiguous.

I feel that these themes did impact on the students' learning of my subject. Had I not delivered the class within a relevant context to them as teachers, I don't think they would have seen the benefit of the exercises I was delivering, and perhaps would have seen the exercises as slightly abstract. They began to look at Voice as a subject in itself for what appeared to be the first time which was satisfying to see (K5), and they did seem to assess its relevance to themselves. Therefore I feel that my enhancement themes were successful: The perspective of the students, regarding my subject, appeared to be changed, which, according to Mezirow (Mezirow, 1996) is a transformative learning experience. He claims that learning consists of three areas which must be altered in order to learn: change in the understanding of the self, of belief systems and in lifestyle. In my class, at the very least I feel I challenged these areas with regard to Voice!

An area in which I have room for growth is in allowing the students more time to practise the exercises I have laid out for them (V1, K6, A4). Through my own lack of confidence, I feel I limited their learning by cutting short the time offered to practise each exercise. This would have countered their lack of willing to spend time on developing each exercise, and perhaps would have made the class seem like less of an experiment. It would have shifted the learning and focus from myself as a didactic teacher, and onto them as learners, allowing me to be a facilitator instead, which was my intention (K2). According to Weyers (Weyers, 2006), didactic teaching is “focused on delivering content”, whereas facilitative teaching is “learning oriented” and creates learners who are “better equipped to manage informal and realistic learning situations”. He goes on to say “For us as teachers, this means moving away from teacher-directed classroom situations to embrace more facilitating and collaborative models of teaching and learning”. Whereas there is value in both didactic and facilitative learning (Banning, 2005), Voice, as aforementioned, is a practical training and therefore lends predominantly towards a facilitative teaching approach (A4, K2, V3).

This oversight meant that the lesson was slightly shorter than the allocated time. This is a recurring issue for me, one which either requires further content preparation for this eventuality, or more time allocated to the exercises I prepare, as mentioned above. Perhaps a useful strategy would be to prepare further questions: this would give me more content through reflecting on the content already in place, and would focus the learning on the students rather than on myself, encouraging them to delve deeper in to work we have already covered.

Should I teach the class again, another area for improvement would be in allowing the students time to actually practise Projection. This was not laid out as a learning objective, however I feel it would have been a beneficial addition to the class, creating a rounded look at the techniques described by trying out the final stage of the exercises themselves. It would have made a useful conclusion to the exercises, and forced them to observe the three elements we studied (breath support, resonance and intention to project) in practise. It would have encouraged further reflection and I could have assessed their practical application of the exercises (A3). I also feel that perhaps I have a tendency to set slightly low expectations for work. Perhaps I could have challenged the students more. The difficulty in doing that in this particular class was that their previous knowledge on the subject of

Voice was limited and so I needed to frame every element thoroughly (V4). As well, Voice could seem potentially simplistic if one were to look at the elements abstractly: development in Voice, as with any physical exercise, is through repetition and practise solely. Possibly adding a section on Projection would have created a more rounded class, with slightly higher learning expectations.

My awareness of each student was not as astute as it could have been, possibly due to nervousness and a focus on my content rather than on their needs. This affected my intervention capabilities and inevitably affected their learning. This is something I will endeavour to focus on in future classes; again, stepping back from didactic delivery and creating classes that facilitate learning instead, with focus on the students rather than on myself.

In spite of these criticisms, I feel the class was successful. It was structured well with clear learning objectives which I communicated clearly to the class, all of which were achieved. I also tried to encourage *them* to do the work, with myself acting as a facilitator. They understood the exercises and considered Voice from a new perspective at the end of the class, which on top of my learning outcomes being met, meant that the class went well. The embedded enhancement theme did indeed enhance their learning too, as it gave them a personal context for the lesson. I will endeavour to shift my focus onto the students' learning and away from myself for future classes, giving them appropriate time to learn and practise, whilst addressing their needs. Perhaps this would aid with any nervousness I may encounter too!