How can using different approaches to pedagogy help to close the poverty gap at Cardiff High school?

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Summary some key

By adapting pedagogical approaches, this study looks to analyse how pupils can be helped to achieve more through a systematic approach to learning.

Context and Purpose

The poverty gap manifests itself in many ways in education but is perhaps most obviously illustrated with the disparity in performance at GCSE between pupils eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) and those pupils not. Nationally, the gap between non-FSM and eFSM pupils achieving 5 A*-C grades including English and Maths is just under 28%. This has been a fairly consistent figure in recent years and explains why closing this gap has become a national priority.

Although the school I teach in has a relatively low number of eFSM pupils (roughly 9% across the school) I felt the possibility of being able to help disadvantaged pupils make progress was not only a distinct possibility but a moral purpose. What is the role of the teacher if not to help pupils achieve their potential? Clearly, an national achievement gap of 28% tells us, as a whole, these pupils are not achieving their potential.

As a member of the school's Learning and Teaching Team, my area of focus is pedagogy, so it was only natural for me to enquire as to whether classroom teachers can develop their pedagogical approaches to help close the gap. The school already employs a number of very successful targeted and generic strategies to help all pupils achieve their potential, from data captures, literacy interventions, 'walking talking' mock exams to extra revision sessions. However, my focus was to be whether individual class room teachers can have a significant impact on a day to day, lesson by lesson basis. My theory being, if we can narrow the gap in our classrooms from day one, then those strategies employed outside of the classroom can be even more effective by building on solid foundations.

The main areas I needed to address were establishing what the causes of this performance gap actually were, assessing which areas pedagogy can have a significant impact on and then researching and establishing the best pedagogical approaches to adopt before evaluating their impact.

Influences

Firstly, consulting research carried out by the Sutton Trust gave me a grounding of not only the impact of poverty on performance but crucially why poverty had this impact. Coupled with wider sociological reading, such as Basil Bernstein's language work on elaborate and restricted code, as well Pierre Bourdieu's work on cultural capital, I was able to gain a decent insight into the impact of material deprivation such as lack of educational resources, lack of space, and poorer diet to the impact of cultural deprivation such as narrow aspiration, lack of role models who have succeeded in school and restriction of wider cultural experiences. However, although I do not dispute that these factors have a significant impact on performance of eFSM pupils, I was struggling to see just how the day to day pedagogy within a classroom could have a significant impact on these factors.

Only when I came across the graph below did I begin to see that pedagogy may not lessen impact of material and cultural deprivation but could in fact negate it.

Effect of teaching on students in years of progress
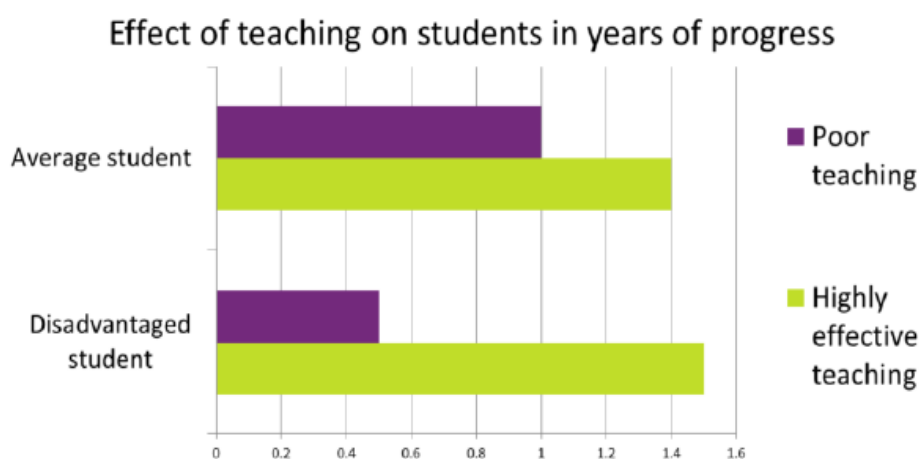
Source: Sutton Trust (2011)

Essentially, the graph shows that pupils from a disadvantaged background make greater progress than other pupils if the teaching they receive is highly effective. Although this may first appear to make little sense, (surely all pupils will benefit equally if they have the same effective teacher?) when put into context of material and cultural deprivation it does make sense. Essentially, the time in the classroom for a pupil from a disadvantaged background is of more value to their progress than an average pupil. To generalise, the average pupil may have access to revision materials, educated parents passing on language and cultural knowledge, higher expectations and more space in which to work at home. A disadvantaged pupil may simply have time in the classroom.

Therefore, it became clear that if the classroom is where the gap can be closed, then that time spent in the classroom has to really count. My next question, therefore, was how can we make that time really count?

Method

With the aim of the action research now about making the most of time in the classroom for disadvantaged pupils, I had to begin with assessing what time in a classroom actually looked like for disadvantaged pupils. Once this became clear, I could then look at strategies of maximising that time.

Working with three English teachers who had expressed an interest in helping with my research, we identified 5 eFSM pupils in Year 9 as well as 4 pupils of similar socio-economic profile. As way of gaining an understanding of their experiences in lessons, I designed an observation sheet **(Appendix 1)** which was used to track contribution and participation during lessons. Along with this, photos of classwork produced were taken **(Evidence 3)** and interviews with the pupils **(Appendix 2)** as well as separate interviews with the three teachers were carried out **(Appendix 3).**

Although based on just one observation of each pupil, the lesson observations revealed contribution to class discussion was infrequent, either through not volunteering answers or opting out of answering questions when selected by a teacher, often by responding "I don't know". **(Evidence 1 and 2)** Interviews with teachers painted a fairly similar picture that underperforming pupils are less likely to participate fully in the lesson, whether it be through discussion or through applying themselves fully to learning activities. Scrutiny of pupils' books seemed to bear this out with work often lacking detail of higher achieving pupils **(Evidence 3)**. When interviewed, the pupils themselves gave a whole range of responses to the question of, "**what stops you from learning in lessons?"** ranging from lack of confidence and wider subject knowledge to boredom, not understanding tasks and it simply being easier to not try rather than to try. You may argue all of these reasons are linked. Either way, what jumped out from this data was that a lack of engagement (engagement being the extent to which pupils think about the learning) was prevalent with pupils underachieving.

I'm not saying that simply increasing pupil engagement is the answer to closing the gap as whole but surely getting pupils to engage in their learning more during lessons will help them make progress. After all, to paraphrase Professor Robert Coe, the harder people think, the more they remember. Therefore, the next step was to look at how best to increase pupil engagement; *how can we get them to think more about what we want them to learn?*

Already a follower of a number of education's foremost Tweeters, a labyrinth of blogs, online journals and books offered no end of ways to engage pupils. Some I felt were misguided (pupils write answers on paper and throw them at one another) whereas others seemed to make perfect sense. Doug Lemov's *Teach Like A Champion* provided me with two techniques that I felt we could look at (Everybody Writes, No Opt Out), along with David Didau's *The Secret of Literacy* (Pause Pose Pounce Bounce). Inspired by the simplicity of these three, I put a name to a technique that I was already using, Task Target Time. Lemov and Didau don't take credit for *inventing* these techniques but they highlighted their ability to engage pupils in learning. Below is a summary of the four techniques;

Everybody Writes

With this technique, teachers will ask pupils to prepare for more ambitious thinking or discussion by reflecting in writing for a short interval. It not only allows for thinking time but gives pupils a framework for future thinking or discussion if they are 'pounced' upon later. As a teacher, you can review students' ideas in advance by circulating, offering guidance where needed. Perhaps more importantly, processing thoughts in writing is challenging and deepens thinking. Lemov cites that pupils remember twice as much of what they are learning if they write it down, which makes sense as writing something down forces you to think about it.

Task Target Time

This very simple technique can be applied to any activity during a lesson to challenge but also engage. Firstly, ensure that the task is explicit and understood. If you can't describe the task in a short sentence then will pupils understand it? For example, "I'd like you to write down reasons why the Tsar abdicated in 1917." Secondly, add a numerical target to the task, "I think everybody should come up with 4 reasons." Finally, set a time limit, "I will give you three minutes." Once explained, you can assess understanding by asking, "Mollie, what's the task?", "John, what's the target?" and "Aisha, what's the time limit?" This technique is great way of building momentum within the room, "Ian's already got 2 reasons he's going for a third, Gemma's not far behind" or for refocussing pupils who may be off task, "Lucy, how many have you got so far? You still have minute left can you try for another 2?" Targets can be adjusted to stretch pupils also, "If you've got four already, can you go for another two?"

Pose Pause Pounce Bounce

By applying this technique, all pupils will think and speak at a much higher level. Pose; ensure the question has a clear and specific purpose. Probing questions work well here. Pause; don't just pause – stop. Give pupils real thinking time. Pupils could write their thoughts (Everybody Writes) or Think, Pair, Share to ensure everyone has something to contribute. Pounce; you choose who answers, in a 'no hands up' way but without being too intimidating. Bounce; rather than evaluate the answer yourself, bounce that over to another pupil, eg "Sophie, was John's answer correct?" or, "Ali, did Sam fail to mention something important?" This technique not only deepens thinking but increases engagement and challenge.

No Opt Out

This technique ensures that not trying is not acceptable. It also helps those students who are striving hard but genuinely don't know the answer. There are four basic formats to *No Opt Out* but all formats begin with a pupil unable to answer a question and end with the pupil giving the right answer. Format 1 sees another pupil providing a cue to help the initial pupil find the answer, Format 2 sees the teacher provide a cue. Format 3 sees another pupil give the correct answer and initial pupil repeat it whereas Format 4 see the teacher give the correct answer and initial pupil repeat it. As a rule of thumb, pupils using cues to then think of an answer are more rigorous than simply

repeating a correct answer. However, whatever the format, pupils should come to expect that opting out of answering is not an option. Again, not only does this deepen thinking, it also increases engagement and provides challenge.

Outcomes

In all observations, engagement of those three pupils increased; greater participation in class discussion, less 'opting out' of activities (**Evidence 4**) and as a result more written classwork **(Evidence 5)** actually completed. In the group interview with the teachers, it was agreed that all pupils, not just our targeted eFSM pupils, seemed more engaged in lessons. In particular, Everybody Writes and Task Target Times were felt to have biggest impact on increasing engagement. As one teacher put it, "just by adopting those two techniques, a lot of opportunities for disengagement are taken away."

In terms of end of Key Stage Levels, all of the pupils were at least on target, with 4 pupils making an extra sub level of progress. However, attributing this directly to the use of the four techniques would be foolish. With so many variables and relatively small sample, it is impossible to say these techniques directly led to those end of year levels. However, when looking at the body of evidence as a whole it is apparent that engagement in learning did increase. Therefore, if the pupils were thinking about their learning more, then surely that would have *a positive* impact on levelled outcomes.

Conclusions

The process of carrying out this Action Research has had a real impact in three ways.

- Firstly, by its very nature, I was forced to think in depth not just about the eFSM gap but about engagement as a concept. Creating space and time for myself to read, to think, to plan and review not only led to me using the four techniques but it helped crystallised my approach to all aspects of my teaching. Rather than allowing myself to get stuck on the treadmill that can be school life, I'm ensuring I give myself time to read, to think, to plan and to review as many aspects of my teaching as I can.

- Secondly, this Action Research has had an impact on teaching across the whole school through the sharing of the four techniques. I have delivered whole school INSET workshops based around using the four techniques to help close the gap and a summary of the techniques (**Appendix 6**) has been shared with all staff. Although I have yet to assess the impact across the whole school, anecdotally I am aware of people genuinely talking about the techniques and applying them in their lessons.

- Finally, the most important impact has been on the learning of the pupils. My research has shown to me that by using these techniques in every lesson in my classroom and the classrooms of my three colleagues, pupils' engagement in learning increased. Looking at our collective timetables, that's over 130 hours of greater pupil engagement over a fortnight. As

this continues to filter across the school, the potential impact is huge. My next step is to ensure that this is exactly what happens.

References

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Lemov,D. [2015]*Teach like a champion,* New York: Jossey Bass.

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Appendix

1. Lesson Observation Form

2. Initial Pupil Interview

3. Initial Teacher Interview

4. Second Pupil Interview

5. Second Teacher Interview

6. The Four Techniques

Evidence

1. Lesson Observation Form

Learning Activities

Learning Activity	Paragraph commenting on content of poem - Key words Link to previous - Model Example } BOTH GIVEN assessment
Teacher explanation time	14:46 - 14:
Engagement during explanation (time and comments)	
Activity Time	
Engagement during activity (time and comments)	14 51 - 14.56 Used on of time.
Feedback Time	
Engagement during feedback (time and comments)	
Opportunity for contribution	"Dunno"
Volunteered contributions	
Actual contributions	
Other Observations, i.e. behaviour for learning, body language,	Looking around during explanation. Called up and asked to explain activity. "Do you want an opening sentence?"

Feedback Time	
Engagement during feedback (time and comments)	
Opportunity for contribution	"Dunno"
Volunteered	

2. Lesson Observation Form

Learning Activities	
Learning Activity	Comprehension Questions *Not much th... ...*
Teacher **explanation** time	1.20s - how do you *lounge* *question?*
Engagement during **explanation** (time and comments)	Passive - listening Hard to judge whether engaged or not. How could we change that?
Activity Time	~~6min~~ 5mins
Engagement during **activity** (time and comments)	Completing work - seemingly on task
Feedback Time	3m
Engagement during **feedback** (time and comments)	Listening, following - ~~/////////~~ Volunteered answer - speech muddled again
Opportunity for contribution (tally)	||||| |||
Volunteered contributions (tally)	0 1
Actual contributions (tally)	0 1
Other observations, i.e. behaviour for learning, body language, relationships	Only pupil writing in pencil Writing, looking between board + exercise book Behaviour fine - very quiet

3. Work Scrutiny

History Department

Using the information you have learnt so far about the changes to Cardiff, complete the table below and answer the following question.

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING
Football grounds for peoples leisure because they have more money from Jobs (+ fine) University so people can get good education to get higher pay jobs.	Alot less greenery, because factories need space.	

At this stage, what seems to be the most significant way in which Cardiff is changing? Education

In my opinion, innovation in Education was the most significant way In which Cardiff was changing during the industrial Revolution. By 1883 Cardiff has a free library and a University. I believe this to be the most significant factor because it meant that people can learn to read and people could get good education at the University.

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4. Lesson Observation post-techniques

Learning Activities	
Learning Activity	Presentation of findings from the Case Study.
Teacher **explanation** time	
Engagement during **explanation** (time and comments)	The student listened and showed some understanding of the piece/work set.
Activity Time	
Engagement during **activity** (time and comments)	Very engaged with this task and had a role to play - enjoyed this! Contributed to later part of the piece with confidence and knowledge.
Feedback Time	
Engagement during **feedback** (time and comments)	Made the comment - "Done Miss" - great enthusiasm. Works on the progress forge - made the feedback truiside. He presented in a confident manner! A very clear presentation - well done!
Opportunity for contribution (tally)	1 1 1 1
Volunteered contributions (tally)	1 1 1 1 (made a lot of contributions)
Actual contributions (tally)	8
Other observations, i.e. behaviour for learning, body language, relationships	LC had to speak with the student to ensure he fully understood the rules of the class and work set. He responded well but had to be reminded of this at a number of stages.

5. Work Scrutiny post-techniques

Signpost Assessment: To what extent was Cardiff positively affected by the Industrial Revolution?

Dev what?

Cardiff underwent a variety of changes during the Industrial Revolution with leisure, Religion, Culture and the Economy. The area changed from a Countryside, green, farmland with people working of the land to sp a grey, industrial place with houses, shops and places for leisure. To some extent the Industrial Revolution was good for Cardiff, however to another extent the Industrial revolution was bad for Cardiff.

One of the most positive changes that Cardiff underwent during the Industrial revolution was Education.

For example, the Howells school for girls, it was built in 1859, the Central Library, its was open opend in 1882, Cardiff University it was built in 1883, Cardiff's first local branch library, it was opend in 1894 and finally Cardiff High School for boys, it was built in 1898.

This would have had a positive impact on Cardiff because people could get education and get a good jobs. However it could be argued that this change was not totally

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neward, unskilled workers

positive for the city because the schools and Librarys would take up space that could be used for greenery and children going to school could be working to make money. // Another positive change that Cardiff underwent during the Industrial Revolution was greenary and parks. For example, a cemetery was built in 1859 at Fairoak Road, Roath park was built in 1844, Sophia gardens, and Cathays park were also built. This would have a positive impact on Cardiff because it would be good for the environment and people could go to the parks for leisure. However, it could be argued that this change was not totally positive for the city because the space could be used for schools Educational facilities or factories. One of the most negative changes that Cardiff underwent during the Industrial Revolution was crime. For example a police force was made in 1836 and this meant that the crime rate had risen. also However, it could be argued that this change was not totally negative for the city because the evil factory owners could have their things stolen because they deserve it. I think that Cardiff was positively affected by the Industrial Revolution because the factories made lots of jobs for people and Educational facilities were built and places for Leisure were built.

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