



BIRMINGHAM CITY  
University

# EDUCATION JOURNAL MAGAZINE



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## Welcome

Welcome to the second volume of the Birmingham City University (BCU) Education Journal Magazine (EJM) and the second edition of this academic year. This edition contains several articles from a variety of sources, ranging from students, ex-students, academics and teaching professionals.

In this edition, we 15 fantastic articles for you read this summer from 17 authors. For some of our authors in this edition it is their first time writing for publication and I congratulate each one of them for putting to paper (electronically) their thoughts, feelings, emotions or experiences to date.

Our articles within our partnership chapter cover some exciting topics, ranging from mentoring across our schools to critical reflection on the impact of their teaching, to an autoethnographic analysis of mentor feedback. We have two personal accounts in our partnership chapter from Muna, who explores how she has navigated her way towards being the first female Muslim Secondary PE student on the Secondary PE course, to Fiona's account and experiences of higher education initial teacher education and preparing back for the classroom!

Within our current enquiry chapter, we have five incredibly well written articles looking at religious education, the use of the TGfU model (in PE), early years professionals and a hybridisation model of leadership. The final article in this chapter is from one of our physiotherapy colleagues, who writes around partnership with physiotherapy students and we can look at what lessons could be learnt in education.

Finally, in our final chapter, we have a terrific article from Anna who explores teaching the Holocaust; Riel explores passion vs professionalism; Olivia explores the impact of the Singapore method in algebraic misconceptions, Charlie has contributed a brilliant article on musical pedagogy within early years and finally (and if you read the headline, you may think it's 6 months early), Suzanne discusses the power of Christmas and its relationship to learning.

I hope you enjoy this edition.

**Grant Huddleston**

## Meet the editorial reviewer team:

<b>Grant Huddleston</b>	Course Leader for BA/BSc Hons. Secondary Education with QTS
<b>Dr Chris Bolton</b>	Senior Lecturer in Drama Education
<b>Dr Tina Collins</b>	Course Leader for MA Education
<b>Gary Pykitt</b>	Senior Lecturer in Primary Education
<b>Mary Bennett-Hartley</b>	Senior Lecturer in Primary Education
<b>Dr Victoria Kinsella</b>	Senior Research Fellow in Education
<b>Kelly Davey Nicklin</b>	Course Leader for PGCE Secondary Education with QTS

## Our Aim

Our aim is to help support practice across our partnership schools and promote enquiry and research. We welcome contributions from students, teachers and academics who wish to make a positive difference to teaching and learning and believe they could help develop and support other's practice. We aim to support new and experienced writers to submit their work so that we share a variety of perspectives.



## Our Goals

- *Showcase the excellent work our BCU students produce.*
- *Allow an opportunity for those interested to publish their work to promote positive development and reflection across our partnership schools.*
- *Promote confidence and competence to write for an education publication*
- *Promote interest towards research and enquiry*

## How to Contribute

Anybody wishing to contribute an article for consideration should email their draft to [BCUEJM@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:BCUEJM@bcu.ac.uk)

You do not need to decide which chapter you wish your article to appear, but you can indicate this if you wish. Please ensure you follow the house style. Final decisions on publication are made by the editorial board. You can submit as many articles as you wish. If the editorial team have received a large number of contributions, your article may be held for later editions.

### House style

When submitting an article for consideration, please aim to follow the subsequent *house style*:

- Documents must be submitted in **Word** in font **Calibri**, size **11**, with **1.5 line spacing**.
- Include your full name and role/school – this will appear under the title.
- Any web links given should be accessible by the reader and not sit behind passwords or paywalls.
- Word count is expected to be **500** to **3000** words “all in” (including references lists).
- Acronyms and abbreviations must be written in full the first time they are used in each article; thereafter the abbreviation may be used, e.g. “The special educational needs and disability co-ordinator (SENDCO) is ... “
- UK English should be used, e.g. “...ise” endings instead of “...ize”
- Numbers one to ten written in full; thereafter numerical (e.g. 28 pupils aged nine completed... etc.)
- Double speech marks for direct speech or quotes; otherwise single speech marks
- Please use the Harvard referencing system (where applicable – we can support with this if necessary).

Please note that the editorial team will amend the final copy to suit our house style. You will receive a copy back if any major changes have been made for you to proofread.

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# **The BCU ITE Partnerships: The Importance of an Effective ITE Mentoring Relationship**

**Amanda Brougham** - BCU Strategic Lead for Secondary ITE Partnerships

## **Context**

When building effective school partnerships as part of the BCU Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision, our strategic vision is underpinned with a desire to both serve the needs of Birmingham City University as the 'University for Birmingham' in securing local School Based Training placements for our community of beginning teachers, and the needs of the school communities in and around Birmingham who are increasingly committed to building social capital within their own communities by valuing opportunities for learning to be led by authentic local role models who will support and guide the successful learning outcomes of their pupils.

Social Capital is intrinsically linked to success within the education system (Putnam, 2000, cited in West-Burnham, 2003). "Social Capital is essentially about networks, trust, engagement, communication, shared values, aspirations and interconnectedness" (West-Burnham 2003: 5). As a university ITE provider, we are therefore mandated to work alongside school leaders to facilitate their aim to build on the assets within their own communities by providing opportunities for local beginning teachers, committed to both their communities' values and their own professional development, to learn their craft in a range of local schools.

## **The BCU ITE Partnership Aims**

I see my role as Academic Lead for Secondary ITE Partnerships to be one that builds strong local networks. This can only be achieved by creating opportunities for meaningful engagement within our school communities – where we welcome and take on board feedback and contributions from valued school partners. The Joint Chair of the Secondary Strategic Partnership Committee (SPC) stated at the end of the last meeting that she 'really appreciated the fact that BCU takes mentor feedback on board and makes them feel part of the team (BCU SPC Summary of Minutes, March 2010).

I am confident that the journey to strengthen our ITE partnerships has come a long way in recent years through dogged moves to create clear channels of communication which include Partnership Webpages, monthly ITE Partnership Newsletters, Mentor CPD Events, mentor updates and newsletters and of course termly Strategic Partnership Committee meetings. Great communication is unquestionably at the heart of great partnerships across organisations. I do not for one moment believe that our communication is perfect, maintaining an up-to-date database of all school personnel across the partnership is a constant uphill task, but we do our very best to cover all bases and undoubtedly the existence of a strategic link supports schools as a conduit to respond quickly to any enquiries that they may have. We are constantly reflecting on our practice and responding to feedback – things are

never static! One area where we are developing our practice further is in supporting those mentors training BCU ITE student teachers in our partnership schools.

### **Mentors at the heart of our ITE Partnerships**

We acknowledge that effective communication with our mentors across the partnership is essential. It is also an area which is at the heart of guaranteeing our continued success as an ITE provider: “We ... noted that good quality mentoring, backed up by effective quality assurance and communication within ITE partnerships, is vital to creating and delivering a quality curriculum” (OfSTED, 2020).

We know from our consultation with mentors that workload is a concern and significant changes to the BCU ITE Paperwork have been developed in the previous year which ensure that all core evidence collated by trainees is completed by them rather than their mentors – for example, our Learning Observation Records and Progress / Review Meeting Forms are streamlined to ensure that they can be completed swiftly, and in weekly mentor meetings trainees complete full reflections on their progress with mentors only being required to monitor progress against targets and attainment aligned to the BCU ITE Formative Tracker.

To secure effective mentoring in partnership schools hosting BCU ITE trainees, we produce a clear Mentoring Handbook and work within a BCU ITE Mentoring Policy (available on the BCU Partnerships Webpages for each of our ITE phases) which identify the requirement for mentors to attend core CPD events aligned to the needs of all BCU ITE courses. These publications are undoubtedly useful strategic tools and are conscientiously adhered to by the majority of our ITE mentors. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that a Handbook and Policy in themselves will not necessarily secure the most successful mentoring experience for all our trainees.

In reviewing mentoring practices in wider contexts, we identified that a contracting meeting at the start of any mentoring relationship was standard practice as a method to secure clear communication relating to the aims and processes to guide ongoing practice. Thomas, Willis, and Davis (2007) identified that “Mentoring research suggests that having been functionally mentored correlates strongly with both success and satisfaction in academia (Sanders and Wong, 1985), business (Burke, 1984; Fagenson, 1989), and education (Wilde and Schau, 1991)” (ibid, 2007: 179) This paper also identified how miscommunication can lead to a dysfunctional mentoring experience and “when the lines of communication between mentor and [mentee] are not left open and properly defined, incidences of miscommunication become more evident and in some cases cause conflict” (ibid 2007: 186). In our experience, the breakdown of a mentoring relationship will inevitably lead to the breakdown of a School Based Training placement and creates additional stress for all stakeholders in the process. Our response to such situations is always a robust one as we see such instances as a significant partnership risk - and a risk that we should always endeavour to avoid!

Therefore, to translate our existing key strategies into more concrete operational practice we are currently trialing a BCU ITE Mentoring Contract with our Year 2 Secondary Undergraduate cohort. Within the contract we have clearly identified the roles and responsibilities of both a BCU Mentor and a BCU trainee. The contract will be reviewed in

the first mentor meeting in each School Based Training placement sowing the seeds for a functional mentoring relationship. The aim of the contract is to clearly communicate the requirements aligned to the BCU ITE Curriculum, QTS expectations and to accommodate any specific contextual issues related to the placement. It is anticipated that, upon review of its impact in our June Strategic Partnership Committee, this document will become central to the BCU ITE Mentoring Policy for the coming academic year. It will serve as a tool for lead mentors and BCU tutors to effectively quality assure all mentoring relationships by deepening both the mentor and the trainee's understanding of the relationship as part of their training development. We believe that a BCU ITE Mentoring Contract will strengthen our partnerships further by providing even clearer communication and engagement with school partners and of course we hope that it will secure successful QTS outcomes for our trainees.

### Increasing our local networks

I hope that this explanation of our current practice inspires further confidence in your partnership with BCU ITE courses. We are currently collating offers for School Based training for 2022/23; Placement Opportunity Packs and Expression of Interest Forms are available on the BCU Secondary partnership Webpages and can be returned to our [Education.Partnerships@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Education.Partnerships@bcu.ac.uk) team at any point this term!

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# **An autoethnographic analysis of mentor critical feedback adopting the use of McAteer's reflective cycle**

**Dr Conner Hodgkiss** – PGCE Science with Chemistry, Birmingham City University

## Introduction

Professional enquiry can be seen as “an investigation with a rationale and approach that can be explained or defended” (Menter et al, 2011:14) and it is commonplace for these findings to be shared so that this becomes a personal reflection of one's own practice. In addition, both evaluation and reflective teaching are the principal components of practitioner enquiry if it is to impact upon teaching practice and ultimately pupil experience. As such, teaching practitioner enquiry is viewed as an integral aspect of the day-to-day practice of teaching professionals. This is supported by McLaughlin et al (2004) who suggest that teachers who actively engage in research can demonstrate an enhanced understanding of their own practice and reflect on methods to develop and improve. The focus of this assignment is to conduct a professional enquiry to identify a particular critical incident and reflect on how it has impacted my future practice and teacher identity.

In this study, I use the methodology of autoethnography to both describe and analyse my personal experience with the aim of further understanding cultural experience. Ellis (2004) suggests that autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that aims to describe and analyse (-graphy) personal experience (auto-) in order to further understand cultural experience (-ethno-). Indeed, as part of this study I have used principles of autobiography and ethnography to write autoethnography. I have adopted this methodology as the process of autoethnography can challenge rigid definitions of what is considered useful research and help to open up a wider lens on the world. Indeed, human individuals possess different assumptions about the world, through a multitude of methods of writing, speaking, valuing, and believing. As a result, conventional methodologies of conducting research can be narrow and limiting and autoethnography seeks to address this by accounting for differences in race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, class, education and/or religion (Ellis et al, 2011).

As a method of research, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography, where an author selectively writes with reference to past experiences, and ethnography, the study of a culture's relational practices, common values, and beliefs. Typically, these experiences are assembled using hindsight (Bruner, 1993) and according to Bochner and Ellis (1992), auto-biographers write about moments that have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life. Consequently, this forces an individual to reflect upon the lived experience through a transformative experience. The process of autoethnography consists of retrospectively selecting epiphanies that originate from, or are made possible, by belonging to part of a culture and by holding a particular cultural identity. For this research study I have used methodological tools and literature to analyse a critical incident and consider ways in which others may experience similar moments. Furthermore, I have reflected upon my personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural

experience and construct characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders, by comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research, as suggested by Ronai (1995).

The process of autoethnography can be dismissed according to Hooks (1994) for social scientific standards due to being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, analytical, and altogether too emotional. Furthermore, in using personal experience, Anderson (2006) notes that the data used in such a study can be biased, whilst the writing standard can be dismissed as being inadequately aesthetic and literary (Moro, 2006). I would suggest that such critique positions art and science at odds, which is a condition that autoethnography seeks to correct, by disrupting the binary of science and art. Indeed, according to Ellis (2009), in a world of difference, it can be futile to debate whether autoethnography is a valid research process unless a goal is agreed as this is the term on which achievement can be judged.

In the context of the teaching profession, a critical incident can be thought of as an instance that makes one stop and think, or one that raises questions. Indeed, Farrel (2008:3) defines critical incidents as “any unplanned event that occurs in class, which if reflected on helps teachers to uncover new understandings of teaching and learning”. However, I have chosen to use the definition defined by McAteer (2010:107) that a ‘critical incident is one that challenges your own assumptions or makes you think differently’.

Further to this, a useful technique for self-reflection, suggested by McAteer (2010) is referred to as ‘critical incident analysis’ and the application and reflection of McAteer’s critical incident analysis to an incident can promote professional development for educators. Furthermore, the identifying issue that has provoked strong feelings in regard to a particular event can encourage the teacher to reflect upon it in a structured way and consider future actions.

Brookfield (2006) highlights that critical incident analysis can help to warn teachers before problems occur, can motivate learners to become reflective and creates a case for teaching diversity by suggesting opportunities for teaching development. However, Calderhead (1989) suggests that the term ‘critical incident analysis’ means no more than constructive self-criticism of one’s actions with a view to improvement. I however would suggest that the process encourages deep exploration. Indeed, there are various alternative perspectives that can assist in the reflection process of a critical incident (Dewey, 1993; Tripp, 1993; Gibbs, 1998; Kennedy, 1999). However, I have chosen McAteer’s (2010) structure as it provides characterisations of the incident and, as suggested by Ahluwalia (2009) encourages varying thinking strategies which I believe are lacking in the suggested alternatives. Furthermore, McAteer’s strategies allow a thorough interrogation of one’s thoughts.

Teacher identity has emerged as a prominent factor in the teaching profession because it clarifies the way teachers teach and their attitudes toward innovation in education (Beijaard et al, 2004). This suggests a dynamic, fluid, and continuous process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences and entails professional development where the question is not simply “who am I at this moment” but “who do I want to become?”. Indeed, teacher identity is readily defined by one’s self-concept on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999). It is also important to note that teacher identity is shaped by how both the close and remote external environment perceive the professional’s perception of their self. Notably, teacher identity plays a key role in teacher education as Senel (2020) suggests that it shapes practice and influences teachers’ motivation and self-reliance.

## Critical analysis of incident using reflective cycle

McAteer (2010:107) provides the following criteria as a guide to reflection on the analysis of critical incidents and I have used this template to construct my critical analysis.

- What happened, where and when?
- What is it that made the incident 'critical'?
- What were your immediate thoughts and responses?
- What are your thoughts now? What has changed/developed your thinking?
- What have you learned about (your) practice/identity from this?
- How might your practice change and develop as a result of this analysis and learning?

My critical incident occurred when I received an incomplete lesson feedback observation form from my mentor for an observed lesson. I had planned and delivered a lesson on the topic of 'conservation of mass' for a year 9 group, which included a practical activity based on the reaction between magnesium and oxygen, to form magnesium oxide. In this activity, I wanted pupils to investigate if a change in mass had occurred as a result of the chemical reaction. My mentor was informed that this lesson had been planned for an observation, upon provision of a completed Birmingham City University (BCU) full lesson template and seating plan, however upon the completion of the lesson, minimal critical feedback was provided in terms of the completion of the BCU lesson observation form. Upon examination of the feedback I had received, my mentor had written as a target 'To link in the chemistry content to the wider world' and commented on my organisation of pupils with reference to 'groupings?'. At this point I was frustrated as I had spent time with pupils as part of my lesson delivery, commenting on science capital in how conservation of mass is important in industry so that there is minimal waste of reactants and products. Furthermore, I had grouped pupils in accordance with the provided seating plan in respect of working with the peer sitting next to them, which had been made clear prior to the delivery of the practical activity. It was disappointing that my mentor seemed to not have observed the lesson fully or provided adequate, constructive critical feedback for me to reflect on.

I believe, and still do, that mentor critical feedback is a crucial element in the process of developing as a trainee teacher and becoming competent in the profession. Indeed, mentor feedback is considered the most significant part of placement supervision (Ottesen, 2007). My mentors lack of critical feedback was a challenge to my belief in that providing feedback is a necessity and that this provision largely defines a mentors' work (Clarke, Triggs and Nielson, 2014). This incident was therefore crucial to the development of my teacher identity.

Following this incident, I questioned if my mentor would continue to provide, in what I believe in my opinion, was inadequate critical feedback not at the level expected for an observed lesson. How could the quality of lesson observation feedback be improved? It is clear within research that the quality of mentor critical feedback varies (Brandt, 2008), and that I am not alone with being dissatisfied with the feedback received. Despite this, I have decided to contextualise my critical incident further by researching the provision of critical feedback by mentors during teaching placement supervision. In doing so I am aware of and refer to the ethical guidelines in terms of my position as an educational researcher in that 'Educational researchers should not criticise their peers in a defamatory or

unprofessional manner, in any medium (BERA, 2018:29). Furthermore, I justify using a critical incident approach as it “challenges your [my] own assumptions or makes you [me] think differently” (McAteer et al, 2010:107). Indeed, I view this assignment as a vital contribution to the creation of my teacher identity.

The term “critical feedback” clearly indicates a desire for a specific adaptation in the practice of a trainee teacher, I would therefore be in agreement with Komiskey and Hulse-Killacky (2004:2) who define this as “corrective feedback”. Indeed, the role of mentor feedback can concern the need to modify a trainee teachers’ understanding of practice, with the goal of developing critical reflection (Crutcher and Naseem, 2016). Whilst there are other useful definitions of feedback, I am inclined to agree with Hattie and Timperley (2007:81) who define feedback as “information provided by a mentor that is asserting or asking about a need to change aspects of one’s performance or understanding”. This definition serves well to illustrate the challenging position that this critical incident reveals about the importance of critical feedback as a way of reflecting and developing as a trainee teacher.

So why is the provision of critical feedback from a mentor found to be so challenging? Le and Vasquez (2011) suggest that the deeply asymmetric structure of the teacher training placement may contribute, and I would suggest that the heavy reliance on mentor feedback from trainee teachers’ is a result of said structure. Indeed, in many instances the mentor who provides formative feedback during trainee development, is also responsible for the final evaluation of the summative feedback at the completion of the teaching placement. Copland (2010) argues that this process poses particular challenges in mentors providing critical feedback to trainee teachers’, which I would suggest is due to a fear of tensions and/or conflicts in the trainee teacher-mentor relationship.

Lesham and Bar-Hama (2008) suggest that vague evaluation criteria may contribute to the lack of mentor critical feedback, however in this instance I believe that the BCU formal lesson observation form is fit for purpose and includes a thorough breakdown of what is expected to be critically commented on by the mentor. Critical feedback may indeed render negative emotional reactions (Otienoh, 2010) but is it worth hindering the process of trainee teachers’ development by withholding critical feedback that can be reflected upon? I would suggest not.

Research has highlighted that trainee teachers’ may be provided with callous feedback (Maguire, 2001) which in turn can impact the way in which trainee teachers’ respond to the critical feedback, for example by withholding information to avoid further negative evaluations. Mentors may feel that feedback be deflected or ignored (Pokorny and Pickford, 2010) and therefore are reluctant to critique a trainee teachers’ lesson delivery.

Despite the challenges, there is a necessity for the provision of critical feedback to trainee teachers’ during school placements as they are a crucial part of the mentoring process (Ottesen, 2007). Indeed, Douglas (2011) suggests that an absence of critical feedback can result in mentors becoming more affirmative rather than explorative, limiting opportunities for learning and trainee self-reflection. I would suggest that reflection is a crucial process which allows trainee teachers to reflect and develop teacher identity and that critical feedback is a crucial part of the reflective process. This is supported by Shulman and Shulman (2004) who identified reflection as one of the four main dimensions of developing teacher competency, pertaining to a cluster of attributes including evaluation, review, self-

critique and learning from experience. It is therefore a question of how mentors can communicate effectively to promote trainee teachers' reflection.

It seems that by withholding negative critical feedback, mentors are able to manage the discomfort and issues associated with the provision of such to trainee teachers' and it is suggested by Jeffries and Hornsey (2012) that this is a well-documented practice. I would suggest that mentors need to adopt a more constructive method for disseminating critical feedback, whether this be verbal or written. Scheeler, Ruhl and McAfee (2004) suggest that specific critical feedback can result in lasting changes through trainee self-reflection and development. I would also support the idea that critical feedback be provided as part of dialogue, in addition to written feedback, in a way that contributes to metacognitive thinking, as suggested by Strutz and Hessberg (2012). Indeed, this concept is found in constructivist conceptions of the mentoring relationship (Wang and Odell, 2007) in which trainee teachers are able to develop independent critical thinking in relation to their teaching practice, upon mentor dialogue.

I would argue that a balance between positive and negative feedback needs to be struck, which is in agreement with Beck and Kosnik (2012) who emphasise that the communication of critical feedback is very much dependant on the mentor's capacity for finely tuned communication skills and ability to build a positive relationship. Farrell (2007) highlights the requirement for the relationship between trainee teacher and mentor to be a positive one, where trainees are supported upon the provision of critical feedback by mentors. However, in my critical incident I feel that more support was needed.

The quality of critical feedback is often adapted to the trainee teacher in question, on the basis of different trainee teachers responding differently to the feedback process (Grainger and Adie, 2014). I would suggest that there needs to be a much more consistent approach to providing critical feedback as critical feedback in this instance can seem to be less clear. In summary there is a need for care when communicating critical feedback and I would suggest that mentors need to be able to fully understand critical feedback as a complex, social phenomenon. Mentoring a trainee teacher takes time, during which mentors have to coach, guide and comfort trainees. This is in addition, but not limited to, rewriting schemes of work, gathering and submitting pupil data and updating classroom risk assessments. If overworked mentors are not able to offer adequate support to trainee teachers, and provide the training they need and deserve, through the provision of critical feedback in this example, then what kind of teachers will this produce? I arrived at the conclusion that mentors need more free time, and increased support to mentor effectively.

As a trainee teacher on school placement, I expect feedback pertaining to the lessons I teach, the planning and my classroom management. In fact, this critical feedback would help inform my development as a teacher in the profession, in addition to improving my overall quality of teaching. Frecknall (1994) suggests that the provision of feedback is seen as a high priority by most trainees and despite teachers, acting as mentors, being the main providers of critical feedback to students on school placement, providing written critical feedback is a novel task for the majority of mentors.

As a result of this critical incident, I have taken time to reflect appropriately on both my teaching practice and the professional relationships that I have established during my time on school placement. Indeed, the formation and

subsequent building of a relationship between myself and my mentor is important to the process of the communication of critical feedback from mentor to trainee teacher. I concluded that I have a role to play in ensuring that this relationship is a positive one in order for the feedback process to meet my needs so that I can continue to develop as a trainee teacher in the profession. Additionally, I have learned the value of developing professional relationships during placement for collaboration, support, and opportunities to learn. Indeed, strong professional relationships are formed through the sharing of information and experiences, with the provision of supportive feedback (Carr, Herman, and Harris, 2005).

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# Critical reflection on the impact of praise on my teaching practice and its effectiveness

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In teaching, the reflection of practice and the impact of incidents happens throughout a teaching career; critically reflecting on it is essential to develop the teaching practice and ideas to aid the next generation of teachers (Joshi, 2018). Using a Critical Incident Framework such as David Tripp's (1993) is crucial to gauge more profound thoughts on classroom observations. Tripp's framework allows me to '*reflect strategically and systematically on the critical incident to plan for an appropriate new strategy and ultimately improve your [my] practice*' (Brown, n.d.). This is not to say that you could not use other models of analysis and reflection, such as Driscoll's What Model, which was developed in the mid-1990s or Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle from 1984. These other models allow you to analyse and learn from your experiences; however, Tripp's (1993) concept is helpful in education '*as it provides categorisations of the incident and different analysis in terms of thinking strategies*' (Ahluwalia 2009). While using Tripp's critical reflection techniques aid in my development as a teacher, there is a disadvantage to using it. This technique relies upon human memory; however, incidents are often shrouded in social, emotional, and personal beliefs, hindering the ability to be critical (Forrester, 2020). When using Tripp's (1993) Critical Incident Framework, it is essential to look at the incident as critically as possible and understand its impact on me as a teacher, or I run the risk of being too emotional and personal in my beliefs.

When doing critical reflection, it is also crucial to include autoethnography. '*Autoethnography is a research method and methodology which uses the researcher's personal experience as data to describe, analyse and understand cultural experience.*' (Campbell, 2015). Autoethnography has its benefits in the way it offers a research method that is friendly to both researchers and readers, enabling them to gain an educational awareness of self; whilst looking at it concerning others (Chang, 2008). However, it has its pitfalls, and we are warned that in using autoethnography, we could have an '*excessive focus on self in isolation from others and an overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation*' (Chang, 2008). Autoethnography is one of the research methodologies I shall be using, along with Tripp's Critical Incident framework, due to Autoethnography's ability to analyse my personal experience and reflect on an incident and the impact it had on my training.

My critical incident occurred at the beginning of my training at my home school during a feedback meeting with my mentor in early December 2021. I had delivered lessons on GCSE Data Representation and BTEC Digital IT Theory in preparation for the end-of-year exam. I had also taught my Key Stage Three classes, which included studies on Hardware & Software, the Laws of IT and Cyber Security. My mentor had questioned my use of praise and its effect

on the pupil's learning; he asked if I was using it enough. The school expected me to offer praise as a standard element of my teaching and links to non-statutory guidance provided by the Department for Education; '*schools should have in place a range of options and rewards to reinforce and praise good behaviour*' (Department for Education, 2016). I questioned if over-praising would have an adverse effect and if it would not make the praise ineffective and slightly condescending. At the time, I felt that praise should be given but not overused, as overuse diminishes the effectiveness and can cause competition or rivalry between students, which does not aid in behaviour management.

My lack of using praise was the first critical incident in my teaching practice. My belief that praise was something that needed to be earned, not received for doing something they were told to do, was therefore challenging in a school environment. It made me evaluate the school's beliefs that differed from mine. I immediately thought that if I did overuse praise from now on, it would not be genuine because I was being pushed to use it. This led me to feelings of inauthenticity that could impact my students' behaviour and progress. This assignment is vital to developing my identity as a teacher as it "*challenges your [my] own assumptions or makes you [me] think differently*" (McAteer et al., 2010: 107). This is something I agree with as I was firm, at the time, about my use of praise.

To gauge departmental thinking behind my use of praise; and my beliefs; I went to the other subject specialist teachers in my department, who both stated that whilst my teaching had become more refined and my behaviour management had improved, my lack of praise was noted, and this had been discussed with my mentor. Therefore, this led me to think critically over my last teaching week to remember when I had used praise and whether it was enough to fit the school's standards and expectations.

My belief is that whilst '*the implementation of praise into a classroom is effective in reinforcing value and aids in classroom management*' (Becker, et al., 1967), it is essential to note that '*the use of ineffective praise that is systematic and causes students to compare themselves with others in the class, can lower student confidence and becomes a weak enforcer in the classroom*' (Hitz, et al., 1989). I used this statement when discussing the situation with my mentor; his argument, however, was that school's standards of praise needed to be adhered to. The use of praise is important, but not to the detriment of the students comparing themselves and causing a drop in behaviour.

Following this meeting and subsequent discussions, I was concerned that classroom praise had been reduced to ineffectual words with little meaning. Why would praise for even the slightest aspect be valued more than praise that needed to be worked for and earned? Burnett, et al. (2010) found that non-specific praise, which is quite common in classrooms, is not as effective as first believed due to it not being targeted. Brummelman et al., (2014) found that '*inflated compliments can actually degrade student effort*' and can pressure students to attempt work above their

ability and cause them to withdraw or misbehave in lessons. Praise needs to be effective, and it also must be genuine (Brummelman et al., 2014). I feared that my ability to give effective and genuine praise would diminish through over-use, that my students would lose respect for me, and that behavioural management of the class would be impacted.

An issue with praise at a secondary school level is that as students age, the need for effort-based praise, which was influential in early childhood, '*stops working and even backfires by adolescence*' (Amemiya and Wang, 2018). My concern is (was?) that using effort-based praise, which is the type of praise my mentor suggested, can communicate expectations of low ability to the student (Möller, J. 2005). The shift in effort-based praise is due to the Western-style schooling adopted and the changes in our educational system as students age into secondary school.

In primary school, the focus is goal-oriented, focusing on each student's improvement and learning process and the student's effort in their work. The focus shifts to the student's performance on tests at the secondary school level. The value these tests hold outweighs the student's individual growth, and we see this through the way that secondary schools show off the percentage of pass marks they have in GCSEs. I have also seen it through meetings between teachers and the Senior Leadership Team, who focus on tests such as Pre and Post-tests, end-of-unit tests and mock exams for Key Stage Four rather than the students' individual growth, which could be due to the increased numbers at secondary schools vs primary schools. The data gleaned from these tests allow us to monitor the performance of the student class rather than students' individual needs. '*Students may be demoralised by praising their effort because it could suggest they do not grasp the material quickly, implying they lack the ability*' (Amemiya and Wang, 2018). This agrees with my argument that praise at secondary school age needs to be targeted with apparent factors behind why the student is being praised, allowing them to evaluate and recreate the aspects again; otherwise, it can imply a lack of belief in the student's ability, which is counterintuitive. This can theoretically cause mental issues and low self-esteem.

My shift in my beliefs regarding praise happened when I started to research what makes effective praise. Effective praise from the teacher consists of two things: (1) a description of noteworthy student academic performance or general behaviour, and (2) a signal of teacher approval (Brophy, 1981; Burnett, 2001). Praise can be a helpful classroom reinforcer, but only if it is considered reinforcing by the student (Akin-Little et al., 2004). Praising students' efforts, accomplishments, and improved behaviour is crucial. Wright (2012) argues that the language used in praise significantly affects the understanding, turning 'good job' into 'You completed all of task 1, good job' to include a behavioural element in the praise (Wright, 2012). I agree that praise needs to be used; students seek approval from parents, carers, or teachers. Akin-Little et al. (2004) stated that praise can only be helpful if it is considered reinforcing by the student and not inflated (Brummelman et al., 2014). Therefore, this bare minimum effort in class

would not help my behaviour management of the class and my students' progress. Praise must be reinforced and give the student a clearer understanding of why they were being praised and how they could recreate the scenario, which I started to see I had not been doing. By underusing praise, I had hindered my own classroom behaviour management.

I questioned praise further when I went to my second placement school, a specialist Autistic Spectrum Disorder school based in Derby. This school has far fewer pupils but more complex issues for each student. I was now teaching anywhere from 90 to 95% less than at my mainstream placement school. According to the teachers, praise for SEND students is critical in their progress due to their lack of self-esteem. These students might not '*know how to respond to praise because they have not received much praise in the past*' (Capel, Leask and Younie, 2019). The overuse of praise is something that the teachers at this specialist school use to work on the self-esteem of their students due to the belief that it is an effective way to reinforce classroom behaviours required for learning (Dufrene, Lestremau and Zoder-Martell, 2014) and (Reinke, Lewis-Palmer and Merrell, 2008). Praise used to aid in self-esteem is backed by psychology. However, whilst I questioned this overuse of praise for self-esteem, I was told that the students who attended the SEND school were more likely to be apprehensive towards social praise due to having received a lack of it before attending.

There is psychological reasoning behind the need for social praise. It can reinforce classroom behaviours because social rewarding '*appears to recruit similar subcortical regions of the brain's reward system as receiving money*' (Capel, Leask and Younie, 2019) and (Izuma, Saito and Sadato, 2008). Howard-Jones, Jay, Mason and Jones's (2016) study showed that a reward system such as praise used during questioning increases the release of neuromodulators that can improve students' memory and attention (. I understood the need for praise and the value that some students put on it but was unaware of the psychological implications. During my research after starting my second placement, I came to understand praise during questioning, which I had observed at my mainstream school. Still, I had not used this form of praise that could improve my student's progress and is something I should have been using to ensure retention. By using praise, I was psychologically impacting my students, which would improve their education. I started to see how praise was a requirement in teaching.

Praise can only be a valuable form of motivation if you understand the students; they are intrinsic or extrinsic (Child, 1997). Child (1997) states that those with inherent motivation are motivated by a sense of achievement at solving complex problems. Those with extrinsic motivation require external considerations such as praise. The use of external awards to encourage students is something that extrinsic students thrive on. It has been identified that there are four different types of rewards; social, token, activity, and material (Bull and Solity., 1987). It has become clear during my teaching practice that the praise given to a student depends on how the student responds to the

praise. My reasoning behind not using verbal praise at the time was due to the belief that students might not respond positively to the praise due to embarrassment or being teased, which happened to me whilst at secondary school (Capel, Leask and Younie, 2019). However, in the here-and-now and throughout my critical reflection on praise, I realised that praise is more than just verbal. This made me re-evaluate my understanding of praise and evaluate how I use the alternative forms of praise that Bull and Solity had stated. Perhaps I had been using effective praise in alternative forms without consciously realising it, which could have been causing an unconscious bias towards praise.

Whilst critically researching the use of praise in the classroom, I decided to talk with students at the SEND school about the use of praise. My reasoning behind having these conversations is that praise needs to be targeted to the student, which requires a relationship between student and teacher. A student I spoke to (S) is a 16-year-old male with autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and pathological demand avoidance (PDA). Because S has PDA, '*praise may be perceived as a demand or an expectation to perform at the same level again*' (Freeman, 2019). Because S has PDA, he will avoid requests and displays extreme behaviours as a reaction. My first observation of S and the teacher's use of praise towards him was unexpected compared to the ways of working at my home school. Teachers informed me that the way to work with S is that rather than praising what he is doing, praise his work and indirectly praise him or model the desired behaviour (Freeman, 2019).

I discussed his understanding of praise with S, and his response was that he did not believe in verbal praise and found it ineffective due to his PDA. S stated that physical praise such as stickers, awards, and certificates mean more to him due to his parental figures' ability to display this, which I could understand as I felt the same as a teenager. Something that impacted my concerns about praise causing comparison between students was S telling me that seeing others being praised caused him to be motivated. This went against my initial concerns when I was told I needed to praise more.

Some students, including S, want to work in a learning environment with a level of incentive and enjoy the competition. This was done by implementing online quizzes such as Kahoot and the interaction between students, peers, and faculty. It gave the students instant praise and a form of achievement which motivated them to continue with the tasks in the lesson. Praise used as an achievement motivation is a theory backed by Atkinson (1964) and McClelland (1961), who states that the '*strength of the incentive after the task*' can be used to create a learning environment that raises the level of incentive and need for achievement. After reading this theory, I critically reflected on when I used peer-to-peer feedback or physical incentives such as sweets as a form of motivation. I used this form of motivational praise in lessons at my mainstream school for behaviour management and competitions.

This new way of perceiving praise allowed me to critically evaluate praise as more than just verbal commands, thereby altering my perspective and challenging my bias.

Praise has been seen as an effective and positive form of behaviour management (Lewis, Hudson, Richter and Johnson, 2004). '*When teachers praise appropriate behaviour, it has been researched to show that disruptive behaviour decreases*' (Madsen, Becker and Thomas, 1968). This is perhaps why my mentor suggested that I use more praise in my classroom; however, I did not believe that it was solely to aid in my management of the classroom behaviour and that it was recommended as an effective means of building the self-esteem of the students and promoting a better relationship between the students and the teachers (Brophy, 1981). Praise as a form of self-esteem boosting is used for many of the students at the SEND school because '*adolescents with Asperger syndrome perceive themselves to be less competent in social and athletic domains, and to receive less peer approval*' (Williamson et al., 2008). It is something that I have seen myself whilst at the SEND school. While I observed praise being used as a self-esteem booster, it also came down to the relationship between the teachers and the students. Knowing the students and how they would react to certain types of praise is vital for choosing the alternative form of praise.

In conclusion, after critically evaluating my initial belief that praise for praise's sake is not a good way of teaching, I can concede that in school settings, we need to look at the various forms of praise that Bull and Solyty had stated, which does include verbal. Still, we should not be limited to just verbal praise. I still believe that the praise given must be practical and ability-based rather than solely(?) effort based, but it can be in various forms. There are many types of praise, including social, token, activity, and material. I now understand that the kind of praise depends on the student's needs. The impact the praise will have on the student comes down to the relationship you have with your students and their own social, emotional, and personal beliefs. Through my conversations with teachers and students, I have been able to gauge that the term 'praise' is an umbrella term for various forms of encouragement and support.

This critical evaluation has had me observe that I had used many forms of achievement-based praise through peer-to-peer feedback, physical rewards, and achievement points in the school system without subconsciously connecting this to praise. I could only see these as praise once I completed my second placement. It also made me realise how vital praise is to students' educational and psychological development. I believe that any praise given must reflect the work or development of the students. I have learnt that it is vital to provide the students with a clear understanding of why they are receiving this praise to aid them in repeating the process.

I am due to return to my home school after Easter. I can now work on developing a better relationship with my students to ensure the praise is best for their development. My teaching practice will change due to this incident, which made me analyse my views and biases and compare them to educational bias. Being in a secondary school environment, my praise will need to reinforce and target the students' work and could be achievement-based or incentive-based. I have changed how I view praise, especially after my second placement. I could see the various forms of praise up close, allowing me to research with a clearer understanding of impact. While I still believe that verbal praise needs to be effective and given a reason behind it, other types of praise can aid in self-esteem and behavioural management, which I will now use.

The praise I will use with my future students will be better targeted once the student/teacher relationship develops. I am looking at developing this, especially at my future school in Leicester. It will require my best teaching practice to ensure that students have the best support and praise from staff to aid their development.

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# **Navigating towards a career as a secondary school PE teacher. My perspective as a female Muslim student teacher**

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If you're reading this then the title successfully worked, but most importantly welcome to the start of my journey as a female Muslim student teacher. Although I am a private individual in terms of revealing my private and future career plans, the goal is to help inspire you as the reader and wider audiences about who I am and what led down down this path of Physical Education (PE) initial teacher education.

So firstly, let me introduce myself, my name is Muna Mohammed, born in the year 2001 in the multicultural city of Birmingham. Although I am a proud Brit (sometimes) I am even more proud of my ethnic background of Yemen which has played a significant role in Biblical, Islamic and world history; something many people probably aren't aware of. To name a few, the famous coffee known as Mocha is from the Yemeni port city of "Al Mokha" which was a supreme center for commerce and trade during 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Historical records also indicate that the first skyscrapers were built in Yemen in the Hadhramaut governorate (Anon, 2019). Finally, to complete brief history lesson, the Queen of Sheba (in Arabic she is known as Bilqis and in Amharic, as Makeda) flourished in the Arabian Peninsula as well as northeast Africa through trading gold, frankincense, and myrrh according to all Abrahamic books (Torah, Bible and Quran) with her historical throne resting in Yemen and Ethiopia built during the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Anon, 2019). Although there were times I hid my cultural identity, I've learned to love it as I knew more about its history and the significance it plays in modern society.

Although I could write all day about Yemen's history, I'll save it for another time. The focus for this article is why I chose education and my interest in completing a PE degree.

Reflecting upon my secondary years there are things I wish I didn't take for granted and people I wish I hadn't conversed with; however, I believe everything has its purpose. The first two years of secondary school were all trial and error as I adjusted to the different teaching pedagogies, lesson material, fall outs with primary friends and navigating my emotions where I often felt completely isolated and sought no help. Unfortunately, things worsened as I found myself fighting with different identities with the first being the high achieving academic student but also wanting to be loved by peers by forming fellowships with the wrong crowd in where I valued acceptance rather than my education. However, what always grounded me was my form tutor who was also Muslim who held high standards, a productive devotee and conducted herself accordingly to her ethos in which I desperately wished to be. Although there were days I strayed from my true values she quoted to me "through these thick layers of this carless façade is a student who is ambitious and hungry for academic success". To this day, this has never left me. Teachers like my tutor who aimed to positively impact students' lives is mainly why I favored teaching as a career especially as someone who went through difficulties, I aim to transform those negative experiences into memorable ones.

## So, why PE?

Before university I applied and aimed to follow the footsteps of my family of Doctors, Educators and Designers. To my surprise (and many others) I chose to pursue a career in Dentistry through an apprenticeship which is a chapter in my life I deeply resent. Many people assumed I would pursue a teaching career, however as I enjoyed science, I falsely assumed medicine was the wise option. After months of applying, I got accepted and employed to train as a dental nurse, the first few weeks were intense as I worked 12-hour shifts, I had assignments to complete and a weekend job. To say the least I was extremely burned out and counterproductive. I was found forcing myself into a career I didn't think thoroughly about. One incident became a defining change for me: we had an important Implant case as a patient paid for 6 dental implants (£2000 each) and of course as a dental nurse trainee I was anxious and didn't know what to expect; I was stuck in surgery for 4 hours. After 2 hours had passed we were ready to form an incision on the patient's Gingiva (gum) and start drilling the new implants, as the dentist cut her Gingiva my ears started to ring, my body was excessively sweating, soon enough I lost consciousness in where I embarrassingly collapsed on top of the patient, turns out I couldn't bare the goriness of surgery, what was even more embarrassing was that the patient ensured I was well post-surgery!!! After this incident I knew I needed to change career paths.

Although I felt relieved to leave dentistry which felt like a prison, I was yet again found in the abyss of distress as my career path was coming to an end. After many nights in seclusion feeling hopeless of the future, I contacted my past college tutor who also played a large role in me selecting a career in teaching. She would regularly state that in the future my hard work would pay off and she would use my work for templates. However, I felt that "student" was no longer great as my future was ambiguous; I was then advised to list my strengths rather than dwell on my weaknesses as attending university was my next best option. One thing that became visible to me was passion to educate and guide those in need, although I knew teaching matched my ethos, I was apprehensive about choosing a subject in which I flourished in. So, I decided to apply for my three main subject strengths which were Theology/philosophy, SEN specialist teacher and secondary physical education. As I waited for future interview dates, I managed to get a new job which I blindly applied for, but this changed me for the better.

The majority of jobs I worked in were retail such as Debenhams, Dior and Boots, although I loved perfume, I knew I was ready for a change in one that disciplined me to perform better, both mentally and physically. I applied to become an adventure guide at the NEC in where I taught a range of sports and skills such as archery, shooting, axe throwing and orienteering activities for scouts which seemed daunting as I had little experience in the world of sports. During my childhood I would often compete at netball tournaments, plus I was enthusiastic about gymnastics, and I was a team leader during PE lessons however, I felt my physical abilities for the job weren't adequate especially being asthmatic too. Nevertheless, I couldn't let an opportunity like this slip, so I gave it my all-in training. What motivated me more was I was the only female Muslim at work, so I felt a high level of pressure to represent my community in a positive light. After many hours of training, memorising, positive guest feedback and injuries, I was recognized for my hard work by the CEO (Chief Executive officer) and colleagues and was awarded

“star of the month”. Although I was elated that my performance had improved, it was a shame there was (and still is) a small minority of female Muslims in the sports industry acting as role models to the younger generation.

As the weeks flew by, I received an email that the Theology and philosophy degree course was withdrawn due to COVID-19 and a lack of funding. Yet again it seemed like the world was plotting against me, however little did I know that God had other plans for me. The next week I was then emailed for my PE and SEND QTS degree interview, as I was preparing the necessary documents and material (as I was expected to present a presentation related to the degree subject), I felt that PE correlated with me the most. Although I am passionate about learning religions, Islam advocates to keep our bodies healthy by fueling it with healthy beneficial foods which is stated in the Quran and participating in sports such as horse riding and archery which are acts of Sunnah (habitual practice) which prophet Muhammad blessings be upon him regularly performed.

The Quran says in Surah Taha, verse 81:

[“Eat from the good things We have provided for you, but do not transgress in them” \[20:81\].](#)

However, I was still passionate in helping SEN students by accommodating to their needs and forming a safe environment where they prosper rather than be judged and undermined for their abilities. Finding out during the interview there is a module in our second year that focuses on supporting pupils with SEND was the final confirmation I need for me accepting to the offer in studying Secondary Physical education with QTS as it resonates with my values and beliefs proving otherwise the best route in my career and benefiting wider society.

[“Thus, indeed do We reward those who do good” \[Al Quran 37:81\]](#)

Finally, to round up this article, I am forever grateful for my family, teachers, failed plans, successful plans and Allah (Arabic translation for God). I am grateful for having a supporting mother who constantly prays for my success and happiness, a mother who started with nothing but gave me everything. As I previously stated I live a private life as I believe privacy is power, however this is only a small segment in what I faced in reality. I wish those who read this autobiographical article are able to take some inspiration from this maybe, learned something new or understand a different perspective as this is first of many articles I intend to write as my teaching journey continues, filled with knowledge and life lessons.

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## Going Back to the Future

**Fiona Darby** - Secondary PGCE Deputy Course Leader and Secondary English PGCE Subject Leader, Birmingham City University

In September I will find myself in the same position as my trainees. As they embark upon their journey as an Early Career Teacher (ECT) they will be establishing themselves in their new school with their own classes – flying solo from the start of the academic year. I will be doing the same because after six years working at BCU on the Secondary PGCE, I am returning to the English classroom.

Before I came to BCU in 2016, I had been a secondary English teacher for 15 years, five of which were as Head of Department, and five were as Assistant Headteacher. Although I will be in a similar situation to my trainee teachers, I have a few years of experience to reflect upon to help me make a smooth transition back to the classroom.

Spending six years in Initial Teacher Education has given me ample opportunity to read broadly and deeply on a wealth of education topics, and observe many lessons in a variety of schools. I have taken time to reflect upon how I will use all of this experience to make the first days successful and build on this success over the school year. Here I will set out my intentions for those first lessons in September, firstly as an aide memoire for myself but also to help trainee teachers make their first experiences as a classroom teacher in a new school positive ones.

Before I even step into my new classroom, I'll be doing as much preparation in advance as possible. This will begin as soon as I can before I start and the first thing I need to do is find out what texts are in the department cupboards so I can read any that I haven't yet. I will also look at the different topics on the school's Key Stage 3 curriculum and the GCSE and A Level specifications so that I am up to date on the latest covid related changes.

Reading unfamiliar texts and researching unfamiliar topics will consolidate my subject knowledge. However, this is just the start as I will then consider the pedagogical content knowledge that I need to teach different texts and topics to my pupils.

Teaching the Secondary Subject Pedagogy module means that I have kept up to date with new or evolving pedagogical approaches – I am now excited to put them into practice myself! I'm looking forward to using approaches from Poetry by Heart who delivered an online workshop to the BCU English trainees. There were many great ideas for making poetry meaningful and memorable such as eliciting a personal connection to specific words in a poem or using images to visualise lines from the poem.

We have had a focus on Teachers as Writers over the last five years on the BCU English PGCE. We have encouraged the English trainees to practise and develop their writing skills. There is the assumption that English teachers read – a lot – as they should! However, there is not the same assumption that teachers are writers. Teaching our pupils different writing skills is an everyday part of secondary English teaching so I believe that it is crucial that we are also

practising our own writing skills. Jennifer Webb's book 'Teach Like a Writer' and the 'Teachers as Writers' approaches have been a useful way to practise different writing skills and learn new pedagogies to use with pupils.

Once I know my timetable for September, I can really start to prepare in detail. I will be in contact with my new department to find out what topics I will be teaching and the schemes of work and resources that are already in place for me to adapt for my classes.

If there are any topics that unfamiliar to me, I will prioritise these and spend time developing my knowledge of these areas. I'll also write schemes of work for any new topics and texts. This will keep me busy over the summer until the new term starts in September, then I will turn my attention to making my first lessons with my new classes count.

Most ECTs will not have experienced those lessons right at the start of academic year as they would have been in university lectures. This is a crucial time to set the tone for your lessons and establish yourself as the class teacher. I have found that after a long summer break, the shock of getting up early, putting on school uniform, and being back sitting at a desk means that most pupils are subdued in the first few lessons of the year. This is the teacher's chance to clarify expectations: what your pupils can expect from you and what you expect from your pupils. There are a number of things I will put in place to help the first week go as smoothly as possible.

I will be creating seating plans for all my classes and where possible liaising with class teachers from last year to get advice and information about the dynamics in the class. Having the seating plan in my hand as I teach the first few lessons helps me to remember pupils' names quickly and they will appreciate me knowing their name and addressing them personally.

Class data will be another source available to help me plan for any pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disability, any pupils with English as an Additional Language, and the most able pupils. With year seven groups there might be a delay with data as this will be coming from many different feeder primary schools. A good way around a lack of data is to get pupils to write something about themselves in the first lesson in their neatest writing. This initial activity has many benefits:

- Pupils are setting the standard for the presentation of their work which you can guide them back to if standards start to slip during the year.
- You can get to know some information about your pupils' interests which you can use in future lessons e.g. references to video games, films, sports teams etc.
- You can see who may need help straight away with spelling, punctuation and grammar, or pupils who struggle with ideas and may need prompting first in future lessons.

I will ensure that I gather any resources and get them ready the day before my first lessons so that I'm not rushing around trying to find exercise books, board pens, paper etc. I'm not fortunate enough to have my own classroom so I will be leaving a pile of books in a box at the back of the room I'm teaching in ready for the lesson. I have also bought a box with a handle on the lid so I can take it from room to room easily with all my teaching kit in it.

Even though I've been teaching for over 20 years now, I will still be planning my schemes of work and lessons thoroughly. Admittedly I'm not planning to the extent of my English trainees or ECTs, however I want to feel confident in what I am teaching and how the pupils will learn. I don't believe in 'winging it' and I never have, or never would, arrive at my lesson without having planned it first.

There are a few things I will do during every lesson with my new classes regardless of the topic I'm teaching. I will:

- greet the pupils as they arrive and welcome them to the lesson;
- tell the pupils what to expect from their English lessons and from me;
- tell them what I expect from them and remind them of the school expectations for rewards and sanctions;
- circulate the room as much as I can while pupils are working and try to talk to every single pupil at least once;
- see the pupils out the room and send them calmly to their next lesson.

After the lesson I will reflect on what went well and give myself credit for this as we all know how easy it is to focus on what didn't go well or as planned. I will consider any changes needed for the next lesson. Also, I will look at pupils' work and note down any ideas, topics or interests that I can include in future lessons. I will try to remember some names and record good work and behaviour on the school system.

As the term progresses, I will make time for the following – I am putting this in writing as a pledge to myself in the hope that I can keep to this even when it starts to get very busy!

- I will spend time each week keeping up with what is happening in my subject community – this is easier now as social media is so prevalent compared to when I was last in the classroom – it's only been six years but much has happened in that time!
- I will take time to create quality models of writing to use in lessons and for the department files. This means that I will be writing regularly and also anticipating the challenges that pupils may have with tasks that I set for them.
- I will continue to read for pleasure every day, including young adult fiction, to make recommendations to my pupils.

Thank you for indulging me as I record my thoughts and prepare for my return to the classroom, I have found it very useful, and I hope any ECTs reading will also find it helpful. I am grateful to my fabulous trainees, my wonderful BCU Secondary colleagues, and brilliant mentors in our BCU Partnership for teaching me so much about teaching and learning over the last six years. I'm excited for September!

Stay in touch and let me know how you are doing @darby\_fiona

# Reconstructing the Cinderella subject: a critical review of Religious Education in the National Curriculum

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Religious Education (RE) has long been coined *the Cinderella Subject* (Dierenfield, 1967; Schweitzer, 2018) because of its perceived neglect in the English curriculum. It holds a unique position: it is one of the only compulsory subjects that does not have its content defined by the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014), and is the only humanities subject that schools are required to teach at every Key Stage. However, because of this lack of formal requirements, a student's experience of RE will vary hugely based on where they attend school (REC, NATRE, 2017). A lack of specialist teachers, the removal of specific RE teaching time in some schools, and de-prioritisation of timetabling (ibid) have all been highlighted as furthering the inconsistency in delivery across the country. And yet despite these factors, its content is possibly the most debated of any subject on the secondary curriculum, with expanding subject aims to now encompass personal development and even community cohesion (DCSF, 2010; Birmingham SACRE, 2007).

This article critically looks at the current Key Stage 3 (KS3) RE curriculum in England: making use of national and local guidance in the absence of National Curriculum requirements to outline the current objectives of the subject. It will argue that RE is indeed a suitable subject for whole school aims around students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, as well as social cohesion. However, several factors, including the absence of requirements in the National Curriculum, and minimal guidance on the religions to be taught at KS3, inhibit attempts to achieve these aims. It will attempt to reconstruct the RE curriculum and suggest that an enquiry based, concept cracking approach as developed by Trevor Cooling (1994) is required to achieve these aims. It will argue that more detailed national requirements on RE teaching would further support in affording RE the curriculum time it deserves, reversing the variation in provision nationally, and reinforcing the importance of the subject in being the correct setting for these whole school aims.

## The English RE Curriculum: A Deconstruction

### Context: the place of RE and personal development in the curriculum

In order to understand RE provision today, it is necessary first to address its history. First detailed in the 1944 Education Act, RE has moved from a confessional, theologically driven approach (Franken, 2018) based around submission to Christian doctrine (Freathy and Parker, 2013) to a phenomenological one which taught a number of

different religions and “*championed the academic, objective and respectful study of religion*” (Cooling, 2008: 62) in place of the dogmatic previous approach. Instead, the phenomenological approach sought to teach multiple religious views to students for them to examine and potentially try out, without obligation, in place of the imposition of Christian views (Acquah, 2017). As a result of increasing secularisation and multiculturalism (Jackson, 2013), the phenomenological approach has now been largely replaced by a model based around *learning about as well as from* religions (Ofsted, 2021b): using religious teachings as a framework through which to evaluate and develop different perspectives including our own. This change in approach has driven the increasing prominence of aims around personal development, and more recently, social and community cohesion (Grimmitt, 2010) in RE.

There has long been a focus in English education on personal development beyond just learning and knowledge (Peterson et al, 2014), and its prominence within the objectives of school education have grown over time: it is now included as an area of judgement in Ofsted school inspections (Ofsted, 2021a). The 1988 Education Reform Act first introduced the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of students as an objective for schools (section 2(a) of Chapter 1), largely in response to England becoming both increasingly secular and multicultural: these four areas offered a non-religious framework through which develop socially aware, compassionate young people who are able to thrive in a diverse Britain. The importance of SMSC is restated in the most recent National Curriculum, as well as the requirement to prepare students for life’s “*opportunities, responsibilities and experiences*” (DfE, 2014: 5).

### **The current RE Curriculum**

As there are no specific National Curriculum requirements on the content of RE syllabi, it is within non statutory governmental and local guidance in which the content of the KS3 RE curriculum can be found. The most recent non statutory guidance was from the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2010. Guidance details the responsibility of content to reflect Christianity being the main UK religious tradition, while taking into account other religions (Education Act 1996, 3(3)) (DCSF, 2010). Beyond these requirements, the document outlines the skills students should develop and opportunities they should have in RE, but there are no formal requirements on content that must be covered beyond the above (ibid). The most recent review of RE by Ofsted highlights the need for an enquiry-based approach, whereby students can gather information before reflecting on this to learn *from* religions (Ofsted, 2013). In terms of religious content, there has been no change since the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2004 guidance that at KS3 students should learn about Christianity and at least two other religions, and a range of ethical and global issues (QCA, 2004).

In terms of outlining personal development goals of the RE curriculum, the Ofsted review highlights the importance of RE in supporting the personal development and SMSC aims of the wider curriculum (2013). Additional to personal

development, it further states that RE should also contribute to social cohesion by instilling values of respect and tolerance (ibid). Guidance from non-governmental sources also refers explicitly to personal development goals in RE: the National RE Council's (REC) guidelines promote the view of RE as an opportunity to achieve wider school requirements specifically around SMSC (2013): highlighting skills around religious literacy, articulation and reflection on the views and beliefs of the self and others (ibid). The syllabus aims of Birmingham SACRE (Birmingham City Council, 2007) also explicitly align RE with personal development skills: proposing that RE should seek to embed 24 dispositions including inclusion, belonging and harmony within students. As with the Ofsted review, the Birmingham vision goes beyond personal development to argue that the aims of RE are to develop not only students, but to improve our society. Religions should be studied as means to wider aims of creating a more inclusive, tolerant and open Birmingham, as a consequence of the personal skills developed among students. Content should be selected that will *"contribute to social solidarity and cohesion in a religiously plural community"* (Birmingham SACRE, 2007:3).

## **Deconstruction**

While RE is undoubtedly an appropriate vehicle for these personal development aims in education (Grimmitt, 1987; Rudge, 2008), several factors in the curriculum, especially at KS3, mean that the ability of RE to achieve these aims is limited. Primarily, the exclusion of requirements on content for RE in the National Curriculum. Whilst helpful guidance is offered (as described above), the absence of detailed national requirements undermines the importance of the subject (REC, 2013; Clarke and Woodhead, 2015) and has led to variation in provision and approach nationally (Commission on Religious Education, 2018). Indeed, the removal of RE from the curriculum of many schools, and deprioritisation of RE curriculum time (REC & NATRE, 2017; Commission on Religious Education, 2018), mean that too often inadequate time is allowed for students to properly engage with, investigate and evaluate the topics and belief systems at hand (REC, 2013). Lessons instead become single topic focused, with little acknowledgement of the deeper concepts and themes among these to enable meaningful exploration. Cooling (1994) describes a number of the inadequacies in this approach: highlighting that in an increasingly secular country, many of the concepts behind religious practices or beliefs will be relatively new to students. If these are taught to students without the necessary grounding in the concepts from which they are born, the study of these beliefs becomes largely meaningless. He uses the example of teaching White British children about Islamic prayer; if there is no prior understanding of the concept of submission to a higher power, then the act of prayer and physical positioning performed here cannot be adequately grasped. RE then becomes a largely descriptive exercise in observing what others do: this is clearly inadequate in instilling SMSC development.

Secondly, at KS3, schools are still instructed only to teach about Christianity and two other religions (QCA, 2004). Based on my practice thus far in schools in South Birmingham and Sandwell, both incredibly multicultural areas (ONS, 2011), this guidance is inadequate. Only teaching three religions fails to prepare students in either multicultural or homogenous schools (Cantle, 2013) for life in multicultural Britain. Students should be provided with

a positive understanding of the different communities and ways of life they may encounter in order to live and thrive *anywhere* in the country; limiting this to three religions does not do this. If RE is to be based upon a genuine commitment to the personal development of our students, then we must accept that all religions are indeed relevant to our students. I will argue in the next section how a better approach would be to encourage schools to teach at least the six main religions in the UK at KS3, in order to fulfil the personal development requirements of the subject.

### **The English RE Curriculum: A Reconstruction**

In attempting to reconstruct the RE curriculum, I will focus on the planned, or formal curriculum as outlined by Haydon (2019), though undoubtedly the informal and hidden curriculum both also influence personal development aims. Primarily, more guidance on RE content should be included in the National Curriculum. This would support with the issues in RE outlined above: giving the subject the recognition it deserves (Clarke and Woodhead, 2015), prohibiting schools from dropping the subject entirely, and reassuring doubtful parents that content is of an enquiring, personal development approach. Requirements on content would also lessen the confusion among teachers over the aims of the subject, which in practice furthers the tendency to reflect on students' own experiences and belief systems rather than those of others, and what we can learn from these (Ofsted, 2013).

Secondly, schools should be required to teach at least the six main religions, and one non-religious worldview at KS3. Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework says curriculums should provide students with the cultural capital to succeed in life, and "*prepare(s) learners for life in modern Britain*" (Ofsted, 2021a: 9). The guidance of Birmingham SACRE reflects this, highlighting that the religions studied should "*broaden and deepen their horizons*" (Birmingham SACRE, 2007: 3): an approach that seeks to teach students about primarily their own beliefs, or the most common beliefs in the local area does not achieve this. If we want to enable our students to become tolerant, socially mobile and engaged citizens, equipping them with a deeper knowledge of other religions to their own is required. Whilst there is absolutely a place for ensuring that curriculum content is relevant to students and their own lived experiences, it is a mistake to suggest that other peoples' religions are irrelevant to students. In a plural, tolerant society in which people of all backgrounds and religions have an equal opportunity to thrive, the beliefs and ways of life of those around us are absolutely relevant to us all. Not only does focusing on different religions equip our students to succeed and contribute positively to a multicultural Britain, but this supports the *learning from* element of RE education (QCA, 2004) whereby students are exposed to and can reflect on the personal significance of other belief systems. While it is right that schools have the freedom to adapt content to the needs and contexts of their students, requirements like this would ensure minimal coverage of a variety of religions and worldviews.

In order to ensure RE teaching is more effective, an enquiry-based approach is required. This is supported by the most recent Ofsted report into RE (2013) which found that this was the approach in schools where RE was taught most effectively. Enquiry-based learning which focuses on students exploring concepts through the use of real-world connections and high-level questioning “*allow(s) students to delve deeper into thinking, as they explore different levels of understandings and ways of perceiving reality*” (Laoulach, 2021: 271). The focus is on students engaging with, understanding and then reflecting on concepts outside of their own experience, facilitated by the teacher, in order to better understand and respond to the world, in contrast to the teacher imparting knowledge to students to learn. I have seen this work successfully in my own practice: having used an enquiry-based approach to teach new concepts including mindfulness and meditation in Buddhism to a year 8 class. We began by looking at and discussing the scenario of the end of the school day and the things we have to be mindful of here: other people moving around, cars on the road, bullies we might encounter outside of school and so on, to better understand what mindfulness is and how we already do this in our own lives. This gave the concept a much stronger grounding and allowed the students to more successfully reflect on the role our thoughts play in how we feel, the need to be aware of and respond to these correctly, and thus a religious perspective on meditation practice.

### **Professional development product**

To formulate a more successful approach to RE for myself and colleagues, I have devised a leaflet (Figure 1) detailing ideas of curriculum content for schools at KS3. The aim of this content is twofold: to better achieve the personal development and SMSC goals of the RE curriculum, through a deeper and more informed enquiry approach; and to include the necessary concepts, themes and religious content on which the KS4 content can successfully build. The suggestions are grounded in Trevor Cooling’s Concept Cracking pedagogy (2008): whereby RE learning starts by introducing shared, often secular concepts which students can relate to and understand, to enable meaningful entry into the beliefs and practices which are underpinned by these concepts. KS3 RE Teachers should then relate these ideas to the religious content, and then facilitate students’ reflection on the significance of these. This enquiry-based approach to RE is understood as enabling students to *learn from* religions (Ofsted, 2021b).

The leaflet includes a list of suggested content for one year group at KS3. Each term has a topic focus, covering the ideas and concepts behind each topic in the first half term before turning to look at individual religions in the second: to ensure students are able to grasp the concepts behind practices and beliefs and thus engage with and respond meaningfully to them. I have chosen to look at all religions within a topic rather than looking at each religion in turn, to highlight the many commonalities between them (Cooling, 2008) in the hope this will support with aims around cohesion. The guidance suggests studying at least the six main religions as well as non-religious perspectives, reflecting my points above around the importance of this for RE’s personal development aims.

Term one: Belief in a God / Gods	Term two: Prayer	Term three: Leaders
<p><b>Half Term one</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What is belief?</b> <i>What is the difference between belief and knowledge? What is faith?</i></li> <li>• <b>Where do our beliefs come from?</b> <i>Influences around us; can beliefs change through our lives? Why do some people believe different things?</i></li> <li>• <b>Why do some people believe in Gods?</b> <i>What belief brings to people's lives; The answers to ultimate questions; Searching for meaning in life</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What is a prayer?</b> <i>Prayer as a unique form of communication; The function of speaking to a higher being; things we can't speak to other people about</i></li> <li>• <b>Why do people pray?</b> <i>Why do we seek guidance?; What things can't we ask other people for? Can prayer help people to help themselves?</i></li> <li>• <b>Who do people pray to?</b> <i>Does everyone pray to the same being? How do we know who we are praying to?</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What is a leader?</b> <i>Types of leaders in society; role models (e.g. sportspeople); roles of a leader</i></li> <li>• <b>What qualities does a good leader need?</b> <i>Power vs doing the right thing; confidence; bravery; supporting those in need</i></li> <li>• <b>Why do we need leaders?</b> <i>Ideas around guidance; role models; standing up for justice</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Half Term two</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What God or Gods does each religion believe in?</b> <i>Christianity: The Trinity; Judaism; Islam; Sikhism; Hinduism</i></li> <li>• <b>What do people who don't believe in a God believe?</b> <i>Buddhism: a religion without a God; Humanism</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How does each religion pray?</b> <i>Christianity; Judaism; Islam: Salah; Sikhism; Hinduism; Buddhism: the role of meditation</i></li> <li>• <b>Does prayer have to be religious?</b> <i>Speaking to dead relatives / friends; asking for something; hoping something will happen: are these a form of prayer?</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who are the different religious leaders</b> <i>Jesus; Abraham; Moses; Muhammad; Guru Nanak; The Buddha</i></li> <li>• <b>Who are different non-religious leaders</b> <i>Marcus Rashford; Martin Luther King; Stormzy; Rosa Parks</i></li> </ul>

Figure 1

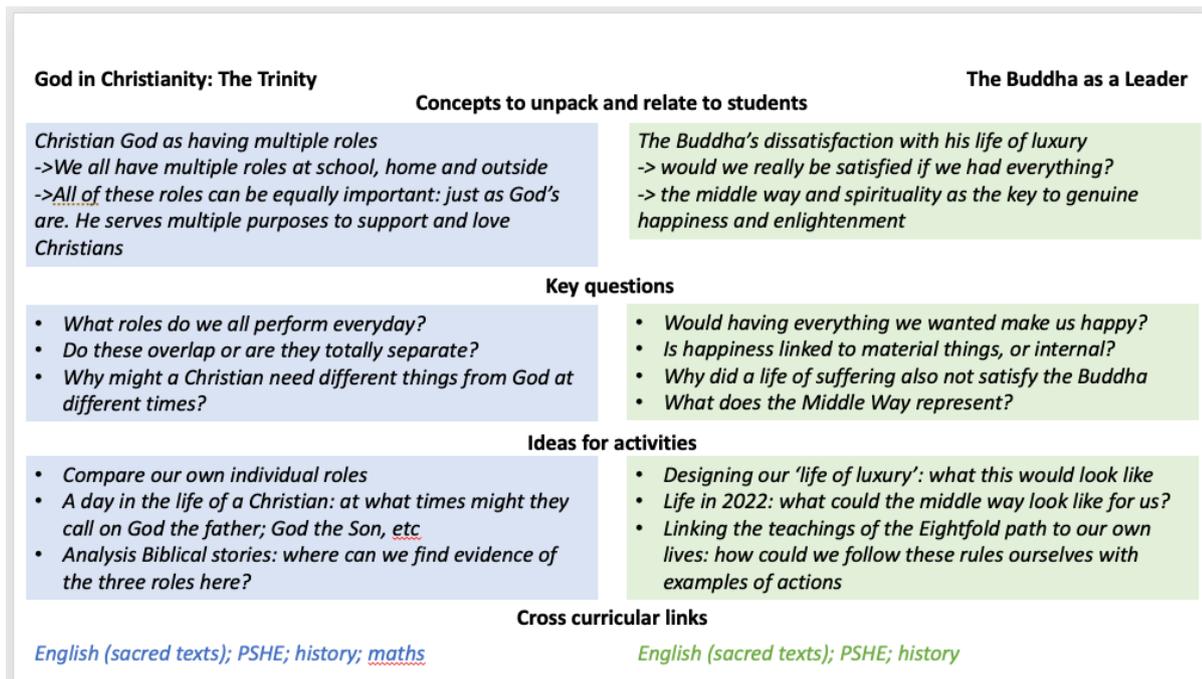
In order to provide more detail on the approach I believe schools should follow, I have looked at four of the suggested topics in detail to outline the process of *cracking the concepts* to make these lessons relevant and meaningful for students. The table (Figure 2) aims to support teachers in identifying the relatable concepts within the beliefs and practices they want students to understand, as well as the reflective process that needs to take place to ensure students are able to *learn from* the religious content.

Lesson Topic	1. Unpack the Cluster ideas	2. Select one idea to explore	3. Relate it to pupils' experience	4. Introduce the explicitly religious idea	5. Reflect on significance of this
<b>God in Christianity: The Trinity</b>	The Trinity; Omnibenevolence; Omniscience; omnipotence	The Trinity	Our multiple roles in life (e.g. student, daughter, footballer etc);	Christian belief in the Trinity and presence of these roles in biblical text	Multiple functions of a Christian God (e.g. God the father to provide for us; the Holy Spirit who is always around us)
<b>Prayer in Christianity</b>	Individual relationship with God (Protestantism); praying with artefacts e.g. Rosary beads	Individual relationship with God	People we have an intimate relationship with who we trust completely	Protestantism as a movement to undo the mediacy of the Pope / church between man and God	Relationships with God / our personal support systems are individual and personal
<b>Abraham as a leader</b>	Covenant; having complete faith in God; sacrifice; a father's love for his son	Covenant	Important promises we have made in our lives	Abraham and God's promise to him; having total faith in God's word; God as provider to man	Importance of having faith and trust For religious people: obedience to God and faith in his plan
<b>The Buddha as a leader</b>	Dissatisfaction with materialism; meditation as the route to truth	Dissatisfaction with materialism	If you had everything you wanted: would this solve all of your problems?	The Middle Way; reducing suffering as the human goal	Importance of living a modest life in Buddhism; life as spiritual and not just material / physical

Figure 2

The final section provides suggested activities, key questions and cross curricular links (Figure 3) for two of the suggested topics (from Figure 2). Cross curricular learning will be crucial to enable student engagement (Hoodless, 2008), and to fully embed the required skills. The key questions and suggested activities seek to illustrate the central

concepts behind content, as well as how to relate these back to students' own lived experiences to support in understanding, as well as underlining commonalities between our experiences and those of other belief systems.



**Figure 3**

I have taught the example lesson of the Buddha as a leader (Figure 3 – Green) based on this approach in my own practice. As a starter activity, students detailed their ideal life: if they could have anything they wanted, what would they have in their life? We then discussed some of these and through questioning, debated whether these would still guarantee our happiness: I reminded students that even with all these possessions, we could not avoid inevitable challenges in life such as mourning, illness, and dissatisfaction. Some more able students began to argue that a life of luxury would not make them truly happy, because ultimately material things cannot do this. We then watched a video on the life of the Buddha to introduce his experience and the concept of the Middle Way. Students completed a timeline of his life and students were encouraged to detail how he might feel at each stage. We then discussed the idea of the Middle Way, and whether this reflected the teachings of some of the celebrities we might consider to be leaders to us now. More able students were able to reflect and argue that it is challenging to achieve the Middle Way in a society where we are encouraged to seek out material goods. Finally, students had the choice to design a poster, or write a letter to a friend detailing the Middle Way that included suggestions for how they could achieve this in their own lives. Students were better equipped to understand and engage with the concept because of the links to their own lives and were then able to reflect on and *learn from* this Buddhist concept by applying the teachings in a practical task.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to deconstruct and begin to reconstruct the KS3 RE curriculum in England. It has argued that the realigning of RE with personal development aims in place of a phenomenological or confessional approach is entirely appropriate, but that several changes need to take place for these aims to be achieved. Primarily, more

specific guidance on curriculum content for RE should be included in the National Curriculum to ensure that all six religions, as well as at least one non-religious perspective are covered at KS3. Secondly, schools should take an enquiry-based approach, based on the *concept cracking* work of Trevor Cooling, to ensure religious content is adequately grounded in relatable concepts for our students to enable meaningful engagement. Despite being described as a *Cinderella subject*, the aims and the approach needed to achieve these highlight that in an increasingly multicultural but disparate UK (Cantle, 2013; 2017), effective RE is more important now than ever.

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# **An analysis of the TGfU model through the eyes of a physical education undergraduate student teacher**

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There are many variables that play a part in the teaching and learning of students within physical education (PE). One such factor is a teacher's pedagogy, where there are a wide range of effective teaching approaches available to the PE teacher. It is important that teachers understand and use the various teaching approaches to meet the needs of their students (Aktop and Karahan 2012) and gain the desired outcomes. It is therefore important for pre-service teachers, undergoing initial teacher education, to also have a strong understanding of these teaching pedagogies so that they have the skills to adapt the delivery of their lessons (Bidabadi et al, 2016), ensuring that their teaching is most effective for their students. This article will explore the pedagogical approach of Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU). I will present my case as to why I believe the use of the TGfU model is an effective model to promote learning within PE (Tan et al, 2011) from my perspective as a second-year undergraduate student on the secondary physical education course, with qualified teacher status.

Firstly, it is necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by the term TGfU. This is a pupil-centred approach to teaching PE, involving teaching student's tactics and strategies within game situations as the vehicle for them to learn an area within the curriculum (Webb and Pearson, 2008). This model-based practice was created by Bunker and Thorpe in 1982 as a way to form a concept of teaching games and learning (Griffin and Butler, 2005). Since this method of teaching was created, there have been many studies exploring this model-based practice to support the use of TGfU within lessons and help promote this model-based practice as a framework for teaching games (Griffin, Brooker and Patton 2005). This model-based practice supports constructivist learning theory (Light, 2002). This is the theory that promotes active learning, where students learn when they are actively seeking solutions (Butler, 1997). That is the baseline to the TGfU model, as students take part in gameplay as a way of learning the skills in a selected sport.

One point of view to using this model-based practice is that it can make PE lessons meaningful for the students (Jones, et al., 2010). To elaborate, TGfU uses tactical creativity which can be explained by students being able to find their own solutions within the game that they play compared with being taught a tactic and then applying that specific tactic to a game (Mommert et al, 2015). Therefore, this appeals to students more as the lesson is student centred, giving them freedom and allowing them flexibility to set their own pace for that lesson (Geven and Attard, 2012). With that being said, a criticism of this model is that occasionally the techniques the students use may not

progress the way that they should and therefore lead to these students underperforming (Diaz-Cueto, et al,2010). This could mean that these students progress slower. It is therefore important that while this model continues to be student centred, that it is meaningful, and that teachers also correct incorrect techniques.

Another essential point to add is that using this model helps develop the cognitive domain in students (Aryanti et al, 2021). The cognitive domain is the development of knowledge which involves the recall and understanding of certain facts (Bloom, 2006). The reason for this is that this model encourages students to make decisions and uses prior knowledge within the lesson that therefore helps develop the cognitive domain (Rinaldo, et al., 2021). On the other hand, another limitation of this model is that the development of the affective domain is weak in comparison to the other domains (Aryanti et al, 2021). The affective domain is the domain that involves the development of socialization and emotions (Bloom, 2006). This contrasts with other model-based practices, for example, the Sport Education model, where the affective domain is strongly developed during lessons (Hastie 2013). However, there is limited evidence to support this fully and some studies show an improved amount of social behaviour using this practice method (SATPE, 2013).

Whilst there is evidence to suggest that this model-based practice is effective, there is still a limited amount of research that can suggest otherwise. TGfU is limited to only parts of the PE curriculum because this model-based practice is team game-based (Light 2002). This means that it could be argued that there are parts of the curriculum best taught using a different model. Additionally, some research (Bracco, Lodewyk and Morrison, 2019) suggests that the use of TGfU in lessons can disengage students, as lessons can become repetitive when team games is the sole focus of the lesson; especially if these games have no context to larger life. This is in comparison to the Sport Education model which educates the students on responsibility and forces specific interpersonal behaviours (Hastie 2013). With that being said, the use of the TGfU model can help promote physical literacy as this model helps students to become physically competent in the chosen sporting areas, thus developing them in their physical literacy journey (Doozan and Bae, 2016).

With team games still currently dominating the national curriculum, this model-based practice has become a teaching method that enables PE lessons to move away from the very traditional command and practice styles and, as stated before, TGfU is a fantastic way to make these lessons meaningful and motivating. Research (Jones, et al, 2010) also shows that TGfU is popular in its use with adolescent girls, where current physical activity levels are decreasing. Additionally, lessons using TGfU focus more on teaching for participation than teaching for performance, as during these lessons students will not spend a substantial portion of it in skill-based drills, thus providing another reason why TGfU promotes meaningful PE (Butler, 2006).

Overall, I believe the TGfU model is an effective teaching approach that has many benefits. However, as with all lessons, it's important to plan thoroughly in order to challenge students and ensure that effective learning can take place.

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# **“I don’t think it’s out there enough”: Practitioners’ views on the status of Early Years Professionals in comparison to Qualified Teachers**

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## **Policy and the Early Years Professional**

In 2008, the English Government introduced Early Years Professional Status, a graduate-level qualification with the potential to raise qualifications and professionalism within a disparate early years workforce (Teaching Agency, 2012). However, the later Nutbrown review (DfE, 2012: 17) showed that these objectives had still not been met. Low professional status and a lack of “clear progression routes” remained a key concern. Graduate leaders had been shown to improve the quality of provision in early years settings (Sylva et al., 2004) and Nutbrown questioned why those working in early years should be any less qualified or have any lower status than teachers working with older children. A new Early Years Teacher (EYT) status for children from birth to seven was proposed.

The Nutbrown review was implemented through the new Coalition government’s publication of *More Great Childcare*. Graduate practitioners would become “specialists in early childhood development, trained to work with babies and young children”. They would gain the confidence to lead practice and raise standards for children aged birth to five (DfE, 2013: 27). The entry requirements and expectations were similar for both Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in primary schools and the EYT, making them comparable qualifications. However, the existing disparities in pay and conditions that had been identified in the Nutbrown review were still not addressed (Kay et al., 2021).

This policy has resulted in a lack of clarity on the status of the early years workforce which has left many early years teachers feeling undervalued, underpaid and unrecognised (Roberts-Holmes, 2012). The lack of clarity may also be an influential factor in the high number of practitioners leaving the sector (Henshall et al., 2018), and the current recruitment and retention crisis (Traunter, 2019).

## **Professionalism and status**

Despite these issues, Sims et al. (2015) show that higher-level qualifications have gained some recognition and status in settings. Graduate practitioners felt valued for achieving the additional qualifications and had indeed grown in confidence through a renewed professional identity. This is where the qualification can be helpful in forming a shared professional identity for EYTs that recognises their knowledge and expertise.

However, professionalism is a complex phenomenon. The role of EYT is often viewed as being that of caregiver, rather than educator. The skills of care are often taken for granted, not considered professional (Taggart, 2011), or not requiring specialist professional knowledge (Jonsdottir & Coleman, 2014). Therefore, Henshall et al. (2018) argue for care to be recognised as specialist knowledge and deserving of equal recognition to that of teaching, while other studies suggest that value and recognition of their role could be as important to graduate practitioners as the financial reward (Brock, 2012).

### **Graduate leaders**

A further key policy aim for creating a graduate-led workforce is the development of leadership to raise educational standards, although that leadership role has also been poorly defined. McDowall Clark (2012) argues that there are significant differences between the leadership style in business organisations and that which is required to lead pedagogical practice. While EYTs do see themselves as agents of change (Hadfield et al., 2012), there is a complexity to leadership in settings that is often misunderstood or overlooked. The largely female early years workforce may not readily accept the more instrumental and marketised managerial approach (Jonsdottir & Coleman, 2014) that is implied in policy documents (Kay et al., 2019). Therefore, the sector needs to create its own contextualised interpretations of pedagogical leadership (Palaiologou & Male, 2018) to support the graduate practitioner role.

In response to these differences in parity between early years teachers and those with QTS, and the lack of clarity regarding leadership and professionalism, this article seeks to identify practitioners' views on these issues and create a contemporary understanding for future practice. This has been guided by the research question: *What are practitioners views on the status of Early Years Professionals in comparison to the status of Qualified Teachers?*

### **Methodology**

Qualitative data was collected through a mixed method approach of interviews and questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants - three EYP/EYT and one QTS. Interview transcripts were checked with participants afterwards to ensure that the data was reliable and trustworthy (Denscombe, 2017).

Questionnaires were used to gain a complexity of views, yet not demanding too much effort from the participants (Denscombe, 2017). There were six responses from EYP/EYTs and eight from QTS. Ethical approval was obtained from Birmingham City University and the BERA (2018) ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research.

Obtaining informed consent from Twitter participants was an additional challenge (Townsend & Wallace, 2016). Therefore, measures were taken within the questionnaire including a 'welcome section' stating the research aims and clarifying that by pressing 'submit' the participant gave their agreement to taking part.

## Findings and analysis

Through the process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), three key themes were identified from the data: the status of early years teachers, the leadership role and professional identity.

### The status of Early Years Teachers

Existing research had expressed a lack of parity between EYT and QTS in terms of recognition, pay and conditions (Nutbrown, 2021). This was confirmed by the present study with all EYTs, and the majority of QTs, agreeing that Early Years Teachers are treated as inferior to those with QTS. Within the data, a recurring theme was a minimal understanding of the EYT from both the public and other professionals:

*“I think that people don’t understand the EYPS because I don’t think it is out there enough for people to understand”*

(Interview Participant 2)

*“I know that colleagues on QTS training have absolutely NO IDEA what EYTS is!”*

(Questionnaire Participant 4)

The findings in the Hadfield et al (2012) study, were borne out in this study too with many of the QTS participants admitting they did not know of the EYP/T status.

*“I have to confess to knowing very little about EYP qualification – even though I am a Reception teacher!”*

(Questionnaire Participant 4)

Moreover, every participant in the EYP/T questionnaire stated ‘yes’ to believing they are seen/treated as inferior to QTs in terms of understanding and recognition of their qualifications, pay, status and conditions. Most QTS participants also acknowledged this lack of recognition and respect given to EYP/Ts:

*“...they should always be rewarded with much better pay and as much respect as having QTS”*

(Questionnaire Participant 2)

Henshall et al. (2018) and Roberts-Holmes (2012) link this lack of parity to the current recruitment crisis in the sector (Traunter, 2019). That view was supported by an EYT in this research who decided to gain QTS, suggesting that the

EYT is not enough on its own. However, some QTS participants were also concerned regarding the lack of knowledge and respect for their own status:

*“The respect isn’t there from society like it was in the past”*

(Questionnaire Participant 2)

In the QTS questionnaire, the reasons given for believing the EYT qualification is seen/treated as lower than the QTS qualification centred around the word ‘teacher’ having more respect. This was highlighted consistently throughout the EYP/T responses too:

*“I think if you have got QTS, if you are a teacher, I think people would think that you were above early years teacher”*

(Interview Participant 3)

One participant emphasised that this could be due to the EYT being optional, not mandatory like the QTS:

*“Because all who work in schools have to have QTS, and EYPS is only optional... raises the question of how important this status actually is”*

(Questionnaire Participant 6)

As with Lightfoot and Frost (2015), the majority of EYTs in this study mentioned a general view of their job as ‘just playing’:

*“[People] believing that we just play with children and that they will start to learn when they start school”*

(Questionnaire Participant 2)

Unexpected views of the effect of the pandemic were proffered, with some EYT participants stating that, as a result of parents having to look after their children through lockdown, their work was now more appreciated and recognised:

*“especially since covid happened and they have had to look after their children more... like it is not just playing like all day, so I think parents views have possibly changed a bit”*

(Interview Participant 2)

Yet other EYT participants felt the pandemic widened the disparity, as there was much more support for schools and teachers during this period:

*“You just have to look at the pandemic. EYPs were working throughout too. But they’re a passive workforce and don’t shout as loud as teachers, nor do they have the same platforms to reach the right audiences.”*

(Questionnaire Participant 5)

*“[QTs being above EYPs] has been even more evident during the pandemic when support for schools and teachers, such as testing, was issued to them ahead of the early years sector”*

(Questionnaire Participant 1)

### **The leadership role**

There were mixed responses on the roles and responsibilities of a leader in the early years. Most EYT participants identified these as supporting and developing staff, advocating for children and improving standards. Every EYT participant said the qualification had improved their willingness to take on leadership roles and it enabled them to put these responsibilities into practice. However, they all felt that leadership in the early years is often disregarded and perceived as an ‘optional extra’, which corresponds with Lightfoot and Frost’s (2015) findings.

### **Professional identity**

In parallel with Sims et al. (2015), nearly every EYT felt the qualification had developed their professional identity and confidence to lead, with some saying they had received external validation and recognition from mentors, colleagues and/or managers. This is consistent with some of Henshall et al.’s (2018) findings.

In terms of professionalising the sector, literature suggested that there is a need for a balance in internal and external components of professional identity to gain social legitimacy in their professional role (Murray, 2013). This was identified in this study through nearly every EYT stating that the status had improved their professional identity, except one who gained their identity from their previous BA Honours Degree. This suggests that EYTs internal view of professional self has developed and is prevalent, although external components were less evident. Interestingly, an EYP participant raised that if the EYPS was mandatory in settings, like the QTS, then more value would be placed on it. This is endorsed by other data, as many of the QTS participants stated they had already developed their professional identities upon qualification, as the QTS is mandatory in order to teach in schools. Enhancing the early years workforce by making the EYT qualification mandatory, could eliminate the stereotype of the EYT as ‘caregiver’, and ‘just playing’, rather than expert with specialist knowledge. It would also provide much needed clarity and understanding.

## Conclusion

This article has provided an insight into practitioners' views on the status of EYTs compared to the status of QTs, relating to their professional identities and their role as leaders. The findings reveal a disconnect between the two qualifications, with EYTs feeling they are inferior to those with QTS. Many of the issues can be related to the use of the term 'teacher' in both roles despite a lack of parity in terms and conditions.

The EYT participants revealed that, despite them developing their professional identity and confidence to lead, leadership in the early years is still overlooked. The pandemic has further highlighted the divide between the two roles, where those with QTS appeared more supported during this time than the early years workforce; although some EYT participants did suggest that the lockdown brought a new recognition and appreciation from parents for the work they do.

This study determines that, whilst the EYT qualification has brought an internal development and an increase in knowledge and confidence, there is not enough external recognition or reward given to these professionals, when compared to those with QTS. There is a need for further research into possible solutions and to gain EYTs' views and opinions, their suggestions for future practice and new ways of advocating for EYTs as pedagogical leaders with expert knowledge and skills.

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#### ***Eight reasons why contributing to the journal is worthwhile***

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# Hybridisation Model of Leadership – how it can support professional development?

**Paola Pedrelli** - Course Leader for MA AIC Degree Programme

## **Introduction:**

In this journal article, I will be discussing aspects of the Hybridisation model of leadership which emerged from my PhD. The focus of my PhD was how leaders manage the complexity of their leadership life on a daily basis. For me it was important to develop a theoretical model that could have a practical application. The reason for focusing on leadership is that evidence seems to indicate that there is a crisis of leadership within services that are linked with a family and children agenda, for example social workers, teachers and early years' practitioners. It is difficult to recruit and retain these leaders (Simpson, 2022; Weale, 2022, Bonetti, 2020; Pascal et al., 2020).

I have therefore developed a hybridisation model of leadership which acknowledges the holistic nature of the operating environment (Baltaci and Balci, 2017) and simultaneously recognises the importance of the individual's personal and professional narrative (Pascal and Ribbins, 1998; Mancini et al., 2015). The findings of this research are applicable to any leader that leads in a complex organisation. I focused on Children's Centres (CCs); however the applicability of this model is for any organisation, especially if the organisation is operating within the public and voluntary sector.

The focus of this article is on the value of this model, my positionality and how my positionality influenced the design of this model, and how this model be used to support leaders with their professional development in these turbulent and changing times. As the leadership literature is so vast, I wanted to ensure that I had considered a range of disciplines, such as business, education and early years so that a holistic model could be developed.

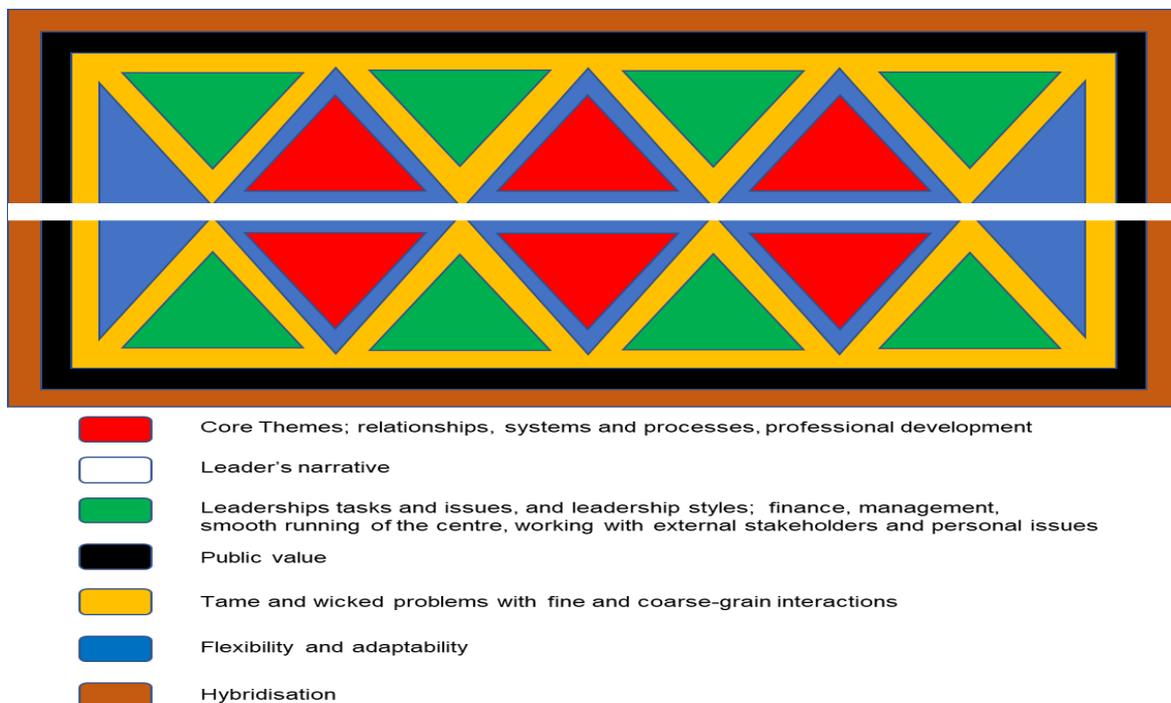
## **The Value of the Model:**

It is designed to support and empower leaders as it recognises that leadership evolves and that all aspects impact on each other over time. This detailed model allows for different aspects to be unpicked and analysed. This is helpful as it allows individual to understand and identify what aspects can be changed, what will or needs to stay the same and what professional support is available to support them in adapting to the current situation and what support is required for their future development. For each individual leader is it important that they feel heard and supported so that they can reflect on their leadership journey and the quality of their daily leadership life (Boram-Hays, 2000; Pascal and Ribbins, 1998, 1998b).

### **My Positionality and Design of the Model:**

This model was developed from a strengths-based perspective, and it is seen as being a guide rather than being used as a tick box exercise. Therefore, it was important for me to be explicit about my positionality and how I saw this model being applied in practice. The hybridisation happens when practice and theory are intertwined. This interweaving will be slightly different for all leaders. The design of the model was influenced by my childhood growing up in South Africa and my professional heritage. I have incorporated the concept of '*Ubuntu*' which is about the quality of being human (Flippin, 2012). It describes how our actions have an impact on society and others, it is about togetherness. '*Ubuntu Ngumutu Ngabantu*' highlights the importance of connection, growth and progress (Williams, 2018). The Te Whariki (2017) curriculum framework used the imagery and concept of the tapestry, which acknowledged the importance of community and culture was congruent with my childhood and professional experience of working as a community development worker and within the early years sector. The lattice work from public value literature was complimentary and linked with the business aspect of creating public value and operating as a leader in complex environments (Geuijzen et al, 2014; Moore, 1995).

The visual design is influenced by Zulu beadwork, Zulu beadwork is designed to be worn, adorns an individual and it is fit for purpose, communicating messages between individuals. (Biyela, 2013; Boram-Hays, 2000). The beads, cotton and colour have been intentionally chosen. The different colours have positive and negative connotations except for white. White is seen as purity, and I consciously chose white for the leader's narrative (Biyela, 2013). Therefore, the size of the beads link with the tame and wicked problems, or how easy or difficult the problems are to solve within the organisation (Grint, 2010). The different materials the beads are made from, for example pottery or glass related to fine-grain or coarse-grain properties, the daily and organisational interactions. The cotton which goes through the beads is the leaders' narrative (Pascal and Ribbins, 1998), their adaptability and flexibility as they deal with tasks and issues (Mancini et al., 2015) The concept of using beads means that patterns can change, beads can be moved as this model is about adaptability, flexibility and hybridisation (Baltaci and Balci, 2017). The model highlight's themes, simultaneously being mindful that the model needs flexibility and adaptability which are appropriate for individual contexts. The themes will always be present, however they will be influenced by a variety of factors such as the individual's narrative; the level of their experience as a leader; what type of tame and wicked problems that have to deal with; the fine and coarse-grain properties, the daily and organisational interactions (Grint, 2010). In addition, leaders need to deal with social, economic and political influences, which they might not be able to change or influence, such as government policy change, the impact of Covid-19. They still need to be adaptable and flexible in how they react the situation and be able to deal with value pluralism and public value.



**Figure 1:** Hybridisation Model of Leadership

The overall findings were based on an interpretivist, qualitative study of 20 Heads CCs based in two geographical areas of England. Ten Heads of CCs were working an urban area and ten Heads were working in a rural area. The findings showed that leaders need to be able to deal with the internal and external changes which are occurring within their operating environments (Eisenstadt and Oppenheim, 2019), they need to be politically astute, be able to deal with value pluralism and remain aware of the importance of public value. To achieve this, leaders need to simultaneously see the bigger picture and the minutia of everyday life be adaptable and flexible (Heifetz, 1994). These leaders needed to have a range of skills of practical and theoretical sector knowledge, people skills and be able to deal with uncertainty.

### **Professional Development:**

The different ways this model can help support the leaders in the professional development is help them reflect on their strengths and areas of development within the context of their operating environment. For example, the leaders need to understand the impact of their own personal and professional narrative and how it impacts on them as leaders and the bi-directional relationship between themselves, others and the organisation (Pascal and Ribbins, 1998; Biyela, 2013, Murray, 2013; Taggart, 2015). Some useful models and theories to support leaders in their reflections and progress include Pascal and Ribbins (1998) leadership career model and Social Identity theory and Identity Status models (Mancini et al., 2015). In understanding themselves, this will support the leaders in the more practical application of their roles as they have to deal with a range of tasks and issues including management, finance, working with external stakeholders, ensuring the smooth running of the centre and dealing with

interpersonal issues on a daily basis. It is the recognition of how interactive processes and relationships are, that systems are interlinked and unpredictable, Complexity Leadership Theory is particularly pertinent as it focused on leaders being adaptable, action-focused and having an administrative focus. (Lorenz, 1993; Lorenz, 1963; Baltaci and Balci, 2017). From an operational perspective, leaders need to be acknowledge and engage with the external environment (Geuijen et al., 2017), this means that they need a skill set which requires value pluralism and hybridisation (de Graaf et al., 2014) and political astuteness (Hartley et al., 2015). It is therefore important that leadership is seen as an evolving process and that all leaders need support in developing and honing their leadership skills. This can be achieved through continual professional development, mentoring and leaders receiving clear guidance of what their role entails to help retain leaders in their roles.

## Conclusion:

To conclude, I will share my reflections on this model. The hybridisation model has been developed for any leader working in a complex environment and I feel that this is particularly pertinent at the moment as a number of services are facing a leadership crisis, services are stretched and budgets are tight. It is therefore important that professionals are supported in their leadership roles. This is a win-win situation for all. The government and organisations can achieve successful outcomes linked to their remits, leaders can feel empowered through knowledge, support and feeling valued. The leaders can be secure in themselves knowing that their narrative, linked with their theoretical and practical skills will help them be effective and resilient leaders as they have developed the necessary skill set. This will enable them to provide the best quality services to their service user and in turn help create public value within their local community and society as a whole.

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# **Working in partnership with students for assessment topics in postgraduate education: lessons from physiotherapy education.**

**Jodie Bryant** - Associate Professor, School of Health Sciences Lead for Simulation, Birmingham City University

**Harriet Shannon** - Associate Professor, Physiotherapy, UCL GOS Institute of Child Health

## **Introduction**

Student-led assessment encompasses a variety of practices through which students are actively involved in their own learning and assessment processes. It was first documented in 1938 by John Dewey, who coined the phrase 'progressive education' as a move away from didactic, teacher-led education towards a more social/context-oriented model. At its core, student-led assessment aims to empower students to take responsibility for their own learning, and the learning of their peers. This might include peer feedback (Lui & Carless, 2006), group portfolios (Lopez-Pastor et al, 2010), or co-creating a database of multiple-choice questions (Harris et al, 2015). Much of the research into student-led assessment is focused on formative assessment that does not carry a mark or module weighting, often as part of a broader student-led pedagogical shift (Rowley et al, 2017). Indeed the 2015 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Standard 1.3), states that universities "should ensure that programme are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach" (ESG, 2015).

The UCL (University College London) 'Acute Cardiorespiratory Physiotherapy Skills' module is delivered across a 6-day programme. Learners on the programme are post-registration postgraduate physiotherapy students. Most work in a specific subspeciality within the cardiorespiratory field, either locally or overseas. The module is assessed by a written, case-study based exam. The module lead (an academic with expertise in cardiorespiratory physiotherapy) sets the exam paper, with input from external lecturers who have contributed to the module. It is sent to the external examiner for final amendments and sign-off was in 2020-21. 11% of students reported that they felt the exam topics that had been selected were somewhat removed from their own clinical reality, involving scenarios they were unlikely to see in their own practice. The challenge is that each cohort is diverse (in terms of area of specialism and country of training), and it is impossible to predict the clinical expertise that each student will bring to the module. To address this, we designed a student-led collaborative exam preparation session, which sought to better understand students' own clinical environments (e.g., community, hospital or school setting), specialty areas (e.g., intensive care, surgery, long-term ventilation, palliative care) and patient population (e.g., asthma, chronic obstructive lung disease, burns, neuromuscular conditions). This was used to guide and inform the content of the written assessment.

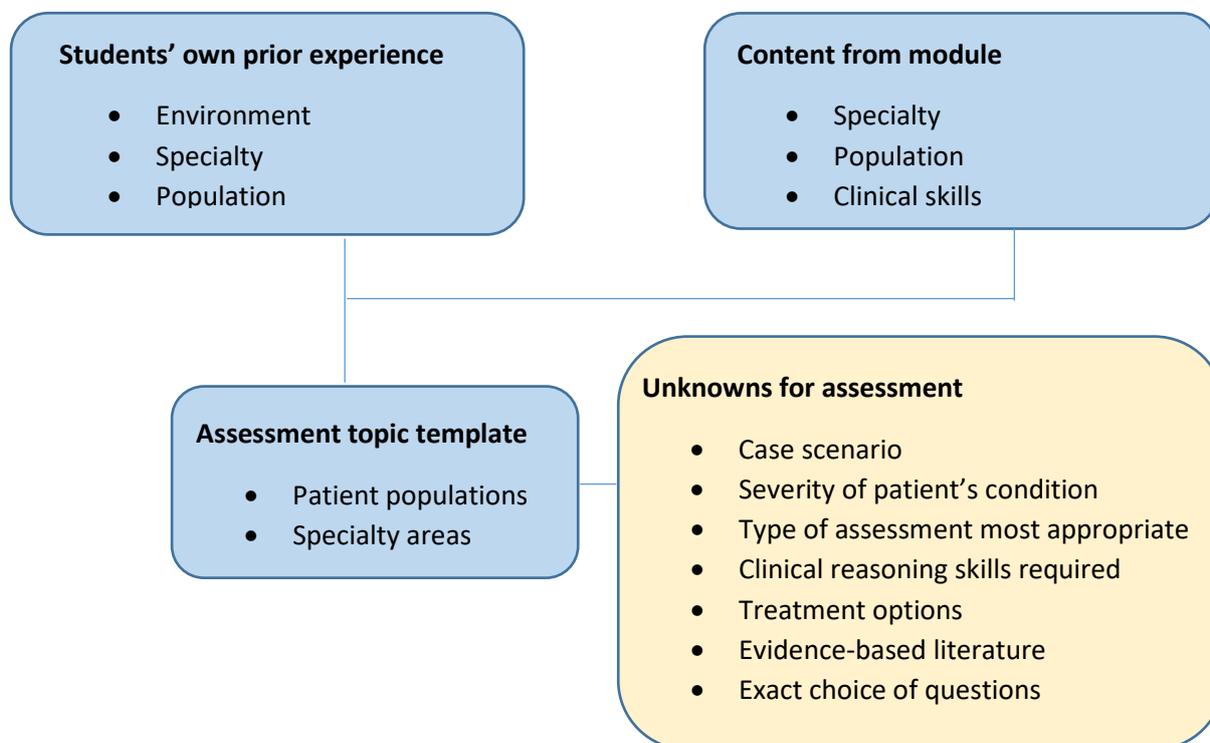
## **Development of a student-led collaborative exam preparation session**

There were 26 students on the module (7 male, 19 female), 15 of whom came from the UK, and the remaining from Singapore, Saudi Arabia, India, New Zealand, Oman, Italy and Ireland. All were qualified physiotherapists. The exam preparation session took place on the final afternoon of the module, by which time the group were relaxed with each other and the group dynamic was one of peer facilitative learning. We began the session by explaining details of the exam process. This was a three-hour, unseen written exam. It was conducted online, and students had access to module resources, online content, books and their own notes. The exam consisted of five clinical case studies, each with three accompanying questions. Students could choose to answer all questions from any three of the five case studies. It took place four weeks after the end of the module.

It was important that all students felt comfortable to share their experiences and views. Following this introduction, we invited students to discuss their own clinical experiences. This was deemed to be a good starting point, because there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer, everybody's background is equally valued. It helped to create an open, supportive environment. To direct the conversations, we suggested that students consider three different aspects of their clinical work: clinical environment, specialty areas and patient population. Students discussed their clinical experiences in pairs first, to encourage participation, and then fed back to the rest of the group. We compared and contrasted each other's clinical lives and recognised the richness of collective experience in the diversity of the group.

We then turned to the module content. For each timetabled lecture, we encouraged discussion as to how relevant this was to the students' own clinical practice, how likely they would be to use the information clinically and whether it would be helpful for students to spend time revising this topic in preparation for the exam. Students were discouraged from making personal observations about the quality or delivery of the lecture, but to focus on how well each topic would inform their clinical practice.

At the end of the session, the students summarised what they felt to be the most important assessment topics to have come from the open discussion. At this point, the students were informed that the exam would be based on the discussions that had taken place. A template of specific assessment topics was then released one week before the assessment. Since students would only complete three out of five case studies, they were able to further tailor their revision towards the most clinically applicable areas. Although they knew the specialty areas and patient populations that would be included in the exam, the assessment was still considered 'unseen' since each case study could refer to a wide range of presenting conditions, and the students were unaware of the specific questions relating to each case (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Process for discussing and selecting exam topics

## Findings and feedback

In comparison to exam results from previous years, the average remained similar. However, unlike in previous years, all students passed, and some students accessed the higher marking range (Table 1).

**Table 1:** class average and marking range for module – a comparison between three years.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21*	2021-22
Average	64	62	X	65
Minimum	42	40	X	50
Maximum	72	74	X	82

\*The 2020-21 exam took a different structure, owing to Covid restrictions

Student feedback was constructive, with 65% of students (n=17) completed the module evaluation. Details of module evaluation are summarised in the table below.

**Table 1.** Summary of module evaluation. Only questions relevant to the exam preparation session are included

Question	Responses		
	Not at all	Somewhat	Fully
How well were your views listened to in the exam preparation session?	N=0	N=4	N=13

Did the exam content reflect the discussions that were had in the exam preparation session?	Not at all N=0	Somewhat N=1	Absolutely N=16
<b>How did the exam preparation session help with your revision?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helped direct study in the final week before the exam</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It helped me learn greater detail of conditions etc. However, I still felt there was a lot to cover. And although “long term ventilation” or “ECMO” wasn’t on the list, I still had to thoroughly learn these as they could have been a treatment option for a case study.</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It allowed us to narrow down the revision and prepare adequately. In doing so, it also ensures our learning and revision were holistic.</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helped focus attention as skills is a large topic</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given the immense amount of information available on any given topic/module, allowing students the chance to narrow down on certain topics was extremely helpful. It personally helped me to provide more focused answers with in-depth knowledge on the topic, rather than revising absolutely everything and only being able to provide superficial knowledge on many different topics (given time constraints).</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I felt more at ease that I could prepare for extensively for the topics, reduced anxiety around the exam.</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enabled me to focus on a few key areas</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helped a lot, made studying a lot easier and more focused</li> </ul>			

Students felt at least somewhat listened to during the exam preparation session and could see a clear link between the in-class discussions and the final exam paper. They could see the advantages of having a clear focus to their revision time, reducing anxiety and making best use of their time. Students stated that their revision was more meaningful to their clinical practice. Whilst the exam still remained stressful for some, most students still found the exam to be a positive experience (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Summary of additional comments from module evaluation

<b>Do you have any further comments about using student-led discussion to inform assessment topics?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think it was important to leave it till the last week to release the topics to ensure that further learning was spread across all areas</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have to say I quite enjoyed the exam! There were no nasty surprises and I felt like I could combine both my clinical expertise with what we’d learnt on the module. Thank you for making it not too painful.</li> </ul>

- I work full-time as an ICU physio, and I have a young family. Revision has to have a purpose beyond the exam otherwise I am just not motivated to fit it in at all. Being given the chance to say what revision topics I wanted was super helpful.
- I found revising for the exam and exam morning quite stressful, because there was so much to learn.  
However once in the exam, I found it really enjoyable, and enjoyed the questions. I found it challenging but a nice way to show off knowledge.
- I thought this was a very interesting way to assess the students. I think we are shifting away from the traditional method of assessment, and this is a brilliant start by allowing students to take ownership in not only their learning but also their revision
- Definitely keep doing this. Exams shouldn't be scary; they should help with learning!
- I liked to feel involved in the exam process. I felt our views were taken seriously.
- Asking students what topics, they would prefer on the exam allows us to have a more meaningful experience in our learning, as the topics chosen would be more relevant to what we can bring to our clinical practice.
- Great idea. It feels more applicable to our clinical practice, as most people will feel motivated to want to learn things that are relevant and interesting to us.
- It made the exam more enjoyable as I felt ready for the exam.
- I think it is really useful as it also means that it's possible to make the module more clinically relevant for your area of practice, obviously there will always be a wide range of experience/ specialties but as much as possible this was really helpful. I will never not find exams stressful and anxiety inducing but this did help.

**Which of the following words best describe your exam experience?**

*Stressful, Negative, Anxiety-inducing, Challenging, Relaxing, Positive, Motivating*



**Reflections**

Assessment is important for postgraduate physiotherapy education. Students who pass the 'skills' module are permitted to progress to clinical placements, where they will be expected to assess and treat patients

independently. The exam paper provides an indicator of clinical competence. We require students to synthesise a large amount of information from the module and combine it with their own clinical expertise to demonstrate advanced clinical reasoning skills tailored to specific patients. These are the skills that will allow them to thrive on placement. Involving students in the choice of assessment topics, does not advantage them in terms of how they apply their knowledge to a case (it is noteworthy that most students still found the exam 'challenging'). But it does allow them to focus on the topics that matter most to them during their revision period. We want to support our postgraduate students to become better clinical physiotherapists delivering the best possible patient care, so studying topics that have direct clinical applicability is hugely beneficial to both of them, and their patients.

Our students are adult learners, with real-world clinical experience that allows them to contribute fully to taught modules. Student-led assessment empowers the students to take responsibility for their own learning, allowing them to set their own agenda for revision and further study. Such approaches are strongly associated with self-regulated learning strategies, which are vital for encouraging the life-long learning required in an evidence-based profession such as physiotherapy (Makkonen & Jaquet, 2020). In the UK, postgraduate physiotherapy education is not linked to a pay increase or promotion. Students attend to increase their skills and knowledge, for the direct benefit of the patients they treat. Therefore, giving them autonomy over their assessment topics celebrates their own clinical experience, and encourages active engagement in the revision process.

We were concerned that group dynamics would result in some students dominating the discussion and dictating assessment topics, whilst others would not feel able to express opposing views. The module lead has expertise in focus group facilitation and ensured that all voices were heard. Students could also add comments to the online message board, if they did not feel confident to vocalise their opinions. Giving a clear structure to the session, and beginning with the non-confrontational topic of personal experiences, helped students to feel comfortable voicing their opinions and preferences. There were also queries over whether students would narrow their revision too much, and not appreciate the breadth of knowledge required for the clinical specialty. However, the final assessment topics template was only released in the final week before the exam. Students could direct their studies broadly towards the student-led discussions during their self-directed study period, and then focus on key areas in the last few days.

## **Conclusion**

It is feasible for students to contribute to exam content for summative assessment. Students respond positively when asked to engage as partners in exam preparation. This takes some of the stress out of the revision process, and ensures that students' clinical learning needs are closely aligned with exam content. As a result, the time taken to learn and understand clinical topics has benefits beyond the assessment process, as it can be directly applied to the students' professional practice.

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## The impact of collaboration on innovative practice in teaching the Holocaust at KS3

**Anna Hogan** - Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership in Learning, Birmingham City University

The critical enquiry of my collaboration group addressed the use of evidence in teaching controversial issues in History. We chose to analyse and develop this aspect of the curriculum because the use of evidence presents numerous dilemmas due to the often-sensitive nature of such sources. We concluded that students are making massively important judgements based on the snippets of evidence and information that we choose to give them from a vast and complex history. The weight of the responsibility of 'evidence mining' and refining information in our planning is greater with a controversial issue than with usual content due to a controversial issue being more likely to inform a world perspective on an important issue. Within this enquiry, I will be focusing on enhancing the Holocaust provision at my school which is taught in year nine as part of a unit on World War 2 and the Holocaust. National data shows that this year is the most common for this to be taught, due to the maturity required of students to handle this sensitive content (House of Commons Education Committee, 2016). My collaboration group began by defining what makes a teaching area controversial and concluded it was one that required different precautions in the classroom and requires a contextual conversation about sensitivity beforehand due to the nature of the subject matter. For example, Global Citizenship Guides states that ground rules must be established and this illustrates how a teacher must control the circumstances of a child's development around these issues in order for teaching to produce the 'active and informed citizen' desired by the government (Oxfam, 2006).

I considered academic literature and innovative practices on the delivery of the Holocaust in order to enhance the teaching and learning in my classroom and in my school. Although, an interview with leading academic Etienne Wenger on the interface between theory and practice points out that educational research will not be implemented universally just because it is 'evidence-based practice' and a teacher's practice should be 'local' (Farnsworth, 2016). This emboldens my collaboration group's understanding that the teaching of controversial issues and use of evidence should be context led. Edwards and O'Dowd sought to map students' prior understanding of the Holocaust through a questionnaire and formal interview in year 8, the year before their students' Holocaust studies, since historical knowledge is derived from contexts outside of the classroom (Edwards, 2010). The teachers in this study had a pupil who identified Hitler's rejection from Art school in Vienna as the monocausal explanation for the Holocaust. A student of mine stated this too; claiming he already knew everything about Hitler because he loves to study 'evil people'. This underlines how preconceptions entering the classroom are not always helpful. Without a year eight class, I tried this exercise with my top set year seven group. Again, one student in this group iterated that Hitler's rejection from art school by a Jewish man fuelled his antisemitism and caused the Holocaust (Appendix 1). When I spoke to him about this he was at least willing to concede that it was only one cause amongst many. About one third of my class showed a basic understanding of the Holocaust, but it was evidently limited. The outcomes that year seven produced demonstrated that many knew that the Holocaust targeted Jewish people and many of these linked Hitler's personal beliefs to the murder of the Jewish (Appendix 2). This confirmed the anticipated misconception that many saw the Holocaust as Hitler's individual responsibility and, further to this, that antisemitism began with the Nazi rise to power. Impressively, one student showed that they already knew that Jewish people were not the only victims of the Holocaust, and included mention of LGBTQ people (Appendix 3). No one could define antisemitism, evidencing that this was not a part of their cultural capital. This was a beneficial study to replicate in order to evidence the misconceptions I would need to address and appreciating the cultural capital that I could also expect to be lacking from my year nines.

The CEO of HET, Karen Pollock, CBE, drew the House of Commons' attention to research that concluded 80% of teachers of the Holocaust were self-taught (Pettigrew). Therefore, I took part in CPD with UCL with my department on students being able to have 'Authentic encounters' with the Holocaust through using primary evidence, crucially aligning to my group's aims and also ensuring we were not self-taught and following the latest best practice (Centre for Holocaust Education). The Ofsted series recommended that teachers facilitate pupils to have 'encounters with a wide range of sources and source types' and this was applicable to this UCL training (Ofsted, 2021). UCL taught me how to help students 'mine the evidence' for deeper layers of meaning, making their encounters with a variety of sources more meaningful. UCL demonstrated how starting with a singular source and layering the narrative allows students to extrapolate this story of an individual family onto the larger scene of the Holocaust, all whilst having an 'authentic encounter' with a primary source. Furthermore, pupils are able to learn about Jews as *people* first and not

solely as victims, illuminating their agency and resistance within the Holocaust. From this training, I took away the imperative nature of teaching students that Jewish people were not helpless and it is dangerous for students to walk away with this overriding impression. Rather, this training stated that ‘the norm was resistance and not compliance’. I feel that this misconception is a key area of that I can innovate to improve upon my departments’ holocaust planning from last year. The session was rounded out with ‘top tips’; to create a different atmosphere and a culture of respect when you teach something of this emotional nature, aligning to the aforementioned advice from Global Citizenship Studies.

Reflecting on the personal value that the first CPD session offered to understanding innovative practices that could improve the learning in my school, I participated in further training offered by UCL. This was titled “An ordinary shoe’; stepping into this challenging curriculum at KS3’ (Centre for Holocaust Education). This lesson plan was an introduction and a way to open this SoW. The premise was to begin with a single shoe, displayed at the Imperial War Museum, and asked the students to make reasonable claims about the owner of the shoe. This exploratory style of learning is not common to the teaching and learning of my school, which has very prescriptive, evidence-based methods. The delivery of this CPD treated participants (teachers) as the students so that we might experience the process of this lesson plan. Reflecting on the impact that this had on me personally as an adult who already holds expertise in this area, I felt that this innovative method of teaching was going to be successful for my students to have a first time encounter with this subject matter in our classroom, regardless of typical school methods. Additionally, Ofsted recommended using less common source types, such as artefacts, alongside written sources in the classroom in order to uplift History teaching, which this lesson plan facilitated (Ofsted, 2021).

My first lesson was based on the introductory model provided by UCL. History teachers are encouraged to ‘use relics as well as records’ to show that the past is not only revealed through truthful eyewitness and I applied this to my teaching here (Wrenn, 2019). A downfall of the packet system used within my school can be to rush through tasks rather than giving time to class discussion and I was determined not to let that be a downfall of my Holocaust teaching when I knew that answering their questions was one of the best services I could offer to my students. Guided by my oversight, students produced the expected conclusions around the shoe; that it was old and in a different style to their own shoes, that it had been repaired many times, perhaps by a loving parent and that the economic circumstances of the family meant they could not afford to go to a proper shoemaker since the repairs did not demonstrate the original craftsmanship of the shoe’s design (Appendix 4). As written on the lesson plan, I summarised and repeated the conclusions that they had made so far and then told them of the information that they could not have known from only looking at the source. At this point I was grateful to have the script that UCL had written to hand in order to support me in this pivotal moment of the lesson where I revealed the circumstances of the owner of this shoe (Appendix 5). An RE colleague in Alternative Curriculum praised the way that I had taught this introductory lesson,

seen on the 'staff shout out' she wrote (Appendix 6). She liked seeing different approaches after a lengthy career in teaching, demonstrating our collaboration in reverse now; as I had influenced her understanding.

I followed the innovative practice of UCL to ensure I included images that offered scale and different perspectives of this shoe since they were not directly handling the source itself (Appendix 7). I gave space for students to write initial questions that they had and allowed them to hand these in on their exit tickets, anonymously if they wished (Appendix 8). This was again practice that I learned from the training that would both inform my planning, but more importantly allow me to meet the specific questions of my classroom. I grouped and compiled the questions that they asked to inform subsequent lessons and ensure that I gave room for pupil curiosity to be addressed (Appendix 9). I reflect that this was a hugely valuable practice that I benefitted from due to the CPD because the 'curse of expertise' could have led me to overlook questions that it became clear several of my students shared. As such I was able to cater my teaching to their needs.

The impact of teaching this Holocaust module was undoubtedly enhanced through my collaboration with university colleagues, as well as with Holocaust Education institutions and school colleagues. We defined collaboration as being influenced by someone else to change your original plan, and in many instances this occurred for me. As an ECT, I feel collaboration is essential to my development to learn best practice and ensure I am giving the absolute best to my students. Through this exercise, I have seen how collaboration is beneficial to all colleagues when it has direct impact on the pupils, and that is always where the value of collaboration should be placed and judged. As a time consuming activity for teachers always under time pressures, it is essential that collaboration be undertaken with clear and relevant goals for the school and pupil outcomes. Patton and Parker do not feel that enough research has been dedicated to how teachers learn, and see this as beneficial to ensure the success of collaboration within schools (Patton, 2017). These researchers also point out that collaboration can counteract the isolation and pressures that typify the teaching profession, a sentiment also shared by Hargreaves, illustrating again the value of collaboration (Hargreaves, 2018).

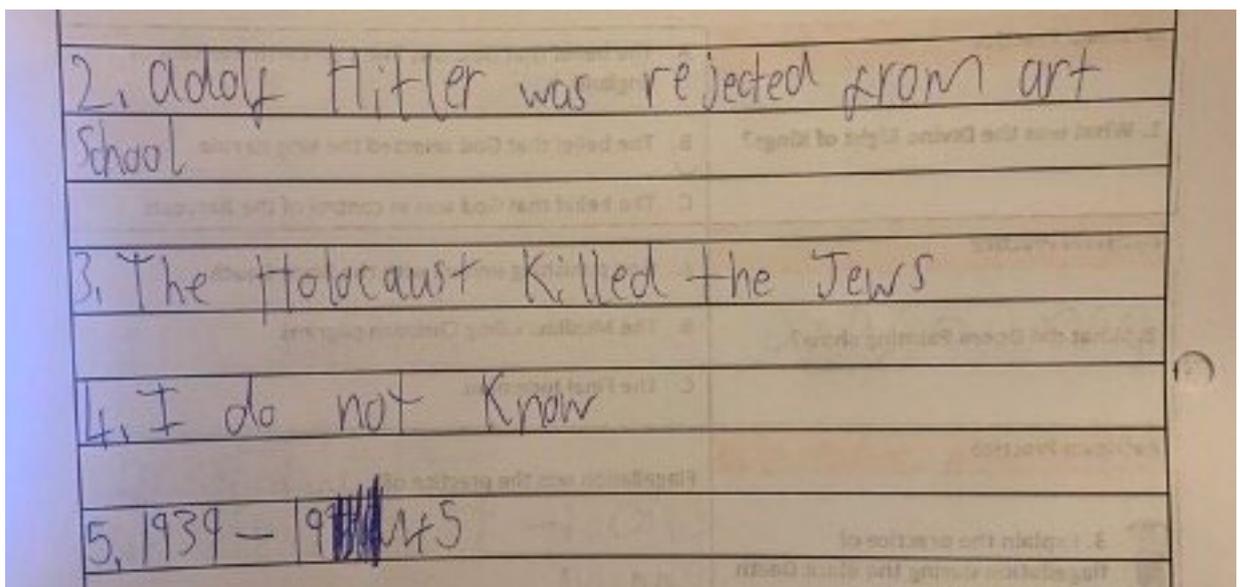
Inspired by Leyman and Harris' 'Connecting the Dots' article I decided to question my year nine pupils' understanding weeks after the module had concluded (Leyman, 2013). As in the example study, students were told that they were free to argue in favour or against teaching of the Holocaust, so that they felt freedom in their answers. Their responses showed some consideration of both sides. Some showed that they appreciated that it is sensitive content and yet, unanimously, they all argued for the importance of teaching the Holocaust (Appendix 10). A couple of students focused on the idea that they should not only be taught about Britain's past but demonstrated some confused ideas about Britain's involvement; showing how I had not addressed this through my time limitations and inability to allocate a lesson to perpetrator guilt (Appendix 11). Illustrating again that time constraints is a key area for my action plan to

address. The IHRA recommends using an 'interdisciplinary approach' to teaching the Holocaust, which also leaves a lot of room for innovation within my school. The House of Commons report on Holocaust teaching also drew attention to RE, citizenship and English teachers teaching the Holocaust without any quality-assured training (House of Commons Education Committee, 2016). I know this to be true in my own school that in Year eight they study the Boy in the Striped Pyjamas and deliver 'context' on this despite not being trained on the Holocaust. Therefore, I could see how some collaboration across departments would work and, as a result of this enquiry study, I am dedicated to fostering a culture of collaboration within my department and school community.

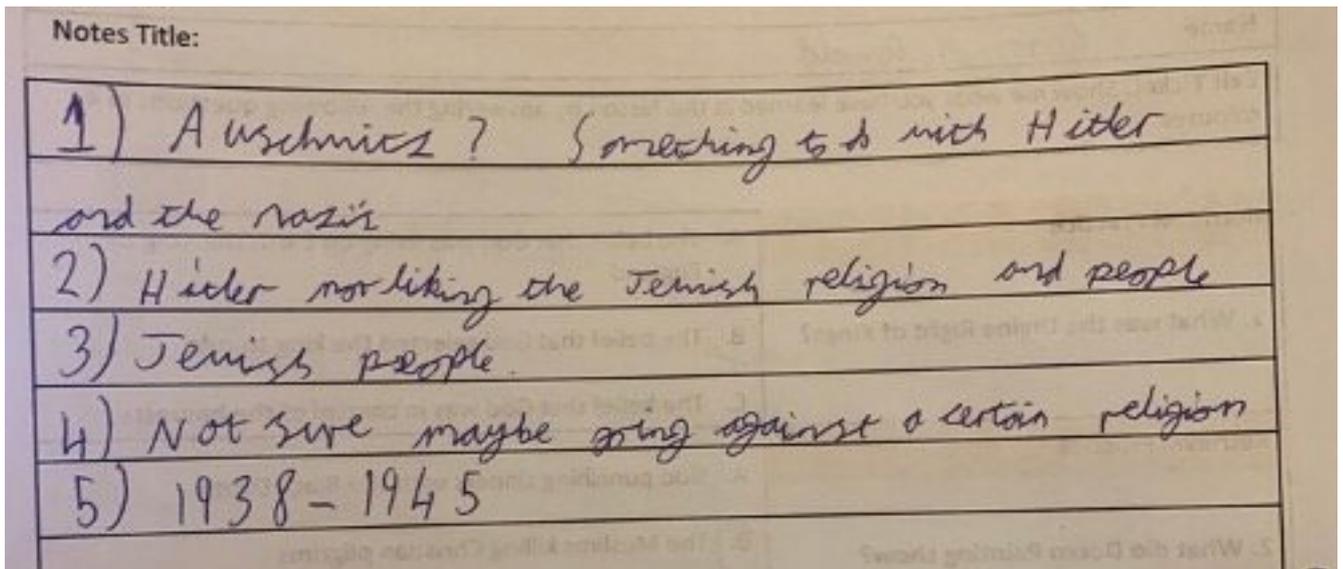
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## Appendix

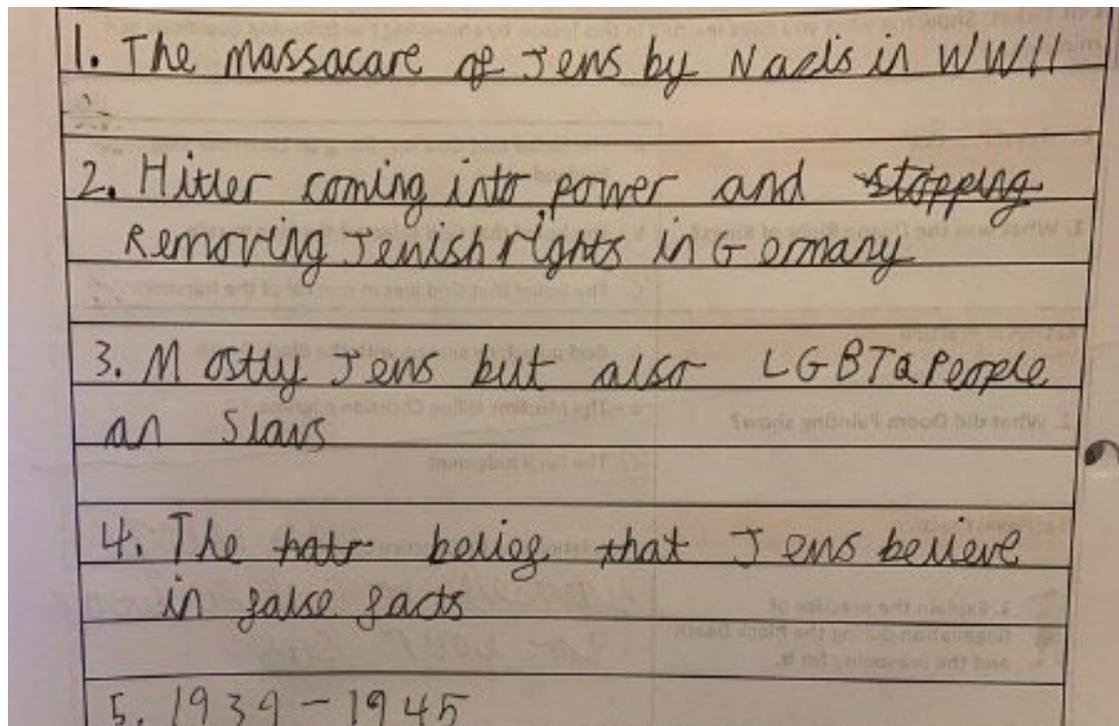


**Appendix 1.** Year seven outcome from my replicated study looking at knowledge before year nine. They claimed the cause of the Holocaust was rooted in Hitler's rejection from art school.



**Appendix 2.** This student linked Hitler to the targeting the Jewish religion. They also showed basic understanding of Auschwitz and the Nazis. The questions I asked:

1. What was the Holocaust?
2. What caused the Holocaust?
3. Who did the Holocaust target?
4. What is antisemitism?
5. When was WW2? (asked because I wanted those who had not been able to answer any or few questions to feel a small sense of achievement from this small task)



**Appendix 3.** Impressively this student knew that the Jewish were not the only victim group in the Holocaust and had good answers. But he still did not know what antisemitism was.

An 'ordinary shoe'.



**Appendix 4.** A student outcome on the lesson opener using a shoe found in Auschwitz to introduce students to an individualised version of the Holocaust.

Explain, regretfully, that this is probably as far as we can go in our deductions – **except for one last detail which may make a difference – the location of where the shoe was found.** Reveal that the shoe was found at place called **Auschwitz-Birkenau** in 1945. Invite students to share what they know or have heard about this place and what that might tell us about the owner of the shoe and what happened to him/her. Explore and respond to students' knowledge and understanding of Auschwitz.

Drawing on the guidance notes provided in the lesson plan and in the 'Additional Information' section, explain that due to the fact that the shoe was discovered at Auschwitz at the end of the war, the child who owned the shoe was, in all probability, Jewish, and possibly from Hungary (as many Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz in 1944). However, there was also a chance that it may have been a Roma child as the Roma were also targeted for murder by the Nazis and brought to Auschwitz but in smaller numbers.

Turn now to provide students with an overview of what would, in all likelihood, have happened to this child on their arrival at Auschwitz. Include reference to arriving after a journey without food, water or sanitation. Explain how the child would have seen armed guards, been separated from their adult male relatives, and possibly mother too and made to walk a distance or was transported to what would have been described by the camp guards as a shower room. Once there, the child would have been told to remove his/her clothing, tie his/her shoe laces together for ease of access once they finished showering. Explain that this would have been a lie, a cruel deception. The shower rooms were fake and in reality served as gas chambers. The child would have been murdered there. Carefully explain that the child's body along with hundreds of others murdered at the same time, would have then been removed and burned in the camp crematoria or in a nearby open pit. All that would have been left would be his clothes and shoes. These items would have been sent to Germany had the war not soon come to an end. Instead they were found at the site. The shoe along with other evidence of this Nazi crime are now housed in the Imperial War Museum in London.

#### **What was the Holocaust:**

After explaining this difficult information, point out that during the Second World War (1939-1945) the Nazis and their collaborators murdered approximately 6 million Jewish people including 1.5 million children, of which the owner of the shoe was one, and that this crime is called **The Holocaust**. It is important to highlight that the Holocaust is considered by many historians as unprecedented, as never before has there been an attempt to completely annihilate every single man, woman and child of a particular group.

You may also wish to ask the students to consider the sobering thought that *had* the child who walked in this shoe lived, he/she could have grown up to have children, grandchildren and, by now even, great grandchildren. The child may have had a fulfilling life, contributed to society, done good and charitable things. Students could be encouraged to speculate on what the child may have achieved ( allow students to voice their ideas) some may suggest the possibility that the child could have done something exceptional such as finding a cure for disease. Help students grasp that the loss of possibility and potential is immeasurable.

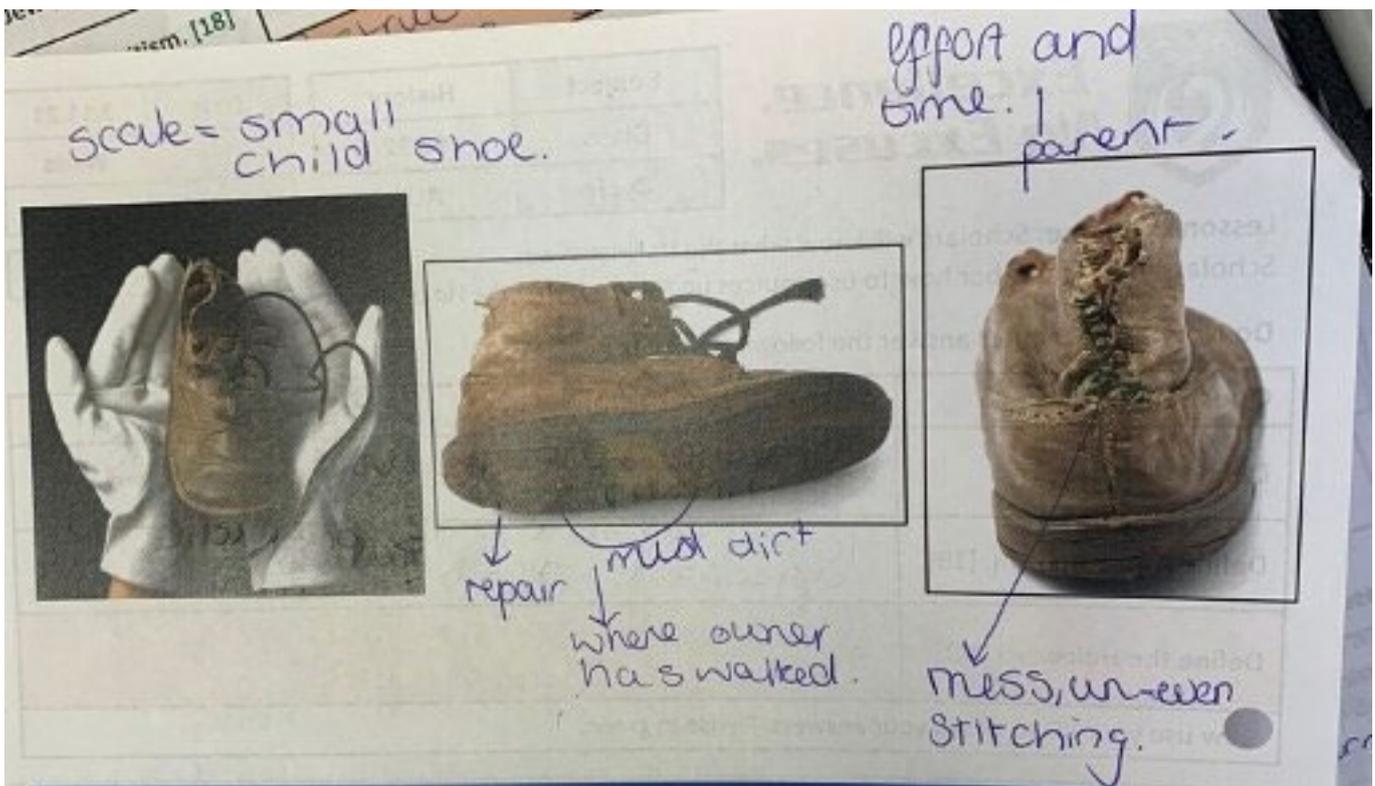
Allow sufficient time and space for students to process the narrative they have just heard. You will know how best to do this with your students. Silence can provide a rare space to digest emotionally demanding information

**Appendix 5.** The information provided in the lesson plan from UCL.

**Name:** Anna Hogan

**Reason for shout out:** for inspiring scholars in Alternative Curriculum with her lesson on "No Ordinary Shoe"; a very sensitive and thought-provoking approach to the Holocaust. Thank you!

**Appendix 6.** This is the shoutout from the Alternative Curriculum leader praising my introductory lesson on the Holocaust. In part I think praise for inspiring scholars can be seen as success of innovative practice. I take praise for this approach as very complimentary from a teacher who has taught the Holocaust in Religious Education many times.



**Appendix 7.** Student outcome illustrating their notes based around the scale and different viewpoints of the shoe.

Name:

**Exit Ticket:** Show me what you have learned in this lesson by answering the following questions in 4 minutes.

<b>Define Holocaust.</b>	
<b>Define Anti-Semitism.</b>	
<b>Define genocide.</b>	
<b>What questions do you have about the Holocaust?</b>	

**Appendix 8.** The exit ticket questions from the first lesson delivered on the Holocaust and the bottom row showing where they could leave questions that they had to inform my planning.

- Why was Hitler this brutal?
- What reasoning did Hitler have for this?
- Why did they do this? (the Nazis and collaborators)
  
- Why didn't the Jews hide their identity?
  
- Did any pregnant women get captured or shot?
- How many people would die a week?
- Did Hitler kill any Jews?
- How did Hitler kill Jews but also control the war?
  
- What happened to the people who weren't killed in the gas chambers?
  
- Why was Auschwitz well-known?
- Where were the other camps built?
- How many camps were there?
- Do any of the gas chambers still stand?
- How much gas was used in the chambers?
- What are the names of the concentration camps?
- Were most / all women and girls removed first as they were seen as not needed unlike the males?
  
- How many people hid their identity?
- How many people survived?
- How many people escaped?
- How many escaped from the camps?
- How did people escape?
- Why did no escapers try to stop it?
- What happened to people who tried to escape?
  
- Is Auschwitz free to explore? Why bits are open? What is there to see?
- What was the process after Hitler died for the camps?
- How many are still alive?

**Appendix 9.** The collated questions from pupils in 9SG2 after their first lesson on the Holocaust.

## Should the Holocaust be taught in British schools?

New Message

To @dontwery@gmail.com

Subject

I think it should be taught as there is still anti-semitism in the 21st century because of people who weren't taught properly about the Holocaust so if the youth are taught now we will be the next generation of the world hopefully to stop anti-semitism

## Should the Holocaust be taught in British schools:

New Message

To Board person 😊

Subject Holocaust reasoning

I think that the Holocaust should be taught in schools as it is an important part of history that we all should know because it affected many people in bad ways and still so many ~~are~~ people are affected still to this day. Some people still think that it was something good and ~~we~~ we need to be taught that this sort of thing can't happen again as it killed so many people. We don't want a repeat of this event.

Send

**Appendix 10.** Pupil outcomes in response to this study that I completed to see their opinions about the importance of Holocaust education.

## Should the Holocaust be taught in British schools?

New Message

To

Subject Holocaust

The Holocaust should be taught in schools to show that it is unfair and how judgement has got a no. one anywhere. Also to show the past worlds mistakes and that we can't just learn about Britains past.

Send

**Appendix 11.** Confused ideas about Britain's past – implying they don't think Britain had a role in the Holocaust, even as a bystander and emphasising the importance of having more lesson time to address ideas such as these.

# Passion vs Professionalism

Riel Barbon – PGCE Art and Design, Birmingham City University

## Introduction

In this article I will talk about the use of autoethnography as a methodology in my emerging identity as a professional teacher. I will describe how useful it is for my own development in discovering and refining my overall identity. Almost like meditation, it is a technique to help acknowledge thoughts surrounding a situation and observing them as they are – allowing me to recognise thought patterns that stem from past experiences. Considering the way identity is formed based on the culture around you, it is vital to maintain positive interactions with everyone human being involved. This is why I will talk about the ethics within autoethnography. This term (autoethnography) “invokes the self (auto), culture (ethnos), and writing (graphy)” (Adams, et al. 2015). Ethics forms important principles that encourage honesty and truthfulness which, in turn, allow for better human connections. Although one’s morals are dynamic and can change dependent on someone’s capacity to understand but essentially it is the “method, procedure, or perspective for deciding how to act and for analysing complex problems and issues” (Resnik, D. 2020). Not only this, maintaining proper ethics allows for more thoughtful, collaborative work.

The process of autoethnography is a form of self-reflection through metacognition. I will also mention this in my article in reference to bell hook’s purpose of freedom within education in *Teaching to Transgress* (Hooks, B. 1994). She talks about how being self-actualised is absolutely essential as a teacher since educating is a holistic act. Having the ability to understand one’s own thought processes can allow you to form a worldview that is beneficial. Doing this will only inspire the children that you teach. This creates a positive life, one worth living.

I will also talk about a critical incident that triggered the growth and understanding of my professional identity. The incident will be about one that I have experienced first-hand in the school that I am training in. I will use McAteer’s 2010 (McAteer, M. 2010) critical incident structure to inform this article. McAteer (2010) suggest that a ‘critical incident is one that challenges your own assumptions or makes you think differently’. They provide the following helpful questions to guide reflection on critical incidents:

- What happened, where and when? Give a brief history of the incident.
- What is it that made the incident ‘critical’?
- What were your immediate thoughts and responses?
- What are your thoughts now? What has changed/developed your thinking?
- What have you learned about (your) practice from this?

- How might your practice change and develop as a result of this analysis and learning?

This analysis will then lead me to a conclusion on how that specific experience helped inform my professional identity. Exactly what emerged from the critical incident to form my identity as a trainee teacher.

### **Autoethnography**

Using autoethnography as a methodology is an act of academic journaling. A process whereby your interpretation of the world around you is shaped and influenced by your experiences: your relationships, upbringing, your fears and beliefs and then documented down for an academic purpose. This form of self-reflection within its own social context allows you to make sense of your thoughts around a particular situation to unpick and understand. In this instance, a critical incident that I will be discussing later. Metacognition is used in autoethnographic research because of its intimate identification of what is going on in someone's mind which is then understood and reflected on (educare, 2020). This form of analysis is what allows you to step back from the thoughts to understand the route of those interpretations. This is especially useful in academic circumstances as it helps you to refine your professional identity – how this can be separate yet intertwined with your overall identity – who you are as a person. Especially since your career has such a substantial impact on your individuality it is important to create one that is supportive to yourself and the other human beings around you within the workplace. In this instance, you, your colleagues, mentors and pupils.

Using autoethnography as a methodology goes hand in hand with self-actualisation. This is the understanding of one's utmost potential through the awareness of their worldview – what morals and principles they hold and how that can impact their personal perception of success. Self-actualisation, being the top of Maslow's (1962) hierarchy of needs theory, can be refined by identifying limitations that may inhibit one's potential. This is done through the skill of metacognition in autoethnography – acknowledging which thoughts harm and which thoughts benefit. Being a self-actualised professional is key, especially in a pedagogical context. This is because your understanding of what potential is to you can only inspire and motivate those around us – our children, the next generation. Self-actualisation comes hand in hand with positive self-belief and self-esteem. The process of this combined with professionalism will create a sense of fulfilment. It is also the process letting go of our tainted worldviews and deconstructing the traditional biases we bring into the classroom to ensure that all pupils can feel a sense of belongingness and contentment (Hooks, B. 1994). After all, what is the purpose of autoethnography if not to support the children we educate.

Growing up in a first generation Filipino and conservative household has influenced my outlook on life until the age of 19 when I moved to London to live independently. Throughout my childhood and teenage years in Birmingham, UK, I have always been dedicated to learning about my relationship to the idea of God whilst being subjected to the correct way of living. All while existing within the confusing duality of Filipino parents in a Western world. The transition between a near poverty life and then in a society of a wealth and gain. Unfortunately, this came with rigid ideas of being - doing well in school to be worthy of praise, getting a job to be worthy of attention. The pressure was felt for me to find the safest possible occupation in the field of health and medicine. Eventually, the true change I experienced, one that defined my personal individuality was when I moved to a bigger city, London. Here I stepped out the bubble of religious conformity and career pressures and finally experienced the dynamicity of life, relationships and identity. Essentially, I felt liberated for the first time. What saved me from the anxiety and depression of this drastic transition was my enthusiasm for passions and interests. I stopped surviving and started living.

## **Ethics**

Through what lens are we seeing life unfold, how can we step back to understand our instant perception to interpret it in a way that does not harm? The process of involving our personal thoughts within a provoking situation can tempt us to release damaging opinions which can pose risks in a way that could potentially damage somebody's autonomy (Adams, et al. 2014). To prevent this, I must ensure to maintain anonymity throughout the study despite the importance of unique experiences and to recognise the multitude of interpretations within one event. Furthermore, exposing a participant's identity may cause harm by revealing information so deep and profound to them that they are not ready for the world to hear. Especially in experiences within autoethnography, a level of vulnerability being shared uncovers stories that provide the greatest value to a study. Doing so will help benefit both the participant and researcher by keeping an important level of trust by respecting information exchange (Adams, et al. 2015). Within the ethics of autoethnography, caring for the self is vital to "reduce or eliminate anxiety and depression, reduce stress, improve concentration, minimize frustration and anger, increase happiness, improve energy" (Glowiak, M. 2020). So far in my experiences with all my critical incidents, I realised this: although I try to give the benefit of the doubt to maintain an open mind in circumstances I do not particularly agree with, I also remember to validate any feelings I have. This helps me maintain sanity and increases the confidence I have within myself. This helps me to alleviate levels of shame around negative thought patterns which helps me recognise them more reasonably. This, for me, is the true process of self-reflection.

This whole process of autoethnography unleashes a new self. One that can combine both personal and professional identities into one. Particularly how my professional identity and my personal beliefs can exist together peacefully without the internal battle of which principles I may have to compromise to fit more into one particular identity. The process of self-actualisation is an ethical practice because I can overcome for my own struggles whilst building

resilience in doing so because of this we can decide how we want our professional identity to form. If we have conflict within our own identity, how can we guarantee peace in an environment we spend more of our time in? This concept is also relating to the ethics surrounding respect for the relationships with the participants who are involved.

### **Introducing the critical incident**

One of the changes I experienced living in London was my newfound love in my health and fitness. I noticed my mental health regulating as soon as I gave my body movement therapy. Since then, without exercise, I would fall into a pit of unexplained sadness and depression. Working out taught me endurance through my body and in my mind. I was able to tackle my life challenges through the act of fitness. I then pursued a Level 2 Gym Instructing and Level 3 Personal Training qualification because of this passion. I gained authentic confidence in my body's ability to break and heal, all over again. So, I continued with consistent exercise ever since.

One day I was working out at my local gym and in the corner of my eye I saw 3 identifiable faces. 3 Year 10 boys working out too. Immediately I felt delighted knowing that children spend their time bettering their minds and body, but a quick feeling of annoyance was felt because of my aims to separate school and personal time. Although I did feel frustrated, I questioned the age policy and surely there must be an age restriction. I did two things: ask a gym staff of the gym policy, to which they said, "16 plus" and googled the ages of pupils in Year 10, to which it read "14-15 years old". I was stuck in a predicament. I was not in a school setting, and I would be working out of hours but also my belief in health and safety as a holistic teacher wanted me to protect those children. I was confused on my stance in this situation in being a responsible adult whilst being a young (23 years old) teacher, I was aware of the societal concept of a what it means to be a 'snitch' and I did not want those pupils to face trouble with the older gym staff. I was facing an internal battle of professionalism. At the end of all this private dialogue in my mind, I decided that informing those Year 10 boys was my responsibility as they would not be liable for any insurance if some were to happen. I informed them of the gym age policy and the reasons for why being in the gym is unsafe.

Later that day I contacted the Physical Education (PE) department expressing this situation and ways we can utilise our pupil's interest. I explained how I wanted to create a document with at home workouts, importance of form and advice on that, body movements, flexibility, workout safety et cetera. I thought that what would be best is if those pupils came to a school where their teachers would go above and beyond to support a good concept – especially because of my life transforming experience with exercise, I knew these pupils just needed some direction and guidance.

After composing the safety booklet for the pupils, I contacted the Year 10 head of department if I could organise a meeting with those pupils to work through the booklet together. I felt like an opportunity like this would assure to those pupils that their school values their individuality as a representation of its character virtues. Moments later, I received an email back saying that this situation will now be dealt with as an 'internal' matter. I instantly felt feelings of betrayal. Almost to say that I, as a trainee teacher, was external, and my aims and purpose was not respected nor even considered. I was worried that instead of support, those pupils would get reprimanded, and it would result in more misbehaviour or further misguidance and danger. I felt a slight loss of purpose and respect. This was difficult for me to deal with the natural spectrum of human emotions in a professional context.

I felt a loss of autonomy because I felt like I had to just submit to whatever the school had planned for these pupils. Almost like the only contribution I had to this situation was the role of the informant. I wanted to desperately see this situation from another lens instead of a resentful one, especially with the organisation I'm working with. I immediately contacted my colleague who has been in the educational sector for a decade and explained the situation and ask for her to share her insight on it. Although she validated my feelings surrounding this experience, she also reminded me of the safeguarding aspect behind the act. That I may not see the bigger picture but there may be a story I am not aware of. That I must entrust my colleagues within the organisation to have the same pupils in their best interest also.

Seeking advice from a trusted colleague was important to me as it helped me navigate intense emotions within professionalism. My thoughts have now developed in a better understanding that confidence between colleagues will only benefit the pupils involved. I have learnt to trust the intentions of everyone in these circumstances, that their 10 years will often times outweigh my 7 months experience. I believe this experience, for me, helped me shape my understanding around professionalism that was once a blurry line. On top of that, I should applaud myself for prioritising the well-being of the pupils that I care about. I can find confidence in cohabitating these loving emotions within my professionalism as I can choose what type of professional, I want to become. The only harm within this situation that I could have caused would be holding onto resentments, but instead, I decided to adapt my thinking into a more positive one through metacognition.

I understood why this situation frustrated me and it all stemmed from my belief around passions and the reasons to feel alive. This all stemmed from my own experiences with liberation as I developed my individuality and identified what makes me feel fulfilled. I felt like I wanted the same for the children that I teach, yet I needed to consider safeguarding policies that I don't completely comprehend in such an early stage of my teaching journey. This experience has taught me new ways to be a professional. From this critical incident, I have learnt how to put others in a position of respect despite the negative feelings that arise.

## Conclusion

For me, I believe that professionalism means being good at what you do. To put it precisely, being the best at what you do. Linking it to teaching, I believe that being a professional teacher is being a really good teacher, so I ask myself this, “What does it mean to be a good teacher?”. I believe it’s the combination of holistic qualities – considering a child’s interests while incorporating important school policies like safeguarding. It is the multitude of both care and education to be a professional and to be this using self-informed methodologies like autoethnography is a useful tool to build a better worldview through metacognitive self-reflection.

I noticed that holding onto certain passions, although beneficial sometimes, can prevent me from seeing the bigger picture of what is important in a particular circumstance. I desperately wanted to give pupils the experience of feeling validated through the support of their hobbies and interests but fixating on one aspect disregarded the importance of safeguarding. These formalities only help provide the utmost safety of pupils and during times of high emotions, I felt resentment rather than supportive and collaborative. This act of self-reflection helped me to find respect for all the participants involved. Autoethnography as a methodology grounded me to form a positive professional identity based on this experience. It taught to be considered all the important policies in communion with my desire to make pupils feel valued. This emerging identity from now on will help me become an even more conscious professional.

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# **An Exploration of the Impact of the Singapore Bar Method on Algebraic**

## **Misconceptions**

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### **Introduction**

This essay will detail the reasoning, aims, method and outcomes of a sequence of researched-based lessons taught to a year 8 maths class, with particular focus on the success of the Singapore bar method. According to Tan (2006), pupils must be given the tools to adopt "more effective, meaningful and satisfying ways to deal with a changing reality" (p 26). To relate specifically to mathematics, this philosophy encourages what Skemp describes as a relational understanding (Skemp, 2006). Pupils must not be taught to the test but instead an in-depth understanding of the fundamentals of mathematics, arming them with the mathematical tools they will need in later life to aid them to become functioning and happy members of society. So too, these lessons were taught to build a solid foundation of understanding of algebraic notation so that pupils can later develop "an unlimited number of plans for getting from any starting point" in a question to any "finishing point" (Skemp, 2006, 95).

### **Identifying the Barriers**

When learning we interpret incoming information in terms of our current knowledge, linking new information to what we already know (Lucariello and Naff, 2013). If this base of knowledge is smaller, perhaps due to low reading age, lack of stimulating resources, or poor ability to retain information, there is less context to help interpret and commit new knowledge to memory. 60% of 8B/Ma, the year eight class that were the focus of this study, are pupil premium, the average reading age of the class is 3 years behind expected and 75% of the class have registered special education needs and disabilities (SEND). It is, therefore, likely that this class have fallen relatively further behind in the pandemic than their year group peers. This is why they were selected to carry out research-informed teaching in an attempt to close this gap.

A poor understanding of arithmetic often creates a barrier for pupils moving forward in many maths topics (Welder, 2012, 255). Paired with the "myth of the mathematically gifted child", "maths anxiety" (Boaler, 2015, 12) can prevent pupils from engaging with new topics deemed too challenging. This lack of confidence is often emphasised by algebra. For pupils who are barely fluent in the symbolism of arithmetic, the introduction of the new kind of symbolic communication which is algebra can be "[alienating]" (Stacey, Chick and Kendal, 2004, 1-2). Literature supports that it is this new symbolism, essential for the understanding of algebra, which can therefore cause issues for pupils. The misconception of this symbolism, hereafter referred to as algebraic notation, was therefore selected

as the focus of this episode of teaching. Three key misconceptions of algebraic notation were identified in the literature; the communication of operational symbols, the nature of variables and the meaning of the equals sign.

To start with operational symbols, according to Lee and Messner pupils “essentially feel like all of the material in algebra is new because it ‘looks’ new” (Welder, 2012, 260). This is because of inconsistencies in the use of operational symbols in arithmetic and algebra (Welder, 2012, 259). The first inconsistency is the representation of multiplication. As highlighted by Booth, early in mathematics education, “the plus sign” in arithmetic “becomes a signal to students to conjoin two terms together” as in  $2 + 2 = 4$ . However, “in algebra,  $2 + x$  is not equal to  $2x$ ” (Welder, 2012, 259), instead  $2x$  means 2 multiplied by  $x$ . Algebraic notation for multiplication can cause further confusion because students can misinterpret that “ $xy$ ” in algebra communicates a similar term to the number “23” when it in fact means “ $x$  times  $y$ ” (Egodawatte, 2011, 31). Finally, the symbolic representation of mixed fractions instils in pupils that when the terms are ‘next door’ to each other with nothing in between it means to add. The concept that  $2\frac{1}{2}$  means to add 2 and a half but that  $2b$  implies the multiplication of 2 and  $b$  causes confusion (Welder, 2012, 260).

According to research the interpretation of variables is also problematic for pupils being introduced to algebra. “Misconceptions about variables may be defined as a failure to understand the role of letters in equations and the tendency to interpret letters in equations as labels referring to concrete objects” (Russell, O’Dwyer, and Miranda, 2009, 417). Literature suggests that this can stem from a “fruit salad” method of teaching algebra in primary. Letters are presented as abbreviations of objects, for example,  $4b$  meaning 4 **b**ananas. This technique allows for a less intimidating and abstract introduction to algebra but has “long-term consequences” (Welder, 2012, 261) for pupils who fail to ever realise that these letters represent numbers (Arcavi, Drijvers and Stacey, 2016, 51). Whilst this instrumental understanding makes algebra more instantly accessible, it fails pupils by acting as what Skemp calls a “faux amis” (Skemp, 2006). A French phrase used to describe a term that is alike but has a different meaning, when pupils graduate to secondary algebra, they find themselves almost speaking a different language. They believe they understand algebra because they could do it in primary, but in reality, the letters represent something completely different to what they believe. So too, even if fruit salad algebra is avoided, then the abbreviations in arithmetic such as 12 m meaning 12 meters can instead cause confusion. In the context of measure ‘12m’ means 12 multiplied by one but in the context of algebra, “12m can mean 12 times some unknown number of meters” (Egodawatte, 2011, 38). Confusion is caused by the fact that symbols carry different meanings “depending on the context” (Egodawatte, 2011, 38).

Finally, the accurate comprehension of the equals sign can be identified as the final notation based misconception. When students are first exposed to the equals symbol in arithmetic they are taught to associate the symbol with a

command to perform an operation and find the 'answer' (Sáenz-Ludlow & Walgamuth, 1998)(Russell, O'Dwyer, and Miranda, 2009, 417). Throughout primary pupils are presented with calculations that demand a single answer "to present solutions in the form of a single term ( $2+5$  is not an acceptable answer)" (Welder, 2012, 259). This becomes problematic as it creates a temptation to simplify all expressions and equations to single terms i.e  $2 + y$  to  $2y$ . This is further encouraged by the use of calculators whereby the equals symbol acts as the "answer button" creating "a stumbling block" (Egodawatte, 2011, 45) as pupils interpret the equals sign to mean 'single term answer follows' rather than 'is the same as'.

## **Research-Informed Methods**

The qualitative approach of a comparative pre and post test was undertaken. Students were tested on their understanding of algebraic notation and after 4 hours of teaching throughout the week using the bar method, students were tested again. The same test was used prior to and after the interventions so that a direct comparison could be made and the impact of the teaching quantified. In order to maintain anonymity pupils were asked not to put their name on pre and post tests. Pupils were also informed that test scores were going to be compared across the class to research the impact of the teaching they were receiving and were given the option to completely opt out of comparison. No pupils objected and all completed both tests.

The results of a pretest showed a poor understanding of algebraic notation class-wide, with few scoring above 3 out of 12. There was very little consistency across the class of which three questions were answered correctly, and because the pre-test was multi-choice, the irregularity of answers teased at the fact that many had potentially just guessed their answers. The decision was therefore taken to 'start again' with algebraic notation to ensure that misconceptions surrounding algebraic notation were tackled across the class, or avoided in the first place.

The primary method suggested by researchers was the widely cited Singapore Bar Method. Algebraic expressions are represented by a bar shaded and labelled into different sections with an arrow indicating the part of the bar which is to be algebraically expressed as the answer. In many Asian countries such as China, Japan and Singapore this method is used as a visual way to solve arithmetic and algebra problems. In such nations, "it is believed that, if children are provided with a means to visualise a problem, they will come to see its structural underpinning" (Kieran, Pang, Schifter and Fong Ng, 2016, 7). According to the Programme for International Student Assessment, the strongest nations for teaching mathematics have consistently been "Singapore, China or any other East Asian country" (Study International Staff, 2019). On further research of these successful methods, the Bar Method has been recognised by "neuroimaging studies" (Kieran, Pang, Schifter and Fong Ng, 2016, 23) to create a less abstract method for solving algebraic problems.

This method was therefore adopted to help pupils "[visualise counterparts]" in a less abstract way to counter the misconception of oversimplifying. The model method aimed to demonstrate that because " $3n$  and  $2$  represent different aspects of a modelled sequence" in the expression  $3n+2$  they "cannot be combined" (Welder, 2012, 260). This was to counter the misconception of a single term answer and practice writing algebraic notation.

According to researchers, the bar method could be used with an inquiry-based method of learning. Pupils could have been given little instruction on how to describe the bars and left to undertake "algebraic babbling" to determine how best to communicate the value of the models. Researchers argue that pupils "through collective discussion, verbalisation, and argumentation, gradually become proficient in syntax" (Kieran, Pang, Schifter and Fong Ng, 2016, 19). However, whilst some researchers such as Caitriona Rooney are passionate about inquiry-based- learning, describing it to have changed the way students learn mathematics by promoting a "higher-order thinking", "[engagement]", "responsibility and accountability for their own work" (Rooney, 2009, 121), others are not so supportive.

Kirschner, Sweller and Clark instead argue that "these approaches ignore both the structures that constitute human cognitive architecture and evidence from empirical studies over the past half-century" (2010, 75). Such authors explain that when inquiry-based learning is given excessive credit the absolute necessity of long term memory for effective learning is being forgotten. Our working memory stores knowledge that is freely accessible to relieve our working memories cognitive load on demand. This allows our working memory to function without overload and commit even more information to long term memory. It is only when this information is committed to long term memory that something is learnt. Academics argue that "inquiry-based instruction, places a huge burden on working memory" making it difficult for students to commit new knowledge to long term memory or alternatively allowing them to "acquire misconceptions or incomplete or disorganised knowledge" (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2010, 76-77). Essentially learning is a slow and disorganised.

The students of 8B/Ma are low ability relative to their age group, low in confidence and 75% SEND. In conjunction with the convincing literature, it was therefore decided that an approach of direct instruction was much more suitable for 8B/Ma to avoid cognitive overload, frustration and the development of misconceptions. Students were therefore given fifteen minutes of explicit teaching before introducing the bar modelling worksheet. In this explicit instruction, pupils were assured that algebra was a different form of mathematic communication, a dialect if you like. As suggested by Arcavi, Drijvers and Stacey the differences between arithmetic notation and algebraic notation were "[directly discussed]" and written down (2016, 55). The meaning and nature of a variable were explicitly explained and the concept of the equals sign being read as "the same as" or "equivalent to" precisely encouraged

(Booth, 1986) (Welder, 2012, 258). The worksheet was then directly explained and the first few questions were completed as a class.

## Evaluation

After completing four research-based lessons, the students of 8B/Ma completed a post-test to assess the extent of their progress. Scores were significantly higher. The mode was 5 out of 12 instead of 3 and the highest score was 11 out of 12. All pupils made progress, even if it was marginal. The most progress was made on the initial questions testing algebraic notation and the understanding that  $2a$  is the equivalent of  $2 \times a$  or  $a + a$ . However, students were still perplexed by more complicated simplification and prevailed to still misinterpret that  $a + 3$  cannot be simplified.

Whilst other methods, not cited in this piece brought success, the bar method itself, adopted from high achieving Singapore, was not so impactful. The prime aim of using the bar method to practice algebraic notation was to visually demonstrate to pupils that the addition of two different terms could not be simplified. Unfortunately, students failed to gain this understanding from the method and many answered the question simplify " $3 + a$ " wrong in the post-test as they attempted to oversimplify to a neat, arithmetic style, single term answer (Welder, 2012, 259).

The hypothesis for why this method did not fulfil its potential is that it was used too early in the schema. This activity was used very early on in the sequence of lessons, under the assumption that a visual, less abstract activity was a good place to start. However, rather than set the students in good stead with a visual demonstration, they struggled. In mathematically high performing Asian nations, the Bar method is encouraged throughout their mathematics education, meaning that by the time pupils reach more difficult algebraic reasoning they are confident in the visual concept. The students of 8B/Ma attend an inadequate rated school emerging from two years of changing leadership and pandemic disruption and therefore, unsurprising, seemed to not have ever come across bar modelling. Students struggled at the very first hurdle of interpreting what the question was asking, with the bars often causing complete confusion. Even with repetitive direct instruction and worked examples pupils struggled to work independently. It is likely that because the bar model strategy was new to the students as well as the algebra itself, pupils were cognitively overloaded by too much unfamiliarity (Sweller, 2016) (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2010).

## Conclusion

Despite having found the bar method to fail 8B/Ma in practice it should not be abandoned entirely. In future, I would choose to use this method again but would ensure that the class had encountered bar modelling before in other scenarios so that the new activity paired with the new concept did not cause cognitive overload, confusion and

disengagement. Pupils of 8B/Ma will revisit algebraic notation in coming terms, but before doing so bar modelling will be used to teach both ratio and finding a fraction of an amount. This is so that the class can become more familiar with the concept before re attempting using it in algebra. The value of research-based planning cannot be underestimated. It allows for a much more critical evaluation of resources and sequences of lessons and a much more in-depth and quantified approach to reflection. This is important for the improvement of my own practice but for the shared cause of bettering students education. For bar modelling to become more widespread across the country, more evidence needs to be collected on its efficacy and the ways it can be used to provide concrete examples in a range of mathematical topics. Once its efficacy is understood better and more substantially proven, it can be included in Continued Professional Development sessions, encouraged in primary schools and also encouraged by exam boards in exam papers, hopefully increasing pupils confidence in applying it to various scenarios.

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# Oh the Grand Old Duke of York: Musical pedagogy as a responsive approach for co-regulation within the Early Years

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## Introduction

The origins of the famous nursery rhyme the 'Grand Old Duke of York' have been much debated. However, it provides a suitable analogy of the Early Years environment, particularly the behaviour and self-regulation of children. In a similar manner to the Duke, young children are up, down and neither up nor down! Additionally, the free-flowing continuous provision can depict the ten thousand men! In this article I present pivotal literature outlining the strengths of musical pedagogy as a responsive approach for co-regulation in the Early Years. I will advocate for the instinctual and soothing roots of music and how those supporting young children must be prepared to collaboratively march through the highs and lows, much like the Grand Old Duke. In a society that all too often shames children for their behaviours and dysregulation, it is hoped this article amplifies the modality of music as a responsive approach.

## Self-Regulation and Co-Regulation

While metacognition is concerned with the control of cognition, self-regulation is more multidimensional, relating to the control of all aspects of behaviour, such as social, motivational and cognitive features (Whitebread and O'Sullivan, 2012). Attentional flexibility, working memory and inhibitory control are three aspects of executive functioning that rapidly develop during the early years and support self-regulation (McClelland and Cameron, 2011). The ability to self-regulate enables children to understand emotions, control behaviour, remember instructions, share attention and participate in activities (McClelland and Cameron, 2011). The amygdala is an integral part of the brain for self-regulating when stressed. When overwhelmed 'amygdala hijack' can occur, where emotions quite literally hijack the brain (Conkbayir, 2017). The thinking parts of the brain become compromised with a reduction in memory and planning, resulting in an inability to respond rationally (Gunnar and Vazquez 2006, Conkbayir 2021). Therefore, co-regulation is an essential experience. This is where "adults and children work together towards a common purpose, finding ways to resolve upsets from stress in any domain and return to balance" (Birth to 5, 2021:20). This links with a Vygotskian (1978) social support structure, which scaffolds learning through a more-knowledgeable-other. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) advocates that sensitive adult interaction and positive relationships are imperative for child development, particularly through connected serve and return interactions. Furthermore, there is a misconception that self-regulation is the same as compliance, this is not true (Desautels, 2020).

## **Musical Co-Regulation and Entrainment**

Engagement with music is frequently associated with emotional and behavioural regulation (Weinberg and Joseph, 2017). Illari (2007) found that the expressive nature of singing and music can carry emotional messages to young children, who are born sensitive to the rhythmic and melodic dimensions of early paternal speech (Cross, 2014). As Cross (2014:813) states “when people make music together, they coordinate their behaviours in time”. This notion of coordination advocates co-regulation, where music can be used to exchange information and “coordinate goal-directed behaviour” (Cross, 2014:813).

It is well known that rhyme and lullaby teach emotionally responsive behaviours for young children, which is essential for self-esteem and prosocial behaviour (Mullen, 2017). Neurologically, music can activate and stimulate the areas of the brain responsible for emotional processing (Trainor and Schmidt, 2003). This affords the cognitive benefits of participation, relaxation and the psychobiology needed to build self-regulation (Williams, 2018). Consequently, not only is academic achievement increased but behavioural and regulatory challenges are decreased (Williams, 2018). This is especially pertinent when adapting music for children, where the likes of nursery rhymes can be improvised to mitigate challenging situations and create emotional bonds (Mullen, 2017; Williams, 2018).

It can therefore be proposed that music can entrain an individual into a relaxed state for learning. The concept of entrainment was discovered through the invention of the pendulum clock. It was found that two clocks could synchronise with each other, even when the pendulum of one was purposely disturbed (Clayton et al., 2005). It has now been discovered through brain research that our own biological systems have similar connections with entrainment at an interpersonal and social level (Clayton et al., 2005). Music therapists commonly use metered stimuli and mirror behaviours to create therapeutic relationships, in sync with their client through musical serve and return (Clayton, et al., 2005). This sense of entrainment reminded me of sensory integration, a term which refers to the processing, integration and organisation of sensory information from the body and environment (Sensory Integration Education, 2022). As music encourages children to use their senses, limbs and whole body, children are given opportunity to support proprioception, interoception, perceptual judgement, logical thinking and abstract thinking through sensory-motor responses to music (Blackburn, 2020; Rose et al., 2019), all vital for self-regulation.

## **A Born Instinct**

Regarding early child development, music is instinctual and thrives within the immediate microsystem of many children. It serves as one of the very first evolutionary adaptations to co-regulate behaviour (Fancourt and Perkins, 2018). Within the microsystem the practice of ‘motherese’ or ‘parentese’ occurs, where caregivers sing as part of infant-directed speech, full of exaggerations, melodic elaborations, slow repetitions and elevated pitch (Fancourt and Perkins, 2018). Ecologically, it has been found that this cultural practice occurs on a global scale in many

countries (Gogate, Maganti, and Bahrack, 2015). Friedrich Fröbel, the pioneer of kindergarten education, created the renowned 'Mother's Songs' book in 1844. Fröbelian practice champions singing as a pedagogical tool and emotional channel (Powell et al., 2013). This evidences some historical understanding that musicality starts with babies, young children and the relationships with people who matter to them. It is part of our evolution. Interestingly, research by Wermke and Mende (2009) identified the resemblance between the crying of infants and the musicality of 'parentese'. This shows how music can support the modulation of arousal levels and emotional states (Fancourt and Perkins, 2018), very much in line with the concept of entrainment. As part of this modulation, music can modulate cortisol levels, physiological stress, increase oxytocin and calm heart rate and increase oxygen (Shenfield et al., 2003; Fancourt et al., 2016). This greatly impacts behavioural states and alters coping responses when challenges arise (Kaitz et al., 2010).

### **Conclusion: Let us stop and hear the music**

Despite the strong evidence base for modulating behaviour in a therapeutic way, discourses around behaviour management in the wider ecology are not always harmonious. Many strategies can become shameful, punitive and make little attempt to identify the function of a behaviour. As Dix (2017:125) says "punishment doesn't teach better behaviour, restorative conversations do". This concept of restorative conversations made me reconsider the practice of 'parentese'. It reminded me of the instinctual serve and return conversations of infant-directed speech, full of regulatory melodies and elaborations. We are born needing to co-regulate and we must be deeply aware of the rich and complex neural streams that flow through our bodies and brains. Reviewing the literature on musical co-regulation has brought to the surface the power of soothing children in multi-modal ways, no matter their age or stage. As an early years teacher I am not urging secondary teachers to start performing nursery rhymes (although Hickory Dickory Dock may narrate any late arrivals to lesson?). However, I strongly urge all teachers and practitioners supporting children and young people to hold tight to the facts of child development and the creativity needed to regulate humans. With neo-liberalism withering the power, respect and need for music and the statutory nature of music ever fractured (Holdhus et al., 2021), it is important we question the emotional offer we afford our students.

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## THE POWER OF CHRISTMAS!

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Have you ever noticed that during our annual Christmas celebrations and long after the season is over, children and adults alike retain long term information such as Christmas song lyrics, the nativity storyline, and specific and minute details of precious memories?

I would like to consider why we seem to retain this information and how we can use this to enhance the cognitive memory power for learning and apply this to how we teach.

Christmas is, for many, a social time for children and parents alike. Whitebread (2012, cited in Carden, 2022) articulated “*all learning begins in the social context, which supports children in the process whereby they construct their own understandings... all learning exists first at the ‘inter-mental’ level in the form of spoken language, and then at the ‘instrumental’ level... This has been termed the ‘social constructivist’ approach to learning.*”

Kuper (1993) suggests that “Christmas is probably the only one annual occasion when virtually everyone in England is doing the same thing at the same time”. Petrelli (2014) agrees stating that “Christmas is a calendrical ritual, i.e. it occurs on the same day every year.... Always occurring on the same date and by being a familiar event, Christmas triggers expectations and obligations.” He continues by explaining, “Many things are done specifically for Christmas and time is set aside to be together”.

Evaluating various aspects of Christmas and echoing Petrelli’s (2014) sentiment that “we do not intend to suggest that everyone is always merry at Christmas; most of us can draw on our own family histories to recognise that tensions and arguments are, for many, part of the Christmas experience”. I will seek to make recommendations on how educators can harness the POWER OF CHRISTMAS!

### **LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THE POWER OF THE CHRISTMAS CAROLS**

Petrelli (2014) reflects that individuals have “an overall positive attitude and willingness to be engaged even with the odd or unusual during the run-up to Christmas”. The communal breaking into song between friends, family and even groups of strangers is a traditional part of the festivities. Why then do we not see this communal sharing of songs during the rest of the year?

In our community we see football fans singings and chanting or at music events where we see again, strangers sharing in the power of the song. Within schools we see shared, forced use of song in assemblies, the teaching of music in the curriculum and (for the performing teachers) as a creative tool for learning.

For adults, very often the memory of school assemblies showcases the power of song as it generates a lifelong shared memory that is often seen at weddings and funerals where songs selected are those from their youth, sometimes due to them being personal favourites but also because the organisers know that most guests will know the lyrics. Those ‘earworm’ songs that are very easily recalled and hard to forget.

Earworm – “a song or tune that stays in your head for a long time after you have heard it” Oxford Learners Dictionaries (2022).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- I would suggest that the use of song for retaining key information be encouraged in schools as part of all subject areas as well as shared in assemblies alongside the old traditional ‘Morning is Broken’ and ‘Give me oil in my lamp’ hymns.
- Harnessing the power or retention shown by the recall of traditional Christmas carols such as Little Donkey, Silent Night and Ruldolf the Red Nose Reindeer.
- Harnessing the fun and shared experiences of song to teach some of the factual elements of the National Curriculum.

STARTING POINT - [SCIENCE - WATER CYCLE](#) (Click link to video)

### **LESSONS TO LEARN FROM TRADITIONAL STORIES**

Parents have confidence to verbally retell their stories of Christmas. A shared context that everyone has lived through annually throughout their years. A shared experience of favourite tales that became blockbusters, their uncle's Christmas tales of the snow of 1946 and which toy they asked for but never received. All of this is verbal storytelling. It is also a demonstration of the power of shared culture capital can bring to a child's learning.

Christmas is the festival which unites the general and the particular; it is the most universal in the sense that everyone, in a hundred countries – today, even non-Christian countries – are imagined to be celebrating the same thing on the same day. Yet it is simultaneously the most specific of all the festivals, since no one else ever celebrates Christmas in the way 'we' celebrate it. [...] Each celebrant brings their own unique traditions (Miller, 2008 cited in Petrelli, 2014).

Building on this shared experience that is often steeped in personal tradition and how it naturally supports confident verbal storytelling by adults, I feel that we can further encourage the verbal storytelling of children.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- To encourage verbal storytelling alongside the reading of books at home.
- Removing the barrier for some of illiteracy and exchanging for the sharing of past memories in a language rich activity.

### **LESSONS TO LEARN FROM CHRISTMAS PERFORMANCES**

Reflecting on what happens during the process of putting together a school performance, teachers use drama to retell a story, giving out characters, sharing with each other which character they were or always wanted to be. This is another example of the shared experience that Christmas traditions in school gives us. Parents are engaged in this topic with their children as they share their own memories and is one of the most well attended events of the school calendar as parents are aware of the expectation of them – come and enjoy your child's performance.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- To recognise the benefits and confidence building that can occur during the rehearsal and performance of the annual nativity or Christmas KS2 play/pantos.

- Use drama and real reasons to perform to others.

## LESSONS TO LEARN FROM WRITING AT CHRISTMAS TIME

Writing at Christmas time gives you true reasons to write (e.g., Christmas cards and letters to Santa). Those Early Years practitioners among us will often use the name writing in cards as a regular assessment tool as the children are excited to write their name for real life purposes. Writing at Christmas is simply that, a real-life purpose for putting pen to paper.

Bearne et al (2017) highlights the importance of children being able to “write for a variety of purposes and readers in a range of forms [as well as] write to explore ideas, emotions and opinions, and communicate them factually and imaginatively.”

Children are excited to write their Christmas lists as someone (Santa) will read it and they hope to receive something on their list. The same engagement for the same reasons could be seen from letters to an MP asking for change or improvement to local facilities or raising awareness of a cause close to their hearts and engaging the community with advertisements.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers to map out the years traditional and religious events and use this long-term plan to create real life contexts for writing.
- To create shared experiences with your classroom of children. To put the pre assessment task work in to enjoy immersing yourselves into the context of a lesson.

## LESSONS TO LEARN FROM KINDNESS AND THE GIFT OF TIME AT CHRISTMAS

*... the most influential text at the heart of the invention of Christmas as an event organised around charity, and again appearing in December 1843, is Charles Dickens’s A Christmas Carol. The novel did not invent Christmas, as is sometimes suggested, but it did do enormous work in popularising the invention and making material its organising ideology of charity (Storey, 2016).*

I truly believe that no child is born without kindness and to harness this is priceless; when adults demonstrate kindness, the children will follow. From Christmas traditions to families meeting together and the giving of gifts, Christmas is steeped in the art of giving. My children adore the option of having their own money and being able to buy their parents a surprise present. This has now developed into an annual tradition where my children visit a shop with a family friend who supervises their shopping and then helps them to wrap it up ready for the big day.

Christmas holidays and the inclusion in many businesses that time must be taken during this time of year gives the gift of time for each other. Petrelli (2014) notes that (We) can count on people having time and attention for each other, being open to experiment with new things and having fun.

Although, we cannot enforce businesses to schedule or enforce annual leave to only be taken during other school holidays to replicate this, we can however, try to educate parents on the benefits of screen free, interrupted free time with each other and the value it can have on all involved.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educate parents on the benefits of the gift of time. No monetary value can replace the memories we make together that do not have to cost a lot or anything at all.

## LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THE MAGIC OF CHRISTMAS -

### DREAMS, HOPE AND THE MAGIC OF BELIEVING

If we take the time to reflect, we would be able to note that the power of this shared celebration has been seen historically with nations ceasing the acts of war to play football in the snow, share a drink and swap gifts as well as recalling that fuzzy feeling of anticipation and joy many of us would have felt. The belief in something that is beyond the realm of real.

Even if not actively participating in the preparation of their family Christmas, everyone is touched by the feeling of anticipation fed by their private or openly public rituals, e.g., home and street decoration. These details provide great themes to inspire design, from the count down or building up (e.g., advent calendar), to the connection of the dispersed family in anticipation of the meeting, to combining inside family and outside family events. These preparatory events are markedly different from the ones, already characterised, on Christmas Day itself (and sometimes those days round it). Linking remote people during preparation and storing activities is a way of heightening the intensity of the moments that are shared (Petrelli, 2014).

True believers have the joy of hope. True believers have the joy of believing the impossible is possible. Children in so many areas of their life are growing up to quickly. Keep this hope and believing in magic for as long as you can and as often as you can in your classroom.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Keep the magic.

**However, not all Christmas traditions need harnessing, don't even get me started on those Elves on the Shelves!**

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