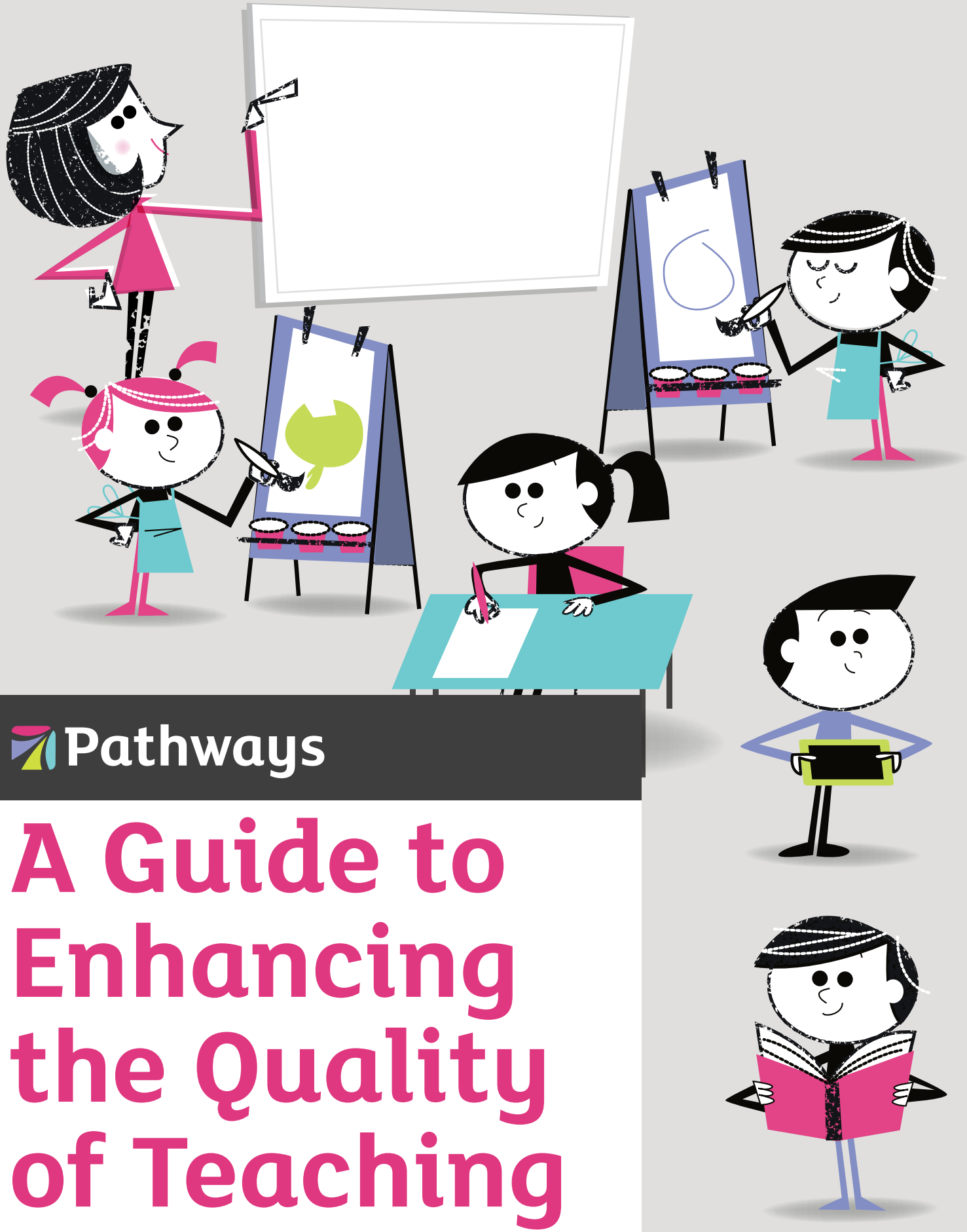

Pathways

A Guide to Enhancing the Quality of Teaching

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Who is this guide for?

This guide is aimed at teachers, middle leaders and senior management in primary schools. It is particularly relevant to those interested in continuing professional development and it links with the Oxford Assessment Pathway.

This guide aims to provide tools and advice to support schools to promote high-quality and effective teaching across the primary school. Ensuring that teaching is regularly discussed, and that high-quality teaching occurs consistently throughout the school is a key responsibility for all school leaders.

Introduction

As readers will be aware, there are myriad publications around the quality of teaching available in a range of forms to download and consume; swathes of advice about what makes an 'effective teacher' targeted towards different levels of schooling, showcasing distinct examples of 'good' or 'best' practice in numerous contexts. How can practitioners make sense of all this information and judge the standard of evidence for different claims?

How can the research inform practice?

This guide focuses on *research literature* and findings from the growing school improvement and teacher effectiveness fields and attempts to digest and condense the evidence into a short, practical guide. The focus is less on 'who' an effective teacher is and more on *professional practices* that characterise effective and high-quality teaching that can help to support *all* teachers in becoming more effective in promoting pupils' learning, attainment, motivation and engagement. This guide attempts to synthesise a selection of texts into a more manageable and accessible format for practitioners at different levels of experience and types of expertise.

This guide provides:

- a definition of effective teaching
- an overview of what the research generally says about effective teaching, particularly in primary school contexts and some of the implications of the research on classroom practice and the main features of effective teaching
- the means of developing and maintaining high-quality teaching via peer observation and the use of inspection evidence
- a choice of tools and resources to help you in reviewing and promoting effective teaching and enhancing your school's capacity to develop and share good practice as part of the school's core purpose. This links with promoting reflective and collaborative practice amongst teachers and links with the school's professional development strategy.

Ideally, this guide might also stimulate further questions around what supports effective teaching practices in your own context, the role of professional development, including the use of assessment for learning and feedback. It seeks to 'plot a route', applying a more holistic approach towards answering those questions, with a focus on improvement throughout the system, from individual pupils and teachers to the whole school.

What does 'effective teaching' mean?

Unpacking some key terms

The word 'effectiveness' can evoke strong emotions because it has links with the idea of professional competency and high-stakes accountability in some systems. This guide seeks to inform and engage readers with research evidence and how it can support professional development. It suggests that 'effectiveness' in achieving educational goals is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for any acceptable definition of what it means to be a 'good' teacher.

> *"A teacher is effective if he/she can accomplish the planned goals and assigned tasks in accordance with school goals."*[1]

The objectives of education and the definitions of the quality and effectiveness of education are closely connected. This means that defining effective teaching must be related to understanding the objectives of education. The objectives of education have changed over time, along with the curriculum in schools; however, language, reading, mathematics and science remain core studies in most systems. In addition, there is an increasing emphasis on promoting social and affective skills and qualities for pupils including enjoyment of learning, motivation and engagement in lessons, positive learning behaviours such as self-regulation and positive academic self-concepts.

This definition of effectiveness links together ideas about what teachers do (observed behaviours in class that support better outcomes for pupils) and the achievement of learning goals for children based on studying their educational outcomes. In the literature on teacher effectiveness the notion that effective teachers are those that promote better outcomes for pupils is of prime importance.

Thus more effective teachers are seen to be effective because they can promote good outcomes of learning (attainment and, most crucially, promoting progress) for pupils and effective teaching practices are those that are used by such teachers to promote better learning outcomes.

> *"Even when the objectives of education change, the stable component in it is that schools and education have to contribute to the cognitive development of students. The same holds for teaching. Even when we expect that schools can contribute to more than academic outcomes, and teaching is more than instruction, effective instruction remains an important component of it."*[1]

It has been argued[2] that schools need to unpack the concept of effectiveness by addressing three key questions relevant for monitoring school improvement.

- Effective in promoting *which outcomes?* This relates to the goals of education for pupils (academic, affective, behavioural etc).
- Effective over *what time period?* This relates to the idea of change and improvement over time (progress across a school year or over a key stage of education).
- Effective *for whom?* This relates to effectiveness in promoting outcomes for different groups of pupils (e.g. by gender, ethnic group, children entitled to the Pupil Premium children versus others). It has a strong link with promoting equity in outcomes and narrowing the achievement gap.

These three questions are also equally relevant for teachers thinking about the outcomes for children they teach in their class. In primary schools, teachers will be interested in a range of outcomes including the core competencies in language (oral, reading, writing), mathematics and science but also developing their pupils' experience and understanding in other important curriculum areas (art, music, drama, PE, ICT, other languages, humanities etc). In addition, they will want to promote children's engagement and motivation in learning, their academic self-concepts and confidence, and important social behaviours (ability to work with other children, and pro-social behaviour) and overall well-being. Making learning fun, fostering children's enjoyment of school and in lessons is also important for teachers and children.

Finally, although research can provide valuable guidance and insights, researchers acknowledge that there is no single, 'best way', to teach.

> *"[T]here is no simple way to learn and the teacher's task in the twenty-first century classroom is becoming increasingly complex and sophisticated."*[5]

A quick word on *teacher* and *teaching* quality ...

Teacher quality can be seen primarily as a combination of "personal traits, skills, and understandings an individual brings to teaching, including dispositions to behave in certain ways."[3] In addition, the OECD have in the past identified the following five key dimensions of teacher quality:

- *knowledge* of substantive curriculum areas and content
- *pedagogic skill*, including the acquisition and ability to use a repertoire of teaching strategies
- *reflection* and the ability to be self-critical, the hallmark of teacher professionalism
- *empathy* and the commitment to the acknowledgement of the dignity of others
- *managerial competence*, as teachers assume a range of managerial responsibilities within and outside the classroom.[4]

In contrast, *teaching* quality refers to "strong instruction that enables a wide range of students to learn."[3]

> *"Teaching quality is in part a function of teacher quality—teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions—but it is also strongly influenced by the context of instruction: the curriculum and assessment system; the "fit" between teachers' qualifications and what they are asked to teach; and teaching conditions, such as time, class size, facilities, and materials. If teaching is to be effective, policymakers must address the teaching and learning environment as well as the capacity of individual teachers."*[3]

What does the research say?

> *"Children esteem teachers who can explain things clearly, who are slightly strict rather than overly sever or permissive; scrupulously fair in their use of rewards and punishments; interested in them as individuals and with a sense of humour not based on sarcasm or humiliation."*[6]

Some characteristics of effective teaching

A review of the research evidence on effective teaching published in 2013 argues that *effective* teachers:

- "are clear about instructional goals
- are knowledgeable about curriculum content and the strategies for teaching it
- communicate to their students what is expected of them, and why
- make expert use of existing instructional materials in order to devote more time to practices that enrich and clarify the content
- are knowledgeable about their students, adapting instruction to their needs and anticipating misconceptions in their existing knowledge
- teach students meta-cognitive strategies and give them opportunities to master them
- address higher- as well as lower-level cognitive objectives
- monitor students' understanding by offering regular appropriate feedback
- integrate their instruction with that in other subject areas
- accept responsibility for student outcomes."[2]

The review also shows that in order to achieve good teaching, good subject knowledge is a prerequisite. Hence, changes in the National Curriculum and assessment requirements need to be reviewed carefully by teachers as well as school senior management. The National Curriculum Pathway provides some helpful guidance in this respect. Also, the skilful use of well-chosen questions to engage and challenge learners, and to consolidate understanding, is an important feature, as is the effective use of assessment for learning. This links with the quality of feedback teachers give to support children's learning.[2]

> *"One of the most important factors both in classroom climate and in school and teacher effectiveness more generally [is] the teacher's expectations of her/his pupils. From the late 1960s onwards, research has found that teachers' expectations of their pupils can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Pupils that teachers expect to do well tend to achieve better, while pupils who are expected to do badly tend to fulfil their teachers' expectations as well. School effectiveness research has paid a lot of attention to this factor, which has been found to be consistently significant, though again with generally modest to moderate effect sizes."*[7]

Factors that contribute to effective teaching

Three main aspects have been identified as crucial factors that contribute to **effective** teaching.

- The pupil must be *attending* to the learning experience.
- The pupil must be *receptive* to the learning experience (in the sense of being motivated and having a willingness to learn and respond to the experience).
- The learning experience must be *appropriate* for the intended learning outcomes (taking particular account of the pupil's initial knowledge and understanding).[8]

Taken together these point to the importance of teachers knowing pupils well and being skilled in diagnosis of their learning needs to help personalise their experiences.

Factors that contribute to ineffective teaching

Examples of **ineffective** classroom practice, meanwhile, include:

- inconsistent expectations for different learners that are lower for disadvantaged students from low socio-economic status families
- an emphasis on supervising and communicating about routines
- low levels of teacher-student interactions
- low levels of student involvement in their work
- student perceptions of their teachers as not caring, unhelpful, under-appreciative of the importance of learning and their work
- more frequent use of negative criticism and feedback.[9]

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The importance of teacher expectations

There is some evidence from school effectiveness research and studies of teaching that ineffective schools and teachers frequently have 'low expectations' of children. They may be affected by stereotypes based on gender, ethnic or language heritage, and socio-economic disadvantage. It is important to have high, but realistic, expectations in setting learning targets and monitoring pupil progress and to check that pupil background is not influencing expectations. Schools can help teachers in this by careful use of performance data for different pupil groups (see the Fischer Family Trust or RAISEonline resources). Teacher assessment can be more prone to subconscious bias than the use of external tests or assessments (see the Bew Review (2011)[10] so schools should ensure teaching assistants (TAs) are appropriately moderated.

In addition to the tendency to place undue weight on biological and social factors when it comes to making projections for individual student performance, and indeed adjusting teacher expectations, there is often some confusion between the functions and structures of schooling.

> *"[A] key function of schooling is the provision of quality teaching and learning experiences that meet the developmental and learning needs of students is dependent on funding and organisational structures that support this function, the danger is a typical proclivity on the part of teachers and educational administrators to stress structure (e.g., single-sex schooling, class size, etc) and pedagogical strategies at the expense of function (quality teaching and learning)."*[11]

School Matters: The Junior Years

A 1988 study of primary school effects used an educational effectiveness design including information on pupils, their classrooms and teachers and their primary schools, following pupils aged 7 to 11 years. The effective teacher characteristics identified were:

- teacher responsibility for ordering activities during the day for pupils, i.e. structured teaching
- pupils having some responsibility for their work and independence within these sessions
- a limited focus covering only one curriculum area at a time
- high levels of teacher interaction with the whole class
- providing ample, challenging work
- high levels of pupil involvement in tasks
- a positive atmosphere in the classroom
- greater use of praise and encouragement.

Overall, teachers who spent more time interacting with individual pupils tended to focus more on routine, i.e. non-work, matters and made less use of challenging open ended (higher-order) questioning, and gave less work related feedback. In contrast, teachers who interacted more with the whole class made relatively more use of higher-order communication and gave more work-related feedback that helped pupils learn.

The study concluded that the key classroom factors contributing to effective outcomes were structured sessions, intellectually challenging teaching, a work orientated environment, communication between teacher and pupils and a limited focus within the sessions.[12]

The teacher effect

In a 2000 study looking at the progress of 30 primary schools and a statistical analysis of mathematics achievement tests to measure the variation between pupils, teachers and schools, Muijs and Reynolds found that while the pupils, their background characteristics and prior attainment accounted for a large amount of the variation, approximately a quarter of the variation was generated by schools and teachers. About 80% of the latter was accountable by teachers alone. Muijs and Reynolds also report that:

> *"All the evidence that has been generated in the school effectiveness research community shows that classrooms are far more important than schools in determining how children perform at school."* [13]

The size of the teacher effect tends to be larger in primary schools (where children typically still have one class teacher for most of their lessons in one school year), and when we measure learning across a single school year. Schools are not unimportant, however, since children will be taught by a number of teachers across six to seven years in a primary school. Some schools may provide a more supportive behavioural climate and be better able to support effective classroom practice than others. Research indicates that to maintain teachers' effectiveness and commitment to the profession, support from colleagues and senior managers can be influential.[14]

It is important to acknowledge that differences in outcomes do exist when taking into consideration pupil characteristics such as age, gender, ethnic and socio-economic status. Many of these differences emerge at a young age before children enter school and persist across subsequent phases of education. However, though such factors relate strongly to attainment at particular time points, they play much less part in shaping pupil value-added *progress* than do schools and teachers. Thus, research indicates that of the range of school contextual variables (e.g. indicators of school socio-economic status, class size) the "single largest factor" affecting pupils' academic growth is differences in individual classroom teachers' effectiveness.[15] The magnitude of these differences, when taken into account altogether, Sanders (1998) continues, "dwarfs others factors".[15]

In addition, Sanders found that compared to students in the classrooms of the most effective teachers who achieved high value-added scores across all prior attainment levels, students in classes taught by least effective teachers did not make expected levels of progress.

> *"As the level of teacher effectiveness increased, students of lower achievement were the first to benefit, and only teachers of the highest effectiveness generally were effective with all students."* [15]

Similar findings have emerged in the review by Rowe (2006). In general, school and teacher effectiveness research shows that schools matter most for initial low attaining and disadvantaged pupils and that it is the quality of teaching that makes a particular difference to their progress.

Constructivist approaches

Another sometimes misguided attempt at adopting what some see as newer, 'fresher' teaching methods at the expense of techniques seen as more 'traditional' is the (over-)reliance on constructivist approaches. While constructivist approaches are viewed as more 'current' modes of teaching in today's classrooms, direct instructional approaches can sometimes be relegated as relics of a bygone era. Research shows that the choice of approaches is neither binary nor independent.

> "[Direct instruction and constructivist approaches to teaching and learning] *have merit in their own right, provided that students have the basic knowledge and skills (best provided initially by direct instruction) before engagement in 'rich' constructivist learning activities. The problem arises when constructivist learning activities precede explicit teaching, or replace it, with the assumption that students have adequate knowledge and skills to efficiently and effectively engage with constructivist learning activities designed to generate new learning.*" [11]

Rowe (2006) goes on to cite examples from empirical research where constructivist approaches may not be tenable including students with learning difficulties, manifesting in a variety of challenges such as disengagement, low self-esteem and behavioural problems at school and home.

There are, however, a number of potentially positive consequences from the use of constructivist techniques in the classroom.[16]

- Learning is seen as an active process. Learning and meaning are 'constructed' by the learner from a range of inputs; this includes resolving 'conflicts' with past experiences, other knowledge and reflection.[17]
- Learning is a search for meaning.
- Learning can be socially constructed through different interactions including with peers, teachers, parents etc.
- Teachers require good working knowledge of child development and learning theories in order to effectively judge when and what learning is occurring at a given time.
- Learning is contextualised in relation to prior knowledge and preconceptions.[18]
- Learning is usually in-depth, which entails pupils being able to envision the 'big picture' and not just the individual components.
- Teaching is more about empowering the learner and allowing him or her to discover and reflect on experiences. This is said to lead to more authentic learning and deeper understanding compared to surface memorisation.

That being said, Muijs and Reynolds (2011) conclude that research into constructivist teaching renders mixed evidence. One thing that is clear, however, is that "pure discovery approaches" do not appear to be effective.

> *Some form of teacher guidance and direction needs to be a part of these approaches, and in practice most effective implementations of constructivism … employ a form of mixed approach where elements of direct instruction are melded with constructivist approaches like coaching.* [19]

More explicit teaching and support is likely to be particularly helpful for learners who struggle (especially those with low prior attainment) who may not yet have the prior knowledge and experiences to benefit from discovery-based learning.

Rowe (2006) succinctly summarises the research evidence; about what supports pupil attainment and especially promotes progress.

> *Certainly not student compositional characteristics such as learning difficulties, educational disadvantage, disruptive student behaviours, nor school structural arrangements of interest to school effectiveness researchers, but the imperative of quality teaching and learning provision, supported by teaching standards and ongoing teacher professional development focused on evidence-based practices that are demonstrably effective in maximising students' learning outcomes and achievement progress.* [11]

Teaching practice examples

Effective Pre-School and Primary Education

The *Effective Pre-School and Primary Education (EPPE 3-11) study* (after Sammons et al, 2008) is a longitudinal research project funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF[20]) that investigated preschool and primary school influences on children's attainment, progress and social/behavioural development. The study was divided into three tiers, one of which is discussed here. Researchers observed classrooms in 125 primary schools in order to investigate the relationship between children's outcomes and classroom processes, determined using direct observation of Year 5 classes. The project employed two types of observation instrument: the *Classroom Observation System for Fifth Grade*[21] and the *Instructional Environment Observation Scale*.[22]

Teachers varied in many aspects of their pedagogical practice and classroom organisation (for example the teaching of analysis skills and the extent of emphasis on basic skills) and several important features of observed practices (related to classroom climate, smooth organisational routines etc). The quality of teaching and pupil response was found to be consistently higher in classes where a plenary was used in both literacy and numeracy lessons and lowest in classes where no plenary was used in either subject.

Key findings from this part of the study

- After controlling for or taking into account the influence of child, family and home learning environment (HLE) factors, both teachers' classroom practice and overall school-level factors make a significant difference to children's academic and social/behavioural progress during primary school.
- Classroom factors, measured using observation instruments, (particularly overall teaching quality and child positivity, which combined teacher-child and peer relationships and children's own self-reliance) and parental support, were found to have an important influence on children's progress in reading between Year 1 and Year 5. Progress in mathematics, however, was found to be relatively equally influenced by factors at classroom-level (overall teaching quality and quality of pedagogy) and school-level (quality of school leadership, school communication with parents, use of homework and school standards).
- The influence of overall teaching quality on reading and mathematics was measured as stronger than the net influence of some background factors such as gender and family disadvantage (measured by eligibility for Free School Meals), but weaker than the influence of Early Years HLE and mothers' qualifications.[23]

Several vital underlying dimensions of classroom processes were identified such as quality of pedagogy, disorganisation, child positivity, pupils' positive engagement and the extent of attention and control, as well as specific features of practice related to literacy and numeracy teaching and learning.

- Teaching quality emerged as a significant predictor of cognitive progress for children across the period Year 1 to Year 5. Children in schools where Year 5 overall teaching quality was observed to be high do significantly better in both reading and mathematics than those attending schools where Year 5 quality was observed to be low.
- The overall quality of teaching as measured by the instruments had a consistent influence on children's academic progress but not on children's social/ behavioural development.

A measure of overall teaching quality was identified (as defined by factors which emerged from the analysis of observational data). When teachers were grouped by this measure, those showing mainly high rather than low quality practices predicted significantly better student progress in both mathematics and reading.

In a more recent study of effective pedagogy in primary schools in England, Siraj et al (2014)[24] drew on evidence from the ongoing longitudinal EPPSE project that followed children from age 3 to 11 in primary school. This report focused on the results of observations of teachers' classroom practice in Year 5 classes. It defined pedagogy as "the instructional techniques and strategies which enable leaning to take place. It refers to the interactive process between teacher/practitioner and learner"[24] but also noted the role of the learning environment children experience (including the concrete learning environment, and the actions of the family and community).

The researchers drew attention to 11 pedagogical strategies that distinguished more effective or 'excellent' practice (see box below). They note that these teachers:

- were skilled at providing clear learning objectives ensuring that each child knew what he or she was expected to learn during each lesson
- used homework that helped to clarify and consolidate pupils' understanding
- were good at behaviour management by setting high expectations and involving children in their learning
- handled discipline privately and sensitively (not through shouting, public naming and shaming)
- made good use of high-quality teaching materials
- were skilled at questioning and providing feedback
- used assessment for learning strategies in their lessons
- ensured pupils had opportunities to reflect on their learning and engage in discussion and analysis
- used the plenary to allow children to consolidate their learning
- cultivated a positive learning environment and responded sensitively to pupil needs.

Effective pedagogical strategies in primary schools

1. Organisation
2. Shared, clear objectives
3. Homework
4. Classroom climate
5. Behaviour management
6. Collaborative learning
7. Personalised teaching and learning
8. Making links explicit
9. Dialogic teaching and learning
10. Assessment for learning
11. Plenary[24]

Teaching for learning

> *"Teaching rather than learning has been the main focus of reform efforts in recent years in the UK. There has been an assumption that teaching will automatically lead to learning and that improving the effectiveness of teachers is the answer to raising standards. The importance of the process of learning* [should also be emphasised]. "[5]

Teaching for learning (after MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed, 2004) is seen as a process of two-way communication between the teacher and learners as well as learners and their peers.

> *"*[I]*t is the skills, knowledge and understanding in the mind of the teacher that interact with skills, knowledge and understanding in the minds of the pupils. Teaching and learning are like a good relationship; they have their separate and different identities, they have different purposes, and they are also composed of differing elements and technologies but depend for their success and wellbeing on the way they relate to each other and work together ... the teacher may be learning, or the pupils teaching, at any one time. They are not role bound. "*[5]

Another important characteristic of teaching for learning is that there is less focus on the distinction between direct and indirect instruction methods, but more complex blending of both approaches at any one time. There are four main aspects.[5]

1 Teachers' subject knowledge and making it accessible to learners

A key concept here is teaching for understanding, which builds on and engages pupils' prior knowledge.

2 Teachers' knowledge of who the pupils are and how they learn

(After Bruner's models of how teachers see learners that influence their teaching.)[25]

- seeing children as imitative learners
- seeing children as learning from didactic exposure
- seeing children as thinkers
- seeing children as knowledgeable.

Of course, Bruner argued that the four perspectives together fused to form effective teaching practice. Learners would be enabled to switch strategies depending on the task required.

3 Facilitating the process of learning and teaching in the learning-centred classroom

a) Learning goals linked to prior learning and the use of learning plan

b) Structuring for learning

Structure featured heavily in the application of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. A uniform approach is taken: e.g. introductory and concluding activities using much interactive whole-class teaching. Group or individual activities often take place in the middle of the lesson, however. It is argued that the lesson structure should match learning goals: "explanations and instruction from the teacher, and experience by the pupils of the process of drawing together what has happened, reflecting on it and planning next steps".[5]

c) Organising for learning

This emphasises the "social nature of learning" and the importance of pupils having opportunities to learn with their peers. There are different schools of thought on grouping and matching. MacGilchrist et al advocate less towards grouping and instead more "provision of a broad, balanced and differentiated curriculum where everyone can thrive and make progress".[5]

d) Using assessment for learning (AfL)

AfL is part of effective planning, focuses on how students learn, is central to classroom practice, is a key professional skill, is sensitive and constructive, fosters motivation, promotes understanding of goals, helps foster know-how to improve, develops the capacity for self-assessment and recognises all educational achievement.[26]

> *"The importance of using assessment information for planning next steps in learning cannot be underestimated. Monitoring and diagnosis, planned as part of teaching and not viewed as something separate, play an important part in learning design and its implementation."*[5]

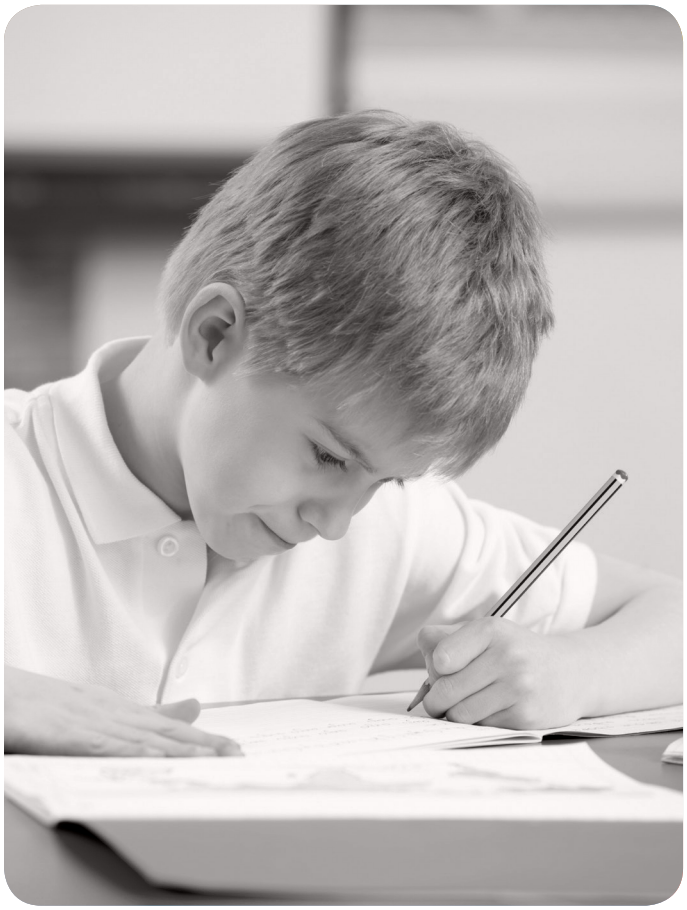
There is a key difference between teachers who use assessment to promote change versus using assessment to measure change.[27]

> *"This is at the heart of what it means to teach for learning and changes the way that we think about both the process and purpose of making judgments within teaching … The process of learning and not its outcomes alone is what is being developed."*[5]

4 Managing the process of teaching for learning

Teachers are advised to teach and practise the strategies required for effective learning more explicitly, e.g. questioning, giving and receiving feedback, talking about learning, and developing a sense of strategies needed for learning and being able to name them. Pupils are said to develop a deeper understanding of how to learn through a range of activities either individually or in groups.

> "[T]*he intelligent school knows how to ... bring* [the] *two dimensions of teaching for learning in a reciprocal relationship with each other. There are two main features of the 'here and now' teaching for learning process that contribute to its success. The first is an approach that emphasises reflection and interaction about the learning taking place as well as instruction. The second is respect for the learners and their learning processes in a way which enables everyone in the classroom to be involved.*"[5]



Inspiring Teachers

Use of the words 'inspiring' and 'inspirational' have become more common in recent UK education policy. A study carried out by researchers at the University of Oxford and commissioned by CfBT Education Trust sought to try and understand what 'inspiring teaching' means and some of the characteristics of 'inspiring teachers'. It also sought to establish whether teachers nominated as 'inspiring' showed more effective practice in terms of what research has identified. A sample of 17 primary and secondary teachers nominated by their headteacher within the CfBT family of schools was studied in order to investigate:

- What do inspiring teachers say about their practice?
- What do inspiring teachers do in their classrooms?
- What are their students' views and experiences?

Inspiring teaching can be seen to encompass the following dimensions:[28]

- positive student outcomes (e.g. motivation, self-efficacy, aspiration, achievement)
- timeframe (both long- and short-term effects)
- particular teacher behaviours and practices
- teacher characteristics (e.g. personality traits, knowledge and motivation) and relationships (heavily emphasised in the non-empirical literature).

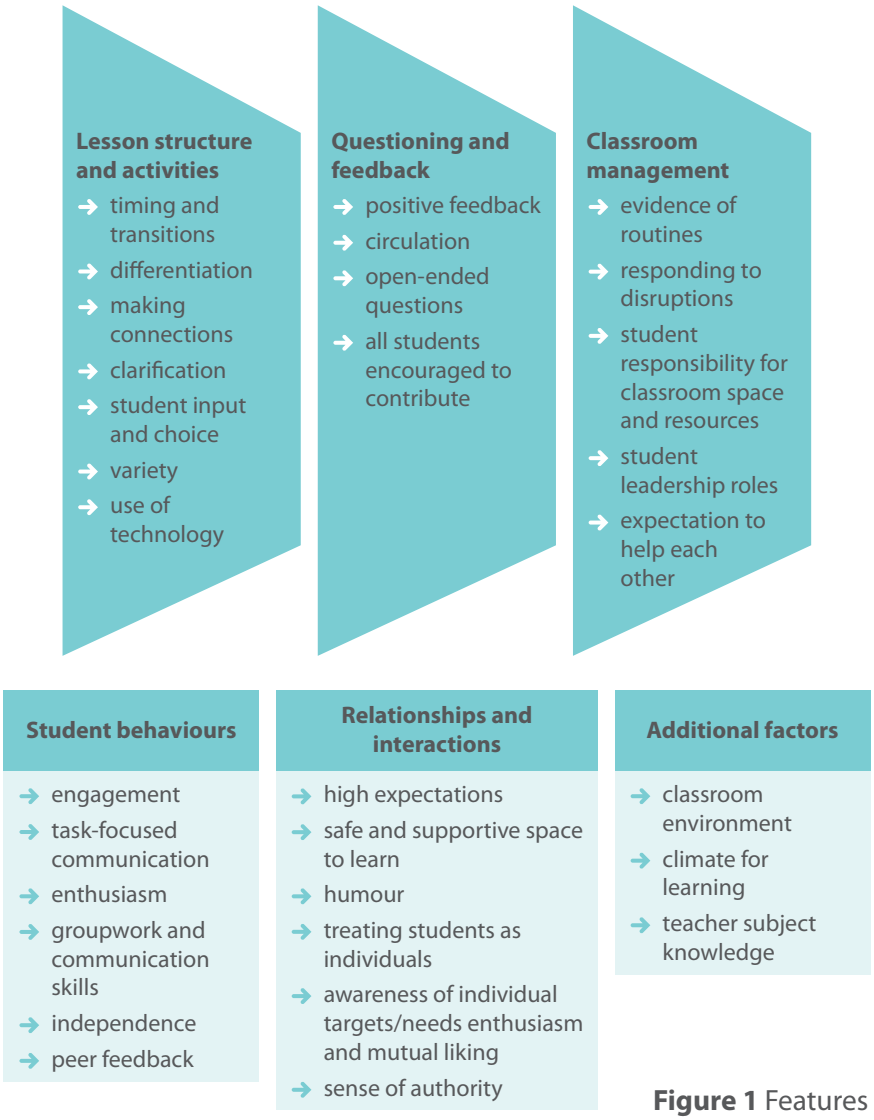


Figure 1 Features of inspiring practice[28]

Teachers in the study tended to separate 'inspiring teaching' from 'outstanding teaching' but linked their practice with features of 'effective teaching'. Some of the most important characteristics identified by participants as 'inspiring' include:

- having and transmitting enthusiasm
- cultivating a positive relationship with pupils
- being flexible and adapting their practice
- making learning purposeful and relevant for pupils
- promoting a safe and stimulating classroom climate
- establishing clear and positive classroom management
- being reflective about their own practice and developing collaboratively
- bringing innovation to the classroom.

Two systematic observational instruments were used in the present study, namely the International System of Teacher Observation and Feedback (ISTOF)[29] and the Lesson Observation Form for Evaluating the Quality of Teaching (QoT).[30] In addition, detailed qualitative field notes were made. The main purpose in using these observation instruments was to investigate whether the participating teachers identified as 'inspiring' also showed behaviours typically associated with teacher effectiveness and to explore the extent of variations amongst the sample in their observed classroom practice. Drawing together the three sets of research evidence Sammons et al (2014) found that this purposive sample of exemplary practitioners showed strongly the characteristics of more effective teaching (see Figure 2).

In terms of inspiring practice at the core they highlight:

- positive relationships
- good classroom/behaviour management
- positive and supportive climate
- formative feedback
- high quality learning experiences
- enjoyment.

Findings include rich descriptions and examples to inform professional development. They add to and extend literature on effective and inspiring classroom practice. The reader can find many examples and vignettes of inspiring primary teachers' practices in the full research report.

Figure 2 Triangulation, integration and synthesis of characteristics of inspiring teaching[28]

Development and enhancement of skills

Peer observation

> *A teacher who is continuing to develop is someone who enjoys the challenge of being creative in practice and thoughtful about theory … deepening subject knowledge, using models offered by others as a means of discriminating your own preferred style, discussing educational questions with colleagues, gaining a critical perspective on the school's ethos and 'common sense', being determined to ask and to answer impartially how far what is imposed by others (from the head teacher to the Secretary of State for Education ….) are in the best interests of children.*[31]

Peer-to-peer observation can be viewed as a type of professional development for teachers which is *embedded* and *localised* in particular schools, contexts and teaching, as opposed to professional development opportunities where teachers are 'extracted' from the classroom[32] and placed with experts often unfamiliar with individual school settings and personalised needs of teachers and pupils.[33]

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Teacher professional development

A recent report commissioned by Oxford University Press that synthesised data from 35 evidence-based studies on teacher professional development (that took place in the last 10 years) showed that while effective teaching makes a difference to learning, there are certain kinds of professional development that influence the development of teachers' skills and students' learning experiences. Seven characteristics of professional development that made a difference to teachers' practice were identified as:

1. concrete and classroom-based
2. using external expertise
3. incorporating teacher participation in the choice of areas to develop and activities in which to take part
4. enabling collaborative working with peers
5. involving opportunities for mentoring and coaching
6. continuing and being sustained over time
7. being reinforced and supported by effective leadership.[34]

Ideas around teacher participation, collaborative working and opportunities for mentoring and coaching chime with the some of the potentially positive returns offered by peer observation. Indeed, these features correspond quite closely to four elements associated with teacher development and school improvement.

1. Collaboration built on sharing, communication, some degree of 'risk-taking', the exploration of more diverse teaching methods and an improved sense of efficacy among teachers.
2. Reflection and the analysis of practice within a 'feedback loop' or process of critical engagement.
3. Action enquiry led by teachers that draws data using different techniques and from various research or philosophical positions.
4. Classroom observation that links the practice of reflection and collaborative working.

A study by Hamilton (2012), conducted in schools in the US, found that peer-to-peer observations offered many teachers choice, on-site learning opportunities and a sense of increased collegial respect. However, peer-observation practices, in order to be truly meaningful and consequential to teachers' professional development, should go beyond the customary presence of colleagues in a classroom.[32] Karagiorgi (2012) in her study of classroom peer observation in a primary school in Cyprus indicated that a failure to implement a level of collegial reflection through construction and deconstruction of personal meanings rendered the practice of peer observation to be rather superficial and inconsequential.[35] Participants in the research suggested the need for peers to share and conduct more discussions on educational concerns, and the organisation of more visits to peers' classrooms, with a larger pool of teachers to be available. Ideas around professional learning communities and collaborative practice come to the fore here; indeed, the British Educational Research Association and RSA recognise the value of peer-to-peer observation frameworks when they are designed to "share and evaluate practice between colleagues and to promote professional reflection".[36]

Inspection evidence

A number of more generic teaching and teacher factors associated with positive outcomes for primary school pupils were identified by Ofsted in their early seminal publication *Primary Matters* (1994); these factors cover a range of aspects of effective teaching considered relevant by the inspection model of teaching quality[37] including:

- good subject knowledge
- good questioning skills
- an emphasis upon instruction
- a balance of grouping strategies
- clear objectives
- good time management
- effective planning
- good classroom organisation
- effective use of other adults in the classroom.[38]

Case Study

A school in Staffordshire was rated as 'inadequate' by Ofsted in 2014. The inspection report noted a number of weaknesses in the teaching at the school.

- Teachers and support staff did not always cater for the full range of abilities in the classroom; for example, those with average or higher abilities sometimes had to repeat work that had already been learned, with little evidence shown of extended learning.
- Reviews of pupil progress were seen as too infrequent, which appeared to account for achievement gaps between particular groups of pupils, for example those eligible for free school meals and pupils with special education needs.
- While marking was generally found to be consistent and helpful, some inconsistencies were noted in the form of repeated mistakes not being corrected, particularly in writing.
- Good teaching in the form of regular intervention to make sure that pupils had understood a particular concept was infrequent where: "pupils are not being guided through a step-by-step sequence of learning towards their learning targets".

The most effective teaching seen during the inspection was characterised by clear instruction, purposeful pace and productive learning, with teachers making it very clear what was expected of pupils by the end of each lesson. "In these lessons, pupils receive timely and consistent support if they do not understand or need assistance."[39]

It is worth being aware, however, that even though the *School Inspection Handbook* published by Ofsted (2015) offers grade descriptors outlining the quality of teaching, Ofsted advises that these criteria are used to judge the quality of teaching in the school *as a whole over time*, and *not individual lessons or individual teachers*.

> *"Direct observations in lessons will be supplemented by a range of other evidence to enable inspectors to evaluate the impact that teachers and support assistants have on pupils' progress. Inspectors will not grade the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in individual lessons or learning walks."* [40]

Ofsted grade descriptors for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding(1)

- Teachers demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. They use questioning highly effectively and demonstrate understanding of the ways pupils think about subject content. They identify pupils' common misconceptions and act to ensure they are corrected.
- Teachers plan lessons very effectively, making maximum use of lesson time and coordinating lesson resources well. They manage pupils' behaviour highly effectively with clear rules that are consistently enforced.
- Teachers provide adequate time for practice to embed the pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills securely. They introduce subject content progressively and constantly demand more of pupils. Teachers identify and support any pupil who is falling behind, and enable almost all to catch up.
- Teachers check pupils' understanding systematically and effectively in lessons, offering clearly directed and timely support.
- Teachers provide pupils with incisive feedback, in line with the school's assessment policy, about what pupils can do to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. The pupils use this feedback effectively.
- Teachers set challenging homework, in line with the school's policy and as appropriate for the age and stage of pupils, that consolidates learning, deepens understanding and prepares pupils very well for work to come.
- Teachers embed reading, writing and communication and, where appropriate, mathematics exceptionally well across the curriculum, equipping all pupils with the necessary skills to make progress. For younger children in particular, phonics teaching is highly effective in enabling them to tackle unfamiliar words.
- Teachers are determined that pupils achieve well. They encourage pupils to try hard, recognise their efforts and ensure that pupils take pride in all aspects of their work. Teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils' attitudes to learning.
- Pupils love the challenge of learning and are resilient to failure. They are curious, interested learners who seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. They thrive in lessons and also regularly take up opportunities to learn through extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils are eager to know how to improve their learning. They capitalise on opportunities to use feedback, written or oral, to improve.
- Parents are provided with clear and timely information on how well their child is progressing and how well their child is doing in relation to the standards expected. Parents are given guidance about how to support their child to improve.
- Teachers are quick to challenge stereotypes and the use of derogatory language in lessons and around the school. Resources and teaching strategies reflect and value the diversity of pupils' experiences and provide pupils with a comprehensive understanding of people and communities beyond their immediate experience. Pupils love the challenge of learning.[40]

A final word

> *"Teaching consists of dozens of favoured strategies that become embedded in deep structures, for there is no time to re-think every single move in a busy classroom. Many decisions are made by teachers in less than a second, so once these deep structures have been laid down they are not always amenable to change, even if a school has a well-developed professional development programme. Reflecting on practice alone or with colleagues does enable teachers to think about what they do away from the immediate pressures of rapid interaction and speedy change."*[41]

This guide has drawn together evidence from teacher effectiveness research and highlighted some of the most important features linked to effective classroom practice. It has provided various examples, particularly from research on primary schools in England. It provides pointers for teacher reflection, continuing professional development and highlights the way observation and feedback can be used to promote collaborative learning, especially the potential value of peer observation. It does not suggest we should seek to promote one 'style' of teaching above another. Indeed, the research shows that it is particular features and strategies that are relevant. Crude classifications such as 'traditional' or 'progressive' do not match teachers' classroom practice well and are not very helpful for improving the quality of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, the research does provide much useful information and evidence that can help schools enhance the quality of teaching in different contexts and support reflective and collaborative practice. Some useful resources are included in the next section.

Further support

Observation tools

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Other sources of information and training

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Visit OUP's website for useful, free resources on related topics, such as closing the gap, the National Curriculum 2014, continuing professional development, assessment and Ofsted inspections.

Endnotes

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