

How can teachers help pupils learn?

The way pupils learn has been the focus of controversy throughout this century. Theorists and psychologists have tried to identify concepts, processes and principles that lead to effective learning. According to Kyriacou (1995:33), 'the essence of effective teaching lies in the ability of the teacher to set up a learning experience which brings about the desired educational outcomes'. Similarly, Black and Wiliam (1998:1) posit that

Learning is driven by what teachers and pupils do in the classroom. Teachers have to manage complicated and demanding situations, channeling the personal, emotional and social pressures amongst a group of 30 or so youngsters in order to help them now, and become better learners in the future. Standards can only be raised if teachers can tackle this task more effectively [...].

There are several factors that have been identified to affect the way pupils learn; in order to facilitate effective learning, teachers have to take these into consideration when teaching. The pertinent literature discussed the influenced of: neuroscience, learning theories, lesson planning, teacher's subject knowledge and understanding; teacher-pupil relationship, learning environment management, and educational initiatives, etc. These aspects of effective learning have been found to either have a direct or indirect effect.

One clearly can interpret from the above statements that the teacher's role in pupils' learning is of paramount importance. Drawing on the above statements, this essay aims to discuss some of the factors that affect pupils' learning, these being: teacher – pupil relationship, classroom climate, management of the classroom environment and learning styles. To complement the study's aim, experiential evidence from the author's school placement will be also introduced.

Comment: Good introduction though it would have been useful to have indicated why you chose these areas.

The relationship between teachers and pupils is fundamental to effective learning. At the same time, building a good teacher-pupil relationship it is difficult to achieve. As Marland

posits, '[...] it is the classroom interchange of teacher and taught that a pupil's success or failure is gained' (2002:1). Cowley (2008:119) supports this argument and suggests that '[b]eing a teacher is all about creating, developing and sustaining relationships' with pupils. Furthermore, the guidance notes that accompany Q1 and Q2 of the QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) underpin this principle. In fact, it is stated that

Children and young people are more likely to thrive if they feel that they are valued and are confident that their teachers and their peers will support them.
(TDA, 2002:7)

This also links with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs; which are often portrayed in pyramid. The largest and most fundamental level of needs (basic needs) is at the bottom and the highest order of needs at the top. According to Maslow (1943), the four basic layers of the pyramid contain the so called 'deficiency needs' or 'd-needs'; these being esteem, friendship and love, security and physical needs. Such needs should be met before the individual becomes motivated and starts feeling tense and anxious. Apart from the basic needs, Maslow (1970) identifies also cognitive needs; these connect with the urge to satisfy curiosity, to find out, to explain, and to understand. Maslow perceives these as being interrelated with the basic needs. A teacher who is aiming to help each pupil to learn and achieve the maximum, should make sure first that his or her lower needs are being satisfied. Unavoidably, teachers cannot control all the situations, such as a child's safety needs at home, but in a classroom, though, the educator has a great deal of influence over the pupils' needs. As the professional Standards for QTS put it, teachers '[...] treat pupils consistently, with respect and consideration, and are concerned with their developments as learners' (TDA, 2002:9).

Comment: It is usual in academic writing to only use the surname of sources

How can teachers help pupils learn?

In order to create good relationships it is essential to establish a constant regime. Pupils need to know where they stand with the teacher, the teachers' rules, what they are allowed to do and what they are not. For example, allowing to talk after a silent session one day but to be reprimanded for a similar occurrence on a different day creates confusion. Pupils should not get in trouble for something they did again and got away with it (Marland, 2002). During my placement in school X, I have observed a teacher giving a warning to a pupil for something he did and the pupil started complaining that pupil Z did the same thing and got away with it. Therefore, it is really important to stick to the rules day in and day out. What is said by the teacher it has to suit the individuals he or she teaches. Not all the pupils respond the same way; as a solution the best thing a teacher can do is to learn the pupils' names. This will help build good rapport and it will signify the pupil as an individual. Cowley (2008:51) also posits that 'learning their names is paramount for good behaviour management'. By learning their names, the teacher gains their respect and where there is a good relationship between pupil and teacher, 'there is less likelihood of difficulties arising' (Cohen et al., 2010:350). Kyriacou (1995) cites that the development of good relationship is based on three qualities in the teacher's interaction with pupils:

[...] the teacher shows quite clearly that he or she cares for each pupil's progress; that the teacher has respect for pupils as learners; and that the teacher has respect for pupils as individuals'.
(Kyriacou, 1995:140)

The learning of names can be an arduous task, especially when the teacher faces classes with 30 pupils. Seating plans, name cards or name badges can help a teacher to remember pupils' names. As Marland (2002) notes,

It helps if you know each of your pupils by his or her correct, used name as early as possible - and that means getting the abbreviations right too.
(Marland, 2002:16)

Comment: Constant or consistent?

Comment: And more than this it loses trust and respect and will then damage the relationship.

Deleted: in

Deleted: same occasion

Comment: Though this is a typical distraction ploy used by children in classrooms - Beadle (2010) has things to say about this.

Comment: And also the ability to identify and communicate - it is hard to address someone as "hey you"

During my placement in school X, I was struggling to remember pupils' names. At first, I used to have the seating chart at hand when teaching. However, referring to the seating chart was proved difficult when teaching; I found easier to hand out name badges and ask the pupils to write their names on them. This has made teaching smoother and in a matter of few weeks I managed to learn their names. The pupils reacted favorably the whole process. Another way of remembering pupils' names is by getting them involved in name learning games (Marland, 2002). According to Marland (2002), there are also other ways of getting to know the pupils: in the playground, corridors or during lunch-hall duties; teachers should seize every opportunity to talk to pupils on a one-to-one basis and discover their interest as this leads to effective relationship building. This links with the Q4 of the QTS that states: 'teachers should communicate with the pupils within and beyond the classroom as this builds rapport and secure learning and well-being' (TDA, 2009a:14)

Another way of helping to create and sustain good teacher-pupil relationships is by taking part or lead activities outside the classroom. Cowley (2008:158) states that by taking part in extra-curricular activities, give the teachers the opportunity of 'getting to know the students in a more relaxed environment'. Hence, the pupils will get to see a different side of the teacher too and this can be beneficial for both parties. Similarly, Kyriacou (1995) outlines that opportunities for social conversation at the beginning or at the end of a lesson, during breaks, during form periods and most importantly through extra-curricular activities, give the teacher the chance to get to know pupils in a different context. Remarks such as '[did] anyone go to the match on Saturday?', 'I enjoyed your performance in the school concert', 'Saw you in town last night' (Kyriacou, 1995:141) are all indicators of good rapport. Nevertheless, according to Kyriacou (1995) pupils may take advantage of this kind of interaction and start asking embarrassing questions. However, if

the teacher's authority is well established, then such exchanges 'serve to enhance and develop mutual respect and rapport rather than to undermine such authority' (Kyriacou, 1995:141).

According to Kyriacou (1995:130) a sound relationship between teacher and pupil should be based on two qualities: (a) the 'pupil's acceptance of the teacher's authority'; this involves having control over the management of learning activities and of pupils' behavior, and (b) the 'mutual respect and rapport between the teacher and the pupils' (Kyriacou, 1995:130). This reflects the idea of teacher and pupil recognizing each other as individuals, holding each other in esteem. At the same time Kyriacou (1992) argues that the classroom climate, as created by the teacher, can have a significant impact on pupils' motivation towards learning. Therefore, the skills involved in establishing a positive classroom climate are crucial. The classroom that facilitates pupils' learning is the one described as being 'purposeful, task-oriented, relaxed, warm, supportive and has a sense of order' (Kyriacou, 1992:65). Such a climate endorses pupils' learning, by establishing and maintaining positive attitudes and motivation by pupils towards the lesson. Empirical evidence has shown the importance of the first lessons with a new class in establishing a positive classroom climate. Wragg and Wood (1984), for example, point out that by being confident, stimulating, and mobile is crucial. They also argue that effective use of eye contact and humor, clear classroom rules and established presence and authority can help teachers to accomplish a working climate for the year ahead (Wragg and Wood, 1984).

Comment: This is a very solid section you have used the literature well (though I would be a little nervous of the Cowley) and have made a cogent argument for the importance of relationships – it would have been nice to link this to learning theories which would have given it a little more depth.

Also, research indicates the importance of teaching environment in learning excellence. Theorists (Brophy & Good, 1986; Wang et al., 1997) link a warm, positive classroom climate with achievement and high self-esteem. A classroom appearance and layout

contributes in building an effective teaching environment. Marland (2002) argues that the physical environment of a room can be seen as an ally in influencing pupils' behavior and teaching patterns. A classroom with a well-organized space has individualistic character, and it has been proved that pupils behave better when being in it. This links with the QTS Professional Standards; it is posited that : 'organizing and managing the physical teaching space, tools, materials, texts and other resources safely and effectively [...]' (TTA 2002:13).

Among the first things pupils notice when entering a classroom is its layout and how desks and chair are arranged. Then, what strikes a pupil is the cleanliness of the room; this is really important as it affects the pupil's attitude and behaviour. As Marland (2002) states, classrooms should be thoroughly cleaned by the pupils before being dismissed. In this way, the effect of displays will strike them during lessons and throughout the day; especially if they spend the entire day in the same classroom environment. Therefore teachers should make good use of the classroom space, displays, and should make sure that these are clean and tidy.

Comment: Be careful about such assertions – it may be the easiest thing to notice but how much pupils pay attention to this is harder to ascertain. Unless you have some data you need to be careful about making these comments.

Marland (2002) suggests that teachers should devise and maintain lively, boards over time. More importantly, the boards can be an active part of the teaching in numerous ways. Kyriacou (1995) agrees that the wall displays are important. For example, in a foreign language classroom, posters can be used to introduce unknown cultures, customs and lifestyle in the classroom. Also, a public display in the classroom may in fact, contribute to a positive atmosphere; seeing their work displayed, pupils feel proud of their work and this consequently builds higher self-esteem (Kyriacou, 1995). As experienced, this approach works effectively: when I was teaching French a year 7 class, I asked them

Comment: Displays?

to create posters for decorating the classroom. This idea was perceived with great enthusiasm. They even started asking questions such as where exactly I was going to put them, how many I was going to use and what were the criteria of selection.

The teacher's desk plays a vital role in pupils' learning too. Marland (2002) suggests that a front side positioned desk is probably the best. In this position, all the pupils are able to see the teacher when seated, and the desk when entering the classroom. This is indeed the case at the school I am placed. The desks in all the classrooms in the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) department are positioned at the front side.

Where pupils sit in the classroom is important as well; the teacher must make these arrangements well in advance, and stick to the same seating plan for a considerable amount of time. As Marland (2002) notes, a classroom's:

[...] arrangement, displays, atmosphere and practical details will contribute to the class management, the learning, the relationships, and the pleasure of working together collaboratively.
(Marland, 2002:51)

This links with the QTS Professional Standard (3.3.8, TTA, 2002:13): 'Classrooms are busy and active places where both pupils and teachers need to use a range of resources safely and effectively'.

In order to use effective teaching strategies, teachers should establish specific classroom routines. Henceforth, this essay will consider how these routines can assist teaching and enhance learning. Classroom routines are really important as they assist class management, allow the growth of good relationships and permit teaching to flourish (Marland, 2002). Cowey (2008) agrees and suggests that pupils need clear boundaries. These should be implemented by the teacher the first time he or she is firstly introduced

to the class. In this way, pupils have a clear understanding of what is allowed and not in a classroom during lessons. Flint and Gordon (1993) believe that, well established routines and good planning, may as well lead to good pupils' behaviour. However, this is not always the case. Nevertheless, establishing routines such as taking the register at the beginning of each lesson give the opportunity to the teacher to settle down the classroom. According to Marland (2002), the teacher should only take the register at the beginning of the lesson if he or she does not know the pupils' names well enough for a visual check. Otherwise, he or she should not 'call the register aloud' (Marland, 2002:56). It is important though for pupils to know that in one or another way the teacher checks regularly and carefully their attendance. This was evident in school X, as it was a policy to take the register at the beginning of each lesson. However, I have observed that some teachers either call the register out loud, or take the register while pupils are working on the starter activity.

Nevertheless, taking the register can be a great opportunity to practice what has been taught in the previous lesson(s). According to Geake's (2009) hebbian model for learning, core repetition is quite important and necessary, in achieving effective and reliable learning. Drawing from the Hebbian model, repetition may as well be implemented in MFL lessons. I have observed the application of this model in school X. Teachers when taking the register were asking pupils to name some of the taught topics of the previous lesson (e.g., colours, adjectives etc.). The following examples demonstrate the application of this model:

Teacher X: Bonjour! Aujourd'hui non 'present' ou 'presente'. Par exemple, Aidan 'rouge', Amelia 'noir', Evie 'bleu' d'accord ?

Teacher Z: Bonjour! Aujourd'hui non 'oui', 'present' ou 'presente' Par exemple, Charlie 'bavard', Maisie 'amusante', Lydia 'intéressante'. D'accord ?

Comment: Hebbian

Deleted: hebbian

Comment: Tres amusant!

How can teachers help pupils learn?

Other routines that can be followed for sustaining a good teacher-pupil relationship, and for promoting effective learning are: receiving classroom at the door at the beginning of the lesson; have always a task at hand for the first pupils entering the classroom; starting gradually the lesson before all pupils arrive (Marland, 2002). These routines have been witnessed in School X. In particular, such routines work effectively for one teacher who teaches French in a year 7 class. I identified that these routines have established a mutual respect among the pupils and towards the teacher. Learning from best practices, I have adopted some or all of these routines in my classes.

Interrelated with teacher-pupil relationship is classroom management. Brophy (1988:2) defines classroom management as ‘the actions taken to create and maintain a learning environment conducive to attainment of the goals of instruction - arranging the physical environment of the classroom, establishing rules and procedures, maintaining attention to lessons and engagement in academic activities’.

Comment: This is a good interlinking but also differentiation of the classroom management and the behaviour management which are different.

Cowley (2008) points out that, one of the most important characteristics of a good teacher is his or her ability to manage pupils’ behaviour. According to Taylor (2009), classroom management plays a crucial role in pupils’ achievements. A classroom’s physical layout and pupils sitting arrangement may also be seen as an effective classroom management device (Marland, 2002). Wheldall and Merrett (1989) find a strong correlation between sitting arrangement and classroom behavior. Empirical evidence has shown that when pupils are sitting in rows tend to work on task better than pupils sitting either in pairs or in fours. In most of the classes in the MFL department that I am placed, desks are positioned in rows.

Clearly, order is needed in any classroom. According to Kyriacou (1992), the creation of necessary order has to do more with the skills involved in effective teaching than with how a teacher deals with pupil misbehavior itself. One of the most difficult aspects in pupil's behavior management is creating consistency across different classes and among different teachers. Even though schools tend to have guidelines for behavior management issues, these are interpreted and implemented differently by the teachers. As I have experienced in School X, one teacher ignored a pupil that walked in late, while another shouted out to the pupil asking why he was late. A third teacher asked the pupil to stay behind at the end of the lesson to discuss the reason for being late. Apparently, this creates confusion as to what the pupils should do in similar cases like this. Such confusions could be avoided by establishing the norms at the beginning of the year (Kyriacou, 1995). In fact, during the first few weeks of teaching, a teacher's behaviour should be firm and serious in order to set guidelines and acceptable boundaries (Docking, 1980; Waterhouse, 1983).

Behaviour issues in the classroom can interfere with learning, and the overall climate in the classroom (Cowley 2008). The most identified types of misbehavior are: excessive talking or talking out of turn; being noisy; not paying attention to what the teacher is saying; getting out of their seats without permission; arriving late for lessons; and being disrespectful to pupils and teachers (DES, 1989a). Additionally, Cowley (2008) points that pupils usually misbehave during lessons, either because they are bored or they do not understand. This has been observed in a number of cases in School X. No matter how engaging the lesson was, some pupils not all were misbehaving. However, 'a well – managed lesson coupled with a relationship based on mutual respect and rapport, will do much to minimize pupil misbehaviour', according to Kyriacou (1992:82).

How can teachers help pupils learn?

At the same time the notion of reinforcement introduced by Skinner (1968) has played a tremendous role in the development of theories on learning (changes in behaviour). Skinner's approach focuses on the consequences for certain misbehaviour. He argues that behaviours (good or bad) that are followed by reinforcement are likely to occur again in a similar situation in the future. If reinforcement is absent, then this behaviour is less likely to occur; this is widely known as the operant conditioning (Skinner, 1968). Skinner's research focus on the two types of reinforcements that tend to increase the likelihood of positive or negative behaviour occurring: the positive reinforcement (rewards such as sweets or praises) and the negative reinforcement (taking back or not following through such as detention). Simultaneously, Skinner (1968) identifies three types of consequences that minimize the likelihood of any misbehavior; these are: extinction (absence of reinforcement); punishment (reprimands, detention); and response cost (removal of expected rewards such as points). As Marland (2002) outlines, it is really important to have a reward system as this motivates pupils. Applying such schemes a teacher 'can make the learning more effective and can create a satisfying social life' (Marland, 2002:15). According to Kyriacou (1995), the behaviour used by teacher to reinforce pupil behaviour (e.g., praise, house points, and avoidance of sanction) can be explicitly linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Drawing on the above, it is in teacher's hands to indicate desirable behaviours and reinforce their occurrence in the classroom. Teachers that have managed to do so are likely to motivate students and enhance the learning experience. According to Marland (2002:5) 'the highest aspirations of teaching rest on good management'. If the teacher manages to establish good order, then he or she can be more subtle and more friendly.

Comment: Good use of behaviourism to support your ideas on classroom behaviour management.

How can teachers help pupils learn?

In order to sustain the teacher-pupil relationship, teachers must be aware of how pupils learn and how different learning styles may in fact help them learn. It is widely acknowledged that people are different; they react differently to similar circumstances, they have different likes and dislikes, they behave differently, and they see and process experience differently. As Ginnis posits (2002:33),

Each person's brain is as individual as their fingerprints, the result of a fantastic process of neural interconnection running [...] in the earliest phase of life. During this period the basic architecture of the brain is established, and [...] preferred learning styles are determined.

According to Dunn et al., (1989:55),

Learning style is the way in which each learner begins to concentrate on process and retain new and difficult information. It can be seen as a biologically and developmentally imposed set of personal characteristics that make the same teaching method effective for some student and ineffective for others. Every person has a learning style; it is as individual as a signature.

Grinder (1991) on one hand, argues that a person's style of preference is the one learned from infancy; thus, their brain prioritises that style for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, theorists such as Gregorc (2001) believe that the mind is separate from the brain and differences in learning styles are mainly due to mind variations and not brain structure physical differences.

Since the 1970s, several attempts have been made to categorize learning differences. Theorists have come to the conclusion that a person's leaning style is a combination of features from five strands or stimuli, these being: environmental (i.e., sound, light, temperature); emotional (i.e., motivation, persistence, structure); sociological (i.e., self, pair, peers, team); physical (i.e., intake, time, mobility); and psychological (i.e., global/analytic, impulsive/reflective) (Ginnis, 2002:35).

A teacher needs to be able to cater for different learning styles in the classroom in order to help pupils learn. Evidently, there are various learning styles. Hastings (2005) outlines

that the most widely known and used learning style is VAK (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). Learning styles such as the VAK model should be taken into account when teaching lessons are planned since children follow different learning patterns (Hastings, 2005). The VAK learning style divides children into three categories: those who learn by looking; those who learn by listening; and those who learn best through physical activity (Hastings, 2005). Nevertheless, as Ginnis (2002) puts it, if pupils, in one hand, are allowed to work in their preferred learning style they will remain narrow; on the other hand, if they are directed to work in a non preferred way, they will underachieve and may become alienated. Therefore, as he outlines, teachers should offer structured choices to pupils in order to achieve multiple learning outcomes. Firstly, they should ask them individually to choose between a visual, an auditory and a kinesthetic way; secondly, they should make sure that in a series of lessons all three styles have been accommodated; and thirdly they can negotiate with pupils so that their preferences are built into lesson plans.

Comment: Good to note the source of the VAK prominence but you needed to be more critical of it (e.g. Sharp)

It is possible to embody the VAK model in the MFL field. To help the visual learners, there is the interactive white board and the use of colours and drawings may be used to introduce various thematic topics. To aid auditory learners, the use of songs and rhymes, core repetition, and class discussion may be applied. For kinesthetic learners, the use of role-plays, games and objects can be adopted in their learning process.

According to Gardner's (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences all humans have eight types of intelligence but to varying degrees; these being: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic. This theoretical paradigm suggests that an individual's learning style should be identified in order to enhance their learning (Gardner, 1983). Therefore teachers should consider these

styles and find ways to implement these in their lessons. Evidence of the VAK model has been observed at my school placement; further, I have adopted this practice into my teaching.

In addition to catering for different learning styles, other ways of enhancing pupils' learning is through questioning and feedback (Kyriacou, 1992). Kyriacou (1995:50) cites that 'quick corrective feedback is a great facilitator of learning, both because its effects on correcting misunderstanding and because of its reinforcement and motivational value'. In general, constructive and supportive feedback is considered to be an important characteristic of effective teaching. Teachers at school X have been observed to give verbal and written feedback to pupils during classes. This is something I have integrated to some extent in my teaching. I feedback pupils on what they did well, what they need to improve, what they should not repeat in the future.

Another way teachers can help pupils learn is through questioning, as this can facilitate interaction. With good questioning, teachers can check pupils' understanding and can assist in verbalizing their thinking (Bloom, 1956). The classical view of learning, points that higher level of question aide learning through the gradual process of 'scaffolding'. This term has been firstly introduced by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978). It is believed that learning take places in what he called the 'Zone of Proximal Development' and that pupils learn through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Beyond the area of Proximal Development, pupils can learn with the help of others (e.g., pupils, teachers, parents) who provide different 'scaffolds' in their learning. When teachers pose higher level questions, they challenge pupils by making them think. Therefore, pupils can progress and achieve any learning outcome.

In applying the method of questioning, teachers can use Bloom's taxonomy (1956) for guidance. Bloom created a system where he classified the educational objectives. He listed six basic steps within the cognitive domain: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. Each step refers to different level of questioning that can eventually lead to multiple learning outcomes. Questioning is an essential tool and really effective when use correctly. In my personal experience I identified that questioning, can assist in finding out which parts of the lesson pupils' did not understand. Also, I have identified questioning as a useful tool to check pupils' knowledge and progress. There are several ways this can be used. Some simple techniques that I have tried to include are: allow time to pupils to think the question before giving the answer (so called wait time); pre-planned the questions which are leveled and reflect the objectives set at the beginning of the each lesson; no hand rules (current's school policy); mini-white boards to consolidate the knowledge of new vocabulary; and traffic lights. If these amongst others are used correctly then teachers can help pupils first understand and then learn.

Comment: Bloom was the head of a committee

The ways teachers can help pupils learn have been analysed throughout this essay. Findings, from the extent literature identify numerous ways of how effective learning can be facilitated. However, amidst these equally important learning ways, I personally believe that one outranks all others. Building and sustaining a positive teacher – pupil relationship and rapport it is of outmost importance. This relationship consists the foundation of the whole process of how pupils can learn. When teachers manage to develop a sound relationship with their pupils, are in position to create the desirable classroom climate of mutual respect and understanding; and can easily handle any type of classroom behaviours (positive or negative). In conclusion, as an educator I will strive to

How can teachers help pupils learn?

create a suitable Learning environment and apply effective tactics at my TP1 and in any future teaching positions.

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