

TEACH LIKE A CHAMPION VS AN ENQUIRY APPROACH – IS THERE A MIDDLE GROUND?

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We were appointed as Co-Heads at Thomas’s Putney Vale, in London, in Sept 2022, after a year of working together as Director of Curriculum Innovation and Director of Teaching and Learning at Thomas’s Battersea. We are developing an enquiry curriculum where students are not left to their own devices to discover independently as some might believe in an enquiry model. Instead, teachers guide students through structured enquiries using recommendations from Doug Lemov’s ‘Teach like a Champion’ (Lemov, 2010; Lemov, 2015; Lemov, 2021).

It is our view that EduTwitter deploys a false dichotomy when presenting both traditional and progressive approaches to teaching. We believe this is damaging not only to the teaching profession but also to the students in our classrooms. This article will outline the debates we discussed at the Rethinking Education Conference surrounding these polarised approaches.

OUR BACKGROUND: THERESE ANDREWS

Our experiences in teaching have been very different. My background is mainly in the international sector. After entering teaching through a PGCE route and teaching for two years in the state sector, I moved to Boston to teach in an international school with the mindset that high levels of teacher control, strong framing of behaviour and using exam specifications to guide teaching were in the best interests of the students. Shortly after arriving in the US, my mind was opened to the idea that perhaps GCSEs and A Levels were not the silver bullets that I had grown up to believe, and students were able to be trusted without always requiring high levels of teacher control.

There were students from all over the world entering my classroom with little prior experience of Geography in the English National Curriculum, and often with no GCSEs at all. This did nothing to prevent them from learning the intended outcomes and from achieving top grades in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. This planted the seed that perhaps I had grown up with a false idea of what good learning looks like, as well as questioning the need for GCSEs, if indeed one can progress to post-16 courses and university without any. Furthermore, when the goal was learning rather than teaching to the test, so many creative and interesting opportunities came along. There was more time for discovery learning and student agency than I had been used to.

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These included developing medium-term plans which encouraged enquiry learning (without me even realising at this point in time), which contained overarching questions which had many complex possible answers. Field trips were frequent, cross-curricular links were made regularly, there was a strong student voice, links to the real world were made, visiting speakers were invited in, and students were able to make choices about how they presented their assessments.

It was only when I moved to Shanghai and subsequently back to the UK that I realised that not all schools or educators had made the leap in thinking that I had. I was gobsmacked that so much was the same after 11 years away. When I started working with Emma at Thomas's, there was much to discuss when developing our approaches to ensure that we were forward-thinking within a traditional national system.

OUR BACKGROUND: EMMA OLIVER

I entered teaching through Teach First, and my background is predominantly in the state or maintained sector. After an intensive summer school, I gained my PGCE with QTS whilst 'on-the-job' at a 'requires improvement' Academy in Essex. My first two years of teaching were a baptism of fire. I was 21, fresh out of university, working in a school where students from difficult and poor socio-economic backgrounds were not fully engaged in their education. Behaviour was challenging, students' attitudes were negative, and attendance was low.

I experienced an education that I believe was well-rounded; it was full of sport, music, drama, art as well as academics. I loved school. I visited numerous countries because of the fantastic school trips my teachers organised. I was exposed to different people, places, cultures and opportunities.

What I noticed, when working at my first school, in particular, was that the 'bells and whistles' were missing. A good school, within the context, meant good results for the students and for the school.

Unlike some of my peers, who left during the first year, I completed my two years of Teach First before moving on to a new school as a Head of Department in South East London. This was another co-educational Academy. Since then, I have worked at two other schools, both members of two big multi-academy trusts. Their aims were similar: to be high achieving and to promote excellence. High achieving and excellence mean strong results at GCSE and A Level.

As a History teacher, I have always used 'enquiry' for planning and delivering lessons – having a big question and sub-questions to guide the learning. However, my classroom manner, style, and pedagogy have also very much been underpinned by the work of Doug Lemov and 'Teach Like a Champion' (Lemov, 2010; Lemov,

2015; Lemov, 2021). This is because it was important to have effective methods and frameworks for consistency in the types of school I was working in.

You could argue that too much routine could result in teaching and learning seeming robotic – and this is where it is important that the content of the lessons, the curriculum itself, that you must deliver does not allow you to diminish the opportunities for students to think. Good teaching is about so much more than routines and practices but having fundamental principles or non-negotiables to underpin your classroom practice can foster better learning.

We are constantly challenged by restrictions, be it the national curriculum, the GCSE and A Level content, government policy and time. This can make it hard to move away from the models of teaching to a test. We know that human beings learn in a variety of different ways – we know that teaching isn't straightforward. It is hugely complex. We also know that we need to be preparing our students for a world that is very different to the world that was imagined in the first version of the national curriculum. What we do and how we do it may vary, and it is important we listen to and learn from different perspectives so that we can give our students the most useful and fulfilling learning experience for life.

WORKING TOGETHER: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT AND WHAT WE HAVE DONE

When we started working together, we realised that we had to develop school policies that were inspired by both traditional and progressive pedagogies. Additionally, the Curriculum Policy we developed was in response to the demands of the national education system, whilst also taking the opportunity to go beyond it; therefore culminating in fewer GCSE examinations than competitor independent schools to enable students to both take GCSE courses and learn for fun.

We are both engaged in our own professional learning and are constantly seeking how to improve what we are doing; we've noticed the often toxic debates online between educators with regard to traditional and progressive approaches to education. Much of the debate is unhelpful as there are undoubtedly benefits to be gained from both approaches. Guy Claxton has summarised the difference between these approaches in his book, 'The Future of Teaching': traditional approaches are perceived as those where the emphasis is on knowledge acquisition for regurgitation in high-stakes examinations, whereas progressive approaches have a broader emphasis where learner agency is high.

Quickly recognising that many parents view enquiry learning as not particularly rigorous, the Teaching and Learning Policy was developed to ensure that there was structure in place to support enquiry. This includes clear expectations for planning as well as a clear framework, with rubric to support teachers'

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classroom practice. The short-term lesson planning guidance has been designed to promote an enquiry approach, whilst maintaining high standards and expectations as well as teacher consistency across subjects.

Short-term: lesson plan

- This is the teacher’s detailed breakdown of individual lesson teaching and learning activities.
- It is one of the vehicles for assessment and should include comments/observations on individual students made during or after the lesson to inform future planning.
- It must be flexible in response to assessment and observation of the students.
- It is personal to the teacher in style and format (we have proforma teachers can use if they choose to).
- When planning a lesson, teachers should:
 - Begin with the lesson title/question.
 - Set out the lesson objectives/expectations (share these with the class).
 - Have clear success criteria (share these with class).
 - Include a Do Now (for a settled and focused start to the lesson).
 - Outline students’ learning (planned activities/tasks).
 - Consider differentiation
 - SEND support
 - Stretch and challenge
 - AfL
- Include opportunities for independent practice.
- Review and feedback.

INSPIRATION: WHO WE HAVE LEARNT FROM

Ron Ritchhart (Ritchart, 2015), Doug Lemov (Lemov, 2010; Lemov, 2015; Lemov, 2021), John Sweller (Sweller, 1988) and Barak Rosenshine (Rosenhine, 2010) are some of the professors and educators who have inspired the pedagogy that underpins our practice at Thomas’s Putney Vale.

We believe the principles that underpin high-quality teaching include: direct instruction, questioning, modelling, visible thinking routines, feedback, reflection and improvement. What this looks like in the classroom will be different, but the philosophy and expectations remain the same for all of our teachers.

You may have engaged or encountered much debate between the two seemingly contrasting schools of thought – that of enquiry learning and that of direct or explicit instruction.

Lemov's methods in 'Teach Like a Champion' (Lemov, 2010; Lemov, 2015; Lemov, 2021) provide excellent frameworks and models upon which a classroom teacher can develop and hone their practice. 'Teach Like a Champion' provides educators with a set of techniques, a shared vocabulary and a framework for practice that equips teachers to achieve dramatic results with their students. All of this is important for creating a school culture and a culture of learning – where teachers' personal and professional development is central to strategy.

Whilst these techniques could appear robotic or systematic, the way in which they are delivered by different teachers, through their own teacher personas and the nuances of their personal practice, can and should mean they are, instead, powerful tools when adopted at the right time within a lesson.

DEVELOPING TEACHER PRACTICE AND PEDAGOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

Furthermore, for our teachers to understand what 'good' looks like, we have provided a framework with a rubric which underpins learning conversations to encourage teacher reflection. The Great Teacher Toolkit Rubric (Coe et al., 2020) is designed as a framework to support and enable teacher development from the earliest stages through to the highest level of innovating practice. It is divided into four stages of development which set out the likely progression of a teacher over the course of their career:

1. Beginning
2. Expected
3. Mastering
4. Innovating

The rubric is divided into five strands and builds on 'The Great Teaching Toolkit' that has been developed by Coe et al (2020):

1. Understanding the content
2. Creating a supportive environment
3. Maximising opportunity to learn
4. Activating hard thinking
5. Professionalism

Each strand is divided into sub-themes and examples of what beginning through to innovating looks like are summarised in the rubric. It has enabled teachers to reflect more accurately on what they are doing well in their teaching practice as well as what more they can do to improve further.

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We have developed an enquiry approach at Thomas's Senior School because we know that enquiry learning can be rigorous and challenging and can prepare students for high-stakes examinations if properly planned. When it is effectively planned, enquiry learning gives students the opportunity to make connections to real life and to develop cross-curricular skills. Students develop independent thinking, problem-solving and curiosity through asking and answering questions. They are able to develop big ideas and concepts which cross many different subject disciplines and apply their ideas to their own lives.

However, if enquiry learning is not effectively planned then it can indeed be too open-ended and compromised in the face of the high-stakes external examinations that our students face. We would also argue that it requires teacher expertise for the formulation of interesting and appropriate enquiry questions to guide learning.

CONCLUSIONS

We recognise that, as yet, our students have not yet taken any high-stakes external examinations so we do not have standardised exam results to share to prove that this middle ground works.

However, we do have evidence of positive change this academic year. There were many more learning walks this term compared to the same term last year, teachers are more comfortable in trying new things in their classrooms, and staff are motivated and enthusiastic to share best practice and seek out new learning opportunities. The culture of the school is changing.

Our current Year 10 students are enjoying the way in which they are being taught in their lessons, but they are questioning the curriculum in terms of what counts for their GCSE exams. If it doesn't count towards a recognised qualification, they are less enthusiastic about undertaking the learning. We are trying to find a balance between learning for its own sake and learning for an examination – perhaps we haven't got this right yet, but we are responding to feedback from teachers, students and parents.

Our biggest takeaway is that both traditional and progressive approaches to teaching are worth exploring, and the polarisation of teaching pedagogy is unhelpful and unhealthy. We also know that one strategy that may work well for one teacher may not work for another. Professional discussion is vital in developing school policies and teacher practice, and this requires individuals to be growth-minded and collaborative about their professional learning.

Therese studied Geography at the University of Nottingham before completing her PGCE. After teaching in North London, she moved to the British International School of Boston where she became Head of Middle School, and subsequently, to

Shanghai where she was Deputy Head at the Nord Anglia International School. Therese was Head of the International Curriculum before joining Thomas's, based in London but working with schools globally. Therese holds a Master's degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is completing doctoral studies at the University of Bath.

Emma studied history at the University of Exeter before embarking on a career in teaching with Teach First. Emma holds a Master's degree in Education and Leadership from the UCL Institute of Education and a Master's degree in Early Modern History from Birkbeck College, University of London. She has been a Head of Department and was Deputy Director of Sixth Form at ARK Bolingbroke Academy. Emma joined Thomas's as Director of Teaching and Learning from Harris Academy, St John's Wood. Emma is currently completing her National Professional Qualification for Headship.

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