"What challenges may you face in putting into practice within Curriculum for Excellence, the principles and practice of effective pedagogy in your subject, about which you have been learning in class and in your wider reading?"

At the time of writing, there is broad consensus within higher education on what constitutes effective pedagogy in the teaching of English and literacy. Constructivism and dialogue is encouraged over outdated transmissionist or behaviourist approaches. Constructivism also emphasises student-centred pedagogy and aspires to the learner's ultimate autonomy, both aims that overlap with some of the desired Experiences and Outcomes of Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE), first unveiled in 2004. The teacher will ideally facilitate this process by engaging learners at their own level with appropriately differentiated lessons and activities, in a positive learning environment in which students are encouraged with praise but also possess intrinsic motivation. There is, however, scepticism and even resistance in certain pockets of the teaching profession to this less traditionally hierarchical, more 'horizontal' conception of the learner-teacher relationship.

Deuchar and Maitles (2009) identify the "conditioned expectation by many pupils of being directed, rather than becoming independent, learners" (p. 291) as a potential barrier to the successful implementation of CfE – but teachers and schools, too, can unfortunately be equally "constrained by engrained notions" (Priestley and Minty 2012, p.3). Priestley and Minty note "a sense that some schools had only started to implement CfE in 2010 when it became absolutely necessary for them to do so." (2012, p.2).

The current popularity of constructivist pedagogy has already been noted, as has its overlap with CfE. Unfortunately Priestley and Minty report a continued belief

among teachers, "particularly in secondary schools…[in] knowledge and learning as the transmission of content." (p.4) However, on balance the evidence suggests that crucial skills such as literacy are neither transmitted nor absorbed, but actively *constructed* by the learner. Literacy is essential for learning to take place; indeed, literacy is the form of learning on which all the others arguably depend. In the language of CfE,

> Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning, as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate increases opportunities for the individual in all aspects of life [and] lays the foundations for lifelong learning (undated, p. 147)

The English teacher therefore bears particular responsibility to ensure that learning occurs. Pike is thus correct to describe English teaching as "an applied art which has social obligations to fulfil." (2004, p.10) Thorough subject knowledge is an obvious bedrock of effective pedagogy in English; but this is a mere precondition, a starting point. Teachers must also know what progression in English looks like: in this respect, CfE provides helpful criteria for the various stages of pupil education, under its headings of Literacy Experiences and Outcomes. According to CfE,

> Teachers will see evidence of their progress through children and young people's growing skills in communicating their thinking and using language appropriately for different purposes and audiences. Much of the evidence will be gathered as part of day-to-day learning. (undated, p.127)

Good practice is therefore to undertake continuous formative assessment of written work, looking for evidence of "increasingly complex ideas, structures and vocabulary" (CfE, undated, p.37), with the aim in mind of improving students'

learning. Indeed**,** the effective English teacher's primary concern will be with **learning**, and their lessons will have a clear learning focus, i.e. the practitioner will know exactly what it is they want students to learn. (Equally, it is good practice to reflect after lessons on the ways in which learning objectives have or have not been met.)

Effective pedagogy in English concerns itself with helping learning to occur, using activities to engage pupils and support that learning. "Why" and "how" students learn is as important as "what", i.e. the subject content. Effective pedagogy in English is to make the relevance of texts transparent, which in turn will help pupils take ownership of their own learning. In other words, it is good practice for the English teacher to explain **why** the skills pupils are learning are useful and transferable to their future lives.

The learning which the effective teacher of English will facilitate will be truly pupil-centred, rather than teacher-led; it will also, more likely than not, be student-driven and collaborative in nature. "Group discussion is…vital because children gain confidence from listening to each other." (Pike 2004, p. 135)

Effective pedagogy requires that every pupil in the English classroom be engaged. As CfE rightly states, learning is an active process (undated, p. 124); the challenge for educators is to ensure that that students are learning actively the majority of the time, "developing not only literal understanding but also the higher order skills", including critical literacy as a facet of literacy generally (CfE, undated, p.21).

An English teacher may set relevant discussion in motion, for example, but insights can and should emerge naturally and organically from the interactions of students with the text. The effective English teacher will seek student input (for

example, on the selection of texts), and look for opportunities to co-construct learning. This requires sensitive responsiveness to students, in order that "the starting point is where the pupil is and not where the teacher is." (Pike 2000, p.20)
The effective teacher of English will therefore consider factors such as what students need to know in order to engage with a text; what resources are available to support learning; what they want their students to learn from the study of a text, and which pedagogic strategies would best support that learning.

While more able readers should be encouraged to select more challenging texts, it is the responsibility of the English teacher that **all** students encounter a wide range of texts, in a variety of different media. CfE's understanding of the term "text" is broad and inclusive (undated, p.23), and the effective teacher of English will reflect this in their classroom practice. CfE particularly promotes digital literacy, which allows for the inclusion of non-traditional media such as internet blogs, websites, text messages and the like. Indeed, CfE specifically mentions "the importance of providing opportunities for young people to make increasingly sophisticated choices" (undated, p.124) as one of the Experiences and Outcomes for literacy in English. Anecdotally, websites such as Facebook are reported to have been used successfully as a tool in the teaching of texts such as *Romeo and Juliet*. Indeed, an entire site (appropriately named 'Fakebook') exists for the purpose of creating profiles for fictional characters. The innovative English teacher can use such resources to make texts 'come alive' for students and reinforce the point that characters exist contextually and relationally, i.e. as part of a community, even a fictitious one.

Privileging principles over prescription, the teacher is configured in CfE as an agent of transformative change, and given unprecedented freedom. This would, ideally, translate into a willingness to personalise both pedagogy and curricular

activities. Sensitivity to the needs of individual learners is an essential component of effective pedagogy, and CfE provides the opportunity to put this more fully into practice. Under previous curricular arrangements, learners may have struggled to relate texts or tasks to their own lives and experiences, but CfE allows for greater freedom in both the selection of texts and self-expression (or *creating texts*, in the language of CfE – p.124). It will thus be easier for the teacher to utilise what CfE calls "the use of relevant, real-life and enjoyable contexts which build upon children and young people's own experiences." (undated, p. 125) The English teacher might, for example, give students the option of choosing the format work will take, whether essay, video, or 'blog'.

Equally, the freedom granted to learners under CfE increases the likelihood of accommodating a wide variety of tastes and thus, freedom in the selection of texts increases the likelihood of learners reading purely for enjoyment, another of CfE's Experiences and Outcomes for literacy (undated, p.135). This is particularly important in the case of young male learners, whose under-performance in the field of literacy, relative to female learners, has been much noted in recent years. Such was the alarm that the Boys' Reading Commission was founded in response by the National Literacy Trust and the All-Party Parliamentary Literacy Group - cf. the 2012 Boys' Reading Commission Report.

One possibility for English teachers is to facilitate group discussions between pupils about books they have enjoyed in the past – though this raises the question of a possible tension between CfE's emphasis on collaborative learning, and its desired outcome of independent thinkers (The word "independently" crops up repeatedly in the CfE Literacy Experiences and Outcomes). Written work, the usual basis of formative assessment in English, is typically done individually. The English teacher's

challenge is therefore to strike an appropriate balance. “Although the group can receive a grade on their work, each student should be responsible for handing in individual work as well, so that the teacher can monitor how each student is progressing.” (Cohen and Cohen 2008, p. 618).

Deuchar and Maitles express the concern that “the pressures associated with attainment, target setting and league table results sometimes stifle teachers’ vision” (2009, p.290), a frustration shared by some of the teachers interviewed by Priestley and Minty. It is undeniable that assessment has been the traditional measure of academic success, and previous curricula have been assessment-driven, i.e. structured with national assessments in mind. This approach, effectively ‘teaching for the test’, is incompatible with the principles of effective pedagogy, to the extent that it privileges shallow rote learning over deep understanding. Priestley and Minty note that “assessment driven philosophies [were] encouraged under the former 5-14 system.” (2012, p.5) CfE represents a liberating framework which removes this pressure by uncoupling learning from national qualifications, enabling the effective English teacher to emphasise learning for the right reason: its own sake.

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