

Collaborative action research, teacher identity and development

The importance of the 'Bigger Picture'

Professor Samantha Twiselton

Director of Sheffield Institute of Education

Member of the Advisory Panel for the Carter Review of ITT

s.twiselton@shu.ac.uk @samtwiselton

Student teachers talking about what they were trying to achieve moment by moment in the classroom



Do any of these comments ring any bells?

Martha

I want to get
through this
task

I need him to
keep busy

I don't want
it to be too
noisy



I want it to
be finished
by the end

I want to feel
in control

Three types of teacher - or three points on a sliding scale:



Task
Manager

Curriculum
Deliverer

Concept/skill
Builder

TASK MANAGERS

I didn't want them to start being silly, that was really the main thing I was thinking about

I wanted them to get the sheet filled in



My role was organisation - make sure they went in turns - went clockwise.

Really I was just concentrating on getting it done.

Classrooms should look busy.

Classrooms should look orderly.

Children should complete their tasks. Teachers should be in control.

Identity = in control and getting things done

I have
objectives to
meet

I need to get
evidence of
fronted
adverbials

I need to
show
progress



My lesson
plan focuses
on this
feature

I need this
writing to
show these
things

CURRICULUM DELIVERERS

It was in the scheme...
that was what was next.

I was bothered
about getting through
the plan

The book said to do
it that way.

To be honest I don't know
why - it was just what I was told to do –
it's what they always do

Learning is prescribed. Learning is dictated by someone else.

The curriculum is a goal in itself. It is hard to give a reason why the learning is important.

**Identity = coverage and
compliance**

I needed them
to see which
were the
effective words

I wanted them
to 'get' the
text

I was trying
to get him to
make the link



I knew she
would be able
to use it in her
writing

I wanted them
to see how it
works so they
could do it
later

CONCEPT/SKILL BUILDERS

I wanted them to be able to use it in their writing – to bring it to life

I knew they had to really get it - to understand ... before they could use it properly

being flexible in the discussion so I haven't like got a set of questions that ... like a script – so I wanted to be flexible ... respond ... go with the flow

I wanted to show them in different ways - help them see what it was all about.

Focused on the subject and why it matters. The concepts and skills are key.

Tasks only a vehicle for learning. The main goal lies beyond the lesson - transferable and transformative learning.

Identity = developing transferable learning within and beyond the subject - concepts and skills

What makes an expert teacher?

What kinds of knowledge and skills are needed?

What are the optimum conditions for developing them?

What can get in the way?

How does/might this link to current policy and practice?



Expert teachers - *synchronic notion of teacher time*

pull together a range of knowledge in one informed professional action...
contingent in nature - the ability to perceive the demands of a situation as it arises



Novice teachers - *diachronic time epistemology*

linear approach - planned and scripted use of curriculum time – closed and task dominated

Professional Expertise

Sternberg and Horvath



Knowledge



Insight



Efficiency

Expert Knowledge



- **Propositional structures and schemata.**
- **Deep structures of the problems – group together - underlying principles.**
- **Meaningful patterns - relevant situations**

Insight



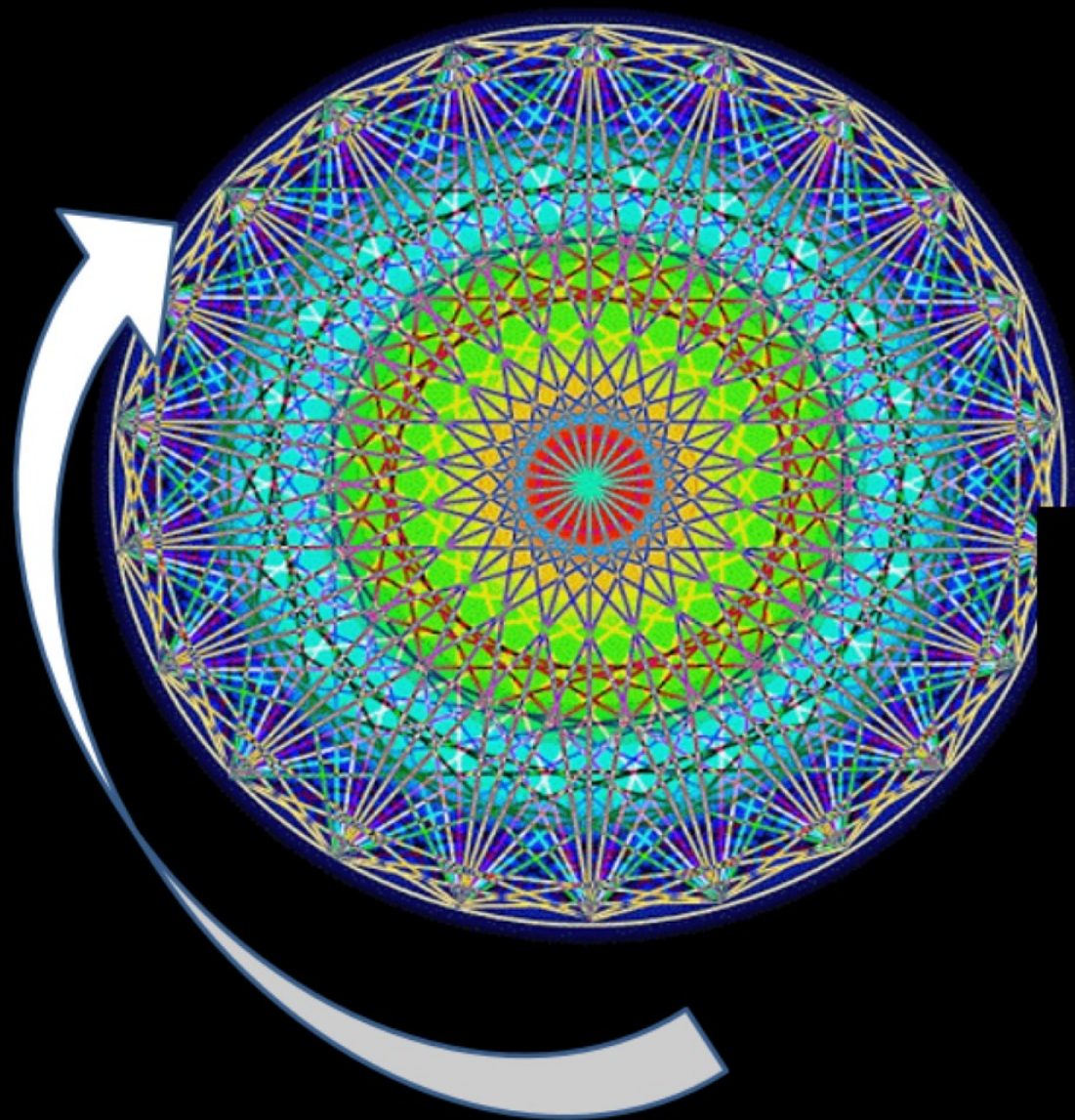
- **'Selective encoding'**
- **Seeing into a problem deeply.**
- **Efficient use of the time available - draw on the most useful areas of knowledge.**
- **Clear understanding of sophisticated nature of role**

Efficiency



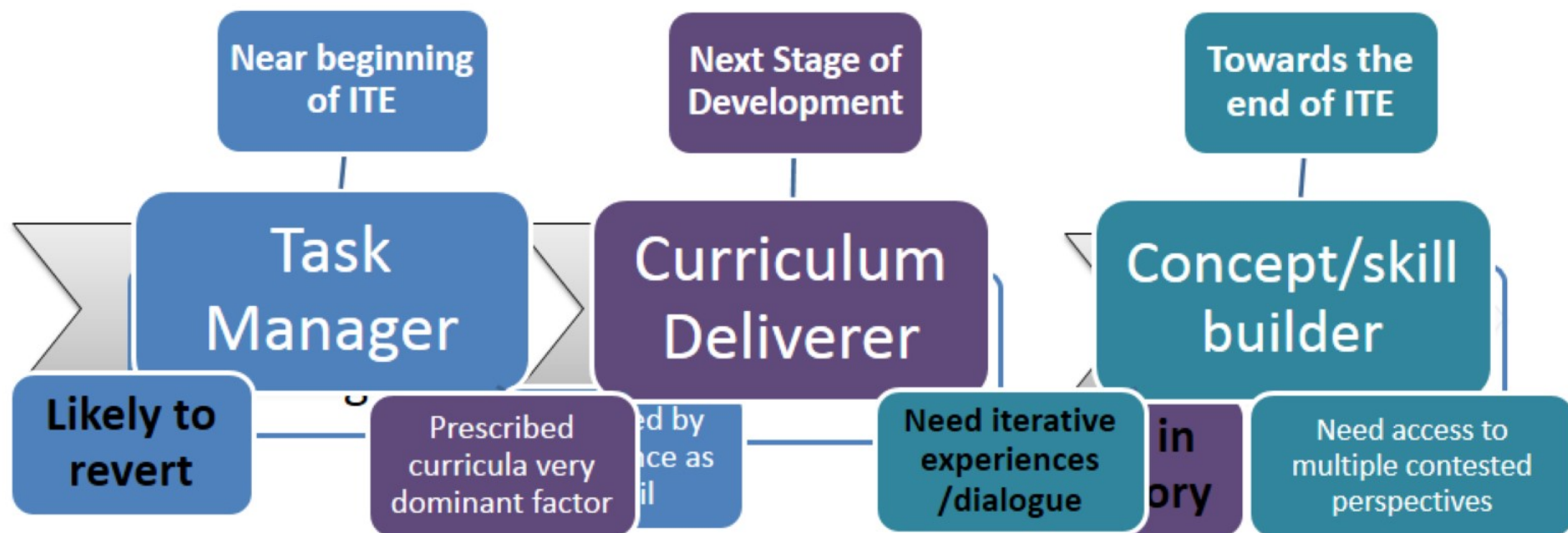
- **Do more in less time**
- **Effortless and automatic**
- **Trying to understand the problem rather than trying out different solutions.**
- **Attention to high level reasoning and problem solving**

Big Picture



Detail

A developmental 'continuum'



A continuum or a cycle?

A vicious circle? A trap to try and avoid?

Something much more messy – but also all of the above

NOT JUST RELEVANT TO ITE OR JUST CONFINED TO SCHOOLS

Seeing the Wood for the Trees

Twiselton, 2000-2010

Major curriculum change— implementation of 'National Strategies' - very detailed in content and method

Too much prescription and detail made most teachers into Curriculum Deliverers

'There's no time to think – it's like a steam roller!'

Routinisation' (Eraut) Tasks and routines become ends in themselves.

'in the face of multiple priorities, a focus on consistency through systems alone seemed to be linked with attention on the surface features of interactions, particularly for teachers whose practice was still developing.'

Gaining and Sustaining Momentum: Accelerating progress in schools project, Curee, TeachFirst, 2016

Too much 'stuff' crowds out ability to see the wood for the trees.

DOES IT MATTER IF EVERYONE IS A CURRICULUM DELIVERER?

Dialogic teaching- Robin Alexander

interactions which encourage pupils to think, and to think in different ways

questions which invite much more than simple recall

answers which are justified, followed up and built upon rather than merely received

feedback which informs and leads thinking forward as well as encourages

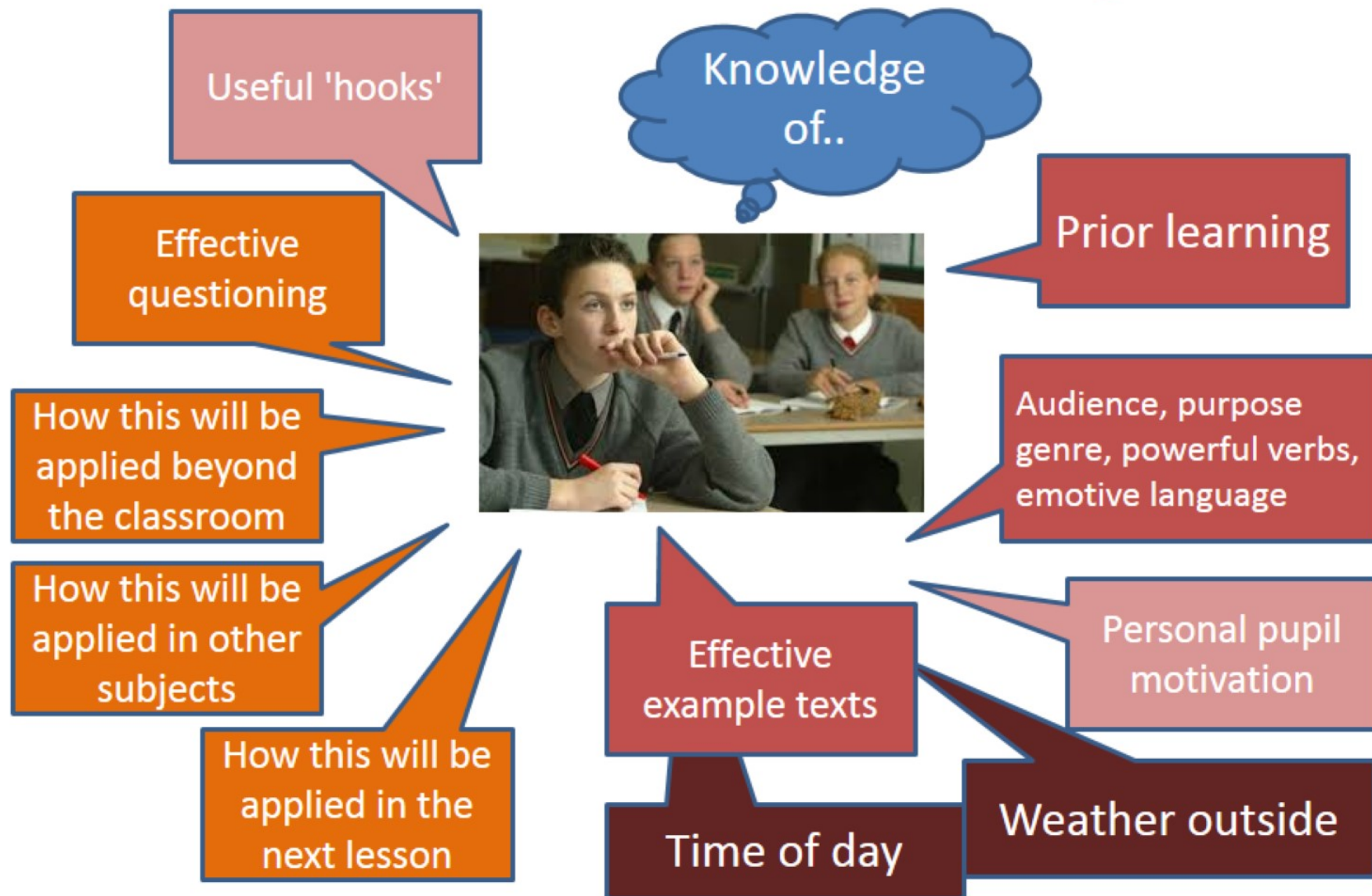
contributions which are extended rather than fragmented

exchanges which chain together into coherent and deepening lines of enquiry

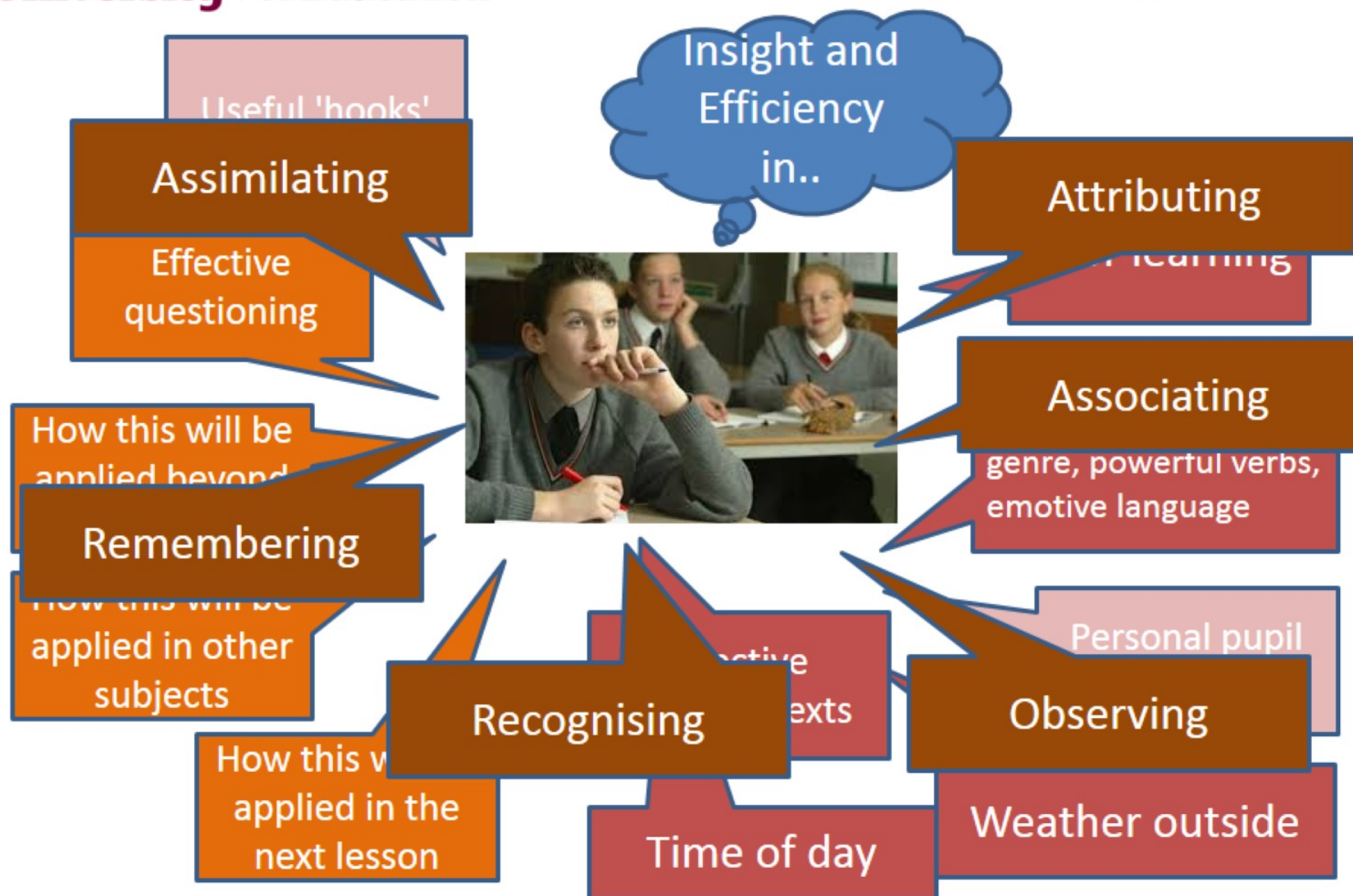
discussion and argumentation which probe and challenge rather than unquestioningly accept

Alexander, 2008

Synchronic Teaching: Persuasive writing...



Persuasive writing...



THE IMPACT OF CONTEXT AND CULTURE

More likely to be/stay a Task Manager or Curriculum Deliverer if:

- **Very crowded and prescriptive curriculum - stops asking 'why'?**
- **Very busy school environments with no built in developmental programme or time for reflection = unreflective culture/unarticulated pedagogy - no time for debate**
- **'Routinisation' (Eraut)**

More likely to become/remain a Concept/Skill Builder if:

- **Contexts conducive to articulation and professional engagement with subject matter which liberates classroom discourse from the safe and conventional - e.g. action learning/research, lesson study - forms on ongoing critical enquiry into practice**
- **Able to compare/contrast/critique approaches**

Effective teaching



- teachers' content knowledge, including how students think about a subject
- quality of instruction - strategies like effective questioning and the use of assessment
- challenging students to identify the reason why an activity is taking place in the lesson

(Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major, Sutton Trust 2014)

Effective Teacher Development



- ongoing, sustained, critical enquiry
- based on theory and evidence, then multiple, iterative activities for teachers to refine /adapt
- individual starting points with collective sense of purpose
- develops meta-cognitive control – e.g. evaluating/interpreting pupils' responses
- needs relevance and contextualisation for subjects/pupils

(Cordingley, Higgins, Greany et al, Teacher Development Trust, 2015)

To what extent does collaborative Research and Development align with effective CPDL?

DEVELOPING GREAT TEACHING

Lessons from the international reviews into
effective professional development



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Approaches to research & development for 'great pedagogy' and 'great CPD' in teaching school alliances

Teaching schools R&D network national
themes project 2012-14

Research Report

Spring 2015

Dr Bronwen Maxwell and Prof Toby Greany with
Kath Aspinwall, Prof Graham Handscomb, Sarah
Seleznyov and Prof Tim Simkins - University
College London Institute of Education and
Sheffield Hallam University

Effective CPDL findings from review of reviews

- Sustained over time
- Initial instruction based on theory and evidence, then multiple, iterative activities for teachers to refine /adapt practice informed by pupils' responses
- Participants need: individual starting points and theories recognised/explored, collective sense of purpose, focus on aspirations for pupils
- Relevance matters - but volunteers vs conscripts less important than environment
- Learning with peers is important - reciprocal vulnerability
- Develops meta-cognitive control – eg evaluating/interpreting pupils' responses
- Generic pedagogic CPD does not work – contextualisation for subjects/pupils

Cordingley, Higgins, Greany et al, Teacher Development Trust, 2015

Collaborative R&D in Teaching Schools

- Research alongside a national project
 - 66 teaching school alliances (TSAs) in undertaking **collaborative** R&D projects over two years.
- National support programme designed using Harris and Jones's (2011; 2012) 'Connecting Professional Learning' model of collaborative R&D.
 - three phases : implementation, innovation and impact phase
 - professional learning conceptualised as personal enquiry with the end-point of improving outcomes for pupils (Harris and Jones, 2012).
- Concurrent mixed methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007) with a dominant qualitative approach
 - survey of all participants and five case studies (purposive sample)

Findings

- Establishing and maintaining a relevant shared focus was crucial.
- Repeated cycles of innovation and enquiry - providing sustained multiple iterative opportunities for learning and opportunities.
- Teachers energised, feeling better informed- grasping the underpinning rationale, leading to deepening of teachers' pedagogical talk, and belief and practice change.
- 'Teachers are looking more deeply into their subject knowledge and being clearer about what we want children to learn: 'We ask is it working, is it secure?'

' it was that light bulb moment of 'they[the students] didn't get it wrong, we got it wrong'it changed your viewpoint ... rather than saying we are going to try this because I think it's a good idea, it became much more, actually they didn't like this and they think this works so we'll try their techniques as well as ours and then listen to what they have to sayand see whether they think it works or not.'

Necessary contextual conditions

- Committed, skilled leaders at all levels who undertake an enabling role

'she worked very closely with like-minded individuals, you know the movers and shakers, the drivers, the people with the energy, but also the people with the status to be able to make it happen.'
- School and alliance cultures, policies, infrastructures and processes that enable and sustain collaborative R&D
- Structuring R&D projects to build in high levels of cross-school collaboration
- HEI support

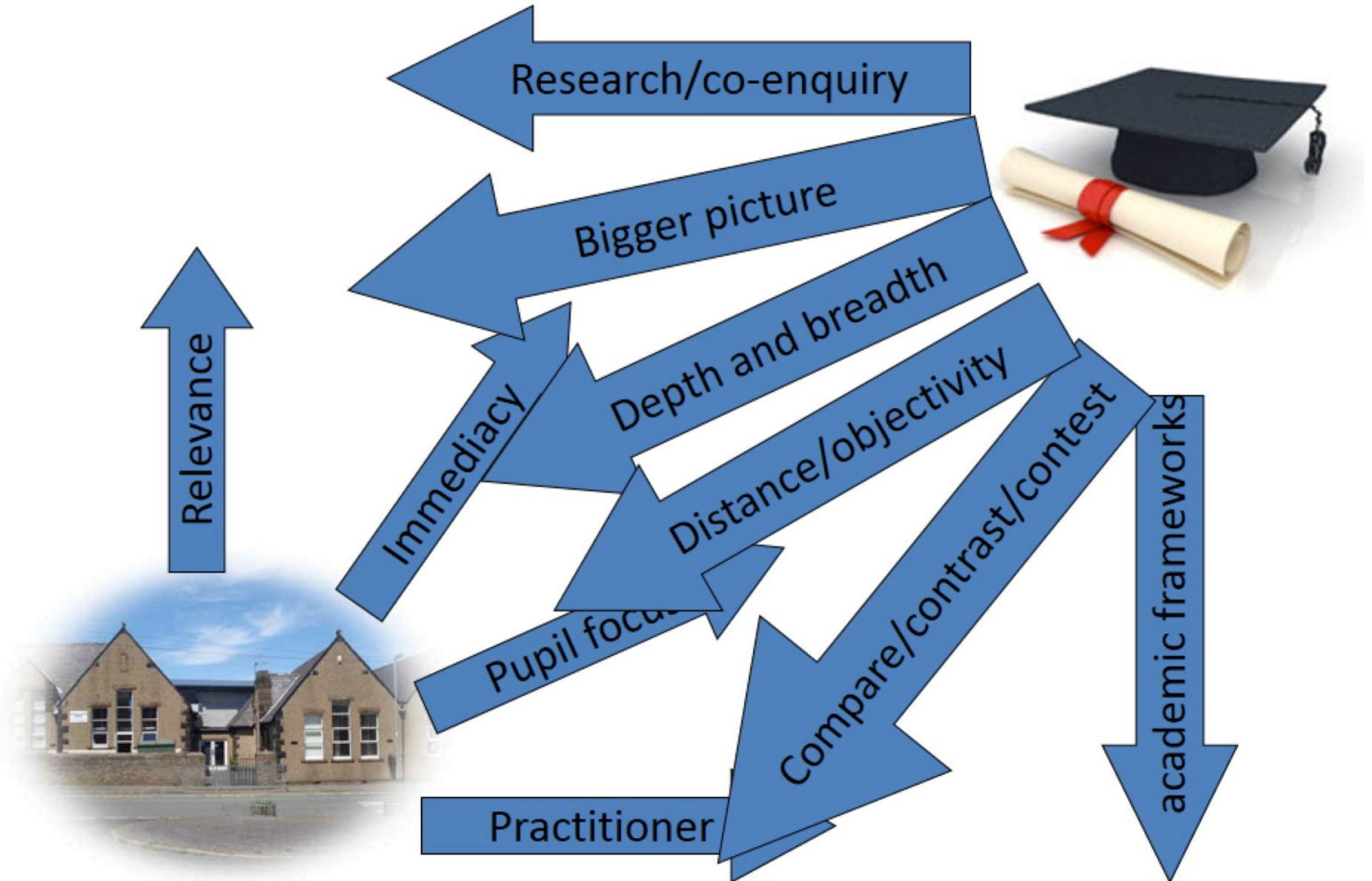
Conclusions:



What does good Teacher Development look like?

- Learning experiences need to be designed to be purposeful, developmental and relevant
- Effective teaching involves being a member of a critically reflective community of practice that is constantly relating practice to the bigger picture at every level
- Teacher development is most in learning organisations that are conducive to this
- HEI/school partnerships can support this

The role of HE?



s.twiselton@shu.ac.uk

@samtwiselton