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**What is pedagogy?**

As part of our Pedagogy Focus series, we take a deep dive into the definition of pedagogy and what it means for teachers

People often talk about their ‘pedagogical approach’ to teaching. But what does it actually mean?

## What is Pedagogy?

Pedagogy is defined simply as the method and practice of teaching. It encompasses:

* [Teaching styles](https://www.tes.com/news/what-are-teaching-styles)
* [Teaching theory](https://www.tes.com/news/pedagogy-focus-teaching-theories)
* **Feedback and assessment**

When people talk about the pedagogy of teaching, they will be referring to the way teachers deliver the content of the curriculum to a class.

When a teacher plans a lesson, they will consider different ways to deliver the content. That decision will be made based on their own teaching preferences, their experience, and the context that they teach in.

## How does setting change the pedagogical approach?

Differences in the age of the pupils and the content being delivered can influence the pedagogical practices a teacher will choose to use.

Teachers will use research from many different academic disciplines to inform their decisions, alongside their experience teaching those age groups. For example, a teacher in EYFS may reference cognitive development research and their experience of the success of adult-directed play.

The justifications behind the decisions will become the pedagogical principles, and every teacher will develop their own pedagogical principles over time.

## What are the pedagogical approaches?

The different pedagogical approaches could be broken down into four categories: behaviourism, constructivism, social constructivism, and liberationist.

### 1. Behaviourism

A behaviourist pedagogy uses the theory of behaviourism to inform its approach. A behaviourist pedagogical approach would say learning is teacher centred. It would advocate the use of direct instruction, and lecture based lessons.

#### What does a behaviourism pedagogical approach look like in a classroom?

The theory of Behaviourism in a classroom setting came from pedagogical research by [Thorndike (1911), Pavlov (1927) and Skinner (1957)](https://www.simplypsychology.org/behaviorism.html). Behaviourist pedagogy is the theory that the teacher should be the sole authority figure, and leads the lesson. Knowledge should be delivered in a curriculum where each subject is taught discretely (as opposed to topic based learning, for example).

In a lesson using a behaviourist pedagogical approach, you could expect to see a mixture of lecturing, modelling and demonstration, rote learning, and choral repetition. All of these activities are ‘visible’ and structured, as well as being led by the teacher.  However, during the course of the lesson, the shift may come where the student is the centre of the activity, and demonstrates their learning.

Behaviourism is also sometimes described as a traditional teaching style.

### 2. Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory that people learn through experiences and reflection. A Constructivist pedagogy puts the child at the centre of the learning, and is sometimes called ‘invisible pedagogy’. A constructivist approach would incorporate project work, inquiry based learning, and might adopt a Montessori or Steiner method.

#### What does a constructivism pedagogical approach look like in a classroom?

Constructivism is based on the pedagogical research of [Piaget (1896-1890)](https://www.tes.com/news/pedagogy-jean-piaget). Piaget wrote extensively about ‘schemas’, an idea that learners come ready to learn, and the teacher must build activities to facilitate their learning. Younger children work things through physically, whereas older children tackle symbolic and abstract ideas.

A lesson might include individualisation, a slower pace, hidden outcomes, the mantle of the expert, and less teacher talk. Some adopters of this pedagogy would also place emphasis on being outdoors, and engaging with nature.

Constructivism is also sometimes described as a progressive teaching style.

### 3. Social constructivism

A Social constructivism pedagogy could be considered to be a blend of two priorities: teacher guided, and student centred. Cognitive psychologist,[Lev Vygotsky](https://www.tes.com/news/pedagogy-lev-vygotsky) developed social constructivism, building on the work of Piaget, but argued against the ideas of Piaget that learning could only happen in its social context, and believed that learning was a collaborative process between student and teacher.

#### What would a social constructivism approach look like in a lesson?

The teacher would use group work elements, but would use smaller group sizes, and limit the choice in topics. The teacher might also use teacher modelling, questioning, and a mixture of individual, pair, and whole class instruction.

### 4. Liberationism

Liberationism is a critical pedagogy developed by the Brazilian educator, [Paulo Freire](https://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/). Freire was the Director of the Department of Education, and developed an approach of teaching where he was able to teach illiterate adults to read in just 45 days. Freire focussed on removing the two barriers to learning: poverty and hunger. Freire was then imprisoned following a military coup. Once he was released, he wrote a book called 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' where Freire wrote about the dehumanisation of students in schools, and argued for cooperation and unity. A liberationist approach is one where the student voice is placed at the centre, and a democracy is put into the classroom. Value is placed on having the teacher as a learner, and the class discovering subjects together.

#### What would a social constructivist approach look like in a lesson?

The teacher might use examples of literature that contain non-standard constructions, such as hip-hop, or graffiti. Students may take on the role of the teacher, and decide upon the topic of the lesson. The teacher should provide space and opportunity for the students to showcase their learning, and this can take the form of a performance, speech, or dance.

## What is the history of pedagogy?

The role of ‘teacher’ can be traced back to Ancient Greece, with Socrates in the 5th Century BC as the keystone of what we now consider to be modern education.

The role of the teacher has developed from the days in Ancient Greece when the slaves would accompany the children to school whilst their masters worked, and the profession of educator grew from there.

Schools appeared in England as early as 597 AD, and it is generally believed that the first school in England was [King’s School in Canterbury, Kent](https://www.kings-school.co.uk/about/history/). Like many of the first schools, King’s School had links to the church, and today operates as a public school.

The content of the curriculum could be split into two sections: Trivium and Quadrivium. Trivium: grammar, rhetoric, logic. Quadrivium: arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music.

Lessons took the form of a lecture, with a teacher leading the students whilst they read, explaining the texts. Then the students were given questions that they argued through the answers amongst themselves, then with opponents a little senior, before they finally engaged with the masters who had taught them.

### How did the first schools approach pedagogy?

By 1780, the church responded to the need to educate the illiterate, and [Ragged Schools, Parish Schools and Church schools](https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/education-in-victorian-britain) educated those who didn’t have the money to send their children to the fee paying schools.

Ragged schools started with large classes of 30-40 students, and were taught to read from the Bible, often orally, as they couldn’t be trusted with books. The church schools tended to use the ‘Lancaster Method’ where the brightest student taught what they had learnt to his fellow students, each of whom then passed it on, and continued until everyone had been taught.

In 1846, the church and the government started the [first teacher training colleges](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/teacher-training/), and graduates were given a certificate of teaching. There was a Committee of Council of Education, and they issued grants to day schools.

## I want to read more about pedagogy. What should I read?

For a book, try [Urban Myths About Learning and Education by Pedro De Bruyckere, Paul A Kirschner and Casper D Hulshof](https://www.waterstones.com/book/urban-myths-about-learning-and-education/pedro-de-bruyckere/paul-a-kirschner/9780128015377), or [Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn by John Hattie and Gregory Yates](https://www.waterstones.com/book/visible-learning-and-the-science-of-how-we-learn/john-hattie/gregory-c-r-yates/9780415704991), or [Cleverlands: The Secrets Behind the Success of the World’s Education Superpowers by Lucy Crehan](https://www.waterstones.com/book/cleverlands/lucy-crehan/9781783524914).

For a blog, try ['Engagement: just because they're busy doesn't mean they're learning anything' by Carl Hendrick](https://chronotopeblog.com/2015/03/22/engagement-just-because-theyre-busy-doesnt-mean-theyre-learning-anything/)

For a research paper, try['The Effectiveness of Direct Instruction Curricula: A Meta-Analysis of a Half Century of Research' (2018](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0034654317751919))

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