

The Wig of Knowledge

1 The Wig of Knowledge developed as a starter activity for a Year 7 mixed ability class in response to the issues faced with a class arriving from multiple locations across a large school site without an allowance for movement time.

Students were arriving in small numbers and it was taking as long as 15 minutes to get everyone into the classroom, settled and engaged.

This loss of time and disruptive start to each 50-minute lesson required a starter activity that would make effective use of the time and establish clear routines and expectations.

The starter activity needed to:

- act as drift activity
- engage students to encourage prompt arrival at the lesson
- establish a clear routine at the start of each lesson
- set clear expectations of behaviour upon entering the classroom
- relevant to current learning

2 Stephens highlights the 'limited empirical research to explicitly support the use of starter activities in lessons' (2014, p. 23), however identifies that the starter activity has been used to fulfil a range of functions such as reminder, motivator and crowd controller.

Stephens explored the use of starter activities to establish classroom expectations and a learning ethos and concluded that structured activities can help ensure that students are hooked from the beginning' as well as teach classroom rules and expectations' (2014, p. 25).

A starter activity that is accessible and enables all students to experience success is a good hook, according to Gershon (2011). Cowley (2010) states that engaging students in a starter activity that grabs their attention can encourage them to be less likely to involve themselves in poor behaviours.

Gershon (2011) identifies starter activities as a way in which 'to signal straight away how you expect [students] to behave, learn and interact'. The use of a regular starter activity develops a sense of recognition for the student and clarifies the focus of the lesson and why the student is present. This recognised routine is supported by Cowley (2010) who considers establishing a pattern for a lesson as a key tool in behaviour management.

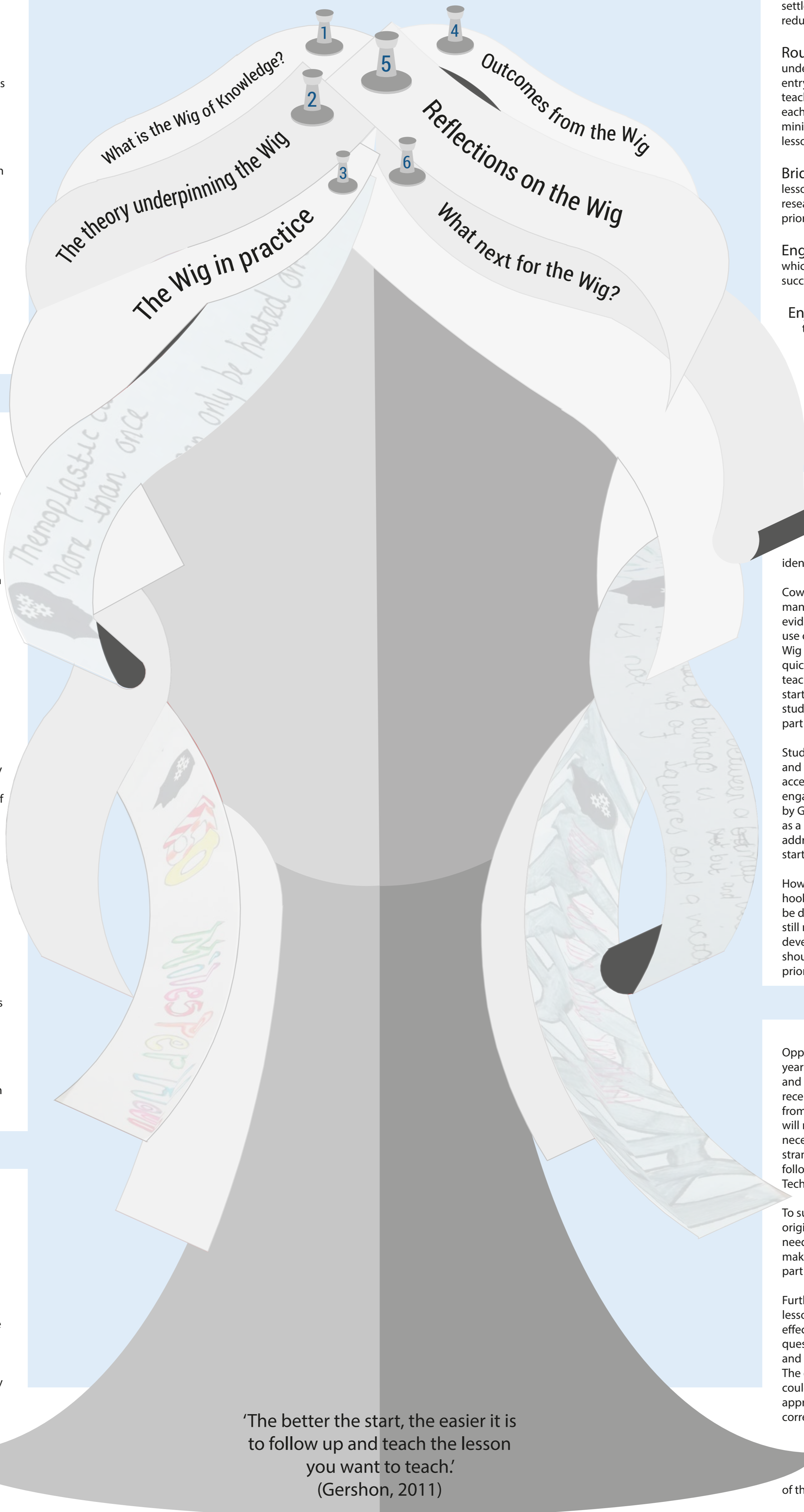
In his 2017 report focusing on optimising behaviour in schools, Bennett recommends establishing routine to remove uncertainty about school expectations. Bennett states this can save time and effort by avoiding repetitive instruction by creating social norms, removing the query of what is and is not acceptable conduct and reduces student anxiety.

Gershon (2011) recommends using open ended questions to get all students thinking and considers these activities to set the tone of the lesson by establishing a 'purposeful atmosphere in which the teacher is in charge and the students are ready and willing to work'.

3 At the end of each lesson, a brainteaser question is shared with the class which forms part of their homework. The brainteaser requires them to investigate a topic that relates to current learning and bridges a link with the next lesson.

At the start of the next lesson, students collect a 'strand' upon entering the classroom and add as much information as they can to this. Students are encouraged to share facts, thoughts, ideas and opinions. The strand provides an opportunity for expression without fear of getting the answer wrong which is crucial to reducing student anxiety and encouraging engagement, discussion and sharing of ideas within a new subject area.

Once everyone is seated, students share their strands with one another. The strands provide a starting point for a discussion and with minimal teacher led instruction, students can share, discuss and challenge one another's strands.



4 **Timing** – student arrival at the lesson, settlement and engagement time rapidly reduced from nearly 15 minutes to 6 – 8 minutes.

Routine – any student entering the classroom understands the routine and collects a strand on entry and settles to the task without the need for teacher intervention or repetition of instructions each time another student arrives. This routine has minimised disruptive behaviours at the start of the lesson.

Bridging – sharing information about the next lesson so that students can independently research and establish a foundation of knowledge prior to the main activities of the lesson.

Engagement – interactive lesson starter to which all students can contribute and achieve success.

Enjoyment – students enjoy the visual and tangible element of the starter and the novelty of pinning their knowledge strands to the growing wig week on week.

Stretch – range and challenge of questions to engage all students

5 The Wig, as a drift activity, has been successful in establishing a routine which saves time and reduces the need for repetition of instruction, a positive outcome of routine identified by Bennett.

Cowley identified the benefit of routine in managing student behaviour, which has been evident over the course of the year as repetitive use of the starter activity and familiarity with the Wig has been established. Students are much quicker to engage and settle to tasks without teacher intervention. The use of a regular starter has been identified by Gershon as aiding student focus which is supported by Cowley as part of a behaviour management toolkit.

Students have enjoyed the concept of the Wig and the brainteaser questions have been accessible to all students, encouraging engagement and enabling success as suggested by Gershon. As identified by Stephens, the Wig as a starter activity has had many functions and addressed many of the issues identified at the start of the year.

However, for this starter activity to continue to hook all students, a range of questions need to be developed to stretch and challenge all whilst still retaining the opportunity for success. The development of the brainteaser questions should continue to bridge learning between prior and current learning.

6 **Opportunities for assessment** – at the end of the year I intend to remove the strands from the Wig and distribute amongst the class. Students will receive a random selection of strands compiled from different members of the class and they will need to sort through these and make any necessary corrections to the comments on the strands considering their acquired knowledge following a year of studying Design and Technology.

To support students in this task, I shall share the original brainteasers with the class and they will need to match answers to questions before making any necessary corrections. This will form part of their end of year assessment.

Further differentiation – Design and Technology lessons are mixed ability and to maximise the effectiveness of the Wig, differentiated questioning to stretch and challenge students and broaden the conversation could be used. The questions could be colour coded, which could be informed by Bloom's Taxonomy where appropriate, and students could pick the corresponding coloured strand to answer.

Where required, I could strategically hand out different colours to different students to support or stretch them as I apply my understanding of their prior knowledge and ability to the task.

'The better the start, the easier it is to follow up and teach the lesson you want to teach.'
(Gershon, 2011)