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The Pedagogy of stylistics: enhancing practice by flipping the classroom, using whiteboards and action research

Abstract

This article describes how teaching in a second-year undergraduate stylistics workshop was transformed in my attempt to increase student attendance and engagement, and the strategies that were put in place to achieve this outcome. The personal account describes how I changed my teaching pedagogy to facilitate learning through collaborative strategies and how I evaluated the impact this had on student learning, using *action research* (Bradbury, 2015) as the investigative approach. Using the model of *Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect* process (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) and with data from a short questionnaire given to students, I was able gain a deeper understanding of the value of the activities as perceived by students. The *flipped classroom* where materials were given to students in advance to prepare became critical for participation in the workshop and allowed for classroom time to be optimised for discussion and feedback. This article also presents photographs of the stylistic analysis produced on whiteboards as part of the collaborative activities with a summary of responses by students to the questionnaire evaluating the impact that changes in my approach to teaching had on their learning, confidence and preparation for the assessment.

Keywords
action research, flipped classroom, pedagogy, stylistics, whiteboards

1. Introduction

How can we teach stylistics to students in an engaging way that facilitates a positive learning experience? This is a question that is central to the case study described in this article based on my experience of responding to students and their learning that draws on previous investigative and innovative practices in teaching stylistics. Readers of this journal will be aware of the many publications that exemplify the long tradition of pedagogy and stylistics, whether to develop a sensitivity to language and sociocultural features by teaching language through literature in a language learning context or as an academic subject in undergraduate and postgraduate classrooms. Classic texts on pedagogical stylistics including Brumfit and Carter 1986) and Short (1989) exemplify the relationship between teaching language and literature and that pedagogical development is very much part of teaching stylistics. A commitment to improving teaching and learning practices, togther with a critical reflection and evaluation of methods and approaches also go hand-in-hand. (See also the *Language and Literature* Special Issue on 'Pedagogical Stylistics', edited by Michael Burke, 2010; Burke, M, Csábi, S, Week, L, Zerkowitz, J, (2012); Fogal (2015); Short and Breen 1988; and Teranishi, Saito and Wales, 2015).

Burke (2010) also asks, 'Why care about pedagogical stylistics', which prompts further questions about the value of teaching stylistics. Through classical rhetorical approaches, stylistics can help students to write a stylistics paper and empower and motivate them to perform better. Stylistics as a methodology offers learners the tools to analyse texts to gain insights into how they are created through linguistic choices and patterns that characterize the text, and give rise to textual effects and affect reader interpretation and response. Using stylistic approaches, then, for formative ends can help support learning of textual form and function. It is worth pointing out that McIntyre (2011: 10) makes a distinction between *pedagogical stylistics* and the *pedagogy of stylistics*. Pedagogical stylistics is 'the application of stylistic techniques for teaching' which can be found in a language learning classroom that aims to develop literacy skills and the subtle nuances of language beyond the

mechanisms of grammar through continuous exposure to literary texts (Clark and Zyngier, 2003). The pedagogy of stylistics 'refers to the study of how best to teach stylistics' which might differ depending on whatever aspect of stylistics is being taught. Using this distinction, the central case study outlined in this article describes the pedagogy of stylistics that aims to improve learning of stylistic features and overall engagement in a stylistics ;earning context.

Teaching stylistics is also about investigation. An investigative approach is likely to begin with one or several questions that provide the reason for conducting a close reading and analysis with the specific aim of finding answers. It is the first necessary step in a process of text analysis where linguistic and structural patterns finally emerge to present themselves for comment. Burke (2014: 3) humorously describes stylisticians as linguistic sleuths in the vein of Sherlock Holmes and together with our stylistic toolkit, the '*Sherlocke Stylistica*', we are able to investigate claims through linguistic evidence as 'a kind of linguistic-forensic, literary discourse criticism'. As teachers we create the conditions to facilitate learning and continue to find ways to engage students while at the same time improve our pedagogy and teaching methods as part of our commitment to teaching. Zerkowitz (2012:195), for example, describes teaching pedagogical stylistics to students that involved reading a short story of 100 words written by the Hungarian author, Istvan Orkeny in an English translation. She explains that students would have been familiar with the author having read his work in a previous lesson. Students were asked to respond to the short story using guided questions knowing this would challenge their entrenched views of the author's ideas. Zerkowitz explains that she did not record the feedback or keep 'retrievable data' but 'for action research purposes the close attention to what went on seemed to be enough at the time'. When the same session was retaught, she introduced 'a kind of safety valve for the students who might feel embarrassed talking about cathartic historical issues in the language class'. By closely observing her students' reactions to the text, Zerkowitz was able to reflect on her teaching methods and makes changes to how she presented the text to student in future classes by anticipating their uncomfortable responses. The fact that there is no retrievable data to analyse may be problematic but feedback from the students in their responses to the text appeared to be valuable 'data' and enough to make changes through observation and reflection. (See also Lambrou, 2015.) The numerous publications on reader responses, a rigorous and evidence-based exploration of readers and their responses to and interpretations of the text, and 'a vital aspect of contemporary stylistics' (Whiteley and Canning, 2017: 71) provides further example of pedagogy and stylistics coming together effectively for insights into the text. (See Bell, Browse, Gibbons, Peplow, 2021 for recent studies in the area; and Harrison and Nuttall, 2020 which investigates rereading as retelling.)

Teaching stylistics is also about innovating the teaching of stylistics using imaginative and collaborative approaches. O'Halloran's (2019: 134) creative pedagogical approach to teaching stylistics focuses on students creating a 'film poem' described as 'a cinematic creation which takes a written, often canonical, poem as its inspiration' by adapting into a film using a mobile device. A international, collaborative project investigates students' responses to e-learning and web-based stylistics of an electronic equivalent of a course which was developed and ran at Lancaster University. (See Busse, Plummer and Short, 2006 Special issue on 'The Language and Style Pedagogical Investigations', which saw students in classes across the world participate in the same course.) In the years since the publication of this case study in 2006, e-learning has become more prevalent in teaching, especially given that at the time of writing this article, the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted the need to provide online courses and remote learning and ensuring that the quality of what is offered is comparable to classroom-based teaching.

The case study presented in this article describes transforming teaching stylistics in a level 5 classroom that used whiteboards as the medium of learning and proved to engage students and increase attendance because it offered them a more positive learning experience. The research questions distilled down to two broad questions: 1. *how can I improve student attendance and engagement in the stylistics classroom?; and 2. What changes can I make in my pedagogy so students understand the value and relevance of stylistic analysis as preparation for their assessment?* The case study also describes using *action research* to reflect on and evaluate the success of changes, including

the use of whiteboards to encourage collaboration and the sharing of ideas among student peers, to understand the impact on students' learning as they perceived it. (The use of whiteboards may seem an incongruous choice in the digital age but there are many advantages as will be outlined below.) Critical to the success of students participating in the activity was the *flipped classroom* where materials were made available to students to prepare in advance, which is turn promoted active learning as students were expected to demonstrate their understanding of the task by producing their answers on the whiteboards.

The terms *flipped classroom* and *action research* are outlined in the following sections before the case study is outlined.

2. What is a flipped classroom?

A flipped classroom approach, also called flipped learning, is 'a pedagogical strategy that replaces the standard lecture-in-class format with opportunities for students to review, discuss, and investigate course content with the teacher or lecturer in class' (Association of Colleges, 2014: 14). Fundamentally, this pedagogical approach reorganises what happens in class time and outside of class time by inverting the traditional classroom-based learning. Students are given a task to do in advance for example, a reading, analysis, writing exercise, watching a video, data collection etc., usually with a set of instructions and are expected to come to the classroom ready to participate. The task is likely to be uploaded onto a virtual learning environment (VLE) or emailed to students in advance, to be accessed remotely. By turning learning on its head in this way, classroom time can be used more efficiently for discussions and problem-solving facilitated by the tutor, with more time spent on participative and peer group learning. Importantly, the flipped classroom approach encourages students to become more active independent learners and use their study time outside the classroom meaningfully. A further advantage is that students are given an equal footing in the classroom having had to time to work at their own speed and not be constrained by time in the classroom. Flipping the classroom is not new in the teaching of English language and linguistics where asking students to undertake an activity as simple as finding definitions of words to undertaking a detailed stylistic analysis of a text to prepare for a lesson is common practice.

   The flipped classroom is usually associated with blended learning, a combination of both online and classroom-based or face-to-face teaching that relies heavily on technology, both popular technology and learning technology (Arshad and Imran, 2013; Hughes, 2013). Universities are continually adopting more sophisticated technologies and innovations to deliver course content through both synchronous and asynchronous modes of teaching – to provide enhanced student support (none more so than during the covid pandemic). However, there are some points to consider as the flipped classroom requires more than uploading materials onto the VLE. As students are expected to prepare a task in advance , it may be the first time they have been exposed to the subject and this may require additional guidance when compared to activities post-lesson where students are familiar with terms and concepts having been introduced to the topics in class. With the class time becoming the focus of discussion, students can receive immediate feedback on how well the task was achieved (unlike a reading task, for example, set as part of the student's independent study that may not be followed-up by the tutor.). Flipping the classroom, then, requires tutors to plan ahead in the delivery of their lessons and consider how content inside and outside the class 'joins up' for a coherent learning experience. A useful suggestion is a discussion early on with students to help them understand the advantages of this pedagogical approach and how it supports their learning as it may confuse their expectations of the traditional lecture-seminar structure. (In the case study described below, I involved students in choosing the readings for their stylistic analysis to give them a feeling of responsibility in and commitment to their learning. Another aim was to improve attendance.)

3. Action research

Action research, also called participatory action research, is an evaluative, investigative and reflective approach or inquiry into pedagogical practices with the aim of improving how something is done. The participation element of action research is important as the activity 'demands that participants perceive the need to change and are willing to play an active part in the research and change process' (Koshy et al., 2011: 11). Those undertaking the research are both 'active agents' and 'investigators' of their own 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Burns, 2010), meaning that action research can be undertaken in any discipline or field (and not just in an educational context).

 In a classroom setting, action research is conducted to explore aspects of teaching and learning with the specific aim of improving pedagogy. This method of investigation can lead to a greater understanding of teaching practice and the implementation of positive changes. 'Action researchers nearly always starts with a question, such as "How can we improve this situation?"' (Bradbury, 2015: 1) and begins with a problem that needs to be solved through a systematic process that involves documenting 'data'. Documentation allows for authentic data to be collected and reflected upon making the process replicable and retrievable and allows for further changes to made if necessary.

 A advantages of why action research is a useful strategy for evaluating and making change to teaching pedagogy is summarised below. (See Koshy et al, 2011)

- Action research is a method used for improving practice. It involves action, evaluation, and critical reflection and – based on the evidence gathered – changes in practice are then implemented
- Action research is participative and collaborative; it is undertaken by individuals with a common purpose.
- It is situation-based and context specific.
- It develops reflection based on interpretations made by the participants.
- Knowledge is created through action and at the point of application.
- Action research can involve problem solving, if the solution to the problem leads to the improvement of practice.
- In action research findings will emerge as action develops, but these are not conclusive or absolute.

To give an example of action research in a language learning classroom, Burns and Kurtoglu-Hooton (2014) describe a collaborative funded project between two universities (Aston University and the University of New South Wales) and three secondary schools, where they worked with three modern language teachers (ML) of Spanish and French. The ML teachers attended two workshops facilitated by the University researchers (UR) and then worked with the researchers on an aspect of their teaching they wanted to explore by first identifying an area of their teaching. The process of planning to effect change led to a stage of reflection on the impact of the change to their pedagogy and student learning. Educators are likely to make changes to their pedagogy informally, which can be as simple as changing the reading for analysis to provide texts that are more meaningful, current or diverse, to introducing more overt means of investigation and evaluation with questionnaires and surveys for capturing data.

 The various stages that make action research replicable and retrievable can be broken down into four stages, which Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) describes a *spiral* with four 'moments' arranged as a cyclical process of *Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect* (summarised below):

   1 Plan: The first stage is where an aspect of teaching and learning is identified and a plan is developed to investigate what needs to change. A question may be asked – how can I change this situation? - as the basis for developing the activity

   2 Act: The new activity is presented in class with the participants and in this way is 'tested'

   3 Observe: To ensure action research systematic, data is collected to be able to evaluate the new activity. This can take different forms, such as verbal feedback from students, to journals,

questionnaires, and photographs. (In my case study, I collected student feedback from a questionnaire and took photographs of the students participating in the activity

4 Reflect: Reflection is a continuous process and begins at the start as it prompts the teacher to make the change but at this stage, there is an opportunity to evaluate and critique the success of the activity and whether to implement it in the future or make further changes which starts another cycle beginning with *Re-planning*.

A model of action research as a spiral with four 'moments' as proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) is represented in Figure 1 where the arrows indicate the direction of movement beginning at (1) *Plan* and moving in a spiral pattern through the next two stages of (2) *Act* and (3) *Observe* to the final stage of the action research cycle, (4) *Reflect*. Once the change has been implemented and reflection has taken place, there may be reasons to make further changes and so the process continues with a second cycle beginning with (1a) *Re-planning* before moving on to the next stages of *Act-Observe-Reflect*. In this way, a dynamic and continuous practice of reflection takes place.
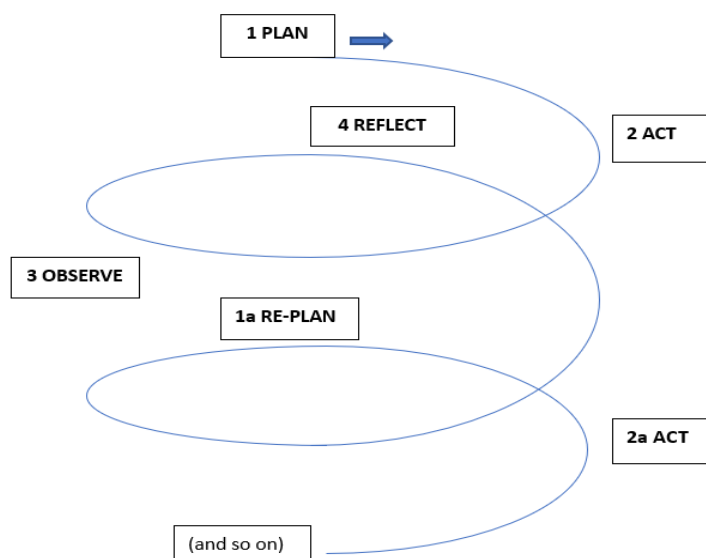
Figure 1. The spiral model of *Action Research* (after Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988)

To be able to identify what aspect of pedagogy needs to change to begin the planning stage, the teacher as researcher should ask themselves a series of questions to help pinpoint and focus on the issue. Wallace (1998: 21) offers a useful set of headings and questions to work through a chosen area, summarised in the following list:

> **Purpose**: why do this research?
> **Topic**: what is the area you want to investigate?
> **Focus**: what specifically do you want to investigate and what questions will you ask?
> **Product**: what is the outcome you would like?
> **Mode**: how are you going to do the research?
> **Timing**: is there a time limit for the research to be completed?
> **Resources**: what do you need to conduct the research i.e. students, IT equipment, transcription equipment
> **Refocusing/fine-tuning**: as with all research you may need to change or adapt your research. (Perhaps you asked the wrong question or it needs to be reframed.)

4. Teaching stylistics with whiteboards: a case study

My research questions (1. *how can I improve student attendance and engagement in the stylistics classroom?; and 2. What changes can I make in my pedagogy so students understand the value and relevance of stylistic analysis as preparation for their assessment?*) developed as a reaction to a situation in a class I was teaching in 2016 at Kingston University, UK. The stylistics module was in the second-year of the BA English Language and Linguistics programme. Students had only received an introductory class on stylistics in the first year to provide them with a taster (along with other core and option topics) of topics they could choose for study in the following two years of their degree. (The second-year stylistics course was also fairly introductory and students could take a more advanced option in the third year.) Timetabling for the stylistics module was originally a two-hour weekly workshop but I asked for an additional hour to run fortnightly to give students more contact time to analyse and discuss a range of literary texts and set readings to prepare them for the summative (final) assessment worth 40%. (See Figure 2 for guidance on the stylistic analysis assessment. The two other points of assessments were an essay on pragmatics, worth 50% and a presentation of a chapter on stylistics worth 10%.) Perhaps because the additional fortnightly hour (henceforth referred to as the third hour) was not part of the original timetabling or perhaps because it ran on a different day to the workshop, which required students to come to the campus for one hour's teaching only, the early weeks saw extremely low attendance. Despite efforts to explain the value of these classes via emails, significant absenteeism persisted. In a cohort of 21 students enrolled on the module, there were usually 3-5 students attending and when those present were asked what was the reasons for the absenteeism, they stated some students did not think the session were important even though those attending disagreed and found the content invaluable. The weekly workshops were also not as well attended as I had hoped. (Attendance issues appeared to be widespread and became a standing agenda item at Departmental meetings.)

Stylistic analysis of a literary text assessment (40%)

i. You have a choice of four excerpts from literary texts and must choose ONE to analyse:
Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte
The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath
Beloved by Toni Morrison
The Birds by Daphne du Maurier

ii. Undertake a detailed stylistic analysis of TWO stylistic features from the list below (- each bullet point represents one feature):
- Syntax and lexis
- Figurative language
- Speech and thought presentation
- Cohesion and coherence
- Narration and point of view
- Dialogue and discourse
- Narrative (structure)

You can also discuss *Text World Theory*, *foregrounding*, *schema theory* and mind style in your analysis (etc.)

Figure 2. Assessment guidance: stylistic analysis of a literary text

In one week where the focus of the stylistic analysis was on dialogue and discourse, students were asked to apply their understanding of the features of conversation (analysis) and power, presented to them in the first hour, to a passage from *Richard III* (taken from Short, 1996) and were given time in the class to work on the activity. A short excerpt of the passage is given in Figure 3 to illustrate the task.

Seminar activity on dialogue and discourse: *Richard III,* Act IV, Scene 2

Guidance
Analyse the dialogue for features associated with CA using Short's (1996: 206) 'power/powerless speaker' model. Comment on the:
i. turn-taking structure: number of turns and turn length, turn allocation, adjacency pairs, hedging etc.
ii. (im)politeness features: terms of address, interruptions and overlaps, topic change, insults, direct and indirect speech acts etc.

Use line numbers to refer to examples form the text

Synopsis of excerpt
Earlier in the play before Richard is King, he asks Buckingham to help him plot the death of Hastings and in return, promises to give him the Earldom of Hereford and other rewards when he becomes King. Buckingham fulfils the deed and in this scene, he is attempting to claim his promise from Richard who has just been crowned King. The setting is public and there are other nobles present which explains King Richard's conversations to others during this dialogue.

BUCKINGHAM. My lord, I have consider'd in my mind	1
The late request that you did sound me in.	
KING RICHARD. Well, let that rest. Dorset is fled to	
Richmond.	
BUCKINGHAM. I hear the news, my lord.	5
KING RICHARD. Stanley, he is your wife's son: well, look	
unto it.	
BUCKINGHAM. My lord, I claim the gift, my due by promise,	
For which your honour and your faith is pawn'd:	
Th' earldom of Hereford and the movables	10
Which you have promised I shall possess.	
KING RICHARD. Stanley, look to your wife; if she convey	
Letters to Richmond, you shall answer it.	
BUCKINGHAM. What says your Highness to my just request?	
KING RICHARD. I do remember me: Henry the Sixth	15
Did prophesy that Richmond should be King,	
When Richmond was a little peevish boy.	
A king!-perhaps-	
BUCKINGHAM. My lord-	
KING RICHARD. How chance the prophet could not at that	20
time	
Have told me, I being by, that I should kill him?	
BUCKINGHAM. My lord, your promise for the earldom-	
[Cont…]	

Figure 3. *Richard III* excerpt and guidance for the stylistic analysis task

As is often the case in a small group, the same one or two students responded to questions on their analysis, a pattern that established itself from week 1. Had all the students understood the concepts and the aims of the teaching? How could I test this this? It was necessary to change my approach as it appeared not all students felt confident to communicate their answers, even though I could see they had all produced annotations on their handouts (which they worked on firstly, individually and then in pairs before I asked for feedback.) I divided the students into two groups (A and B) and each group was given a set of coloured whiteboard marker pens and asked to go to one of the whiteboards in the classroom and produce their stylistic analysis. I explained that how they chose to present their analysis could be agreed between them.

Once the activity began, there was a marked increase in levels of engagement as students collaborated with each other to discuss and share ideas and then produce their analysis on the whiteboards – each presenting their differently i.e. one in the form of a comparable list, and the other as a mind map. (See Figures 4 and 5.)
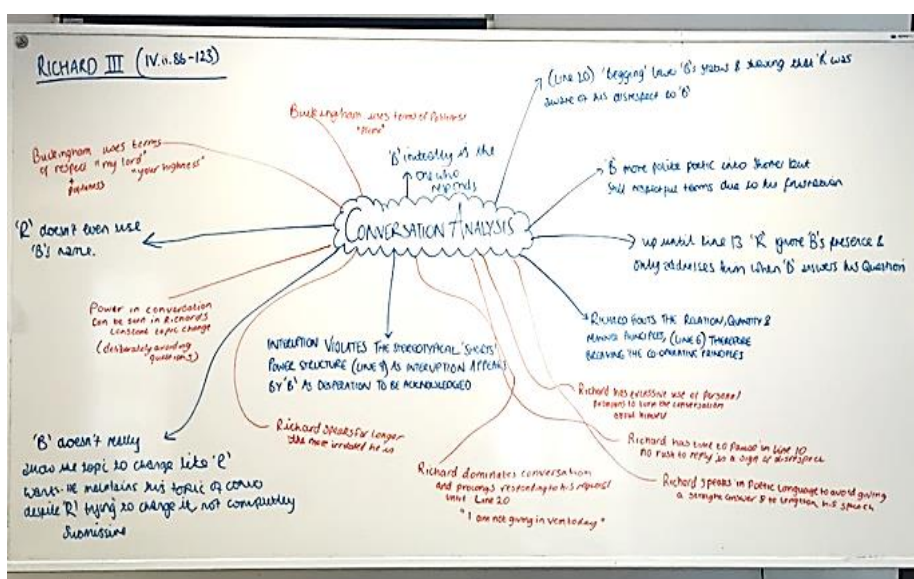

Figure 4. Group A's analysis of King Richard and Buckingham's dialogue from Richard III
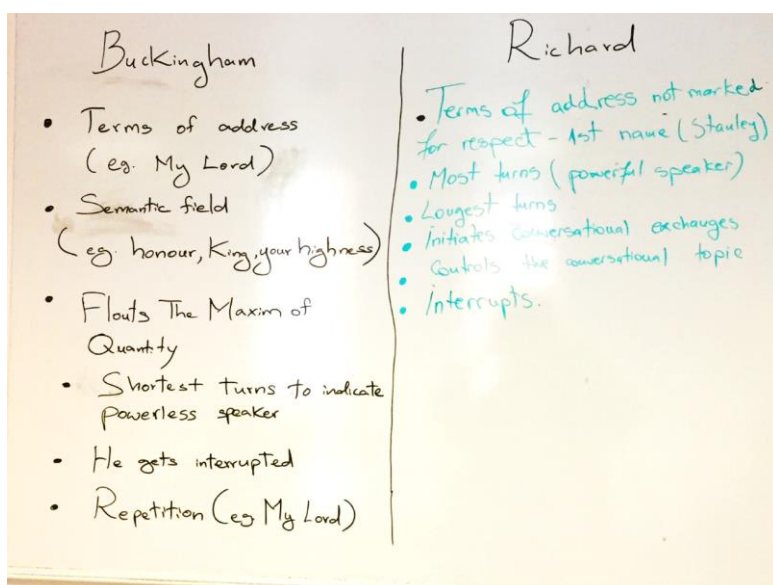
Figure 5. Group B's analysis of King Richard and Buckingham's dialogue from Richard III

Reassuringly, the whiteboards showed evidence of a good understanding of the communicative strategies found in dialogues when applying Conversation Analysis and the Cooperative Principle frameworks, and the discourse features of power, politeness/ impoliteness. Students commented on how much they enjoyed working collaboratively in this way and explained the whiteboard activity allowed them to offer their ideas among their peers and felt less exposed and worried about making a mistake. I suggested that future analysis could be undertaken using the whiteboards rather than working   from   their   desks.

   Reflecting on my own teaching pedagogy and students' responses I could see the value of organising the third hour activity in a similar way to encourage greater engagement and attendance. I thought it would be useful to collect feedback more systematically, in addition to their verbal feedback and planned this research as *action research* with the aim of investigating the impact of the whiteboard activity on students' learning. Using Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) model of action research I identified (*Plan*) the area to investigate – use of whiteboards as a collaborative learning strategy - and would present this this mode of learning (*Act*) in future classes. I would then collect feedback (*Observe*) using a questionnaire in addition to the verbal feedback to evaluate the change in pedagogy and think about (*Reflect*) the impact on both the teaching and learning experience . If necessary, I would make further changes. While it might seem incongruous that the old-fashioned whiteboard was a successful medium for learning in a digital age, evidence suggested it was a useful strategy to encourage collaboration and the sharing of ideas that was less successful in pair and group work seated at the desk. The visual impact of the whiteboard work also gave students a sense of achievement. In the weekly workshop, I continued to give the text out as part of the seminar element (after introducing the terms and frameworks in the first 'lecture' hour), but would continue to flip the classroom for the third hour fortnightly classes by uploading the analysis task onto the VLE a week in advance to optimise class time for analysis and discussion.

   At the next weekly workshop, I saw an increase in attendance which confirmed was because of 'positive word-of-mouth feedback' about the whiteboard activity and relevance to the the assessment. I involved students in the choice of texts for analysis and asked if they would like to suggest one or two for analysis. Students were excited at this prospect and chose *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer (2005), the first novel in her trilogy of 'young adult' fiction. (The books had also been adapted into successful films.) The excerpt from Chapter 1 of *Twilight* was uploaded onto the module's VLE with guidance that reflected the assessment strategy to help students understand what was expected and lessen any anxiety they might have had. Students were expected to bring their analysis to class to be able to participate on the whiteboards. (See Figure 6 for an excerpt of this activity.)

Analyse the excerpt below from Chapter 1 of *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer (2005) focusing on ONE feature below. Use line numbers to refer to the text. (Foregrounding and mind style can be discussed as part of your analysis.)

- *Syntax and lexis*
- *Figurative Language*
- *Speech and Thought Presentation*
- *Cohesion and Coherence*
- *Narration and Point of view*
- *Dialogue and discourse*

Bring your notes to the lecture on Monday to discuss your ideas.

Chapter 1. The First Sight

1   The red-haired woman looked up. "Can I help you?"

"I'm Isabella Swan," I informed her, and saw the immediate awareness light her eyes. I was expected, a topic of gossip no doubt. Daughter of the Chief's flighty ex-wife, come home at last.

5

"Of course," she said. She dug through a precariously stacked pile of documents on her desk till she found the ones she was looking for. "I have your schedule right here, and a map of the school." She brought several sheets to the counter to show me

10   She went through my classes for me, highlighting the best route to each on the map, and gave me a slip to have each teacher sign, which I was to bring back at the end of the day. She smiled at me and

Figure 6. *Twighlight* activity for a stylistic analysis

In the workshop, students were put into small groups depending on the stylistic feature they had chosen to focus on for their analysis (e.g. Group A *Dialogue and Discourse*; Group B *Narration and Point of View* etc.) and work in their groups to produce their analysis on a whiteboard. During the activity, students also wandered over to other groups to look at and comment on those whiteboards. The resulting analysis of the *Twilight* text on the whiteboards was presented colourfully, with students working with different coloured marker pens to organise and demonstrate their understanding of the topic. The coloured pens also showed the work of many students working together. (See Figures 7-10 of the whiteboards.)
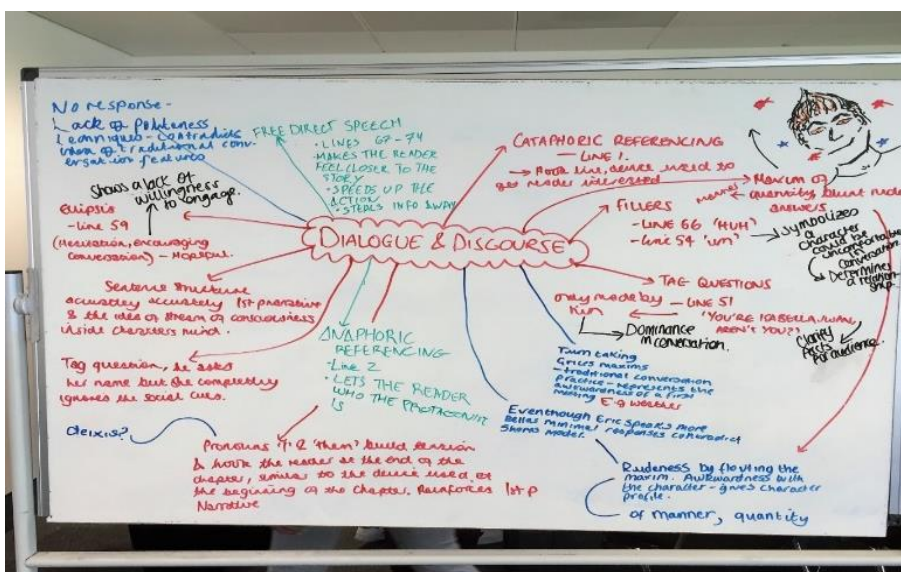

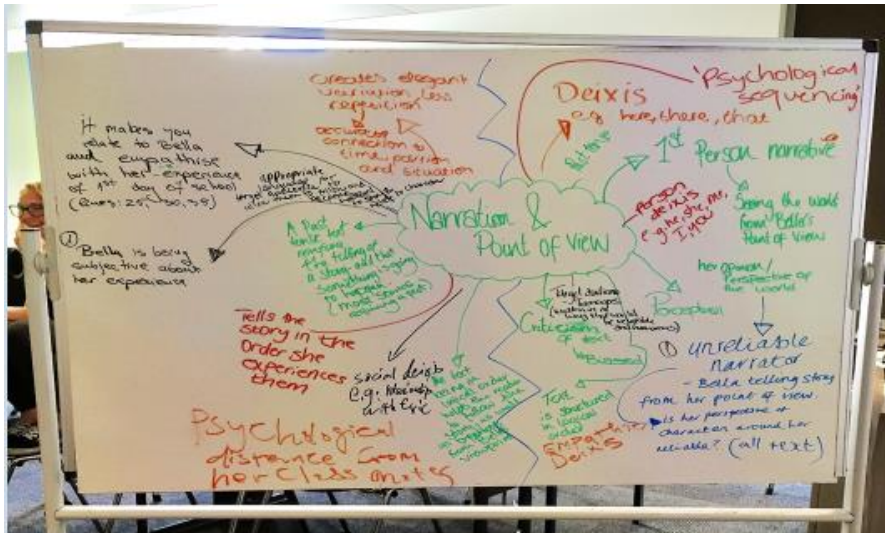**Figure 7**. Whiteboard activity: dialogue and discourse

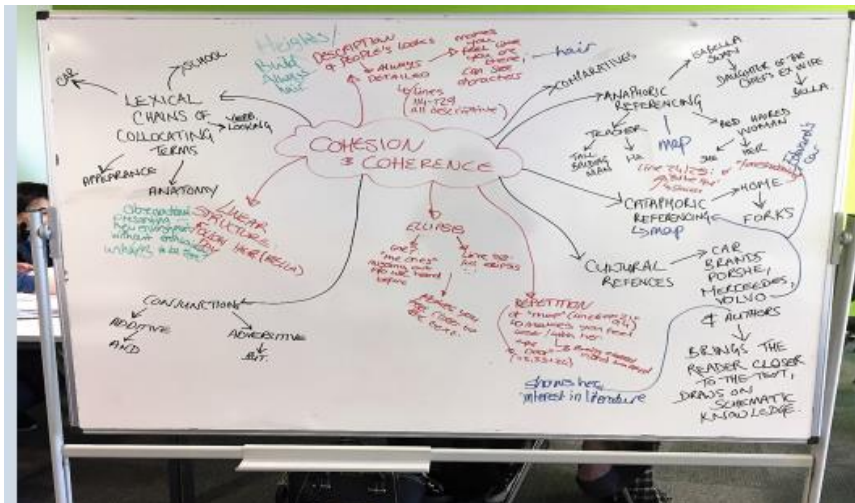**Figure 8**. Whiteboard activity: Narration and point of view

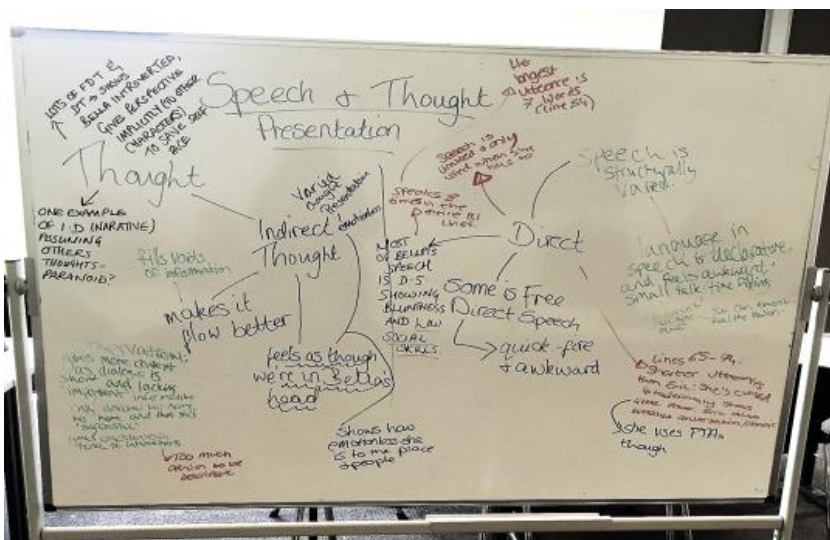Figure 9. Whiteboard activity: cohesion and coherence

Figure 10. Whiteboard activity: Speech and thought presentation

For the action research *observation* stage, I also took photos of students to record their activity, which showed them discussing and collaborating to produce their analysis. (See Figures 11a-11c of students at work.) Throughout the activity, I stood back and only intervened when a student had a question, and let students make their own decisions. (I was given permission by students to take photos and reproduce them for research purposes at a later date.)

Figure 11a. Students working collaboratively

Figure 11b. Students working collaboratively

Figure 11c. Students working collaboratively

With the students' permission, I uploaded all the photos taken during the workshop onto the VLE. Interestingly, at the next workshop, several students had printed off photos of the whiteboards analysis to use as revision aides and help them with their stylistic analysis.

5. Action research: evaluating the whiteboard activity

Part of the *Observation* process of any action research is the recording or collecting of data that can be used as part of the *Reflection* and if necessary, any further *Re-planning*. While informal verbal feedback and images of whiteboards and students working together provide visual evidence of the activity's success, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the activity on student learning and preparation for the final assessment. I designed a simple questionnaire with four questions which was emailed to students to complete. (See Figure 12.)

Student feedback on whiteboard activity and stylistic analysis (March 2016)

Dear students

Thank you for all your hard work this week. I'd really appreciate your feedback on the whiteboard activity and presentation of this work as you said you found it both helpful for your learning and enjoyed it. (etc.)

Figure 12. Email to students about questionnaire

Responses to the four questions were collated and are presented below, in Tables 1a-e. The exact wording from students is reproduced:

1. What did you find particularly helpful/useful about the whiteboard activity and presentation for your learning?	• It was a way to see the work on a large scale. It allowed you to plot it out and physically see it so you could make further links to enable a more detailed analysis • The whiteboard activity was extremely helpful, as we were able to visually break down a stylistic analysis on a large scale. This enabled us to get a better overview of how each feature is analysed, it also promoted discussion within the group and created further ideas • I was not in the lecture but the guys who presented it made clear links and a more interesting way of viewing and processing the information. This really helped me when planning and writing my assessment essay. It was easier to stay focused and make links between points • I found it helpful to see the spectrum of devices we should be looking for when analysing, and how the different elements interact with one another

Table 1a. Responses to Question 1 of questionnaire

1. continued	• I like that we used mind maps. It generally helps me whenever I need to write down idea's and it helps developing more idea's. I also liked that we were doing it in groups and focusing on one particular aspect because it feels like we were able to analyse the text more thoroughly rather than doing a bit of everything. The presentations were also great because explaining it helps us understand what we analysed but also develop our answers and points which is useful for the assignment • Strongly recommended, enhanced teamwork, share opinion. Everyone can contribute

Table 1b. Responses to Question 1 of questionnaire (continued)

2. How did working collaboratively with other students support/ help with your learning?	• Working with other people allowed for initial ideas to be expanded, producing more developed responses • Working collaboratively improved our communication skills, while also combining different ideas, which promoted creativity within a group setting. This is allowed me to take into account different perspectives when analysing stylistics, and to consider alternative perspectives when writing my essay. This also stimulated discussions and was an extremely enjoyable experience • It aided me in planning for my essay • Different people are better at analysing different aspects, and they have contrasting viewpoints on how to do it, or what it means • It helped because we were able to discuss our idea's. Usually when we are doing it alone everybody seems to be worried about getting it wrong. Doing it together allowed us to suggest idea's to one and other and it is also reassuring to know that others in the group have similar idea's • Help to find points I did not analyse before

Table 1c. Responses to Question 2 of questionnaire

	(not confident) 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 (very confident)	
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, indicate how confident you feel about undertaking the stylistic analysis of a literary text for your assessment (with 1 being not confident and 10 very confident).	**Before stylistic analysis practice:** 7 → 6 3 5 5 5	**Now – with practice, whiteboard work and presentation** 9/10 10 9 8 7 10

Table 1d. Responses to Question 3 of questionnaire

4. Any other comments (e.g. maybe comment on the text, amount of time given, range of features, how it links to assessment etc.)	• It was a really fun activity, which was different from the normal technique. It allowed initial responses to be adapted and developed through working collaboratively and actively. It really helped with the assessment as it showed me different ways to undertake a stylistics analysis, thinking of how others expanded on my initial ideas, and being able to do this myself • This type of work stimulated thought, discussion and was really helpful. This work helped me to create structure when it came to writing my stylistic analysis and also showed me a variety of perspectives. Most of all it was fun and allowed us to learn proactively • I think it's a really great way to gather points and make relevant links between points. It also helps to structure work research required (especially the language in the text extracts make for interesting analysis, as there is a measure of background help) • I think last whiteboard activity is well-structured. Timing is also good. This activity helps assessment a lot.

Table 1e. Responses to Question 1 of questionnaire

Of the 14 students who attended the workshop (out of a total of 21 students enrolled on the module) six students completed the questionnaire. The overall feedback from students was positive and confirmed they enjoyed the activity and found it 'helpful' and 'stimulating' and could see the how stylistic analysis activities benefitted their learning and prepared them for the final assessment. They also felt the collaborative approach gave them 'a variety of perspectives' for their 'initial ideas to be expanded'. Most notable was the responses to Question 3. where students indicated a significant increase in their confidence in undertaking the assessment. (Perhaps a more rigorous method would

have been to ask students how confident they felt about undertaking the stylistic analysis in preparation for the assessment prior to introducing the whiteboard activity. Nevertheless, the results on the questionnaire are useful because they indicate that students feel much more prepared, and answered one of my research questions.)

In January 2019, I presented this case study at the *Stylistics Circle* a meeting that takes place every couple of months in London for stylisticians to meet informally and present research, discuss readings and generally talk about stylistics. Fellow stylisticians responded positively to the talk, particularly, having an additional third hour timetabled for further hands-on analysis and were interested in the whiteboard activity for getting students to work together to produce their analysis. Two days later, I received a Twitter notification that one of the stylisticians at the talk had tried the whiteboard activity, and posted images of students working collaboratively on whiteboards together with photos of their work with the caption 'It's...work...ing...' (See Figure 13.) (I am grateful to Jeremy Scott for giving me permission to reproduce the tweet.)

Figure 13. Jeremy's tweet

6. Conclusion

Reflective teaching practice is important to ensure that as educators we continue to improve how we teach as part of our commitment to teaching and learning. Stylisticians have a history of engaging in pedagogical stylistics and the stylistics of pedagogy (McIntyre (2011) to enhance students' learning. Evaluating the success and impact of teaching pedagogies through action research can provide one systematic approach for reflection and as this case study has outlined, offer insights into the impact that changes can make to both the student experience and to improved teaching pedagogies. As Zyngier and Fialho (2010: 17) point out, 'Critical educators see themselves as researchers in constant dialogue with students, who are also expected not to take anything for granted' and action research provides the potential to both critique and reflect.

Some key messages that emerged from this case study that can be taken forward when thinking about approaches to teaching are: if an activity or approach is not working, change it at any point of your lecture/ seminar / workshop. Think on your feet and be spontaneous or anticipate in advance any issues that might arise and use resources and facilities available to you. Use whiteboards if they are available because students like to collaborate and share ideas and as feedback suggest, feel more confident using this method to demonstrate their knowledge. (Any form of collaboration and joint activity should work.) Flip the classroom to give students the time to prepare in advance at their own pace and this will optimise classroom time for discussion and feedback, allowing for learning through problem-based activities. Also involve students in making decisions about their learning, for example, by asking them which books they enjoy reading, and agree which texts to study in class. However experienced the tutor, making minor changes minor can result in positive improvements for both learners and tutors, as evidenced in the case study outlined here.

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