

TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT - THE FUNDAMENTALS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



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I AM A TEACHER

– WHAT IS MY INTENTION?

Teaching is more than just a job; it's a way of life, a mindset, a journey of self-discovery. We have the power to create or destroy! In collaboration with students and parents we can share dreams, calm fears, influence thinking and be remembered for generations. We hold the future in our hands and with that comes no greater responsibility. We just simply have to believe in others.

The individual learner should be central to any educational philosophy we adopt. Gone are the days where a "one size fits all" strategy is good enough to cater for the individual and collective needs of a dynamic and varied classroom cohort. The teachers' role has evolved from a provider of information to a facilitator of learning. In a world of league tables, judgements and policy changes, it should be every teacher's duty to "get stuck in" to learning. We should also actively encourage the development of lifelong learning skills with the students in our care. Vision statements from most schools and colleges convey their support in the development of confident, capable and skilful students. They encourage students to open their minds to the exploration of possibilities that aim to prepare them for globalisation in a world full of transferable skill sets and technological advancements. In essence, we need to make it our mission to equip our students with habits that will allow them to cope with change.

It is a privilege to teach and play a role in the development of a young person's academic and personal maturity. Converting potential into reality should be our central purpose. We are shaping the future and creating a new generation of citizens that will contribute to our ever evolving society. Our work is tangible in every respect and with that there can be no greater accountability. By embracing diversity, committing to excellence, overcoming challenges and working together, we can ensure that every student becomes the best possible version of themselves.

THE LEARNING PROCESS

Learning is a messy business that occurs inside the individual, and personalised, milieu of the student brain. In an ever changing, and challenging profession, it is our job as teachers to elucidate the mechanisms by which our students process, contextualise and retain the information we are supplying them with. Learning is a whole brain activity and involves multiple locations and communication between neurons in both hemispheres. Whilst both hemispheres are required for learning to take place there is strong scientific evidence that the right hemisphere generates holistic understanding of incoming sensory stimuli. It has greater integrative power than the left hemisphere and is constantly searching for patterns that create "the big picture". Research has proven that contextual understanding depends on the right frontal lobe for meaning to be conveyed. This is especially important when it comes to language comprehension and provides us with a rationale to ensure that students are given an opportunity, perhaps as a starting point in their learning, to be taught context and rationale. People with right hemisphere brain damage rarely understand humour, as humour relies on context. The left hemisphere decodes the sum of all parts and deals with the individual components presented. To use a simple analogy the right hemisphere "sees" a person as a whole body; the left knows that it is made up of arms, legs, eyes, ears etc.

Learning is **not** simply a sequential process (although new learning does require existing neuronal pathways to be activated and connections to be made between what is already known). If we take the simple model highlighted on page 6 (X-Y-Z model) it can be manipulated to inform our teaching and assessment strategies. It is important to remember that you cannot force your brain to learn disconnected facts. Learning occurs on a continuum starting with an understanding of where content, facts and knowledge fit in an existing understanding of the world we live in. Our brains are designed to solve problems and make sense of sensory input; not to store random facts long term for future use. Of greater relevance to us are the factors we can influence to augment the efficacy of our teaching strategies. They include the promotion of deep processing, brain compatibility (information in stories is retained longer than information that is abstract), and maybe the most important of all, meaningfulness.

Our memory system is intimately integrated into our emotional and sensory systems. Think of how difficult it is to recall previously learned information, or learn something new, if we are stressed, tired or cannot relate to the content. The more we practice and rehearse something new the easier it is for our brain to transmit these experiences efficiently and store them for ready access later. This process is called fluency.



Since learning inherently requires acquisition of new information, our brains' propensity to focus on the novel and forget the redundant make it a natural learning ally.

In fact, our brains are hard wired to learn from the moment we are born.

However, if this is the case -

- ❑ Why does learning so often disappear in the brain?
- ❑ Why is retention of information so difficult?
- ❑ Why is forgetting so easy?

The answers to these questions will hopefully be explained in the text below to some degree. Of wider consideration, and something that we need to think about, is how students revise and learn over time. Low impact strategies like mass highlighting, re-reading, note copying and poor mind mapping need to be discussed with students as they often lead to an overestimation of expertise.

A SIMPLE MODEL FOR LEARNING

	Novice	User	Expert
Point:	X	Y	Z
Level:	Big picture	Medium picture	Small picture
Skills:	Basic knowledge	Processing and understanding	Abstract understanding, application in unfamiliar context and extension
Assessment:	Entry level questions	Medium difficulty level/tasks	Most difficult questions/tasks
Time to teach:	Hours	Often weeks	Can take months

Imagine you are teaching curriculum content for the first time.

How does our understanding of brain mechanisms influence the way in which we teach and assess?

Point X – generating the big picture: You would not expect students to understand the intricacies of content, or to be able to manipulate information as we do, after one lesson. Expertise development takes time, effort, rehearsal and repetition. The starting point, and the generation of context and rules, requires “scene setting” activities. One of the most important things we can do in a classroom is to ensure that new learning is observed through the eyes of the students. Base lining, or assessing what they already know, is essential to generate new learning. It is at this point that new information should be presented through discussion, exploration, questioning and context.

Creating strong, emotionally relevant context for the students at this stage is essential for long term retention. Most of the learning at this stage will be fact based, or early level skills based. Imagine a Velcro wall of knowledge that you want to create at this stage for future use, and the facts as sticky balls that we throw at it. We all know what it is like to remember facts, or skills, one day and forget them the next. Without reinforcement these “sticky fact balls” either fall off or form weak connections. Over time they may disappear and prior learning can become undone.

At this stage in learning, making the information presented relevant to the students is essential. Finding out what they know, and how content fits in with their world views and prior understanding, is essential. Ensure all students have the opportunity to discuss the content. Set out non-negotiable facts that need to be reinforced. Make sure the notes that they are taking are personalised and examples of how this information fits “through their eyes” with examples are recorded. Discussion based learning, with collective modelling of how the content is used, is the best teaching strategy at this point. Asking the right questions to gauge processing rates also needs to be carried out.

DRILLING DOWN

Once the “big picture” contextual learning has occurred in the classroom we must “drill down” to reinforce prior learning and provide opportunities for students to apply new knowledge in the context of the examination. “Mid picture” learning (Point Y) requires a different teaching strategy. Learning at this stage requires more rigorous processing and the ability to communicate fluently on paper. Teaching the students the skills of written communication to match their inherent knowledge can be often frustrating. It is not uncommon for students to have secure knowledge in their heads but a lack of skills to put it down on paper. Teaching strategies at this stage require elements of the following:

- Identification of how content is assessed.
- Analysing assessment data to isolate areas students previously underachieved.
- Identification of command words in questions and developing strategies to write fluently.
- The use of key terms, ideas or skills that obtain marks.
- A literacy strategy that ensures students can decode questions and develop effective written communication.
- Peer assessment.
- Focused group work that involves problem solving and modelling.

DEVELOPING THE LEARNING PROCESS

If we are to take learning as a progressive development of skills and knowledge then the latter stages are related to being able to use learning in multiple formats; including the abstract (Point Z). At this point in the learning process expertise is developed and students can manipulate their understanding in both the contextual and abstract form. If you think of how examinations are presented they are often designed to be progressively more difficult as one progresses through a paper or task. The skills required to move up through the mark bands are notably different. An explicit decoding of the skills is required in conjunction with the removal of emerging barriers to learning. At this stage in learning teachers often need to spend more time on the following:

- Developing the students’ extended writing skills.
- Making links between content more obvious.
- Improved analysis of text.
- Reading and interpretation skills.
- Abstract thought processes.
- Teaching them the differences between strong and weak answers.
- Ensuring challenging questions can be decoded before planning responses.
- Ensuring skills are fine tuned to represent the marking criteria.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

- ❑ Assessment skills require time to develop.
- ❑ Regular assessment progressively develops the skills required to cope with the examination process.
- ❑ Students learn best when the focus of learning is not just tests – we have to find the balance between assessment capability and a love of lifelong learning. Information is much more likely to be retained when the students actually enjoy their learning and understand the links between their learning and future development.
- ❑ Assessment strategies that astutely provide information on what the students currently can and cannot do are essential. In learning, failure can often be used positively to make new learning happen. We often learn best when we learn from our mistakes. Students with a fear of failure do not learn long term as they should.
- ❑ Develop the abilities of the students to design and mark their own assessments.

Assessments provide us with a snapshot of learning rates. A circular assessment strategy to reinforce learning can be a powerful teaching tool. For example consider the following:

- ❑ Mark a student's test.
- ❑ Record for yourself what they can do well and what they currently cannot do.
- ❑ Provide feedback that is directional to the student; in other words what have they got to do about the parts that they cannot do? Is it a quick fix or something that requires more input from you or their peers?
- ❑ Use assessment information wisely. Once you go through a test with the class create a summary of what you found. This information can be used to plan for future assessments, to design question types that are causing difficulty, to inform homework and group work activities, or lesson starters and plenaries.
- ❑ Keep coming back to areas that students have underscored on. Keep reinforcing and teaching them the skills and content over time to alleviate prior errors.
- ❑ Students are coached in the self-reflective process.
- ❑ Small manageable steps are provided to move students toward the "finish line" of the learning expected of them.

TRACKING LEARNING OVER TIME

If students keep a "live" record of what they cannot do following assessment then learning can be personalised. Most importantly of all when it comes to revision, intervention and skills development, having a record of what you cannot do over time can be used to supplement the revision strategy. Teachers who work with groups of students who have a similar problem (in or out of the lesson) can provide solutions and ensure that students have an understanding of how to address errors and misconceptions. In short, students who require more input from the teacher obviously require more opportunities to reinforce, rehearse and practice their craft. A good teacher uses assessment data as a tool to reinforce key areas for improvement.

Repetition and persistent rehearsal are powerful tools that we can utilise to develop the more difficult areas of the exam. If students are already experts in these areas then use them to support the less able. The best decoding of difficult content often comes from the students not the teachers. Use them as additional resources in the classroom. This strategy develops self-confidence, collective accountability and creates a dynamic learning atmosphere. Alternatively, these are the students that need to be writing examination questions, with solutions and marking criteria, with you or for you. It is them after all that need to develop exam robustness not us.



CASE STUDY

Students, in their notes, had a column running down the side of their page and a box at the bottom of their page. In the column, adjacent to the student's notes, the teacher was linking the notes they were taking to previous assessment questions (by difficulty level). Every time the students were revising their notes they had direct links to where the content was previously assessed. The box at the bottom of the page was for student evaluation. In this box, as part of their homework, they had to record what they could not do and why they could not do it. This information was used by the teacher to reinforce prior learning, provide bespoke intervention and create future assessment questions to elucidate the impact of their input over time.

The students could only get their notes countersigned by the teacher when they provided a robust evidence base that the problems identified were overcome. This type of teaching strategy also develops additional learning skills (self-reflection, identification of learning barriers, resilience) that the students will need as they move through the educational system. Homework for the more able students involved the creation of questions and mark schemes that assessed their learning over time. These questions, and the mark schemes they developed, were shared at the whole class level. This was done with a year 9 class.

AN ASSESSMENT GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

TRACKING LEARNING OVER TIME

The new assessment regimes imposed on teachers will mean that we have to evolve and tweak the way in which we teach over time. Intrinsic to the success of the students in our care will be how we assess them in the short, medium and long term so we can ascertain more astutely what they can and cannot do. Understanding the manner in which information is encoded and retrieved in the brain of young people that are still developing their social, emotional and reflective capacities, is vital to how we teach. Knowing more about the learning process for different age groups can only help; simple models that reflect the internal workings of our memory may be the starting point that we need. In summary let's teach our students to:

- + LISTEN ATTENTIVELY
- + READ CURIOUSLY
- + THINK CRITICALLY
- + KNOW THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS
- + REVISE EFFECTIVELY
- + MAP MINDFULLY
- + LOVE LEARNING
- + TRACK THEIR PROGRESS
- + DEVELOP COLLECTIVE EXPERTISE

WHAT MAKES GOOD LEARNING?

We have learned more about the learning process over the past twenty years than we have learned in past two hundred! With the mysticism behind learning being greatly decoded, are we as teachers responding with a deliberate pedagogical shift in our curriculum delivery strategies? Are we rising to the challenge of 21st learning initiatives? More importantly, do we need to do anything different? With our increased knowledge of how learning takes place I dare say we have an accountability to augment our repertoire of teaching strategies so that we can strive to become expert facilitators of learning.

Stick to what makes a difference!

Firstly, we need to debunk some common fallacies, or neuro-myths, associated with the way in which we learn. In the late 1990s there was a fundamental requirement to match the learning styles of our teaching cohorts. It was met with a plethora of lesson plans singling out the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners that sat eagerly awaiting their 'input channel' to be stimulated in the classroom. This benefited the egalitarian view of education but often restricted the 'playground of the mind' that is intrinsically linked to making sense of incoming information.

We now know of course that learning requires meaningful contextual input that engages previously existing schematas. This allows students to make sense of the world around them and to process the information being provided to them.

Learning does not occur in isolated islands in the brain. It is intimately connected to our emotional and sensory systems; systems that play a critical role in encoding and retrieving information. Our brains are designed to capture both the new and novel idiosyncrasies of the world around us. Memories get rewritten every day based upon new learning. Have you ever asked the question why students tend to learn best in classes where they have outstanding rapport with their teachers, are praised for making and correcting mistakes, have an opportunity to discuss their learning, share their thoughts, obtain appropriate and timely feedback, understand the assessment process and the 'rules of the examinations'? The ideology of 'primary learning styles' negates these principles.

Learning occurs more effectively when we plan lessons that encourage students to make multiple connections to existing knowledge. The mammalian brain, and the learning processes that occurs within it, work upon a highly associative architecture. Allowing students to make their own associations with the intended learning activities favours a better return in terms of outcomes. Learning is making the invisible visible, making the unknown known and turning confusion into clarity.



The three most important questions that teachers should ask themselves at the end of a lesson are:

1. Have the students in my lesson made progress?
2. Have all the students in my classroom made progress to the right extent?
3. How do I know?

Using these questions as reflective exercises, a practitioner can reframe the ways in which they teach and assess learning rates over time. The answers to these questions can provide valuable feedback regarding the impact of teaching strategies! We do not need to reinvent the educational wheel based upon new knowledge about learning processes but we do need to tweak our practices. 21st century learners need 21st century teachers who evolve their practices where necessary.

Some simple rules for learning - moving from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence

- ❑ Learning requires motivation and time. The input has to be powerful, purposeful and contextual.
- ❑ Surface approaches and rote learning activities are prone to rapid decay.
- ❑ Unearthing prior knowledge is essential where possible.
- ❑ A student's concentration span is often short.
- ❑ Isolating and breaking down barriers to learning will improve the overall future applicability of specific learning activities (in assessments for example).
- ❑ There are many factors that influence the learning process – some of which are out of our control.
- ❑ Learning is not always about output and outcomes; it may involve behavioural or personality changes.
- ❑ Not all learning should be tailored towards assessments; we also have accountability to develop employability and core skills.



EXPERT TEACHERS

- + Possess pedagogical content knowledge that is far more flexible and innovatively employed
- + Are more likely to improvise and change according to lesson context
- + Understand at a deeper level why students succeed and/or fail on a given task
- + Develop activities to stretch, challenge and track student progress
- + Understand the importance of effective feedback strategies
- + Are passionate and loved by students
- + View assessment as feedback on themselves!

EXPERT STUDENTS

- + Understand how to learn
- + Obtain immediate feedback from their teachers
- + Do not worry about failure in the 'here and now'
- + Enjoy what they are doing
- + Think about their learning and share this with others

SIMPLICITY IN THE CLASSROOM IS OFTEN THE ULTIMATE COMPLEXITY

Moving students from surface to deep learning requires considerable planning on behalf of the teacher. This is often referred to as the 'pre-structural learning phase'. A teacher's role is to engage students with exploratory questions that can be used to baseline their understanding of basic conceptual facts. This will allow them to access the learning content. Teachers who have secure subject knowledge and are not afraid to adapt their teaching styles based upon student responses are most successful at laying the foundations for learning in this phase. Remember, our input is competing for 'territory in the brain' so it is vital to allow the students to explore and discuss initial learning objectives. Remember we are social animals that often learn best through discussion, feedback and structured exploration.

The next stage of the learning process occurs when students utilise new knowledge to complete procedural tasks such as answering simple written questions or effectively labelling parts of a diagram. These two phases of learning can be considered the most important, as without them, students cannot proceed to the age appropriate level expected of them. Recording and providing bespoke solutions to individual misconceptions is a useful strategy here for the reflective teacher and learner. Consider putting your expert feet into the shoes of the novice. Too often teachers provide generic notes for all students to take during these stages and often adopt a 'one size fits all' approach to note taking in lessons. It is just as important for students to accurately record what they did not know to remind them of their situational learning at a later date.

As knowledge is consumed and students apply that knowledge in a basic context, teachers should 'drill down' to promote deeper learning activities. Activities at this deeper level are dependent upon students understanding the rules, required behaviours and context about a learning task. This phase of learning is often referred to as the 'multi structural' phase; whereby students can apply their learning in more depth than they previously could. Extended writing tasks, group activities, problem solving and extension activities usually supply the stimulus for this phase.

Finally, students move into the 'relational' and 'extended abstract' phases of learning. These phases are represented by students who can apply their learning at a holistic cross curricular level, who understand abstract connections and can reframe their understanding in multiple settings to attain desired outcomes. Teachers promoting this type of learning need to be astute in their assessment of expertise. They also need to have personalised feedback strategies and appropriate resources available to challenge the students beyond their proximal zones of development.

We are taught as teachers how to teach but there is a surprising lack of detail in educational CPD programmes about how we learn. It is almost taken for granted that specific teaching strategies cause learning to occur at specific rates. Teachers need the full range of lessons to develop the skills, practice and learning to cope with the knowledge demands placed upon the students.

Remember, deep learning is about developing meaningful links from one topic to another. The culture of peer learning should never be underestimated. Everyone in a classroom should be utilised for their expertise to reinforce the learning intentions; the sum of all parts is certainly greater than the individual!

Understanding why we forget can be an important tool for learning

There has been a plethora of educational research undertaken in an attempt to provide structure and meaning to the inner workings of our memory. Practitioners will be familiar with the proverbial question "How did they forget? I only taught them yesterday!" Why, does it seem, that what we tell our students often goes in one ear and out the other?

Current studies are beginning to answer this question for us. Understanding the processes behind both the

retention, and loss, of information can be very powerful to inform a teacher's planning and delivery strategies. We sometimes forget, that forgetting, can actually be very useful; for example forgetting old phone numbers, old addresses, painful experiences etc.

Losing information that could potentially interfere with new learning is good for us. Addressing misconceptions works upon the same principle. We should use knowledge about the forgetting process to tweak our teaching practices and inform future learning opportunities.

FOUR PEDAGOGICAL QUESTIONS THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED THOUGHTFULLY

1. Why do we remember?
2. What links does this have to teaching strategies?
3. Why do we forget?
4. What links does this have to teaching strategies?

The first important point to make is this – we cannot remember, or forget, information that has not been encoded and stored in the first place. The second important point to make is that our brains, whilst beautifully complex, have not evolved to instantaneously store information that does not directly impact upon our immediate environment or evolutionary survival. On the African savannah understanding French grammar did not make you a better sprinter! Learning in the classroom is very different to learning out of it. The situations in which we concentrate our attention to remember and retain information are actually very limited. We do not however intimately understand how to manipulate the input to make information stick; and this is where good pedagogy steps in.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

- Spoken information is transient in nature and often difficult to process.
- Complex information needs to be presented in small chunks.
- To develop content mastery, students need time and the opportunity for repetition and reinforcement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

- How do we access and ascertain the strength/relevance of a student's pre-existing knowledge?
- How do we develop relevance and/or emotional hooks for our content?
- How do we assess progress and the development of subject fluency?
- What feedback strategies do we use to address misconceptions and improve knowledge?
- Are we building in enough independent application of knowledge in unfamiliar contexts?
- What 'real' evidence of learning are we seeking to avoid the common phenomenon of the 'illusion of knowing'?
(This is where teachers accept spoken surface level responses as evidence of student progress).
- How are we stretching the capabilities of all our students?

MISCONCEPTIONS IN THE EDUCATIONAL WORLD

- Students respond well to material presented in their preferred learning style.
- It's a good idea to activate the brain via 'Brain Gym' at the start.
- Teachers should not talk for too long in lessons.
- The best means of teaching students is to allow them to discover information for themselves.
- Familiarity with content is not the same as being able to produce it in a test.

KEY POINTS

- We remember what we value.
- We need pre-existing knowledge to learn new content.
- Emotional content is often processed at a deeper level.

WHY DO STUDENTS FORGET? (not an exhaustive list)

Rote Memory – information is crammed in for a high/low stakes test but is quickly lost/displaced following the event.

Time – to develop the mastery levels we desire, students often need more time than we provide in lessons. Curriculum designs do not often have memory or the development of mastery in mind.

Decay – the clarity and quality of information may decay over time or be lost completely. I am sure you can think of examples of content from your own education that you are no longer using.

Retrieval cues – students only demonstrate understanding, or retention of information, when the teacher provides a cue. There is a difference between forming memories and accessing them at a later date.

Non-context – students cannot apply knowledge to unfamiliar contexts due to a lack of practice or they have simply forgotten the skills needed to be able to do so.

Interference – students have busy lives! In a single day they move from lesson to lesson, socialise, discuss content that matters to them etc. New information may simply get diluted in the cornucopia of knowledge presented to them on daily basis (both in and out of the classroom).

Value – without attaching some intrinsic or extrinsic value to subject content, much of it is lost over time. In simple terms – we remember information that we value or has a personally emotive stigma.

Understanding – if you understand something you are more likely to remember it. Too often students simply do not understand the content we teach at the depth they need to apply it freely.

Once we retain and retrieve the important subject content we can develop the skills needed to apply it in both familiar and unfamiliar context over time. Understanding something is not a pre-requisite to being able to use it appropriately in an examination.

For an examination students have to develop a different skills set:

- + Reading
- + Effective written communication
- + Decoding abilities
- + Patience
- + Resilience
- + Resourcefulness
- + Time management
- + Review
- + Structure
- + Subject specific flair!
- + Independence
- + Creativity

A SIMPLE SOLUTION?

I.V. D.O.L.L

Input – how we present new learning/information to students can be critical in their initial engagement, focused attention and development of context. Finding out what students already know, and creating a stable ‘big picture’ for learning, can be invaluable. Asking the right questions at this early stage in learning often unearths misconceptions and provides the teacher with a real opportunity to discuss context. Meaningful information is more likely to be encoded in our brains when we understand where it fits in our world view.

Variety – the more ways information can be discussed, presented to students or used, the more likely it is that they will not forget it. As social creatures we learn through discussion, exploration, trial and error, problem solving and reflection. Obviously there is much curriculum content that cannot be presented in multiple formats, or lends itself to novel or diverse methods of delivery, but where possible present information in multiple formats to improve contextualisation and processing.

Distributed practice – current research states that revisiting information, or delivering specific content over time, has a significant impact on retention rates. Students who are encouraged, both in and out of the class, to revisit previously taught content and to engage with it at their current working level have lower rates of forgetting. Teachers can use this information to plan assessments, homework tasks, low stakes tests, curriculum delivery, feedback and intervention.

Order – the order in which students receive information has a profound impact on what they retain. It makes sense for teachers to develop student expertise by teaching content in a sequential matter; where new information is layered upon secure pre-existing subject knowledge and skills. New learning should not be so complex that it does not complement what is already retained. This will take careful curriculum management and lesson planning. Recap lessons and ‘big picture’ reinforcement is essential.

Links – reinforcement of new concepts and skills can be done by making links explicit to prior learning/taught content. This can be carried out at both subject and non-subject specific level. This is also useful if teachers want to reinforce previously taught content, or to encourage students to retrieve previously stored information which can be used as a springboard for new learning. Making links to prior learning often engages students and focuses attention on the new input. When we make sense of input, especially when we relate it previously encoded information, it is more likely to be retained. In short, students learn by referencing new input to what they already know.

Learning – share the process of learning with students. Young students will have little or no understanding of how their brain works. Information about learning can be used to drive study habit initiatives and reduce the impact of low level revision strategies. Too often we teach content with little reference to how that content can be effectively encoded, stored, retrieved and used. Sharing the learning process with students over time can really reinforce how our brains have evolved to make sense of the world around us.

Learning requires motivation and time as student concentration spans are often short. We must never forget the impact of reinforcing, or re-engaging, prior learning. Students often arrive in our lessons with deep rooted misconceptions which can hinder the storage of new knowledge. Effective AfL practice (questioning techniques, discussion and feedback) can address these misconceptions and remove them. Over time misconceptions are often forgotten. In addition, students do not always know what they do not know. In the current fast paced classroom environment, teachers and students often fall into ‘the illusion of knowing’ trap. Once knowledge has been gained students must develop the appropriate skills so they can use their knowledge appropriately; in written examinations, performances, skills showcase etc. Finally, we know that the rates of forgetting are enormous in rote learning activities. We all remember what cramming the night before an exam feels like, or learning information in short bursts. Both of these activities lead to an enormous rate of forgetting and will not serve the students well in linear examination systems. To compound the problem cognitive overload can

occur when they are stressed or do not attach meaning to the required input. As professionals we should make it our business to become more informed of the learning/forgetting process and fulfil our ambitions to create true learning communities.

Scholarly papers and research have highlighted ten life skills, or habits, that 21st century teachers deploy in 21st century educational settings to aid learning. These habits are embedded in the way we teach and are reflected in the culture we develop for learning. More importantly they are used interchangeably and frequently to support the specialist curriculum content delivered on a daily basis. Learning, as we now know, occurs in specialist circumstances. The more we know about the learning process, the ideal conditions for learning to occur and the skills and habits that underpin it, the better we and our students will be equipped to cope with change.

STICK TO WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

GRADES

EVERYTHING ELSE

Ensuring our students are assessment capable learners is the most important thing we can do to raise student achievement.

Ensuring our students love learning, develop core skills, personalise experiences, reflect upon mistakes and enjoy challenge is the most important we can do to raise their life/employability chances.

The big questions:

- + Are my students making progress?
- + Are students able to articulate what they are learning at the right level?
- + How do I know?

As you can see from the ‘educational iceberg’ the contribution made by grades to the holistic development of a young person’s life chances are much smaller than you would first think. Yes, grades matter, but they do not occur without an associated skills set that feeds into the knowledge that informs the grade profile. To contextualise this phenomenon let us use a case example; to apply for Medicine at University, in general, you need a minimum of three A grades at A level and A and A* grades in the Sciences and Maths at GCSE; that is an undisputed fact. To succeed at university studying medicine, and to successfully obtain a place in the first instance, requires the “what lies beneath” skills set.

Candidates applying to study specific courses have one thing in common – the grade profile. What separates the successful applicant from the unsuccessful applicant is the demonstrable skills set (core and employability skills) that they have developed over time and the relationship that skills set has with current and future learning. A simpler example of the necessity to develop core and employability skills is evident when applying for employment. Think of a job specification and the required skills needed to be successful. Like any skill in life these do not develop overnight. They must be taught and nurtured over a long time frame so that they become part of learning and social behaviour. They do not act independently of one another but are intrinsically linked to form “a learning package” that becomes more developed with our input and expertise.

THE 10 LIFE SKILLS

(not an exhaustive list)

- Collaboration
- Adaptability and resourcefulness
- Initiative
- Effective oral and written communication
- Accessing and analysing information
- Curiosity and imagination
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Resilience
- Reflectiveness

COLLABORATION

Students work with their peers, parents and teachers to ensure they maximise their potential. We as teachers have to organise effective group work and develop opportunities for peer assessment in our lessons. We have to ensure that the activities are differentiated, relevant and selected at appropriate levels for the students whilst keeping one eye on a demanding curriculum specification.

EFFECTIVE ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

It is well documented and understood that today’s learners are digital learners. Many teachers report that there is a significance difference between what a student can say compared to what a student can write. The practice of communication through writing and expression of thoughts, feelings and knowledge in the written form often suffers. Students have spent their entire lives immersed in a digital media culture. Their world is shaped by media networks, mobile phones, mobile applications, internet, short hand, short cuts, quick access to knowledge, written and spoken code and digital streaming. The world has become flat again! Flat screen TV, iPads, laptops, mobile phone flat screens etc. How many students do you know keep a written diary, write letters, read for fun or practice literacy skills? According to UNICEF, “Nearly a billion people are unable to read a book or write fluently and two thirds of them are women.” 85 percent of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate. More than 60 percent of all prison inmates are functionally illiterate. Illiteracy and crime are closely related. The Department of Justice states, “the link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime is welded to reading failure.”

So what do we do? Firstly, we do not accept poor literacy from our students. Secondly, we do not accept poor literacy from ourselves. Thirdly, we teach students to value their written and oral communication and once again become relentless in our pursuit of perfection. Finally, we embrace the world they live in and utilise their knowledge and understanding of a digital age to support their learning.

ADAPTABILITY

The students develop resourcefulness, a skill that is taught to them by the teacher. This skill allows the student to adapt to unfamiliar situations and seek other means of answers before they confirm with a teacher. If we spoon feed students, we are creating young people who do not have the transference of skills into the working world. A simple technique to develop resourcefulness is “try three before me”. When students cannot do something they generally ask the teacher for immediate input and/or immediate answers. The “try three before me” tool makes the students try three different resources in their local environment to find an answer prior to the teacher input. These resources may be their peers, revision guides, text books, the internet or other learning material. A realistic assessment of new understanding, or depth of processing, can then be made through effective questioning techniques. Teachers sometimes find it difficult not to “give answers away” too quickly. There is a compromise to be made between the pace of learning, the progression through the curriculum and the development of resilience and resourcefulness amongst the students.

INITIATIVE

The students come prepared to learn, they show keenness and a willingness to learn. They carry out tasks to support their own learning without prompt by the teacher. This occurs when we create an outstanding classroom climate built upon powerful relationships, clear learning guidelines, a relentless expectation of success and mutual respect.

ACCESSING AND ANALYSING INFORMATION

To create new learning the information we supply our students with must be critiqued, evaluated and analysed. We must teach them the skills of discussion and debate and how to formulate and defend multiple opinions. These after all are examination skills. They are also skills at the top of Bloom’s taxonomy pyramid which was developed in 1956! Have things really changed that much? New learning is laid down on existing schemas. To learn something new we first contextualise the input. Information that makes no sense to us is quickly filtered out. New memories are only created from existing understanding of the world around us. It is therefore vital that we create “the big picture” for our students when new knowledge is being imparted. It is also vital that we create opportunities for the students themselves to discuss their existing understanding and context for new learning. I have seen far too many lessons where the teacher creates the “big picture” from their existing experiences – this is not very helpful. Techniques to comprehend knowledge should be seamlessly embedded into lessons and the teacher should intervene when new learning is blocked.

CURIOSITY AND IMAGINATION

Lesson planning, starter activities, plenaries and objectives can all be effectively used to stimulate a sense of wonder and a “need to know” in our students. Almost all outstanding lesson guides and literature say “start with a hook”. Make learning relevant to their lives, let them give the examples, lead discussions and set the pace. The students should ask the question “so how does it work then”? There often exists an invisible membrane between what goes on in schools and colleges and the real world in which the student lives in. If we stimulate curiosity, teach them respect, allow them to imagine and become resourceful when solving problems in lessons then we are beginning to formulate the strategies they will need for lifelong learning habits.

CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

These skills are often the most difficult to teach. They require teachers to effectively plan lessons with clear learning objectives and activities and to model the learning process themselves. Students should think critically (and be taught how to do so) about the best approach to solve posed problem.

RESILIENCE

This is a trait often lacking in our students. Teaching students how to be resilient requires patience and a classroom climate that encourages ‘intelligent floundering’, self-reflection, honesty and constructive criticism. We must not expect our students to become experts overnight. Teaching that fosters the development of skills and knowledge in a sequential target based approach tends to develop learners that are more robust. The personality of the teacher, as well as their own credibility in the eyes of the students, is important to generate such a climate. Students do not like being told that they are wrong. Therefore, the feedback provided by an empathetic and supportive teacher should be developmental rather than critical.

The Common Inspection Framework retains a focus on learning and progress. Good teachers have to be good every day and their work will be reflected in students' outcomes over time.

- Teachers promote higher standards for learners by focusing more on the quality and craft of teaching, **learning and assessment**.
- Behaviour** in lessons takes into account all types of behaviour.
- A major focus on developing crucial skills (**core and employability**) at every opportunity.
- An expectation of embedded strategies (the invisible indicators) that will be evident in student and teacher **interactions**.
- A focus on how learning is supported through the use of **technology**.
- Assessment for Learning is the heartbeat of good practice.
- Equality and Diversity are fully **integrated** into learning experiences.

The Common Inspection Framework (schools and colleges) deliberately opens up the door for inspectors to make informed decisions to answer the following questions:

1. *Is what they have seen typical of a daily lesson/daily experience for a young person?*
2. *How is the teaching strategy employed creating opportunities for all students to make progress?*
3. *How is this progress being assessed, tracked and monitored against expected progress measures?*
4. *Are there opportunities to develop core and employability skills?*
5. *How is the holistic development of the student being catered for?*
6. *Is intervention effective?*

We will have to look at how a wider variety of pedagogical practices affects learning. We have to support each other in developing the strategies that we currently utilise.

"Nobody ever learned anything from experience. It was the reflection on the experience that taught them something."

There is no point in reinventing the educational wheel; it is much more efficient to add strategic "spokes" to the one that is already spinning for you.



THE 21ST CENTURY LEARNER AND LEARNING HABITS

- Are learning habits rigid because we do not effectively model our own learning habits?
- Are learning habits rigid because our own learning habits are rigid?
- Do we encourage intelligent floundering?
- Do we promote active learning through outstanding teaching?

A TEACHER'S HEAVEN OR A RIGID LESSON?

Students enter the classroom in an orderly fashion.

They sit down and take out their books without prompt.

They copy all materials off the board without fuss.

The class is silent and all teacher instructions are followed.

The teacher asks all the questions and they are all answered by the students.

All students read independently and can answer a range of examination questions presented.

The bell goes and the teacher lets the students out.

- What skills are being developed in this lesson?
- What skills are not being developed in this lesson?
- What type of lesson gets the best results?
- What is the default position of the teacher?

GOOD INTENTIONS ARE GLOBAL

Every school/college wants to be the best they possibly can for their students.

Every teacher wants the best results that they can get for their students.

Every parent wants the best opportunities for their child.

Every employer wants to the best candidate for the job.

HOW ARE WE PLAYING OUR ROLE?

Do we teach students how to work outside their friendship groups or teach them strategies to cope with different people? Are our students asking the right questions at the right time about their learning? Are our students passengers or crew on our learning boats?

If we impart independence, flexibility, resourcefulness, imagination and resilience to our teaching cohorts then we add another dimension to the learning platform. This three dimensional teaching style enhances the learning experience and makes it more likely that we develop “worldly” young people. The incorporation of these characteristics however requires the teacher to adapt their teaching styles and use an effective classroom climate to springboard change. There is so much more to good teaching than sound subject knowledge and effective planning routines (although these certainly help). We should not be the product of reducible codified behaviours; there are so many instinctive personality based characteristics that are very difficult to define and very difficult to explain, particularly to a NQT. They must be observed in “live action” to be discerned and decoded. We already exhibit many of the personality traits required to be a good teacher. We already exhibit and understand the personality traits required to be an effective learner. It is the secrets of the learning skills we need to unlock and share with our students. Not everyone can teach. There still exists, in a minority, the conception that pedagogy is a set of skills that anyone can acquire, and anyone who acquires them can teach. Individually we may be steeped in educational wisdom and have years of teaching under our belts, but all this means nothing if we do not use this knowledge to create the learning package. More to the point we have to imagine the power of utilising collective knowledge to create a learning package.

To change habits takes a couple of months, to change a culture often takes years, but you have to start somewhere. There is no quick fix and no badge at the end of it.

What are the main traits needed for powerful learning? Do our students demonstrate the following traits?

- + Inquisitive nature
- + Resilience and resourcefulness
- + Imaginative disposition
- + Rational behaviour
- + Reflective learning

“TALK ABOUT THE PROCESS OF LEARNING – WHEN STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT HOW THEY LEARN, PERFORMANCE IS ENHANCED”

CHRIS WATKINS

As a teacher learning is our core business. How often do we talk about the learning process itself? Do we just assume students know how they learn? Our classroom dialogue with students will have a profound effect on getting the students to think about how they learn.

As a teacher try asking your students the following questions. **Do not accept the answers “I just do” or “I do not know”**

HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

HOW ELSE COULD YOU DO THAT?

WHAT DID YOU FIND DIFFICULT ABOUT DOING THAT?

CAN YOU EXPLAIN THIS IN A DIFFERENT WAY?

CAN YOU USE AN ANALOGY TO EXPLAIN YOUR FINDINGS?

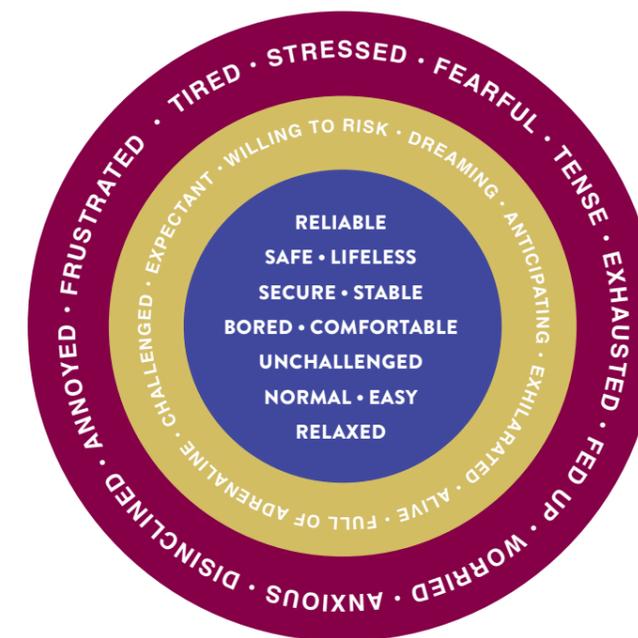
WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU GET STUCK?

HOW COULD I HAVE TAUGHT THAT BETTER?

HOW COULD YOU TEACH THAT TO SOMEONE ELSE?

HOW COULD YOU MAKE THAT HARDER FOR YOURSELF?

When students can personalise their learning they are likely to stretch and challenge themselves in a way that they never previously had before. Design tasks that personalise extension and use your teaching skills to facilitate the timing and direction of the extension activity. People learn new material when it is presented just outside their normal “comfort zones”. We should not just display perfect work on our walls, we should display work that was, or still is, in working progress.



■ PANIC ZONE ■ STRETCH ZONE ■ COMFORT ZONE

Nobody perfects anything in one go, sometimes it takes years to perfect a task. The importance is to be able to recognise the changes you have made along the way and reflect upon the manner in which those changes brought you closer to the end point you seek. If students can continually see a personalised learning journey that has a definite successful endpoint then they are more likely to develop learning habits that reinforce the strategies required to make the journey in the first place. This, I feel, is where a learning diary or log comes in very useful. A learning journal in a specific subject tells the students straight away what they found difficult and what strategies they employed to successfully overcome that difficulty. It is a very empowering tool in the classroom. Teachers can also comment in the journal and talk about the specific learning habit utilised or reinforced to allow learning to happen. We have to move away from 20th century learning techniques where the teacher is the centre of attention and provider of information. Lessons should be student centred where the teacher is the facilitator of learning.

We should not stop there:

MOVE AWAY FROM	TO
Passive learning	active learning
Learners work in isolation	collaboration
Lower level Blooms	upper level Blooms
Teacher is judge of quality	self, peer, public assessment
Factory model teaching	global model teaching
Low tech teaching	high tech teaching

EXPERT TEACHERS SOMETIMES LOSE CONTROL A LITTLE AND ARE CONFIDENT TO DO SO

TEACHER LED
(HIGH CONTROL)

ROTE MEMORY

Q/A SESSIONS

PRACTICAL/DEMOS/VIDEO CLIPS
PRESENTATIONS

INDIVIDUAL WORK

GROUP WORK

DISCUSSIONS

DEBATE

STRUCTURED DISCOVERY

INDEPENDENT LEARNING

STUDENT DIRECTED LEARNING

STUDENT LED
(LOW CONTROL)

SELF ACTUALISATION

Students should feel that knowledge is not about memorising facts simply because “they have to”. It encompasses application, connection to previous knowledge, interests, experiences and passions. Assessment needs to move in to the realm of deep level process assessment rather than congratulating students for regurgitation of simple facts from the previous lesson. This is where the power of outstanding lesson starters, assessment strategies, feedback and curriculum planning to a differentiated level really come to the foreground. These strategies are supported with the development of core and employability skills.

THE BUSINESS OF LEARNING

Students who adopt a **deep** approach to learning are interested in learning for its own sake. They want to understand ideas for themselves and learn by transforming. They tend to:

- + Relate ideas to previous knowledge and experience
- + Look for patterns and underlying principles
- + Be actively involved and interested in course content
- + Adopt an evidence based approach
- + Critically examine arguments

Students who adopt a **surface** approach to learning often want merely to get through a course and learn by reproducing. They tend to:

- + Study without reflecting on purpose or strategy
- + Memorise facts and procedures by rote
- + Learn subject content in isolation
- + Have difficulty in making sense of new ideas
- + Feel pressurised by the amount of work involved



HOW DO YOU KNOW A STUDENT HAS UNDERSTOOD YOUR LESSON CONTENT?

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU HAVE LEARNED SOMETHING NEW?

Learning is an active process and demands that we do something at the cognitive level. The Russian psychologist Vygotsky indicated that people learn in what he terms “zone of proximal development”. This is the area just beyond a person’s current capabilities. The intervention and support that must occur for new learning to happen is often referred to as scaffolding.

HOW DO YOU SCAFFOLD?

1. Model performance whilst thinking out loud (modelling). Learning by modelling occurs even when you do not intend it to do so (Petty 2009). Students take more note of what teachers do rather than what they say.
2. Pair advanced learners with developing ones (group work).
3. Provide prompts, links, guides and structure (climate for learning, effective questioning).
4. Fade when appropriate (inductive teaching style).

Transformation:

Transformation involves the students taking their learning and transferring/ recreating knowledge in another context or manner:

1. Convert text into graph, mind map, chart, cartoon strip, summary, picture etc.
2. Use key words to create a song/ poem/mind map.
3. Portray a piece of information as a play/mime/charade.
4. Describe pictures in words.
5. Describe words in pictures.
6. Convey emotions using alternative expression.

Assessing understanding by conventional formative assessment will be employed by teachers from time to time as part of the learning process. The individual learner must be considered at each assessment point and the teacher must avoid generalising class results. Attainment and progress is specifically measured against prior attainment, expectation and individual student criteria.



WHAT HAVE THE STUDENTS LEARNED AND UNDERSTOOD?

HOW DO I KNOW?

To create model learners in our classroom we must be model learners ourselves. The following list is not exhaustive but encompasses some of the changes we may need to make in order to illicit change in our students.

Be fallible – we will not know absolutely all the answers all the time. It does happen that students will ask questions that we are unsure of. This demonstrates two things; firstly, the students have been thinking about the topic you are teaching them in great depth and secondly, it is a great opportunity to develop some in class resourcefulness. The teacher is not the only role model in the classroom the students can access to learn. There are historical characters, current media characters and fictional characters that can be used to support or model learning. The teacher is not the only learning role model outside

the classroom. Students also learn from their friends, parents and other people in their society. Many students agree that they respect a teacher more when they demonstrate fallibility with a strategy to overcome it. It is a ridiculous ideology to support the notion that the teacher is the all-knowing learning oracle. True learning communities adopt a “learning for all” culture which includes the teaching and non-teaching staff. If we are to truly model the learning process than we must show our students what it is like to learn and share the strategies we utilise to get unstuck when we encounter difficulty.

There are many factors we must take into account when new learning is to occur.

Environmental factors such as light levels, temperature, noise levels, seating plans, time of the day, room appearance and even wind speed have been known to have an impact on learning!

Socio-economic factors like peer influence, parental involvement, number of siblings, financial status, nutrition, parental occupation and lack of empowerment in deprived socio economic communities all have an impact on learning.

Genetic factors – there are a plethora of scientific and neurological papers discussing the role of our genes in our ability to form and retain memories, as well as having an influence on the speed in which we learn. Whilst it is generally accepted that our environment plays a role in the expression of our genes, there are specific genes associated with our capacity to learn that are not affected by an environmental influence. These genes are expressed in utero and any modifications in their activity have a profound affect in the innate capacity to learn.

The teacher – research by John Hattie has found that the single biggest influence (talking away individual student variance) in a student’s education is the teacher. Excellent teaching is the single most powerful influence on achievement. In fact the influence of a teacher on the educational attainment of a young person has been found to be four times greater than that of the parent! This in itself creates accountability issues. In other words, and in simple terms, if what you are doing in the classroom is not good enough for your own children then it certainly is not good enough for anyone else’s! The biggest issue in attainment in any educational setting is related to variability amongst the teachers – not the students. If leaders of educational institutes can create a hierarchy of best teachers to worst teachers (the unofficial teacher league table) then there is a problem; and it does exist. The next questions that need to be asked are;

1. What is being done about it to reduce the inconsistency?
2. How are you using your best teachers as coaches?
3. What support programme is in place to develop teachers with poor results?
4. What measures are in place to determine impact over time?

In the world of accountability if you do not “grasp nettles” then you are colluding with poor performance. How do you ensure that the following are implemented as non-negotiable in every classroom?

- + Expectations for learning (teachers and students) are always high.
- + Intervention is timely, appropriate and useful.
- + Teachers have the highest credibility.
- + Classroom Discussion exists to promote learning and assess progress.
- + Feedback (multiple levels of feedback are occurring to enhance the learning experience of the students).
- + Reciprocal Teaching allows students to develop expertise.
- + Metacognitive strategies (students understand the learning process and reflect upon their personal learning habits).

EXPERT TEACHERS:

1. Have outstanding subject knowledge.
2. Can guide learning through interaction (questioning, engagement and learning behaviour).
3. Can monitor learning and provide feedback (Kounin originally spoke of a teacher’s “withitness” in the classroom which describes how teachers are the purveyors of all learning that is occurring - there is overt AfL).
4. Can attend to affective attributes (rapport development, classroom climate, level of stretch and challenge).
5. Can influence student outcome (enhance profound learning through outstanding facilitation of learning opportunities, have a positive impact on student engagement, and promote self-assessment opportunities).

Changing teaching habits initially feels awkward. We have to overcome the conscious incompetence that we are all too familiar with. Repetition, mental rehearsal, reflection and resilience are the core skills we need to employ to turn conscious incompetence into unconscious competence. These are core skills that we ironically try to instil in our students. To come back to the point of being a model learner, if we want the students to be outstanding learners we must model the process in all we do. We have to ask the question about planning lessons. We often plan the best lessons in isolation and the best ideas often pass by unheard, unseen and potentially unrealised. Do we think we should build more time into our daily lives to plan together? If we plan together we are more likely to try things out together. If you get a number of people trying the same thing out you suddenly have critical mass and strategies are more likely to be tried, employed and embedded.

There is a mass of evidence (neuroscience, psychological and sociobiological) to suggest that animals (we are animals!) learn best by imitation and adaptation. If we want to be able to do something we watch someone who can do it better than ourselves and imitate them. Learning to become a better facilitator of learning does not occur by reading a book. Observe strategies “live” and adapt them to suit your own needs. How often do we ask the most talented student in our lesson to demonstrate their learning and talk through the process at a level that can be mirrored by their peers? No learning occurs without a certain degree of confusion. To quote the neurolinguistic programmer “confusion leads to clarity”. Confusion only leads to clarity if the right tools clear the fog. What are the right tools?

Language – we should all speak “learninsh” says Guy Claxton. Talk students through the learning process; do not assume there is one best fit. The language of learning is always encouraging, empathetic and personalised.

Let them share their thoughts and feelings regarding their learning. If you can attach an emotional hook to learning than it is more likely to be reinforced. Lesson starters are therefore vital in setting scenes, generating interest and getting the students to expand their capacity to learn. These activities allow the students to decide how new topics fit in with their model of the world.

Activities – The activities must bring students down a learning path that is difficult. Fun activities with no stretch or purpose are a waste of time. Without stretch students coast and often underperform due to a lack of stimulation. An accomplished guitarist never learns anything new playing a simple G chord.

Relevance – I never want to do anything that is not relevant to my current state of being, and neither do you! I hate irrelevance,

and find irrelevant chores boring, mundane and easily forgettable. Why should our students be any different? We also need to overcome the ideology that just because we love our subjects intently the students will have the same passion for them. Passion only develops when we connect prior learning, current learning and future learning to the real world. To generate relevance empowers the students; let them connect to the topic and express their interests and concerns. Make the topic genuinely matter and do not be afraid to go off task and discuss tenuous “wild card” topics.

“ONE OF THE CORE FUNCTIONS OF 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION IS LEARNING TO LEARN IN PREPARATION FOR A LIFETIME OF CHANGE”

DAVID MILLIBAND

“WE NEED TO PRODUCE PEOPLE WHO KNOW HOW TO ACT WHEN THEY ARE FACED WITH SITUATIONS FOR WHICH THEY WERE NOT SPECIFICALLY PREPARED”

SEYMOUR PAPERT

Transference – most learning, in student’s minds, occurs in isolation. They do not see the big “learning picture”. It is rare to hear students talk about cross curriculum learning, or decide how their current learning may be advantageous in a wider sense for them. In schools across the UK, in an attempt to get boys reading, it is not uncommon to find posters of famous men reading books (Amir Khan, David Beckham and Robert De Niro). How many students with an obvious gift for sport or music do not transfer the skills required to develop aptitude in these areas into lessons (resilience, perseverance, reflection, evaluation).

The three most powerful questions to ask any student when they are learning something new are:

1. Where else could you use that learning?
2. What did you do to make learning happen?
3. Will this type of learning be important to you in the future?

“The biggest effects on student achievement occurs when teachers become learners about their own teaching and the students become their own teachers” Hattie

OBSERVE A LESSON AND DECIDE ON THE FOLLOWING:

1. How do students respond to the teacher?
2. How do they listen and respond to each other?
3. How well do they collaborate and share learning?
4. How well do they check and change each other’s understanding?
5. How many questions do they ask, and at what level?
6. What does the teacher do when a student gets “stuck”?
7. What do the students do when they get “stuck”?
8. What type of students are in the group?
9. What type of language does the teacher use with the students?
10. Who organises the groups in the room and the seating plan?

THE HEART OF GOOD TEACHING STARTS WITH BEING INTERESTED IN IT.

THE HEART OF GOOD LEARNING STARTS WITH UNDERSTANDING IT.

In essence, nothing has changed from our day to day expectations, what hopefully has changed, is our conscious awareness of the learning process and the strategies we need to employ to empower the students with a wider capacity for learning in our subjects.

The standard expectations of the classroom remain as follows:

1. Share the learning expectations, objectives and context of the lesson with your students.
2. Ensure they understand the relevance of your lesson content and how it is related to the schemes of work, examination objectives and their lives outside of school or college where possible.
3. Check their understanding through effective questioning techniques and the use of mini assessment strategies in the lesson.
4. Know your students strengths and their areas for development.
5. Share the learning process with the students. Explain to them how to measure learning.
6. Model the learning process and the expectations for them. Use independent (self-assessment) and group activities (peer assessment) to reinforce and check their learning.
7. Have fun, show them your personality and enthusiasm for your subject.
8. Pitch and pace your lesson to meet their needs and stretch and challenge all the learning abilities.
9. Ask the students for feedback as they are the best indicators of success in your lessons.
10. Be open to try something new.

WHAT IS PRESENT IN EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE?

A simple acronym – going P.L.A.C.E.S

Progress

Learning

Assessment for Learning

Core skills

Employability skills

Stretch and Challenge

SIMPLICITY IS THE ULTIMATE COMPLEXITY!

Set the scene

Start with a hook. Take advantage of the primacy effect; when recalling information, students often show a recall advantage for the first item or piece of information encountered.

The beginning, in particular, is the time when the potential for learning is at its greatest. Anticipation and expectation (driven by prior association with a particular teacher) creates a receptive mind set to new learning. Students should have the opportunity in lesson starters to either develop new learning and/or contextualise prior learning.

In lesson starters:

- Pitch questions appropriately so that every student is able to respond.
- Starter activities should unearth any gaps in knowledge from previously learned material.
- Lesson starters should create the right state for learning. Putting a student in the spotlight or under pressure will not constitute a good learning state for your lesson.

“Creative inspiration often strikes when the mind is in a state of playful relaxation”

Guy Claxton.



Links to prior learning

New information gets laid down on existing schemata in the brain. There are estimated to be over 1,000 trillion connections in the human brain. The possible combinations of connections are about ten to the one-millionth power. As we use the brain, we strengthen certain patterns of connection, making each connection easier to create next time. This is how memory, learning and understanding develop. Group discussion (pairs, threes or fours) is a good way to create a safe environment for exploration of prior learning. Give students a time scale (2-4 minutes) to feedback to you what they learned last lesson, or what they already know about a specific topic. Ask students to record questions that they want answered throughout the lesson (use mini white boards). These questions can be used to discuss learning at the end of each learning episode. This recording activity also forms part of a personalised intervention strategy.

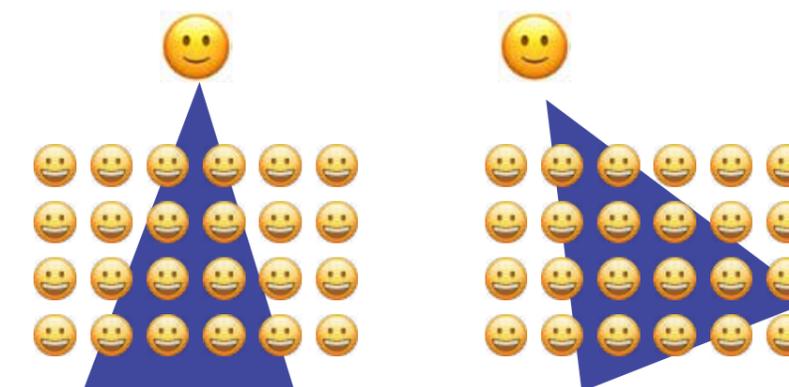
Classroom Climate:

A good classroom must include the possibility for individual control as well as providing a well-proportioned, stimulating and comfortable learning space. Take advantage of local character, solar orientation and appropriate views. Allowing teachers to easily adapt learning environments to their individual pedagogical style(s) will increase the opportunity for student learning. The use of humour is very important. It personalises the teacher (credibility) and allows the development of rapport.

Classroom climate for learning is enhanced when:

1. Students recognise that the teacher treats them fairly and is committed to teaching them.
2. Effective classroom routines, such as the way students enter and leave, and the way lessons begin and end, are understood.
3. Strategies exist for making learning dynamic, interesting and challenging.
4. Students feel secure physically and emotionally.
5. Classroom displays that support learning are up to date and attractive.
6. Table and seating arrangements are varied to suit the different teaching strategies and student groupings. This enhances the learning process.
7. Teachers speak to each student individually about things that interest them.
8. Teachers use language in a way that builds relationships and raises students' self-esteem.

You can make a significant difference to your classroom climate. Start with something which is well within your control and relatively easy to manage. Be determined to maintain the change deliberately and purposefully for the first few weeks as your students adjust. Where you stand in the classroom will influence which students you address directly in question-and-answer sessions. Teachers tend to focus on students within a fairly narrow arc. Simply by moving to different points in the room you can ensure a wider range of students are included.



VIEWPOINT (1)

VIEWPOINT (2)

PROVIDING THE BIG PICTURE

“There is, it seems, more concern about whether children learn the mechanics of reading and writing than grow to love reading and writing; learn about democratic practice rather than have practice in democracy; hear about knowledge... rather than experience in personally constructing knowledge;...see the world narrowly, simple and ordered, rather than broad, complex and uncertain.”

(Vito Perrone)

The brain is more likely to absorb details when it can place them in a wider context. That wider context may be visual, a sound, a feeling, a taste or a smell. The big picture must take into account the multi-sensory nature of information. In general, we learn best when we are actively involved in the learning process

Every little thing we do in the classroom must feed into the “big picture”. Students should be able to develop their knowledge in a sequential and lateral manner whereby exploration, and reflection, of the nature of the big picture occurs through an ever increasing number of small chunks of information.

WHAT DO I WANT STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO DO?

HOW WILL I DO IT?

Learning objectives specify the intended endpoint of a period of engagement in specified learning activities. They are written in the future tense and should clearly indicate the nature and/ or level of learning required to achieve them successfully. They should be achievable and assessable and use language that learners (and other teachers) can easily understand. They relate to explicit statements of achievement and always contain verbs. Objectives should be **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime bound.

WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR SUMMARY

Lesson Planning

1. Lesson objectives are clearly stated and repeatedly used as focal points during the lesson.
2. Planning takes into account the varying needs of the students and consists of stimulatory sections for all groups of learners.
3. The lesson is pitched at the appropriate level and the pace allows all learners to become engaged.
4. There is evidence that the accelerated learners are catered for where applicable.
5. Lessons are in sequence with previous lessons/ prior knowledge and have purpose and direction.
6. Support staff are utilised to allow access to the learning to all the students.
7. A range of teaching strategies are employed to deliver the lesson plan.
8. There is time at the end of the lesson for reflection and progression planning.
9. The progression of the students is mapped against what is actually learned.
10. There are embedded AfL strategies that supports the learner at every step.

All of the above will only happen if:

- Teachers use well-judged and imaginative strategies that match the needs of the learners present.
- Teachers draw on excellent subject knowledge to astutely plan assessment of learners’ skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers understand the learning process itself.

PLANNING FOR GROUP WORK

WORKING IN GROUPS - A FEATHER TO THE DEEP LEARNING BOW

We are social creatures at heart; in fact people work in groups so often that we might be tempted to conclude that groups outperform individuals in task orientated learning activities. Improved learning rates and skill development through interaction, discussion and cooperation in collaborative activities can be significant. This however, is not always the case and we need to be careful when assigning such simplistic statements in terms of group effectiveness. The effectiveness of group work depends on many factors; most notably the competence of the teacher in setting up appropriate group activities. Group work for group work’s sake is never productive and many teachers fall into the trap of reducing work output and effectiveness in group settings. The pitfalls will be discussed later on in the text with some suggestions to overcome them. Firstly, we need to analyse the practical aspects of group work and highlight strategies to maximise their efficiencies for deep learning.

The benefits of collaborative learning

Positive group experiences have been shown to contribute to improved student learning, engagement, progress and overall success. To put it simply, collaborative learning and students’ abilities to work effectively with others is one of the most important life skills we can teach them; it is also one of the foremost skills required to gain employment. Groups will most likely have access to much more collective information than any individual member; the impact on learning can therefore be cumulative. We are not born with the ability to be effective group members (even though we have evolved to work co-operatively within social structures) but many students come “alive” when placed in a well-managed group. It is well documented that students learn effectively, if not better in some cases, from the collective mistakes their peers make on tasks. It is the teacher’s role to create conditions in the classroom where learning through alleviation of misconception and mistake are synonymous with progression indicators.

Teachers need to set the boundaries and be explicit about the benefits of working together. Teachers also need to know their students well and organise group activities to remove their weaknesses and develop their strengths. The closer we are to our students the greater impact we will have on their achievement. Students have their own attributes (determination, organisation), motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) and baggage (learning difficulties, home life, peer influence, maturity levels, and insecurities) therefore careful consideration is required when placing them into groups. In terms of life skills, effective group work develops the following; which can never be underestimated in terms of the impact on learning rates.



Examples of life skills developed through effective group work:

- Social and team working skills
- Empathy
- Listening skills
- Leadership skills
- Decision making strategies
- Problem solving strategies
- The discovery of role models
- The development of shared accountability
- Risk taking behaviours
- Subject knowledge and skills
- Time management
- Feedback – peer to peer and group to group
- Deconstruction of large chunks of information into smaller manageable pieces
- Construction of large chunks of information from smaller piece

PRACTICAL TIPS TO MAXIMISE GROUP ACTIVITIES

Decide first of all the type of activity you wish your students to undertake; then answer the following questions:

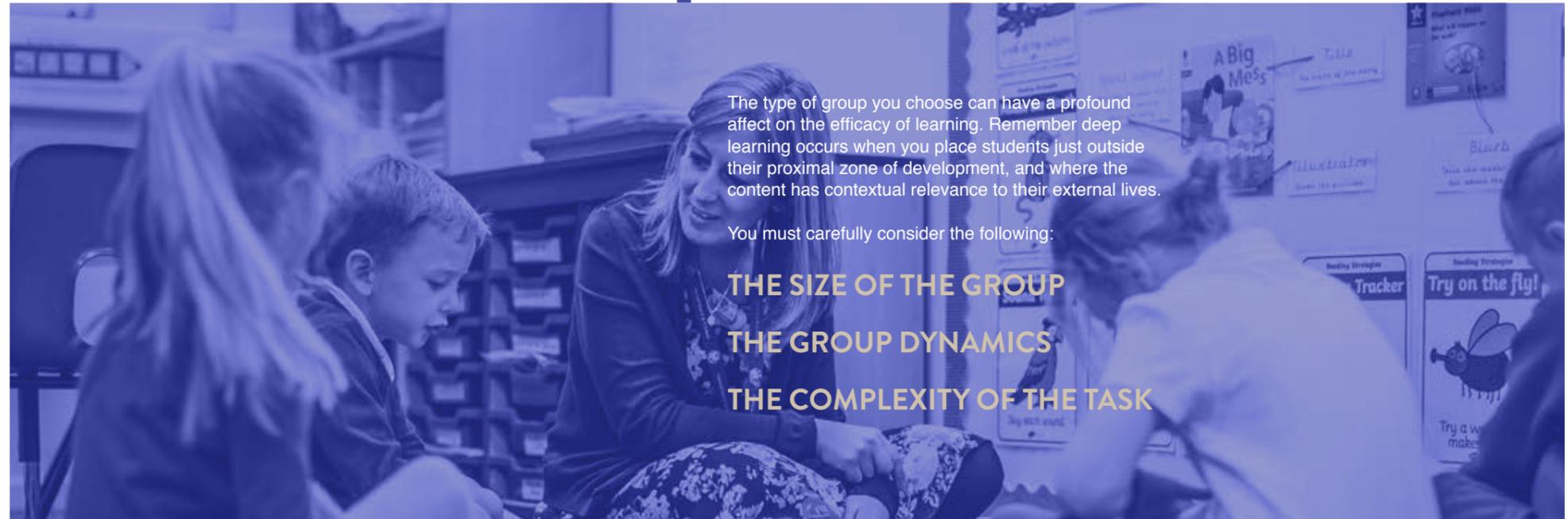
- ❑ **What do I want the final outcomes to be?**
- ❑ **What are the benefits of group activities for my students (knowledge, skills, assessment strategy)?**

1. Does my group work strategy have a positive impact on learning rates?
2. How do I know?
3. What can I tweak to optimize group efficiency?

Production tasks - Is the group task related to productivity (where everyone is doing the same thing)? In this case students will make progress at their own pace and tasks, or groups, can be differentiated by outcome. Peer to peer support becomes the norm and students can easily rotate between different groups as they make more progress. This type of group activity is very useful for intervention and personalised feedback.

Coordination tasks – in this case the students work together to complete learning objectives. Teachers need to carefully explain the start and finish points of the task as well as the time frame for completion. Each member of the group is usually assigned roles and a leader can be chosen to provide feedback to both the group and the rest of the class. Leaders, of course, can be rotated from activity to activity so every student in the group can experience the development of this skill. Teachers must remember the following:

- + Speed and accuracy can be assessed by having explicit success criteria.
- + Group work requires significant planning and knowledge of the students within the group.
- + Provide clear instructions in which the groups can operate (purpose, time, outcome).
- + Use strategies that support positive behaviours (how do you ensure everyone gets involved to the right extent?).
- + Establish clear rules for working in groups (ask the students to set the rules and tweak according to the needs of the task).
- + Select the groups to suit the task (differentiated or mixed, group size).



The type of group you choose can have a profound affect on the efficacy of learning. Remember deep learning occurs when you place students just outside their proximal zone of development, and where the content has contextual relevance to their external lives.

You must carefully consider the following:

- THE SIZE OF THE GROUP
- THE GROUP DYNAMICS
- THE COMPLEXITY OF THE TASK

To maximise the importance of group work in the classroom talk to the students about the benefits and potential problems that may be associated with them working together.

1. **Make it clear** to the students the importance of collaborative learning in terms of learning and future employability skills.
2. **Ask the students** how they feel they would work in a group. Give them time to self-analyse their current group work skills, and share with them the skills they need to develop over time.
3. **Give some case scenarios** where groups have not worked well together and ask the students to suggest ways to overcome them.
4. **Make the end point** of the group task explicit and share success criteria.
5. **Select roles** for group members and teach them how to play that role effectively. Students will not naturally feel comfortable in new groups and you may have to persist with the development of skills like effective communication, presentation, challenging respectfully, listening to others, persuasion and delegation.
6. **Track and evaluate** the effectiveness of the groups you have selected. This will allow you as a practitioner to design more effective groups in future tasks. Share your findings with the students and ask them to evaluate how they worked together to achieve successful outcomes.

GROUP SIZE

The ideal size for a group depends on the activities the teacher is planning. In practical terms having groups in a classroom of more than 4 or 5 can reduce the efficiency and output of the individual members; although there are many variables to consider such as personality types within the group, ease of task, time, the skill set of the individual group members, the confidence level of the individual members etc. Larger groups tend to lose efficiency in the classroom as they compete for “air time”, input and the “final say”.

Group Size	Potential activity
2	recall task with peer to peer self-analysis of knowledge
3	decision making tasks with more complex content/analysis of information
4	tasks with evaluative elements/problem solving/project work

Grouping	Benefits	Limitations	Usage
Friendship	secure and unthreatening	prone to consensus	confidence building
Ability	easy to set work	speed and output	differentiation by task
Random	varied student experience	bad group chemistry	higher order skills (synthesis, evaluation)

Although group work has the potential to improve learning experiences, some research suggests that its potential is not always realised (Pieterse and Thompson 2010). The success or failure of group activities lies heavily on the teacher input and level of expertise. Reasons for the impact being negligible include:

- Some students prefer to work independently.
- Some students do not communicate effectively in a group and leave the work to others.
- Some teachers underestimate group dynamics and the amount of planning that needs to occur.
- Some students think teachers organise group work to reduce their work load.
- Some teachers assume students are already skilled in the art of collaborative learning.

Students need to develop strategies to cope with challenges that naturally arise in any group situation (personal, workload and output). Teachers must equip the students with the right tools to deal with such issues and allow them the time to develop these skills. Each activity will have specific group requirements (speed, accuracy, analysis, evaluation, coordinated effort etc.) and therefore will require specific tweaks to their operational set up and progression. One of the most important aspects of planning group work from a teacher's perspective relates to the tracking, monitoring and evaluation of progress. If students are shown the standards expected, and are given sufficient scaffolding to attain them, success is more likely. Intervention can become more astute if group activities are broken down into manageable steps with overt success criteria.

A checklist to identify issues may also be useful so the intervention can supply appropriate strategies to overcome them.

Group work and collaborative learning can be extremely rewarding for both students and teachers alike. The core elements to any successful group strategy relates to teachers knowing their students and planning for maximum dynamism on the basis of that knowledge.

Group work should complement individual or whole class learning and be used in activities where the sum of collective input will be greater than the individual. Use your expertise to assess the subject content that lends itself to make that happen! Develop group strategies slowly and execute them precisely. Remember the **5 P's** to implement any new classroom strategy;

PREPARE PURPOSE PRACTICE PERSISTENCE PERFECTION

When productive group work is a regular feature of lessons students:

- Fully develop their understanding of an idea because they have tried to explain it to others (reciprocal teaching).
- Are more likely to develop social and team-working skills (collaborative learning).
- Practice and learn from each other (peer assessment).
- Develop a sense of empathy to understand others views.
- Develop problem-solving skills.

When these skills are embedded and students understand the expectations of group activities, learning, and hence progress, become heightened.

How does the activity the students are asked to do vary when they work:

- As individuals?
- In pairs?
- In groups of three?
- In groups of four?

What skills are developed in the different group scenarios?

Group work does however require significant planning (see above) and will only work when the teacher does the following:

- Provides clear structures in which groups can operate.
- Uses strategies that support positive behaviours and develop group-work skills.
- Establishes clear rules and procedures.
- Introduces tasks so that outcomes are clear and linked to the behaviours required.
- Selects groups to suit the task.
- Maintains momentum by effective intervention.
- Sets group objectives.



PRACTICAL TIPS A SNOWBALL ACTIVITY

Prepare well and in detail.

Select a simple activity and build to a group size of four. Plan each question carefully. As a rule of thumb, have:

- A recall task for individuals
- A comparison task with some decision for pairs
- A decision-making task with justification and suggestion activities in threes and fours.

Provide ample opportunity for feedback.

It is vital that all group work tasks are time specific, have measurable outcomes and focus upon learning objectives. Ensure all members of the group have the chance to experience success and the organisation of the groups is such that no student can get away with doing nothing. Group work when managed right develops subject confidence and student self-esteem which will carry into other lessons. It allows specific skills to develop such as negotiation, listening and co-operation.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1999) the cooperative group has five defining elements:

1. Positive independence – students need to feel that their success depends on whether they work together or not (they sink or swim together).
2. Face-to-face supportive interaction – students need to be active in helping one another learn and provide positive feedback.
3. Individual and group accountability – everyone has to feel that they contribute to achieving the group goals.
4. Interpersonal and small-group skills – communication, trust, leadership, decision making and conflict resolution.
5. Group processing – the group reflects upon its performance and functioning and on how to improve.



EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

Questioning is fundamental to good teaching and learning. Teachers ask on average 200 questions per day. When effective questioning is a significant feature of lessons, students are more likely to:

- + Develop a fuller understanding of an idea because they have tried to explain it themselves
- + Be clear about the key issues in a lesson
- + Easily recall existing knowledge
- + Be able to link the ideas in the lesson with their existing knowledge
- + Tackle problems at a deep level and be able to extend their thinking
- + Engage easily with a task because they are clear about what is expected
- + Develop independence in the way they learn and think

Effective Questioning strategies
I must know the following:

WHAT DO MY STUDENTS KNOW?

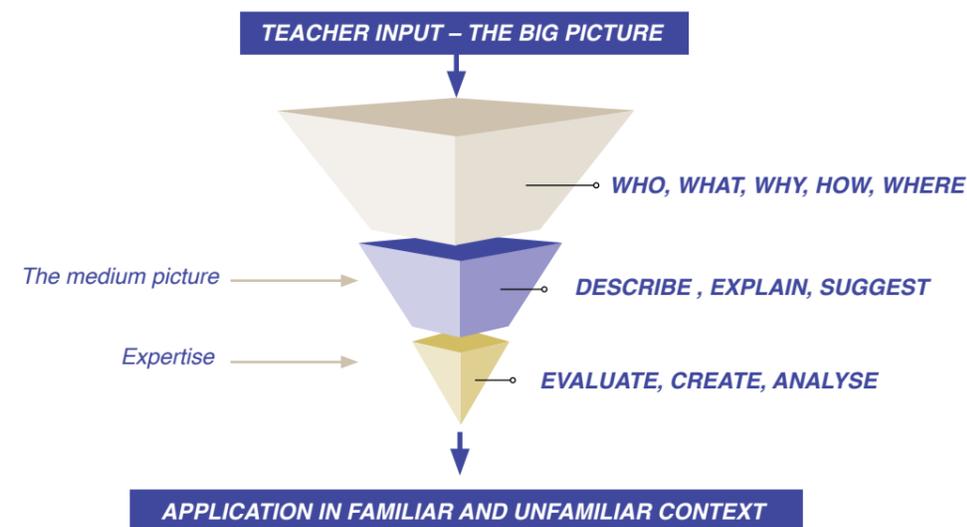
WHAT DO MY STUDENTS NOT KNOW?

HOW DO I KNOW?

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

1. There is a dominant culture of “no hands up” so everyone can be asked a question.
2. Provide wait time (for open ended higher thinking questioning up to 15 seconds may be required).
3. Allow students to think or articulate their thinking in groups. Group thinking responses are reassuring.
4. Ensure students fully understand the questions being asked and the purpose of the questions.
5. Extend and deepen thinking by asking follow up questions.
6. Students often give the first answer that comes into their heads; ask them to identify 3 possible answers and select the best one.
7. Get the students to generate ten possible answers by snowballing.
8. Scaffold thinking and learning. Misconceptions can be peer analysed via questioning.
9. Create a climate where students feel safe to make mistakes. The best learning and innovation happens when multiple mistakes lead to the correct outcome.
10. Effective questioning strategies are embedded into lesson plans and teachers use the strategy to inform future planning, assessment and evaluation of teaching styles.

Make sure to reference the Blooms Taxonomy table when deciding on question stems and the type of response you are expecting. Generate questions together and always allow the students to explore their thoughts and ideas by asking you questions. Listen to the way in which students speak (oral literacy) to you and each other. Always comment on the quality of their response (effective feedback, literacy) when answering questions posed.



Alternatives to direct questions

Sometimes teachers use questioning when other teaching strategies, such as explanation, would be more appropriate. Below are some alternatives to questioning which could be used as additional tools to develop students' learning.

Explore a statement: Rather than asking students a direct question, give them a statement and invite them to discuss, perhaps first in pairs and then in fours, what it means. The statement could be correct or false or ambiguous.

Make a suggestion: You could offer alternative ways of carrying out a task. This may be more practical during small-group work than with a whole class.

Paint the picture: A picture paints a thousand words! Students are sometimes better off explaining or nurturing ideas with sketches or drawings.

Offer extra information: Providing extra information during a problem-solving activity can be useful in stimulating students' thinking.

Invite students to elaborate: Phrases such as 'Would you say a little more about that?' or 'I'm not sure what you mean' are useful in getting students to expand and develop a comment. Do not settle for short responses; encourage students to really express their thinking and learning.

Reinforce suggestions from students: Try developing a comment made by a student by saying something like 'I really liked ... because ...'

Speculate about the subject under discussion: Saying things like 'I wonder what would happen if ...' can help students to think around an issue (lateral thinking).

Clarify ideas: Saying something like 'we can tell that this is the case because ...' helps to reinforce learning by focusing sharply on the main issues under consideration.

Record misconceptions and solutions at the individual and class level.

Repeat comments and summarise: When you want to reinforce important points that have been made, it helps to restate or summarise them in a slightly different manner.

TEACHING TIP

Get into another lesson, preferably outside your own subject specialism, and listen to the different type of questions that teachers use. Make a record of student response time, the type of questions asked, the climate for learning, the distribution of the questions and the manner in which the responses are dealt with. Use the prompts above to focus your observation.

Some questions to consider whilst carrying out a peer observation/learning walk

- + What I am looking for? People are more likely to see something if they are looking for it!
- + How do I know when I see/hear it?
- + What phase of the lesson do I need to be in to observe it?
- + What do I do with what I have learned?
- + How do I evaluate the impact on my practice?
- + How do I evaluate the impact on my students?

There are a number of well-developed models of teaching and curriculum that generate substantially higher levels of student learning compared to “normative” practice. Importantly, the most effective models of teaching are also models of learning that increase the intellectual capacity of all students. These models achieve their power through the thorough integration of a teaching strategy with outstanding assessment for learning (AfL) principles. The most effective curricular teaching patterns induce students to construct knowledge and to inquire into subject areas intensively. The result is to increase student capacity to learn and work smarter.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: THE HEARTBEAT OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING

The process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

Have a professional conversation with a colleague to decide upon the impact on learning each characteristic has. How do you implement and analyse the impact of each characteristic in your own lessons? Could you coach others to do the same?

AfL: Self-Assessment

STUDENTS

1. Ask relevant questions to extend their thinking
2. Demonstrate initiative and resilience
3. Identify improvements that would benefit themselves/others
4. Explore issues or problems
5. Use reasoned arguments to support evidence
6. Invite feedback and deal positively with criticism
7. Use effective and seeking questions
8. Current attainment is known and target grades are understood
9. Consider multiple resources (resourcefulness) to aid self-progression
10. Communicate the next steps they need to take to improve the quality of their work

AfL: Peer Assessment

STUDENTS

1. Show consideration to others ideas and answers
2. Provide constructive support and feedback to peers
3. Identify improvements that would benefit others
4. Use questions to find out what peers know and understand
5. Feel comfortable to ask each other questions and obtain feedback
6. Support the attainment of others in the classroom
7. Generate ideas and strategies to assess each other in the classroom
8. Demonstrate resilience in their uptake of constructive criticism
9. Are not afraid to make mistakes
10. Work collaboratively in groups to share knowledge and expertise

TEACHERS

1. Are clear and constructive about areas for development
2. Provide opportunity to reflect upon development
3. Feedback in multiple ways in the classroom (oral, written, body language)
4. Know the students well and make judgements to ensure progress is being made
5. Promote high level of self-esteem and confidence within the students following feedback
6. Create review time in the classroom as part of their feedback strategy
7. Provide standards and a defined quality to aim for (modelling)
8. Use student’s questions to assess understanding
9. Ask a range of question types in the feedback process
10. Act regularly upon student feedback and view their outcomes as a reflection of the quality of their teaching.

THE ART OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback is so intrinsically linked to our daily lives that we often underestimate its power to alter performance. As social animals we give each other feedback all the time; with the words we use, our body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, the manner in which we engage with others etc. We have become expert interpreters of the subtle, and not so subtle, feedback indicators that we have been programmed to perceive. We simply cannot not give feedback!

In terms of education it has long been documented that academic feedback is probably more important in relation to achievement than any other teaching strategy. The impact of feedback has a correlational relationship with how well we know the students in our care. Feedback has a maximal impact when students receive it from teachers that have high expectations and credibility. Teachers who know their students well can alter the delivery style of the feedback; we know students that will take a more critical oral or written comment compared to those that require the message to be tempered differently. The Gordon Ramsey feedback style will not work on everyone!

Every opportunity should be taken to use the knowledge gleaned from discussions and interaction with students to personalise the direction and speed in which they are travelling towards their academic goals.

The principles of effective feedback

There are many ways to offer students feedback on their performance; some are very simple to implement in a classroom whilst others require a more nuanced

pedagogical approach. Improving the impact of feedback to students starts with a teacher reflecting upon the impact of the types of feedback that they currently offer.

The fallacies around written feedback are well documented and will, to a certain extent, be used to tweak a new model of feedback as we move into an era of linear examinations. I have lost count of how many teachers report that the time they spend writing really positive, coherent and directional written feedback in students’ books/exams/essays etc. is not being translated, or reciprocated with effort, that correlates to an improvement in attainment. This of course may not be the norm; but it certainly exists in many schools across the UK today. With the pressure from internal and external educational influences (government, parents, and leaders) to have evidenced that teachers are marking work and ‘doing their job’ some have lost their way; the volume of written feedback becomes more important than the quality. Over relying on written feedback can also increase marking time. We all know too well that written feedback, no matter how poignant it is, loses impact the longer it takes to get it back to the student.

In short, written feedback that is too generic, or unacted upon, has no impact. You are now marking to be a teacher rather than marking to improve outcomes. This is why choosing a range of proven feedback strategies is the best thing that we can do. This is also why self-reflecting on the best feedback strategies, against the ones that a teacher currently uses, should be encouraged.

TEACHERS

- + Are clear and constructive about areas to develop/improve.
- + Provide opportunity for students to reflect upon the feedback.
- + Provide feedback in multiple ways (oral, written, body language, formal, informal etc.).
- + Receive feedback in multiple ways (feedback boards, email, meeting times with students etc.).
- + Know the students in depth so feedback discussions can be tempered accordingly.
- + Promote high levels of esteem and confidence within the students; it’s OK to be wrong sometimes!
- + Promote review time in the classroom to review feedback.
- + Model standards so that feedback is directional.
- + Provide timely feedback.
- + Use student questions to assess understanding.
- + Ask a range of question types in the feedback process.
- + Act regularly upon feedback that they receive from the students.
- + Train students to provide feedback to each other.

STUDENTS

- + Act upon feedback because they are taught the importance of it as a tool to improve.
- + Understand that feedback is a two way process – the receiver must feedback to the giver and vice versa.
- + Use their time effectively (guided or non-guided) to ensure that important feedback is recorded and reflected upon for future use.
- + Encourage each other to provide feedback through written and oral work.
- + Are taught the difference between deconstructive and constructive criticism.
- + Are trained to work with teachers, parents and stakeholders to ensure that feedback is culturally embedded.

THE TYPES OF FEEDBACK

Let's think outside of the box and consider a different level of feedback. Teachers most commonly use questioning techniques to obtain feedback from students orally and assessments and written tasks to obtain feedback in a written format. How can we use this knowledge to tweak our practice and embed more beneficial nuances into the feedback strategy?



THE 4 LEVELS OF FEEDBACK

As you proceed down through the four levels the feedback strategies become more complex. They do however, unearth more personalised misconceptions and barriers to learning that the students possess.

SELF-LEVEL

TASK LEVEL

PROCESS LEVEL

SELF-REGULATORY LEVEL

SELF-LEVEL

The simplest level of feedback provided to the students and the teacher. This is the feedback that provides a simple "yes I understand the content" or "no I do not understand the content" based upon questions asked during a learning activity. For example, a teacher may ask a question to a student and the answer provided will provide an instantaneous assessment of knowledge for the student (yes I get it) or to the teacher (he or she does/does not get it to the right extent). It's important at this stage of the learning process to ensure that there is a mechanism for students, and teachers, to record/remember/evaluate the reasons why a student may not understand a task or a question and use this information for future planning/assessment/homework/starter activity/plenary etc. This is the quickest of all the stages and new learning can occur instantaneously.



TASK LEVEL

A task is provided to an individual student or a group of students. Effective questioning techniques unearth the comfort zones, knowledge and understanding that the students currently possess. The task is designed to assess the application of this knowledge in either a familiar or unfamiliar context. The ability to perform the task successfully (may be an exam question or a group activity) will provide both the student, and the teacher, with feedback on progress and learning. Intervention has to become more astute at this stage to prevent knowledge gaps appearing later in learning when the more complex associated knowledge must be processed.

PROCESS LEVEL

This is the type of feedback a teacher provides a student when he/she is applying knowledge in an unfamiliar context or at a greater depth than the previous level. The activities normally associated with this type of feedback are essay based or activities that asks the students to pull together large volumes of prior learning. **This feedback is usually written** and more detailed but always requires follow up so misconceptions/misunderstanding and knowledge gaps are "filled in". Literacy barriers (effective decoding of questions, effective written responses and higher order application skills) are normally the barriers to progress at this stage. Intervention therefore needs to be bespoke.



SELF-REGULATORY LEVEL

This is the feedback students provide themselves because they are skilled enough to "know what to do when they do not know what to do". It involves the students acting upon external input to drive their own learning. It also requires the students to understand how their learning could be modified to make attainment better.

Most teachers spend most of their time in the first two levels. To seamlessly embed all 4 levels into your teaching takes time to develop; and a dedicated teacher to teach students the associated skills set to act upon each type. In essence, self-regulatory feedback occurs when the students master learning in any given topic, can apply it to any novel situation and can think laterally around the content to develop new ideas. They actively seek out opportunities to develop additional expertise. These students can also be coached to mentor others so that their skills of personalised feedback can be fine-tuned over time.

Questions to consider

1. How do you embed these levels of feedback into the classroom?
2. How do you create opportunities for these levels out of the classroom?
3. How well do you know your students in terms of what they can do, what they cannot do, their internal and external drivers and their potential to be taught how to move through the levels when required?
4. Who is giving feedback to who and when? (teachers, peer to peer, coaches etc.)
5. What is the impact on attainment and progress with the feedback strategies a teacher is employing?

Avoid common pitfalls with feedback

1. Expressing truisms without solutions ("you have spelt that wrong", "you need to add more information here", "try this part/section again because you have missed many learning points").
2. Providing feedback that is non-directional ("well done, you have most of the relevant mark scheme points contained within your answer"). Students will not know HOW to improve work with feedback like this.
3. Providing feedback that focuses only on the negative; this will dishearten students and you may lose credibility and/or rapport. Deconstructive criticism sets the wrong tone.
4. Providing no feedback; if there is one thing students hate it is teachers that do not mark their work, or hand work back weeks after they have submitted it. This will also dishearten students and you may lose credibility and/ or rapport. Feedback needs to be timely to have an impact.
5. Providing feedback and not expecting/allowing students to act upon it. If feedback is not acted upon then students will simply make the same mistakes again and again.

Feedback strategies should be the norm in any classroom setting. It should form part of the learning strategy and be expected in all learning conversations. Only through making mistakes, isolating those mistakes and having a framework to rectify errors, will we ever be able to attain the standard we expect of ourselves and others. Can you imagine the impact in our daily lives (learning to be a teacher, teaching your children the difference between right and wrong etc.) if the feedback we received was not relevant or acted upon. A person develops expertise only through constructive feedback.

Feedback is simply one of those teaching strategies that we can always tweak to get the sought after gains we desire in educational attainment. There is no one-size fits all mechanism to make feedback principles work, but there are non-negotiables that need to be implemented in the individual and collective classrooms of our schools to make it consistent. The importance of feedback strategies in a time of educational change can never be understated. In a world of linear examinations the input we have as teachers on student progress, intervention, assessment strategies and learning are hinged upon the manner in which we provide and receive detailed, developmental, feedback.

Our feedback should allow students to move forward in their learning

Their feedback should allow us to gauge our effectiveness

THE USE OF DATA IN LESSONS

Understanding student data and attainment over time is a very powerful tool for teachers when planning a series of lessons.

1. A variety of detailed progress data is collected to inform the teacher of a student's learning.
2. Student attainment data is used to plan lessons effectively and consider the differentiated needs of the learner.
3. Feedback from data capture is used to produce personalised "next steps" for the learner.
4. Students are seated/grouped in a manner based on assessment data and in a way that is mutually beneficial for all (effective group work).
5. Data is used to tweak/review/re-do sections of the syllabus until student attainment matches potential.
6. Sharing grade descriptors and modelling answers are embedded as part of the teaching repertoire.
7. Data is discussed in lessons and students are acutely aware of any discrepancy between target grades and current grades.
8. Student assessment grades are used to plan booster/intervention lessons focusing on the areas that continually cause problems.
9. Teachers know the questions they want answers to and plan lessons accordingly.
10. Data is used to make accurate and confident judgements about individual student learning and progress over time.

In summary, expert practitioners of AfL commonly have a constructivist approach to lesson planning and execution.

Assessment strategies in our education system have once again been overhauled as we continue to serve the needs of an evolving educational landscape. Many teachers have lamented that education is all about the "end figures" and statistics; unfortunately for us these "end figures" are the make or break digits in defining the next steps a young person will take in their learning journey. Getting assessment strategies right is therefore pivotal in ensuring we are "doing the right thing by our students". "Teaching to the test" has many short term benefits, but does not create a robust young person ready to take their next steps from one key stage to the next. If teachers drill students in techniques for earning marks, at the expense of teaching for deeper learning, then our best intentions are often moot point.

Formative Assessment strategies and closing the loop

All across schools in the UK formative assessment forms the heartbeat of the teaching strategy utilised to gauge learning. The chosen strategy however is not truly formative unless it provides information, and knowledge, that is actually used to take learning forward. Take the following simple example as an illustration:

- The teacher asks a student a question.
- The student does not understand the question, or cannot answer it.
- The teacher moves to a peer for clarification.
- The peer provides the correct answer.
- The original student acknowledges the response.
- Nothing further happens.

This common example will be discussed later in the text when we deal with isolating and using misconceptions as learning tools. The use of formative assessment is not a tick box exercise whereby teachers can say "I do ask questions in lessons" or "we do have discussions about the content". Formative assessment is more than about just doing; it is about strategically using information gained to personalise learning and drive standards upwards. Formative assessment should help learners to grow in their capacity to manage their own learning and make progress in specific subject fields. Formative assessment should not be used as a labelling exercise but used to provide manageable and developmental next steps with any learning intentions. The ideal is that students engage in formative assessment for one another in collaboration with the teacher. The mind-set that needs to be adopted must therefore be that ability is incremental, not fixed. Nations with successful educational systems believe that young people are capable of anything because of the focus on progress and learning over time that can occur when the curriculum is taught effectively, enthusiastically and with high expectations. Assessment strategies should therefore provide evidence of progression towards a pre-planned end point.

Whilst there are many strategies to promote formative assessment they must all have the following characteristics:

- Be learner centred (make it about the individual).
- Positive in ethos (it is OK to make mistakes – learning sometimes happens when the starting point is an error!).
- Develops student skills (record keeping, self-reflection, independent learning, revision and learning strategies).
- Constructive (differentiated and purposeful to learning).
- Appropriate (in application, timing and evaluation).
- Develops understanding over time.
- Relevant (to curriculum, examination and individual).
- Diagnostic (against individual and group needs).

In summary formative assessment is a central part of teaching pedagogy. It is so central in fact that many teachers often find it hard to get right! Without doubt one of the most important strategies is questioning techniques and the isolation of student misconceptions, errors and misunderstanding. It is just as important to find out what the students do not know as well as what they do know. Below are some strategies that are essential in the formative assessment process; we will focus upon two later in the text.

- Expectations for learning (teachers and students) are always high.
- Intervention is timely, appropriate and useful.
- Teachers have the highest credibility.
- Classroom Discussion and the flow of productive dialogue is the norm.
- Multiple levels of feedback are occurring to enhance the learning experiences of the students.
- Reciprocal teaching allows students to develop expertise.
- Metacognitive strategies are taught, reinforced and embedded.

ASSESSING LEARNING

Effective assessment procedures play an important role in learner success. They provide us with the tools to differentiate, personalise, analyse and motivate. High quality assessment needs to happen throughout learning and provide a real, holistic "forward looking" snapshot of student progress.

Ability is incremental, not fixed, so assessment strategies should provide evidence of progression and support the student's reflective and independent learning characteristics.

Questions we must be able to answer regarding assessment strategies

- How do we assess?
- What role does the student/teacher/peer/parent/subject-leader/leadership have on assessment?
- What strategies do I employ to assess progression?
- How do I know they are effective?
- How are they monitored/tracked?
- How much of a profile does assessment have in different subject areas?
- Does assessment have a positive/negative impact on student confidence?
- How do we tweak/personalise assessment to assure students gain confidence and independence in their chosen subjects?

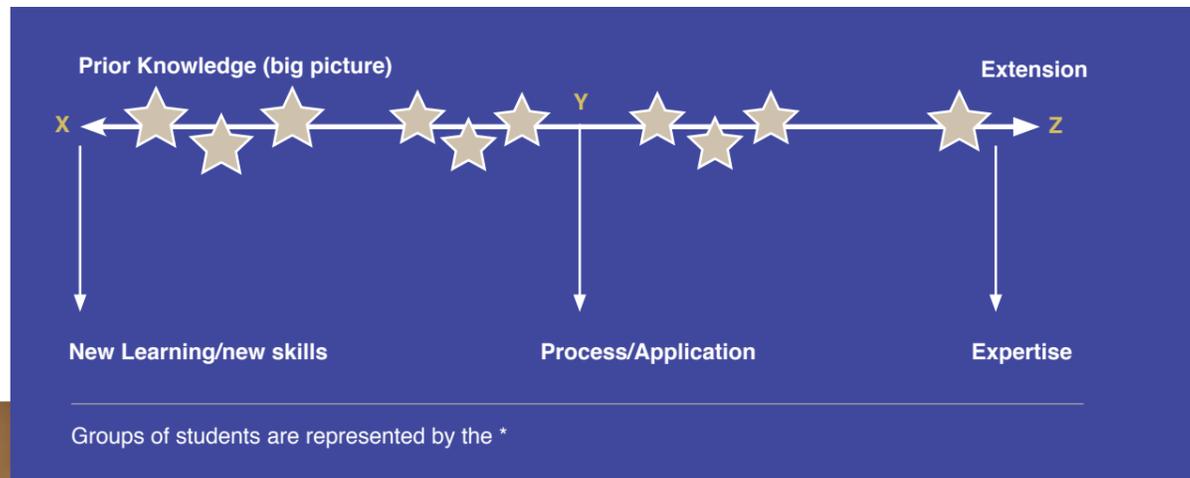
Teachers should be able to answer these two questions:

WHAT DO I WANT STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO DO?

HOW WILL I DO IT?

ASSESSMENT CONTINUED.

When planning a lesson decide on what the end goal will be – what do you want the students to be able to do at the end of the lesson? How do you identify students that are making more progress than others? What is the barrier to learning that is stopping them from moving towards point Z on the learning line below?



FIND OUT WHAT STUDENTS KNOW BY ASKING THEM A RANGE OF DEVELOPMENTAL AND CHALLENGING QUESTIONS!

Record misconceptions, and solutions, that have been uncovered at the individual and class level. Misconceptions are a great resource to plan personalised homework, starter activities, plenaries, future assessments and to provide evidence of learning over time.

Good teachers utilise student feedback and progress markers to intervene at timely and appropriate points in a learning episode. The secret to powerful intervention is to make it personalised.

Questions to answer:

1. What intervention strategies do I use in the class to positively impact rates of progress and learning?
2. What intervention strategies do I use out of the class to promote progress and learning?
3. Do students record their misconceptions and the associated solutions?
4. How much emphasis is there on this process?
5. What is the impact of my intervention strategies on student attainment?
6. How do I record individual/whole class misconceptions and successful intervention?
7. Do students make an accurate and reflective record of their learning “cans” and “cannots” over time for review prior to the examination?

Teachers need to create frameworks that cater for personalised intervention. These frameworks should allow the next steps in a student’s learning to become explicit. Each student could record “live” their learning so during group activities, Q/A sessions, teacher circulation, plenaries etc. you can intervene instantaneously. This also forms part of a learning diary that can be used as a useful revision tool before the terminal examinations. It is essential for you, and for your students, that a record is kept of prior misconceptions/misunderstandings/mistakes so they do not occur again at a later point in the academic year. The framework is as simple as this for a student:

What do I know/can do	What do I not know/cannot do	Key Words and Core Ideas
Big picture content/ Previous learning	Identified through Q/A, discussion, independent tasks, group work, visualisation etc. These “barriers” are recorded live as they occur in the classroom.	The non-negotiable material is recorded here
Solutions	What I still need to do	
How do I work upon the material/skill that I did not know, or the content in which I could not do? – teachers need to supply the strategy here initially.	Identified once misconceptions have been firmly dealt with – what are the student’s next steps to deepen their learning? Work with... Work on... Develop.... Consolidate.... Practice.... Download.....	

QUESTION PAPER ANALYSIS

- Describe and evaluate the questions and mark schemes that are related to this topic (common themes, what key words must you use etc.)
- From my assessments I have learned (evidence provided)
- I need to work on.....
- I need to see (teacher) urgently about (a question, a mark scheme, some content, other)

To make this strategy effective teachers need to do the following:

1. Know the type of questions asked on particular topics.
2. Know how many marks/weighting is given to a specific topic/content.
3. Understand the skills required to be able to answer examination style question types.
4. Plan teaching strategies that remove “exam barriers” for the students.
5. Insist upon understanding what the students know/do not know. A record should be kept by both parties for further use.
6. Teach the students the literacy skills to cope with the examination demands.

How do you assess where each student is on the learning continuum?

How do you ensure they are all making progress given their different starting points?

Intervention as part of a formative assessment strategy works best when the following occurs:

1. Teachers know their students (strengths and weaknesses).
2. A fit for purpose tracker (used by student and teacher) is used to record misconceptions.
3. Students are coached in the self-reflective process.
4. Intervention is personalised to the individual.
5. Small manageable steps are provided to move students toward the “finish line” of the learning expected of them.
6. Teachers differentiate effectively and use the students current mode of thinking and level of understanding to intervene appropriately.
7. Assessment strategies are used effectively to develop learning skills (do students keep a record of when they effectively analyse, justify, explain etc. – you could colour code these in their books or assessments).
8. Feedback is constructive and directional.
9. There is a commitment to succeed.
10. Teaching develops core skills (resilience, independence, English) when challenging activities are tackled.
11. High expectations permeate the lesson – a “can do collaborative approach” is utilised.
12. Learning is monitored effectively through the lesson through astute questioning techniques.

There is no “one size fits all” or any prescribed method of teaching that occurs where all students will be at the exact same place at any given time frame in their learning. Learning is a messy business that goes on inside the students’ heads. It is our job to differentiate the learning, make it accessible and ensure all our students are making progress towards the end point (Z) from their initial starting points (X). Some students after a single lesson will be still developing new learning whilst others will be seeking extension.

It is very common to observe teachers “teaching to the middle” as most of our learners will be clustered here. The result of such a teaching strategy is that the more and less able in a class often get overlooked. Adjusting teaching strategies to cope with this demand can pay great dividends. This is the nature of our job and it is essential that we get the balance right.



SYNOPTIC ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A LINEAR SYSTEM

The validity of the educational changes made to assessment strategies have been hotly debated amongst educators but one thing is for sure; the changes are happening and they are here to stay. There has been a lot of concern amongst teachers who perhaps perceive the new methodology as being alien. In addition, there is probably a significant proportion of teachers in any school that have never taught linear specifications before and have been trained to be a modular facilitator of learning. The first question that needs to be asked is this – is teaching a linear curriculum very different to teaching in a modular system? The simple answer is not really. Good teachers will not suddenly become unable to teach overnight!

‘THE BUY IN’

There is a feeling amongst many teachers and leaders that there is a disjointed educational experience for students who move from key stage to key stage. Students who are taught solely for examinations (‘teach to the test strategies’) tend to possess underdeveloped skills that has an impact on their future learning. New synoptic methodology provides us with an opportunity to really focus on deep learning and the development of skills over time. Historically, the modular system we worked within did not afford us an opportunity to plan a curriculum that promoted in depth understanding of subject content. The changes in our practice to cope with linear examination systems needs to be considered by the following:

Any training organisation involved with developing PGCE students

All mentors and leaders involved in NQT training

The leaders involved in INSET and CPD in schools and colleges across the country

The reform to assessment in order to encourage better teaching and learning is crucial. We now potentially possess time to support our weaker learners without the constant pressure from modular examinations. We can also move away from the perceived ‘spoon fed’ culture that prevents students from developing a true understanding and love of the subjects they take. The content and concepts that we teach are no longer isolated and the opportunity to have continuous coverage of all of the assessment objectives should be exciting!

Some questions to be considered to reinforce ‘the buy in’

1. Do we currently prepare students for the ‘next level’ and support a seamless transition? (from key stage 2 to 5, and from post 16 to HE).
2. If the answer to above is no, what more do we need to do?
3. Do we sacrifice skills development for spoon feeding to meet subject targets?
4. Do teachers understand the educational skills needed to be a success at each point in a student’s educational experience (year 1-11, year 12-13, undergraduate study and beyond)?
5. What does the word synoptic mean to the following groups of people:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| NQT | RQT (recently qualified teacher) |
| Students | PGCE |
| PGCE | Parents |
| SLT | Governors |

Is there a consistent understanding of the term and its implications for student achievement?

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ANY SYNOPTIC STRATEGY

1. Synoptic assessments should be cumulative by nature and design.
2. It should be up to subject teams to create accurate, weighted assessments.
3. Assessment should only assess what the students have been taught at each time frame – this is only fair!
4. The specification should be used to plan difficulty levels.
5. Appropriate grade boundaries and standards should be set (do these differ depending on the assessment type at different times of the year? – for example what does a level 6 in September look like compared to a level 6 in June?).
6. Are formative and summative assessments designed to enable an ‘A’ grade student to obtain an ‘A’ grade, or a level nine student to obtain a level nine, throughout the entire course?
7. Teach the skills they need over time to compensate for the more difficult questions – are these skills explicitly planned for in SoW?
8. Do we risk assess skills/question types, and if so, how?
9. How do we use previously assessed material to plan for the future examinations?
10. Make students fully aware of their synoptic ‘flight path’.
11. Consider the implications of giving a student a ‘full’ exam paper early on in the course. We should realise that they are being set up to underachieve unless careful expectations are conveyed about the outcomes. The proverbial ‘carrot and stick’ assessment should not be used!
12. All assessments should be standardised. Assessing ability occurs in every lesson as part of the natural learning process. Use feedback from students to gauge their ‘readiness’ for the assessments that you plan. Their exam readiness is reflective of our teaching efficiencies and our understanding of the exam skills they require over time.

Students should have frameworks to do the following:

1. Understand why they are successful and what examination skills still need to be developed.
2. Understand the next steps that need to be taken on their 'synoptic flight path'.
3. Understand what works best and why (in terms of revision, learning and retaining information).
4. Understand how their work compares to others (of similar and different ability).
5. Understand how close they are to their learning goals and potential.

A SIMPLE SYNOPTIC ASSESSMENT STRATEGY?

Learning should follow a 'ramp effect' from the start of the subject curriculum (easy) to the end of the curriculum (more demand). This strategy is subject dependant! It does work well for all subjects but is entirely dependent on how the curriculum is organised, how many assessment points have been pre-planned, the skill sets of the teachers and how effectively student flight paths are understood.

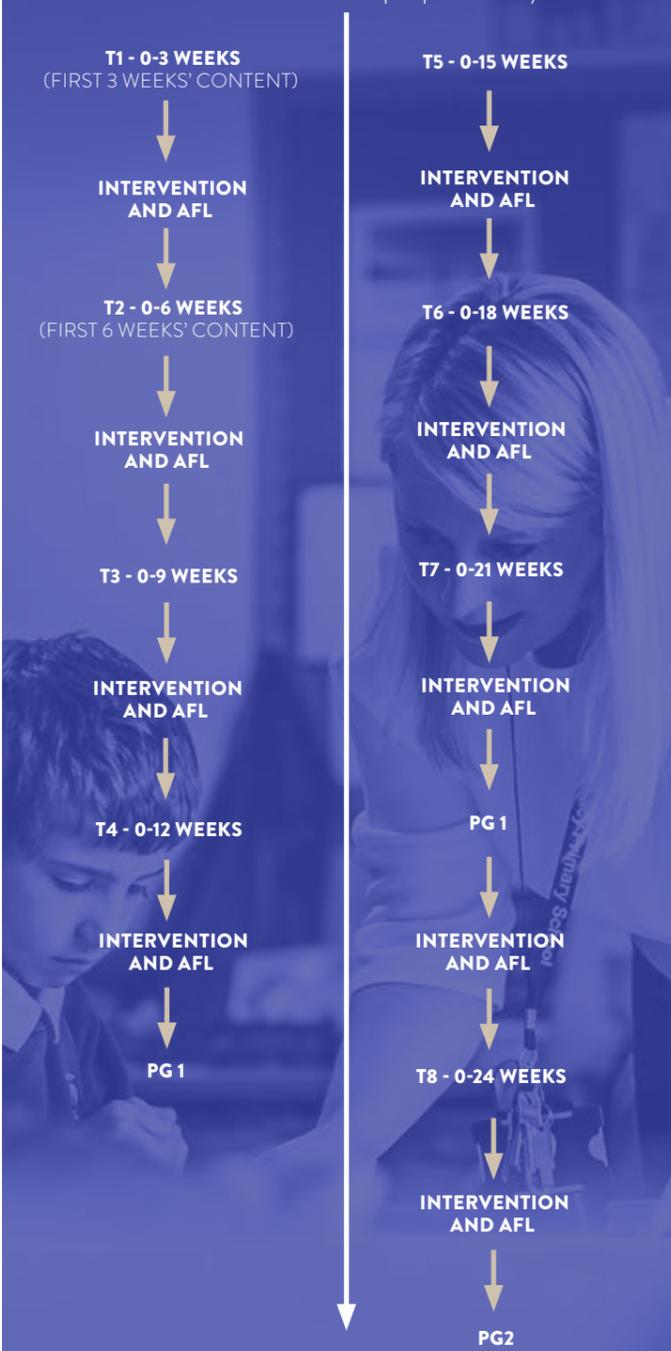
The rules of this strategy are as follows:

1. Teachers need to understand the students starting points and minimum target grades.
2. In principle, a student predicted to obtain a specific grade, or level, at the end of their key stage experience should be able to attain that grade and keep it (or better it) over the entire time frame. It does require teachers to decode content and alter the weightings of the exams that they provide. Over time our teaching and learning has to get better to 'skill up' the students in our care as we move into more demanding curriculum content. The expectations of what a young person can do in September of year 10 compared to April in year 11 must be considered. If a student has a predicted grade of an 8 at the end of a two-year GCSE programme than I simply expect that student to maintain that standard of attainment in all they do on route to the terminal exam.
3. Assessment objectives and skills required to meet target grades must be made explicit in our teaching assessment strategies.
4. This strategy can be tweaked to cater for subjects such as English, history, geography etc. In such subjects there is a common belief that students do not reach their full potential until the latter portions of their courses. It is common for them to be below target grades for significant portions of their course. This has implications for student confidence, parental concerns, predicted grades, perception by Ofsted and intervention. A forensic analysis therefore needs to occur on what the students can and cannot do at different times of the year and what steps need to be taken to close gaps in knowledge and skills.

The questions asked at different times of the academic journey will depend on what has being taught in terms of knowledge and skills. The demand of the assessments should assess working memory, long term memory and reading and writing skills against explicit time limits. Question difficulty and demand should be ascertained by teachers during normal lessons.

TO START AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR –

This is for illustrative purposes only



FROM 24 WEEKS UNTIL THE END OF ACADEMIC YEAR – INTERVENTION AND FINAL SUMMER PG3

*T = test (T1 = test 1 etc.)
PG = progress grade (a cumulative assessment that ascertains the development of knowledge and skills, the effectiveness of our intervention and the efficiency of our teaching strategies).*

*Intervention if necessary (to bridge knowledge and skills gaps between each assessment point).
The outcomes of the tests (T1, T2 etc.) can be used to inform predicted grades on route to the more 'weighty' end of half term assessments.*

An assessment strategy like this gives us a number of interim assessment points and 3 'major' assessment landmarks. The time frames of course can be altered to suit the course design and subject demands. In a number of schools, the interim assessment points are monthly or even half termly. The principle however remains the same – assessment should be developmental, forensic in nature and allow us to prepare our students for the exams at the end of their key stage.

Intervention needs to use the following strategy to make it effective.

THE D.I.R.E.C.T MODEL

Diagnose the individual needs following an assessment point (what can they not do and why?).

Implement a strategy that closes learning gaps (1:1 support, bespoke homework, additional classes, after school support, re and pre teaching strategies, peer support, coaching, etc.).

Reflect upon the intervention successes between each interim assessment point (between T1-T4 for example).

Evaluate the pitfalls and difficulties that students experience, and their causes, over medium time frames (PG1 – PG2).

Collaborate with other teachers both within and outside of your subject specialisms to decide upon teaching and learning strategies that are having a real positive impact.

Tweak your pedagogy as you move forward in time to cater for change, student diversity and assessment strategy.

Information unearthed in year 1 of any key stage can be used to inform planning and teaching in subsequent years. As mentioned earlier our teaching needs to become more progressive over time to ensure that the students are effectively developing more robust skills at the desired rate. In year 2 of the course, links between prior assessments can be made (areas of difficulty, content overlap, misconceptions etc.) to really drive home the expected learning. Content from PG1-3 can be constantly reinforced and even re-sat to gauge retention levels. In some schools the content of PG1-3 is re-assessed using a pre designed paper B that mirrored the assessment objectives, demand and weighting of their predecessor papers. In the second year of any key stage the time frames can be repeated, or changed, to reflect the 'flight path' strategy that you have employed.

The strategy will depend on the following:

1. Whether you begin GCSE study in year 9 or 10
2. Whether you are an A level teacher (the strategy begins in year 12 and continues in year 13)
3. Whether you teach a non-core subject with less contact time

Considerations need to be made on the following in each subject area:

- what do we do with assessment information?
- how often should we assess in our subject?
- how do we plan, track and measure the impact of intervention?
- how do we use assessment data to inform our teaching and learning?
- how do we move forward?

To better prepare students for the transition between primary school to secondary school, secondary school to college, and colleges to higher education, the manner in which we assess needs to change. Assessment strategies that encourage the best possible teaching practice deepens learning and discourages 'teaching to the test'. We now have the time to develop the 'missing skills' so often highlighted by educators across the country; namely our student's ability to effectively communicate on paper, their development of deeper understanding of links between the topics we teach, their development of critical thinking skills and independent enquiry, and finally their development of resilience and effective revision strategies. There is now time to innovate and potentially explore the interesting additional components of the subjects that we teach.

DEVELOPING LITERACY SKILLS

In most cases, where underachievement has occurred, we find that there are mismatches between the knowledge a student possesses and practices when compared to the knowledge they express in an exam.

Memorising mark schemes is simply not enough!

Most of the assessment strategies we employ invariably have a degree of written communication attached to them. It is well documented, and well founded, that the development of core skills, particularly the quality of written literacy/standard of English, is one of the major threads of the common inspection frameworks to assess the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

It is well documented and known by teachers that there can be a massive difference between what a student can say, and what a student can write. We work in an unfortunate profession whereby the outcomes of all our hard work (or certainly most of it) are terminally assessed via a written paper. Writing for an examiner is a specialised skill, a skill that many students fail to master and many adults fail to undertake. It is much easier in today's world to communicate knowledge and understanding via recorded dialogue, text, email, podcast etc. but despite all the latest in technological innovation the written exam is still the "bread and butter" for the majority of our students. This of course is not to say that we do not embrace new technologies to deliver our teaching content and enhance our repertoire of delivery strategies. We must keep a mindful eye on the examination process, criteria and written style expected to ensure the students we teach maximise their potential. Many students have not had practice, or very little in previous key stages, at extended or purposeful writing tasks. We also have other issues to contend with, such as student confidence with written tasks, or those from ethnic minority backgrounds who have a limited range of formal writing styles. Research shows that the critical age when children learn to become good writers is between three and seven. The best schools are consistent in giving students opportunities to talk, listen and build their vocabulary to ensure good writing skills are developed. Creating opportunities to improve a student's English skill should be a non-negotiable through their formal education.

How do we encourage and motivate students to take on engaged writing activities in our classroom?

WHAT CAN WE DO?

1. Start small; ask another teacher to help you by talking through what you intend to do and to act as a mentor.
2. Work with another teacher or group of teachers who teach the same students. Discuss the barriers that exist in written communication and devise strategies to overcome them.
3. Work together on your approach to developing writing (after four weeks compare). Discuss which strategies are the most effective and why.
4. Find someone to pair up with and team-teach. Design the tasks together and divide the role of teacher in the lesson between you.
5. Work with a small group of teachers within your school or college to make change happen where it is needed!

A 10 STEP STRATEGY TO IMPLEMENT ENGAGED WRITING IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Establish clear aims – share with the students the rationale behind what you are asking them to do. Ensure they have a purpose attached to the task and where applicable a target audience to write for (other students, examiner, next year's cohort, the creation of an auditory podcast etc.)
2. Provide example(s) – it is very hard to reach a standard of communication when we do not know what it should look like or sounds like. Provide chunked down models of the type of writing style you want to students to attain.
3. Explore the conventions of the text – break text down into meaningful and purposeful sections. Discuss, debate and deliberate over the text style, context and content.
4. Define the conventions. Demonstrate how it is written – use as many examples as possible to demonstrate the point.
5. Compose together – involve the students where ever possible, simple dictation does not embed learning.
6. Scaffold the first attempts – provide the frameworks, scaffold their responses, give the time scales for completion and ensure they use the correct terminology and depth to reach your target goals for the session.
7. Independent writing – give the students time to practice the skills you have taught them.
8. Ensure feedback is constructive and personal.
9. Draw out key learning – take out the best examples of written work so students can hear, and see, the key learning steps that need to be taken to achieve success.
10. Have fun – if writing tasks become fun students are more likely to repeat the procedure with positive associations.

SUCCESSFUL WRITERS

1. Know where they are going and how the writing will end.
2. Use key words and terminology effectively.
3. Can hear the writing inside their heads and make judgements about it so they can edit it.
4. Use reading to inform writing.
5. Have a range of styles and text types to choose from.
6. Are aware of the needs of the reader.
7. Rehearse and re-read.
8. Concentrate.
9. Have a good standard of communication in terms of grammar, spelling and punctuation.
10. Accept constructive feedback to improve their capabilities.
11. Attend to their known areas for development.

CONVENTION SUMMARY

Purpose

- What is its purpose?
- Who is it for?
- How will it be used?
- What kind of writing is therefore appropriate?

Text level

- Layout
- Structure/organisation
- Sequence

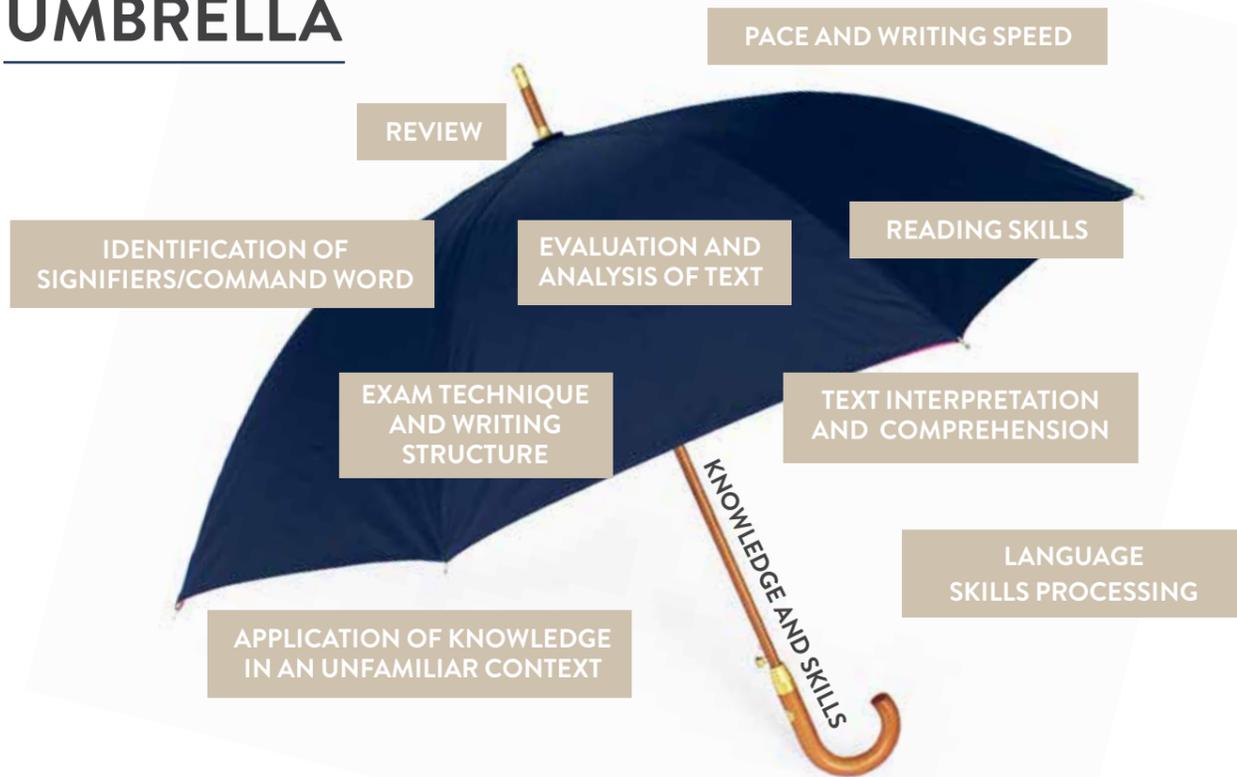
Sentence level

- Viewpoint (first person, third person, etc.)
- Prevailing tense
- Active/passive voice
- Typical sentence structure and length
- Typical cohesion devices and linking words

Word level

- Stock words and phrases
- Specialised or typical vocabulary
- Elaborate/plain vocabulary choices

THE ENGLISH UMBRELLA



Providing students have developed the knowledge and skills in their lessons (see umbrella handle) then what are the potential barriers that exist which prevent them from maximising their inherent potential? Most subjects suffer from a combination of the above characteristics so what are we doing about them? In general essay based subjects suffer most from the barriers identified on the right hand side, where as maths and science subjects tends to suffer more from the barriers highlighted on the left hand side. There are of course overlaps and in many cases it is teacher or curriculum dependant.

Barriers in assessment – reducing the mismatch between knowledge and written application

All suggested strategies require a relentless delivery that develops the skills to overcome identified barriers in the long term. Most teachers employ these strategies as part of their assessment and feedback in lessons. Making the barriers explicit to the students shares the learning for all. Some simple strategies are highlighted to the right.

1. Choose from the umbrella the areas that cause most concern for you as a subject teacher.
2. Decide amongst your teaching staff which areas are the biggest cause for concern in your subject.
3. Devise a strategy (short to long term) that will effectively deal with these barriers. How is the impact of the strategy being evaluated and by who?
4. What personal, historical, factual and anecdotal information have you used to decide upon which areas to focus upon (*examiner reports for example*)?
5. Commit to long term removal of these barriers.
6. Share effective strategies and tweak as you see fit.
7. When marking assessments highlight the barrier that exists and the impact it is having on student attainment.
8. Personalise student feedback to cope with the barrier identified.
9. Ensure coping and development strategies are discussed and encouraged with the students.
10. Measure impact of “barrier attack” over time.
11. Design specific tasks (writing, reading, discussion and research) that can be incorporated into the SoW to improve student’s literacy skills.
12. Ensure all assessment strategies/feedback have a consistent and embedded focus on English skills.

SOME SIMPLE EXAMPLES

Barrier: identification of signifiers/command words

Strategy: develop the students’ understanding of the meaning of the following command words (both in and out of the lesson context); describe, discuss, analyse, evaluate, suggest, devise, design etc. Once you see these command words, or combination of these command words, what are the written coping behaviours we should employ? For example, do students know how to evaluate effectively? Do students know how to apply their knowledge to support/disagree effectively? There is a specific rationale for asking students to evaluate. Very often, when first reading from an extract, a question, a theory, a statement or a concept, the initial response is to form a value judgement; that is to either agree or disagree. However, by applying knowledge and thinking about both sides of the story, both good and bad, students develop and refine their analytical skills. These skills are important as they form the foundation for robust problem solving and decision making. Furthermore, they help build creativity and innovation by encouraging them to challenge how they think about things. This is crucial to the development of reflective practice. These skills were all discussed in the opening pages of this booklet. The importance of their development to feed into student grades should, by now, be becoming transparent.

- + How much time do you dedicate in a lesson to develop this skill; both orally and on paper? To identify question signifiers students need to learn key terms and core terminology. Once they can identify these in a question then more often than not the question becomes easier to answer.
- + How many students get stuck on exam questions because they are focusing on the wrong words, or words which are present to “bulk” the question out and actually have no bearing on the response?
- + How many examples can you, and your colleagues, give on this phenomenon? What strategy do you employ when you read words in questions that you do not understand?
- + How many students do not read question properly and realise that actually some of the more “abstract” words and terms are actually explained (literal resilience?).

Barrier – text comprehension

Strategy – in every lesson provide students with a piece of extended text that requires them to read and record areas they find difficult to understand (personalised intervention to solve misconceptions). Remember it’s just as important for us to know what students do not know as well as what they do know. Discuss ALL identified barriers with the class and decide together ways to overcome them. It’s important that the text is contextualised, age appropriate and uses language that develops their subject terminology.

Barrier – review

Strategy – many students do not read what they have written! How many times do they make silly errors, repeat the same points unnecessarily or miss key terminology. It is frustrating for both the teacher and the student alike. To reinforce the importance of review try the following; Once a student has completed a timed assessment ask them to choose a different colour and read all their answers again. At every point where they want to change or add information they do so in the new colour. Provide the students with a pre and post review score. In general you will find that the average student gains at least 2-3 marks in their assessment. Whilst this may seem trivial it may also mean the difference between a grade 5 and a grade 6, a pass or a fail, or a student getting into college or university or not. As a general rule give the student +5 minutes to review a 30 minute assessment and +10 minutes for a 60 minute assessment. This strategy is not only useful as an examination technique in its own right, but it also makes the students more mindful of their learning and contributes to a reflective outlook. Ensure all students record their errors and solutions in a learning log/diary which can be reviewed before their terminal examinations.

Some examples of the importance of review gathered from my experiences of supporting students with UCAS applications to Higher Education;

- “I have been at my current school for 55 years”
- “I attended a fist aid course with St. John Ambulance”
- “In my spare time I enjoy hiding my horse”
- “I speak English and Spinach”
- “I am especially interested in the moths application of the course”
- “I was responsible for stick control”
- “I hope to hear from you shortly”
- “I wish you all the bery vest” (I love this spoonerism!)

PITFALL TO AVOID

We are not our students! As experts, we tend to access and apply knowledge automatically and unconsciously (for example we can make connections drawing on relevant bodies of knowledge whilst choosing appropriate coping strategies) and so we often skip or overlook critical steps when we teach.

Put your expert feet into the novice shoes of the students you teach!

Stating the Obvious?

If students needed to integrate multiple pieces of knowledge for the exam, then additional practice that requires increasing levels of integration or synthesis will help them build this skill.

In short give them more practice at what they need to be able to do!



SOLUTIONS TO COPE WITH DIVERSITY

- Staff with high expectations of what learners should achieve.
- A school/college wide emphasis on writing, speaking and listening skills.
- A systematic approach to teaching knowledge and skills.
- Careful assessment and analysis of data to determine the next steps and most appropriate action to develop written communication.
- Carefully planned provision, which might include additional support or intervention, to meet individual needs.
- Rigorous monitoring of impact.
- Creative use of time, staff and resources.
- High-quality pastoral care supported by effective partnerships with parents.

More strategies - "the secret to literacy is making the implicit explicit".

- 3 x reading strategies (skimming, scanning and independent research).
- 3 x writing strategies (long & short sentences, varied sentence starts, varied connectives).
- 3 x spelling strategies (what words look like, sound like and other connections e.g. mnemonics).
- 3 x application in an examination scenario (identification of where this knowledge can be applied at different levels).
- 3 x modelling exercises (the student, a peer, you).



Written rules – once question/text interpretation has occurred:

- Clarify your thoughts and the purpose of your communication before you start writing. In examinations, clarity is more important than style.
- Identify the key points, facts and themes.
- Decide on a logical order for what you have to say.
- Compose a strong introduction and ending. The first will make an immediate and positive impression on the reader; the second will remain in their mind after they have finished reading.
- Use short paragraphs and sentences rather than long, rambling ones. Keep to one idea per paragraph and put your point in the first line, then add the supporting information.
- Help key points to stand out by the use of headings, sub-headings and bullet points. This will allow your reader to quickly scan your message for the main points.
- Review – read what you have wrote to ensure all the above apply and the question has been fully understood, decoded and answered.

SUMMARY - ANSWER THE FOLLOWING

1. How do I support learners with writing in an appropriate style and format?
2. How do I engage learners with clarifying and consolidating key vocabulary in each unit?
3. How do I help learners with appropriate reading skills so that they can read effectively in and out of the classroom?
4. How do I systematically identify/tackle and remove the pertinent literacy barriers that affect student attainment?
5. How do I make all of the above explicit in my planning and delivery?



IN THE DYNAMIC ATMOSPHERE OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES IT IS A COMMON OCCURRENCE FOR TEACHERS TO DO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- + Teach to the middle.
- + Ignore the most able as they “just get on with it”.
- + Not provide opportunity to really extend learning due to the time constraints of the curriculum.

STRETCH AND CHALLENGE FOR THE MORE ABLE STUDENTS

This of course is not the norm in all classrooms but it certainly occurs in a majority. I have spoken to many teachers previously who have expressed a type of “helplessness” with this occurrence. Rightly so they need to spend a lot of their “in class contact time” supporting the less able and decoding content to ensure progression for all. The result is that progress tends to be skewed for the most able and we settle for a “maintenance phenomenon” (they are doing really well on tests so we just leave them to it). With this in mind you have to question the impact a teacher has directly on students who do obtain high grades.

If you look online, or in the range of published material, there seems to be a little bit of “same old same old” in regards to the characteristics of a ‘gifted’ student. The advice and guidance provided to teachers is generally good. However, the bespoke strategies that remove barriers to learning for this cohort are often too generic and lack any detail in regards to measuring impact.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- + How much impact do I actually have in the classroom on this type of student?
- + How do I know?
- + How much impact do I have outside the classroom on this type of student?
- + What are the characteristics of an 8/9 student?
- + What impact do I (the teacher) have on unlocking this potential – what do I do to ensure students can make the progress between an 8 and a 9?
- + Do I know what it takes to be a grade 9 student?

In a survey of 200 students in year 11 (all predicted 8’s and 9’s) the top 3 responses to the following questions were as follows:

<p>What skills do you need?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Effective learning skills 2. Exam practice 3. Writing skills 	<p>What knowledge do you need?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specification content 2. How to get a grade 9 3. Exam format 	<p>What incentives do you have?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial reasons 2. College places 3. Peer recognition
<p>How does a ‘gifted’ student behave?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hard working 2. Motivated 3. Organised 	<p>How is your potential measured</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers tell me 2. Homework grades 3. Progress in class 	<p>What barriers exist?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time with teachers 2. Effective revision strategies 3. Difficult content

Table 1 - Student responses

What is interesting about this little study? Firstly, when repeated in many schools the results tend to be the same whether you speak to students from both mixed or setted classes. Secondly, there are the following lessons to be learned for teachers:

1. Never underestimate how little a student knows about effective revision and learning techniques.
2. Students need to be explicitly taught how to fluently express themselves on paper under examination conditions.
3. Attainment in assessments over time should be cumulative (re-testing previous skills/knowledge that students struggle with) and not isolated (modular assessment strategies).

4. Even the most able struggle sometimes with content, and certainly in many cases do not have the expert context to reinforce new learning.

5. Hard work does not always pay off, especially if students are working hard in the wrong area/at the wrong things. We have to support students in identifying the curriculum content that they need to spend more time at with explicit success indicators (including assessment and evidence of the development of expertise).

In a survey of 200 teachers of year 11 students the top 3 responses to the following questions were as follows:

<p>What skills do students need?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resilience 2. Resourcefulness 3. Critical/reflective thinker 	<p>What knowledge must they have?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All specification content 2. How to learn effectively 3. Self-identification of weaknesses 	<p>What behaviour must they exhibit?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Readiness to learn 2. Read around their subject 3. Highly organised
<p>How is potential measured?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Previous attainment 2. In class assessment 3. Homework/book work 	<p>What barriers exist?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Literacy (written communication) 2. Time dedicated to these students in lessons 3. Revision – “not enough of” 	<p>How do you incentivise the students?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In class activities 2. Trips and visits 3. Speak to parents

Table 2 – Teacher responses

As you can see the teacher’s responses are not too dissimilar to the students above. It is interesting however to analyse the differences, particularly in the skills and barriers the two groups perceive, and come up with a teaching consensus.

What can we do in the classroom? These are not exhaustive lists

The simple things

- Have high expectations
- Use your expertise to inspire students
- Provide directional feedback on learning
- Rigorously assess learning
- Teach content effectively
- Set aspirational targets
- Teach students how we learn
- Differentiate effectively
- Share model answers

The complex things

- Peer assessment strategies
- Develop "expertise" resources
- Create student learning logs
- Design bespoke assessment resources
- Develop written communication
- Create impact indicators for success
- Teach our students' effective revision techniques
- Embed higher skills development
- Develop peer coaching/marking/feedback cohort

What can we do out of the classroom? These are not exhaustive lists

The simple things

- Liaise with parents
- Organise appropriate trips/visits
- Expose students to graduates/college teachers etc.
- Organise intervention
- Be a role model
- Reinforce expectations
- Analyse 'in class' peer assessment data

The complex things

- Develop coaching groups
- Create junior examiners
- Develop written communication
- Analyse examiner reports
- Remove personal learning barriers
- Decode the best revision/learning strategies
- Develop a marking team to support you

Where do I start? There are so many successful strategies that a teacher can employ to make this happen. Creating junior examiners as the academic year progresses is a good starting point.

Creating junior examiners

These students' :

- Have a full understanding of AO's and mark band criteria.
- Understand how their responses compare to others.
- Possess an understanding of command words and how to apply knowledge both in and out of context.
- Have an appreciation of areas in their exams that commonly cause problems (and how they can effectively overcome them).
- Decide how to share and disseminate their learning with others through initiatives that allow them to analyse other students work, provide feedback, peer coach and peer teach.



Ensuring that all students with top grade potential understand how to effectively revise, in my experience, has certainly helped when they are developing expertise over time.



A FRAMEWORK FOR REVISION AND LEARNING FOR THE STUDENTS

Students, in liaison with their teachers, can decide the best stage to begin their revision based upon assessment feedback, self-reporting, peer assessment and teacher judgement. In summary, the revision and learning strategies are broken up into three stages that can be used interchangeably against different curriculum content. These strategies should be used with all students, but for the more able, the skill set to embed stage 3 often requires explicit support.

Show students the following and ask them to try at least two of the bulleted strategies in each phase.

STAGE 1: THE BIG PICTURE

STAGE 2: THE MID-POINT

STAGE 3: THE EXPERT STAGE



THE BIG PICTURE - STAGE 1

What should I do?

- Use resources (notes, booklets, web pages) to capture the core content and consolidate knowledge.
- Understand the exam/coursework structure.
- Evaluate how the content fits into your world/study programme/ career aspiration. Make a note of this in your revision notes and make the links clear!

How do I do it?

- Read all your notes from the lesson(s). Use your booklets, previous tests and revision guides to support this activity.
- Record on a flash card, or the beginning of a mind map key terms and ideas only.
- Go back over at least 3-5 exam papers to find out how this content is assessed (A01-A04). Record this on your cards or map.
- Have a separate card/page/journal that records the parts that you do not understand yet and seek help – be honest!!

Why does it work?

You cannot attempt exam questions without having a secure knowledge base. This is often the hardest part to do as you want to get straight into exam practice. If this stage is done correctly the next stages become easier. Learn to walk before you run. Share this learning stage with others to ensure you have developed a surface expertise. If you can't "speak" your knowledge you can't fluently "write" your knowledge.

THE MID POINT - STAGE 2

What should I do?

- Identify command words in questions and develop strategies to write fluently for the examiner.
- Decode content – what comes up and how often?
- Look at key terms, ideas or skills that obtain marks (all exams).
- Work in groups to solve problems, share concerns and model great answers.
- Analyse mark schemes.

How do I do it?

- Choose an area you want to practice/complete and once again go over your "big picture" ideas.
- Have to hand all past papers and write your answers/essays/text initially without looking at the mark schemes. Repeat this with as many examples as you can find that test the content. Compare your answers with mark schemes/ other student's attempts.
- Update cue cards, mind maps, journal with new learning. What can you do/cannot do yet – seek clarification from teachers/ students.

Why does it work?

Keeping a record of the content/exam questions/areas of the exam that you lose marks within, will help focus your revision. It is vital that you spend time practicing what you cannot do. This will help you fine tune your exam technique over time. Only move forwards when you have completely satisfied these criteria.

THE EXPERT STAGE - STAGE 3

What should I do?

- Become the examiner.
- Use comparative writing styles.
- Complete flash cards (make difficulty cards depicting level 1,2,3 content) mind maps, journal etc.
- Practice timed questions.
- Get coursework in on time.
- Don't accept unsolved answers on tests – only file away when every mark is understood.

How do I do it?

- Write out a bank of questions that could be asked using different command words and different ideas.
- Aim to use all previous knowledge to write mark schemes that are self-assessed against examiner mark schemes.
- Lead a group of students in completing the more difficult questions.
- Attempt different levels of questions against the clock to see where time can be gained/is being lost.
- Update your personal tracking system. Be unstoppable!

Why does it work?

If you can use all your learning to teach others, understand the exam requirements, attack difficult questions and use your knowledge in any format then you will succeed. This process needs to be repeated for all examined content.

In conclusion, there are lots of things we can do to support a student's transition from a grade 7-8 or 8-9. Thinking about their learning from a 360° perspective (what they are doing in the classroom, out of the classroom and at home) will greatly help. We often have the answers and the simple things we suggest are most often the most effective. Creating lifelong expertise may not be as difficult as we, or our students, think!

HOMEWORK

The question of how much, if any, homework students should complete outside of lessons remains controversial; despite a plethora of research that correlates a positive impact between homework and attainment. There is however a fine balance to be achieved between the provision of ‘whole class’ tasks that do not have an equal impact on a student’s progress, and those that personalise, consolidate and accelerate an individual’s learning.

The volume of homework that students receive, per night, is also highly variable and often subject specific. In some cases an inconsistent approach with regards to volume by one teacher can have a negative impact on the completion rate for another. Little research has ever found conclusive evidence that mass homework makes a significant difference for every student and conflicting research does not make our job any easier. In addition, homework can often cause friction between teachers and students, and students and parents. A rigid whole school policy on homework is not the answer; there needs to be flexibility between subject and curriculum areas to make homework meaningful, purposeful, engaging and worth the effort.

Here are some thought for teachers to consider:

- + *If you are teaching a mixed ability class, with students who are at different points in their learning ‘flight paths’, why do they all get the same homework?*
- + *If you are teaching a class of similar ability how is homework designed to promote further progress? - Is it given to consolidate current learning, deal with recognised misconceptions, develop a core skill, to promote further learning or to enhance independence?*
- + *If you are giving homework that does not require submission of written evidence what indicators of successful completion are you seeking?*
- + *What is the impact of the homework you are giving on progress?*
- + *Do students think that homework grades are reflective of hard work or feedback about learning?*
- + *Is homework used as an option to cover up what cannot be covered in class?*
- + *Are teachers trained well in the art of assigning effective homework?*

PROBLEMS WITH HOMEWORK – WHICH ONES ARE IN OUR SCHOOL CONTEXT?

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. A significant proportion of students do not complete tasks set. | 6. Homework is often task orientated rather than learner centred. |
| 2. Not completing homework leads to confrontation between teachers/students/parents that can impact on engagement. | 7. Timely feedback is not provided. |
| 3. If teachers do not grade homework students will not do it. | 8. Rewards systems, and additional support, is often in place for students that do not do their homework rather than for those who always submit it. |
| 4. The fallacy with policy – The marking policies of schools varies tremendously. Why are some schools still insisting that teachers ‘tick and flick’. The volume of red pen in a student’s copybook does not equate to good learning. | 9. There is a hyper accountability associated with teachers setting, receiving, marking and providing feedback on homework (misconception that excessive red pen feedback leads to gains in progress). |
| 5. The volume of homework set in different subjects varies tremendously. | 10. For a significant volume of students homework has no/little impact on their progress, learning and attainment. |

Below is an executive summary of a small case study I carried out involving 100 students in key stage 4 and ‘A’ level. The comments highlighted below are those that were provided most regularly during questioning. Questions were asked on a 1:1 basis so peer consensus could not bias the results. It is interesting to note that many teachers in other institutions say that **“this pretty much mirrors their school”**.

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY (100 STUDENTS)

1. “Homework does not always hep me to learn or get better because I just want to get it out of the way”.
2. “Homework is pointless”. Common responses were that it was either too easy or too hard to complete. Is there a goldilocks strategy for homework based upon a robust understanding of student progress and a differentiated, personalised homework strategy?
3. “By the time I get my homework mark back I forgot the content that is within it”.
4. “I cannot understand the teachers’ feedback and therefore I do not act upon it”.
5. “If I can get away without doing it then I will; the answers are given to us in class anyway”.
6. “We have no reflection time, or enough time, to work out what we still have to do”.



WHAT THE TEACHERS SAY (25 TEACHERS)

1. “I spend most of my additional spare time marking homework”.
2. “I do not chase homework any more, if they do it then great, if they do not than that is their loss”.
3. “I need help setting bespoke group homework”.
4. “Homework only helps those that really need it”.
5. “Only the good students do their homework, and really, they are the ones that need the least consolidation of content”.
6. “There is not enough time to build in reflection and personalised feedback in lesson time”.

As schools and colleges move into linear models of assessment we have to ask ourselves the following questions; are there ways to encourage the development of different skills? Is there a better way to incorporate formative assessment strategies both within and outside the class to re-engage students with the ownership of their own learning? What does it really mean for a student, at any time of the year to be a level 5 or a level 6?

Homework strategy – questions to consider

1. What do you want them to do?
2. Why do you want them to do it?
3. What will be the impact on their learning and progress?
4. Can the tasks be differentiated so that they are accessible for all students?
5. How will the task support the more and least able?
6. How long should it take to complete?

What happens if? (Pre-emptive planning)

- 1.They do not complete the homework on time.
- 2.They leave blanks in their responses.
3. They tell you they could not do it.
4. They forget to bring it in to you.
5. How are you closing the loop between identifying what they can do and cannot do?
6. How is homework part of a strategy that can lead to concept mastery?
7. What type of homework develops the skills you are intending the students to develop?

Homework grades should only receive partial weighting in the analysis of 'true' progress – we are confusing practice that checks short term understanding with actual demonstration of learning over time. Have you ever seen this in a classroom report?

KS4 Homework No.	1	2	3	4	5
Grade	6	7	7	7	8
End of Term 1 Assessment Grade	5				

The tracking, intervention and weighting homework receives in schools and colleges should be used only as a marker of potential. We have to remember that for some students homework will be copied, or done at the last minute. Mark schemes can be found and shared easily and many students put little thinking time into the completion of their homework. These problems normally arise if the task set is not fit for purpose, has unrealistic deadlines or the culture of submission is wrong.

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Creating a homework policy that suits the needs for all learners is a difficult task, some may even argue an impossible task. However, with the right mind set, personnel and policy, homework can add real value to a student's learning. It is poor strategies and unrealistic expectations that causes the proverbial negativity around homework. The key facets to remember are related to task variety, expectation and purpose. Homework should never be given for the sake of giving it; this leads to an additional workload stress for both the teacher and the student. When homework is branded as an essential part of the learning process and students experience success, engagement and ownership over their learning, homework becomes part of a schools non-negotiable culture of achievement.

20 POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO THE HOMEWORK PROBLEM

1. The expectation that homework will be completed should be non-negotiable. Ensure that all stakeholders involved in upholding a homework policy apply the expectations consistently and fairly. The homework culture that needs to be developed should work around the principle that it adds value and supports learning. The consequences for non-submission need to be explicit, visible and understood by students.
2. Set the bar high - if they underachieve they repeat the task. Re-submission of material does not always have to be to you. It could be to a peer, a year head, another teacher, a subject leader etc.
3. The volume of homework provided, and the submission dates, need to be negotiated with leaders. Front loading a student on a Monday night with hours upon hours of work that needs to be submitted Tuesday morning will not help. Do schools have specific homework nights for specific subjects?
4. Homework tasks need to be carefully planned using the curriculum schemes of work and your knowledge of common areas that students need to consolidate.
5. Vary the homework task so that assessment objectives can be met equally and thoroughly. Homework should develop independent learning skills, research skills, effective written communication, reflection and content engagement.
6. Don't always provide grades – research suggests that grades can often reduce the impact of formative comments. If grades are provided do the students act upon the feedback you have given? How do you close this 'learning loop'?
7. Homework tasks need be at an appropriate level of difficulty. Knowledge of what the students can, and cannot do, prior to providing the task will help reinforce the expectations of timely completion. You may want to vary the skill that different groups of students need to develop. In an essay based homework for example the more able could be expected to complete an essay and to demonstrate accurate planning, knowledge, synthesis, analysis, evaluation and the use of key concepts. For other students it may be challenging enough to plan an essay and write a 10 line introduction.
8. It is also useful to have additional support in place (in school or at home) to allow students who are really struggling to feel that they are making progress. For some, skills development will take more time and more effort.
9. Make feedback purposeful and timely. Feedback should focus on the following three aspects:
 - What the student has done well?
 - What does the student need to do to improve?
 - What does the student need to do to deepen their learning and make further progress over time?
10. Increase the relevance of homework tasks by linking the tasks to the following;
 - Summative assessment preparation.
 - The student's career aspiration (are there employability links in the tasks provided)?
 - Will the outcomes be shared with different groups of people (peers, other teachers, leaders etc.)?
 - Do students know how the homework fits into your 'big picture' learning intentions (is it for consolidation, reflection, independent learning, extension, critical thinking etc.)?
11. Allow time in lessons to reflect upon feedback. Give students time to share their feedback with others. Are there common misconceptions or errors that need a 'class togetherness' to correct?
12. What is the link between the homeworks you provide? Is there a skills based continuum that is made obvious to the students and their parents?
13. Vary the feedback that is provided (style, length, depth). If you spoon feed a student they become over reliant, if you give no feedback at all they become disillusioned. Consider the skills that you want the students to develop once they receive your feedback.
14. Reflect upon their progress and learning based upon the task. Re-do certain sections if necessary.
15. Elucidate where marks have been awarded and lost – what is the priority for intervention?
16. Elucidate why a grade is a specific grade – what are the explicit differences?
17. Practice specific tasks recognised as 'areas for development'.
18. What are the next steps to augment the students' learning and to add value to the original task? Do you want them to;
 - Provide you/their peers with supportive feedback that changes grades;
 - Create a product/paper/mark scheme/case study/scenario/;
 - Carry out independent research;
 - Carry out group research;
 - Do nothing;
 - Update a learning journal;
19. As the year progresses allow students to take ownership of different additional tasks to support their personal learning journey.
20. Don't always brand work to be completed out of the classroom as 'homework'. This term has negative connotations and poor emotional value. Think of alternative brands for the tasks that you want the students to complete.



“The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him/her accordingly”

DAVID AUSUBEL

TRACKING PROGRESS: ARE WE GETTING IT RIGHT?

THINKING ABOUT PROGRESS

- SOME PRESUPPOSITIONS

The measure of progress is often subjective, messy to evidence and fraught with over complication. What are the exact secure indicators of progress per student? If a student is suddenly making better than expected progress how do we manage predicted grades? If progress was better than expected does that mean we had lower expectations of that student in the first place? In my experience, the students who make the best progress have the most inspiring teachers. These are the people (we all know who they are in our schools and colleges) who know how to get the best out of the young people in front of them. They also understand how to decode the curriculum and ‘up skill’ the students to cope with the demands of the written and practical assessments. These people need to be consulted. Up to 40% of teachers in online opinion polls have indicated that they are unsure how to assess and track progress in the new examination system. Worrying times for the profession; if we don’t know, then who does? Schools have set brave targets and ‘flight paths’ in response to government expectation. We can only hope that teachers do not practice the ‘treadmill effect’ and get through curriculum at the expense of depth and differentiation at the top and bottom ends of ability. We must also hope that creativity is not stifled at the expense of target setting agendas; time will tell.

We have to accept that progress occurs at different rates, at different times, for different students. The big questions we have to ask ourselves are the following;

- + When we track progress, are we doing it the right way?
- + What are the best strategies to produce valid data?

THINKING ABOUT TRACKING

- SOME PRESUPPOSITIONS

Tracking systems should be simple and easy to interpret. They should also use language that is sensitive, especially for those students who are not making expected rates of progress. The impact on a student’s confidence, status amongst peers and well-being can be negatively impacted upon by such reporting measure. Tracking data can often be misleading; some students make greater rates of progress towards the end of an academic year compared to the beginning. The influence of teacher credibility and rapport has been well documented and we must strive to work in an environment where making mistakes and getting things wrong on route to a predicted grade profile is OK. This is part of the learning process, and often the most valuable part. Should we all make the same rate of progress, in the same time frames based upon our previous attainment? Of course not, so why should we expect anything else in our classrooms.

Learning and evidencing/tracking progress, for some, simply requires more time, patience on our part and the right type of feedback and intervention

In summary, all we can do is the following:

- + Teach the curriculum content
- + Assess ‘where students are at’ using ‘the right assessment strategies’
- + Intervene and plug gaps in skills and knowledge as they arise
- + Get them ready for the exams

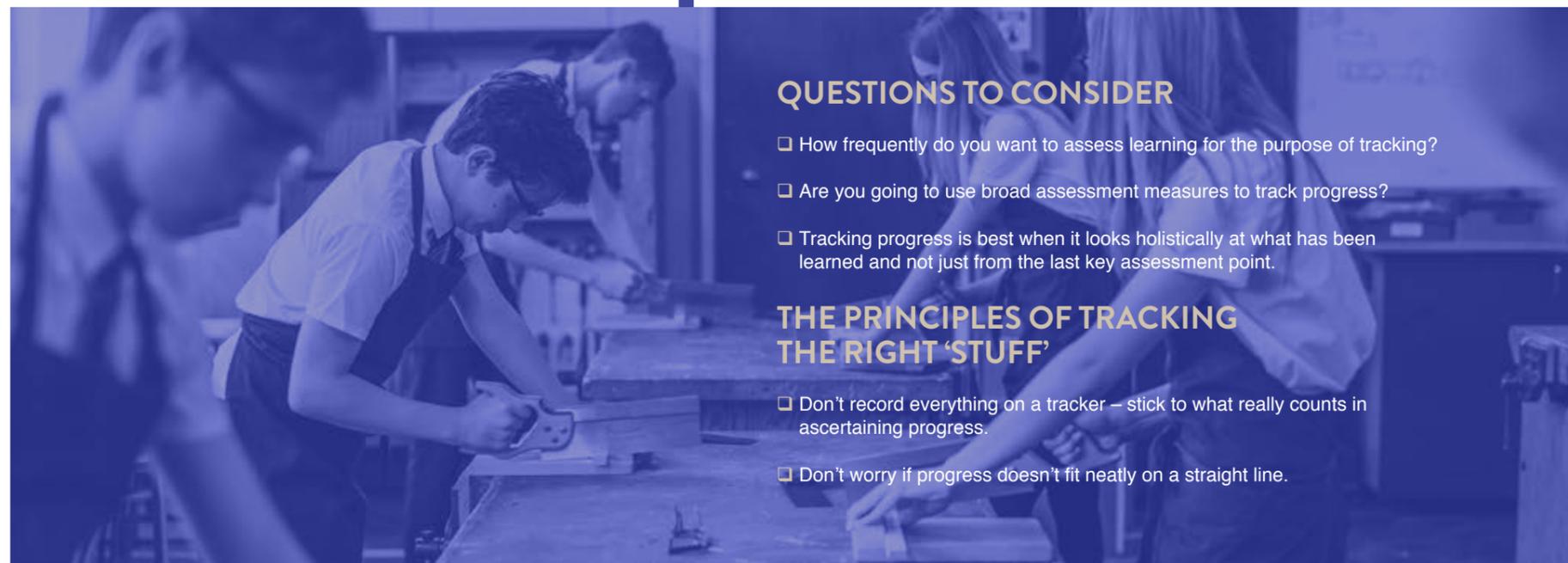
TRACKING PROGRESS

Rule number one – all tracking systems should serve the student! It should not involve complex drop down menus, complex data and information that requires a Master's Degree in logistics to decode.

Tracking strategies should display the following characteristics:

- Be simple to understand at all levels (parents, students, teachers, leaders, governors).
- Support the planning and learning process.
- Reflect true progress.
- Provide information about intervention and its impact.
- Treat a young person as an individual.

A good tracking system should serve all of the above and not undermine a school's ethos or values. If every student is to be valued and nurtured, then the tracking system should do the same. A tracking system should fit the school's vision rather than be created to please external agencies like Ofsted. Remember Ofsted have no preferred approach to tracking, they will work with whatever systems you have in place. Good schools and colleges do what is right for their students and no-one else. We sometimes have an overwhelming desire to make things fit onto scales and tables with little valid meaning.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How frequently do you want to assess learning for the purpose of tracking?
- Are you going to use broad assessment measures to track progress?
- Tracking progress is best when it looks holistically at what has been learned and not just from the last key assessment point.

THE PRINCIPLES OF TRACKING THE RIGHT 'STUFF'

- Don't record everything on a tracker – stick to what really counts in ascertaining progress.
- Don't worry if progress doesn't fit neatly on a straight line.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS - IN A LINEAR WORLD

- Create real understanding of content - 'depth before breadth'.
- Identify misconceptions through their AfL strategy and use them as springboards for learning.
- Possess feedback strategies that facilitate further learning and processing of information.
- Do not predict questions styles for the exam. Instead, they teach skills that allow students to cope with the new exam rigour.
- Use assessment and testing as opportunities for learning.
- Teach students how to learn and to reflect upon their own progress.
- Have credibility in terms of their own subject knowledge and their understanding of the assessment criteria.
- Do not teach mark points - they coach their students to think.
- Promote higher levels of thinking and problem solving in a seamless manner.
- Involve the students in the lesson delivery and evaluation.
- Encourage students to connect their learning in a wider context.

EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT - WITH TRACKING IN MIND

- Tests are designed at timely intervals to assess depth of learning.
- Homework, and simple tasks, reinforce and deepen core learning.
- Teachers and managers plan assessment that reflects the full range of abilities.
- Every assessment point has a timely follow up planned to close knowledge gaps, reinforce weak learning and to intervene where appropriate.
- Student grades at any specific time 'are what they are'. Leaders do not take a best fit approach to learning and leave no stone unturned.
- A review of the curriculum is made at designated points throughout the year to ensure that depth of coverage is occurring.

EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT - SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Have we got the right assessment/testing strategy for linear qualifications? Can it be improved in any way?
- How do we decide when it is right to assess/test?
- Are we building in enough independent application of knowledge in unfamiliar contexts?
- Are assessments planned using content students have previously found difficult?
- What are the subtle differences between a grade 4/5, 6/7, 8/9?
- Are we confident that we have taught the students the necessary skills to cope with the expectations of the different levels?
- Do we use assessment/testing scores as indicators of the quality of our teaching?
- How confident are we that the students have retained the key knowledge from our subjects and will be able to demonstrate this in an exam?
- Have you validated your curriculum and assessment; can you demonstrate the strength of your curriculum and assessment in comparison with other schools?
- Are progress grades used for inspiration or perspiration?

“Until we see tests as aids to enhance teaching and learning and not primarily as thermometers of how much a student knows now, on this day, on this test, then developing more tests will add little and will remain an expensive distraction”- (Hattie)

**“Testing under the right conditions is where learning takes place”
– (Dylan William)**

Does the assessment strategy go in both directions (new and old content) to create and reinforce prior learning and context?

A RECAP ON ASSESSMENT TO INFORM PROGRESS

1. Tests/assessments should be cumulative by nature and design.
2. It is up to subject teams/specialist key stage teachers to create accurate, fit for purpose, assessments.
3. Test should reflect what the teachers believe the students have learned.
4. The skills required to complete assessments successfully need to be explicitly taught (literacy skills in particular).
5. Design the assessments to differentiate the true potential in your class.
6. Make a record of common misconceptions that need immediate alleviation.



ONCE THE ASSESSMENTS HAVE BEEN MARKED

- Establish 'red flags'
- Select appropriate interventions
- Identify mastery thresholds per student
- Develop future formative assessments
- Monitor your plan for impact

Tracking student progress to produce meaningful results will take careful planning. We must work collectively together to ensure that we are 'doing the right things' for our students so that they get the best experiences in school. Finally, we must always remember that students are not numbers or pieces of data to be chewed up in a computer. There is context to consider, doors to open and knowledge to be gained so that we create a prosperous and efficient future workforce.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING INDEPENDENT LEARNERS WHO CAN THINK FOR THEMSELVES

The holy grail of education is to get students thinking about what they have already learned, what they are about to learn, and what more they need to learn to develop expertise. I realise this is a utopian vision and only occurs in a minority of classrooms. However, there is light at the end of the metacognitive tunnel; creating independent learners may not be as difficult as you may think.

THE PRINCIPLES – KNOW THY SELF!

- Self-regulation – I know what I need to do.
- Self-motivation – I want to do it for myself.
- Self-reflection – what more do I need to do, has it gone well?
- Self-evaluation – what have I done well and how could I further improve?

How do teachers promote these?

The starting point begins with creating high expectations and a culture of working together to promote learning. A teacher's credibility and teaching skills will be of paramount importance for students to trust that independent learning strategies are going to work for them. Remember, many students will be used to a 'spoon fed' culture where they can remain passive and still achieve relatively well. There are no quick fixes; developing the skills required to independently learn and become a self-manager will be frustrating. The students need to develop resilience and realise that failing is part of learning.

What can we do? Sharing the skills and processes needed for students to think for themselves – model the process in lessons. Create opportunities to discuss and debate content that leads to a deeper evaluation and analysis of responses. Where applicable, provide

time for students to process content together and to feedback their learning. Where gaps are identified have strategies in place to close them (peer learning, the provision of additional resources, clues to complete tasks, model answers, opportunities to search on line and defined criteria that indicate when the expected level of learning is reached). Provide students with opportunities to peer teach, design their own projects and study case studies to develop wider understanding.

Showcasing and comparative analysis – our brains are pattern seeking organs. Using model responses (oral and written) can be really beneficial when it comes to getting students to compare their work against others, or yours. Use highlighter pens so students can highlight similarities and differences between their written work and one of their peers. To make this more beneficial students must have the opportunity showcase evidence that new learning has occurred (short to long term). This works well from simple spelling corrections to re-drafting text. In addition, providing students with an opportunity to mark exams with you and develop assessments to test their peers can also be really powerful! This will facilitate discussion and evaluation about the standard of responses compared to expected.

Scaffold content – most teachers provide content that is simple and gets more complex over time (bottom up approach). There are times where reversing the teaching strategy may benefit learning. Revealing the most complex information, question or response first can be used to signify the difficulty level. This can then be decoded and pulled apart to create 'the sum of all parts' required to develop expertise. This is particularly effective in the science subjects. Often revealing an answer and asking students to design strategies and methods to work it out can be equally effective.

Good questioning techniques – teachers ask lots of questions in lessons but the ratio of the number of questions a teacher asks compared to the number of questions a student asks is skewed. It is worth supporting colleagues’ questioning strategies in lessons by:

- Recording the number of questions asked by the teacher
- Recording the number of questions asked by the students
- Recording the range of students asked questions during an observed time frame
- Recording the question command words

Changing the command words to questions asked can be a simple but powerful strategy to evaluate a student’s deeper learning and understanding. It also encourages “intelligent floundering” and provides the teacher with an opportunity to really make a student think to their edge of their comfort zone. Teachers that create a culture of independent learning allow time for students to respond and have a strategy in place for them to record their misconceptions or misunderstanding (Cornell note taking strategies).

If every student had a record of content/skills/ misconceptions and misunderstanding recorded in a live learning journal it makes the evidence of progress more streamlined.

Empowering teachers and students to take risks

- Self-regulatory planning and evaluation are critical for students to develop expertise. It’s important to teach them how to effectively make the right learning choices, both within and outside the classroom. Given a choice many students will often choose the easiest tasks to complete. Sharing expectations and targets in the right manner can lead to better reflective learning. Each student should have their own target to reach and are not compared against other students in the class. Problem solving, problem sharing and problem dissipation strategies improve learning over time. Creating a culture where it is acceptable for teachers to take risks supports the development of independent learning.

Self-regulators – persist in directing students to answer these questions. Build time into lessons for this level of reflection.

1. What do I need to do?
2. What resources do I need?
3. How do I know I am successful?
4. What can I change to make it even better?
5. How could I help others (mentoring/coaching)?
6. What did not work?
7. If I was to do this again I would.....
8. What is the worst possible question I could be asked about this content?

Characteristics of independent learners

- They understand how to learn
- They obtain immediate feedback from their teachers
- Do not worry about failure in the “here and now”
- Enjoy what they are doing
- Think about their learning and share this with others
- Understand why they are successful
- Understand the next steps that need to be taken
- Understand what works best and why
- Understand how their work compares to others
- Understand how close they are to their learning goals

Problems faced by teachers on route to develop a culture of independence

- Discovery learning** – not all discovery learning is effective. There will be times when you just need to teach the students. Many students do not have the skill set to effectively research content and valuable learning time is lost having to just give them answers if the activities are not effectively planned.
- Misaligned expectations** – the expectations need to be the same for everyone. Never assume the more able students have the inherent skill set to self-reflective and self-develop (these skills need to be taught). Never assume the less able students will never have the skill set to succeed (they are better than you think).
- Aspirational issues** – there will be students who will struggle with independence and being asked to think critically about their learning. Many students want to go onto lessons and just be taught rather than having to play an active role in their learning. Teachers claim that a lack of aspiration or desire to become more independent can be a real blocker. The teacher’s credibility, patience and understanding of strategies to promote metacognition will be needed in these instances.
- CPD** - It is worth a school or college investing CPD time to ensure the whole staff body work together on this. Included in this type of CPD should be the mechanisms in which we learn new information (contextual base lining to expert level). Many teachers highlight a lack of structured INSET or CPD that fully delineates the best strategies to promote independent learning, metacognition and deep learning.

Creating independent learners that reflect and act on feedback is not easy. However, by introducing some simple strategies over time students do get used to taking ownership of their learning. It requires a whole staff commitment to the process so the expectation in every classroom is consistent.

WHAT CAN WE DO IN CLASS?

The simple things

- Have high expectations
- Use your expertise to inspire students
- Use feedback as a driver to improve
- Rigorously plan for differentiation
- Assess regularly and track progress
- Teach students how to revise

The complex things

- Teach students how to learn
- Create learning journals
- Develop expertise resources
- Encourage peer coaching
- Design bespoke assessments
- Model effective strategies

WHAT CAN WE DO OUT OF CLASS?

The simple things

- Involve parents
- Organise appropriate trips and visits
- Expose students to graduates
- Be a role model
- Take every opportunity to showcase development

The complex things

- Remove barriers to learning
- Decode the best revision strategies
- Create a student marking team
- Create a student examination team
- Develop peer mentoring/coaching

WHAT MUST WE CONSIDER TO SUPPORT OUR DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS?

It is well documented, and has been so for years, that disadvantaged students do not perform as well as their age matched peers in public examinations. The attainment gap between children from rich and poor backgrounds is detectable at an early age (22 months) and widens throughout the education system. In short, the same gaps that begin in very early childhood remain throughout the young person's school and college years and into working life. The reasons are complex, the causes are often insurmountable, and whilst there are no quick fixes to this perpetual problem, there are institutions across the UK making great strides towards eliminating the gap altogether.

The first step in bringing about change is to have an intimate understanding of the reasons linked to underachievement. Schools that close the learning gap choose their battles wisely and do not employ a smorgasbord of activities that often lead to negligible improvements over time. Secondly we must tackle the perception of teachers, parents and the students themselves who often believe that they "will never be able to succeed".

Statistics published by the DFE say that the gap has narrowed by 10% since 2011. Published reports and research articles highlight otherwise; *Schools need 50 years to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their richer peers*, The Independent, 2017. Either way there is still a lot to do!

THE SNOWBALL EFFECT

Student's aspirations play an important intrinsic driver to attainment. Most teachers and leaders identify this as a key factor for underachievement. Students self-identify their place in a community very early in their personal development. This is driven by their emotional, academic and socioeconomic environment. Schools that treat disadvantaged students differently from their peers (different expectations) are culpable of generating a "pigeon hole" effect. It does not take long for the human psyche to generate belief systems about self-worth that become ingrained in behaviour. Recent studies have indicated that by the age of five self-esteem is established strongly enough to be implicitly measured. Young students are generally optimistic that they have ability to learn a new skill or complete provided tasks. This is called achievement related attribution and is an essential quality to nurture. This attribute is quickly lost if peer, parent and teacher input is repeatedly negative. Social media access can become an additional negative reinforcer; students will have no problem generating self-fulfilling prophecies on the basis of what they see, hear and feel. The snowball effect, in essence, results in a student moving through a school system with a negative self-perception label that progressively worsens over time. In this case, underachievement becomes a defence mechanism. How often do teachers hear the language of negativity "I can't do it", "I don't know how", "I don't know why". It is an unfortunate part of growing up and learning but at least recognition of the phenomenon may help leaders and teachers reduce the negative impact it has on disadvantaged learner's attainment.

There is so much in our power that we can control to influence the experiences of our students. I do however want to briefly mention factors that are out of control for three reasons:

1. There are not as many factors that we cannot control compared to what is in our locus of control.
2. Some of these factors actually have very little impact on the progression of a young student if we circumvent and understand them, or more importantly do not reinforce or accept them.
3. There are a minority of teachers that will use these factors to set low expectations.

The factors we cannot control – this is not an exhaustive list but does include many of the main factors:

- Family income and deprivation indices
- Nutrition in the home
- Pre-existing medical conditions
- Parental aspiration
- Language barriers

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS WHO HAVE LITTLE TO NO GAPS IN ATTAINMENT BETWEEN DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS AND THEIR PEERS STRATEGICALLY, CULTURALLY AND PERPETUALLY WORK ON THESE FACTORS TO ELIMINATE THEIR IMPACT ON PROGRESS.

Factors we can control - this is not an exhaustive list but does include many of the main factors:

- The role/skill set of the teacher
- The role/ skill set of the leaders
- Data analysis – counting in 1's
- Climate for learning
- Nutrition in school
- Structured learning
- Core skills
- Enrichment
- Parental involvement
- Access to resources
- Pedagogy including intervention
- Transition between key stages

Whilst this list is in no particular order, the role of the teacher in my experience takes precedent.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The most powerful facilitator of change is the teacher. It is worth investing a lot of CPD and time to bring teachers, especially NQT's, up to speed with the best strategies for closing attainment gaps. Of significance importance is the teacher's mind-set and expectations. The relationship students have with their teachers, and their perception of their teachers sensitivity towards them, are good predictors of future attainment (Whitehead 2007). The teachers' credibility through the eyes of the student and their expectations for success cannot be over emphasised. The words we use are powerful, personalised and internalised by students. Negative feedback can often devalue learning and fulfil the self-prophecies students possess about themselves. This is not to say that we cannot be honest, but it's the delivery and tone of the message that counts. Teachers with credibility amongst the students have not only displayed genuine care over time, but ensured visible progress. They are often the role models for students and genuinely inspire them to want to do better. Too often NQT programmes, and INSET days, fail to evaluate the impact of our verbal and non-verbal language on student development. It is worth recording/ videoing the best teachers in action to share the idiosyncrasies of their classroom interactions; as these are often at the unconscious level.

During NQT observations, I often record the following for feedback purposes:

- Positive interactions including language used
- Negative interactions including language used
- Pace, pitch and tone of voice
- Non-verbal commands
- Position that the teacher takes up in the classroom (map the room)
- The frequency of interaction with different students (questions asked, commands, formal/informal dialogue etc.)
- The evidence for progress and learning
- The number of opportunities created to gather feedback from all/individual students
- Classroom management techniques
- How expectations are conveyed through the lesson plan

These factors are intimately linked to the pedagogy and practice of the teacher but are often left out of observational feedback which tends to focus upon generic practice. It is worth noting that all the pedagogical strategies in the world will make no difference if a teacher does not have credibility and presence in the classroom. The quality of teaching makes the biggest difference to learning outcomes, pedagogy matters!

The questions I pose to NQT's are:

How are you going to become the student's favourite teacher?

How are you going to generate a "can do" attitude?

How are you going to inspire confidence and student self-worth in your subject area?

What type of teacher do you want to be?

How are you going to be that teacher?

What training do you need in the craft of teaching to be a success?

THE ROLE OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM – COUNTING IN 1'S

The culture of "achievement for all" needs to be driven from the very top and a commitment made by the leadership team to instil the values and moral purpose of education throughout its staff body. It is not lip service to a national agenda but more of an explicit moral focus. The foundations for success are rooted in cultivating value and respect, having clear lines of authority and a professional development programme that supports the needs of the teachers. It is also important to recruit teachers that are not only highly capable but share the schools' vision. The quality of teaching and learning should be placed as the core purpose and with that comes a number of questions for leaders to consider:

- Do we have in school variation/inconsistencies? If so why?
- How are the disadvantaged students making progress across their full curriculum (inter-subject differences)?
- Are leaders in the college visible, available and proactively supporting the teachers in their classrooms?
- Are leaders teaching students?
- How is accountability for learning and progress shared with students, parents and teachers – is everyone on the same page?
- Is time made to discuss the progress of all students, and are the right people providing the right tools for success when gaps appear? (meeting time, non-contact time, marking policies, etc.)
- Is intervention arranged and what are the success measures to track effectiveness?
- Are there opportunities to enhance and enrich learning to make it more relevant to the students?
- What comments do external visitors make about the school climate on first visits?
- Are intervention strategies fit for purpose or "one size fits all"? – this is vital!

Leadership teams that foster a culture where every individual student is known, understood (intrinsic and extrinsic drivers), set appropriate targets for success, nurtured and treated as an equal, create learning environments that succeed. Get the simple things right and everything else will fall into place.

Outstanding leaders empower teachers to do the right thing and are not afraid of making difficult decisions. It may sound simple but in practice getting this balance right is more problematic than you may think.



DEVELOPING THE CORE SKILLS

One of the biggest barriers to student progression and attainment is the development and usage of core skills - literacy (writing, reading and oracy) and numeracy (all aspects of number manipulation). These barriers exist regardless of which end of the educational spectrum you are at, but the impact on the holistic development of disadvantaged students is particularly severe. There is a plethora of research that links the efficiencies of core skill development with the creation of life chances, employment opportunities and final income. In short, children's grasp of literacy and numeracy during early years and primary school is fundamental to accessing the curriculum in all of their future key stages. Targeted intervention therefore needs to be aimed at those who need it the most. This is where rigorous tracking and the use of data by leaders and teachers is of paramount importance. It is useless telling people how you collect data and collate statistics; what counts is how you use the data to make changes, track effectiveness and make improvement. If core skills development is a major issue then data collection should inform the teaching strategy or 1:1 additional support that a student may need. The strategy to develop reading should be symbiotic to the strategies for developing written and oral communication. Learning to read should be the focus in primary, reading to learn should be the focus in secondary school. Core skill development should be embedded in every lesson; this coupled with a rigorous assessment strategy to track progress, can be found in all outstanding classrooms, primary and secondary. Outstanding schools work on the following literacy skills per individual student:

- Primary focus:** phonetics, word structure, meaning, comprehension, decoding, enjoyment, confidence, competency and grammar.
- Secondary focus:** all of the above plus semantics, fluency, abstract thought, relational text, review, extended written/oral communication, confidence.

Many schools and colleges have put in place intensive core skills development initiatives with little impact.

The reasons why are primarily:

- Unfocused strategies that only provide surface level solutions
- A lack of 1:1 specialist support
- Using data for the sake of data
- A lack of streamlined planning and communication with teachers and parents
- CPD that is too generic
- Time commitment from staff/SENCO etc.
- Attendance and continuity of disadvantaged students
- Poor leadership
- Poor teaching

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How involved are the parents in supporting and developing their child in your school?
- How well does your school decode and explain what progress grades actually are – how do you know?
- Are learning strategies (core skills) shared with parents to support their children in the home?
- Do parents understand the factors that hinder student progress?

I commonly ask these questions in schools and colleges and the responses typically are quite negative. For example, a common response is “some parents are just not bothered”. When challenged further it becomes apparent that this perception led to a dismissive behaviour and a resignation that nothing would change; but what if it did? The evaluation of parental engagement is typically poor.

Breaking cycles of low aspiration and disenfranchisement within education is an important step for narrowing attainment gaps, for both students and parents. Neighbourhood economic hardship and a lack of role models can also be an important predictor of academic success. Remember for young people trying to form an identity it is easier to fit into a neighbourhood with like-minded individuals than it is to fit into a learning community with adults and peers who are different. Parental support and involvement provides a better indicator of success for disadvantaged students than their parental social class or prior education. School should do everything they can to engage parents. The best schools do.

BARRIERS

1. Parents are hard to reach.
2. More than one teacher wants to see a parent(s).
3. Parents often work during school hours.
4. Parents do not understand the grading/curriculum.
5. Parents have had a bad experience in school.
6. Parents do not see the “big educational picture”.
7. Parents become desensitised to persistent contact.
8. Some parents have language barriers.
9. Parents may only see specific teachers.
10. Parents are unsure of how they can contribute.

SOLUTIONS

Overcoming parental engagement is difficult. The solutions provided below are just some of the strategies that have worked in schools and may be worth considering in your context. The major barrier was related to the times available (without appointments) where parents could access teachers or leaders. Good leadership teams have created additional opportunities where targeted parents are invited into a school more often to discuss progress and development. Parents, in some cases are invited to participate in lessons and spend some time with their children throughout the school day. This is particularly effective where behaviour management issues are concerned and one in which I have used to great effect. Leaders who have a firm understanding of their intake are obviously in a position to do this. They use tracking data and teacher comments to inform their discussion and plan ways forward. Whilst this is not a complete solution it does circumnavigate one of the most commonly recognised barriers in education to parental engagement. This strategy, in conjunction with those highlighted below, have made noticeable differences in disadvantaged student attainment. At the very least these students know that their parents are in regular contact with school leaders!

Examples of good practice

- Community/family learning – evening classes on meta-cognition, literacy skills, numeracy skills, parent-student workshops, nutrition and brain development, community project work that deals with local issues.
- Volunteering – invites for parents to support the learning or working environment of a school. Inviting parents (professionals and non-professionals) to lead assemblies and discuss important community issues is really valuable.

- Family liaison officers – some schools employ people to liaise directly with hard to reach parents. These specialists become the single contact point between home and school and offer great insight into factors that may impact a disadvantaged child’s progress, learning and aspirational targets.
- Communication systems – how are parents contacted? Are there multiple contact strategies to engage parents (text, letter, email, Skype, personalised invites to school, home visits etc.?).
- Curriculum involvement – do leaders plan the curriculum with an understanding of the local socio-economic drivers? Are parents involved, in any way, with shaping/developing the curriculum? For example, are the experiences of the student’s parents used to reinforce British values, PSHE, the facilitating subjects etc.
- Policy development – parent groups are very useful to support leaders and teachers in developing school policies. Their involvement can be critical to support the moral and visionary ethos of a school.
- School hubs – schools that form local hubs tend to have better relationships with their immediate community. Primary and secondary links are fundamentally important in developing student relationships, planning for transition, supporting the development of the student’s at all key stages, enriching core skills development and working as a collective to reinvent their brand in a community.

The factors that cause the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers are multifactorial and difficult to eradicate. There are basic principles however that must be present to ensure any strategic change works. It is important that we remember context, variation and personalised needs. The expectations for all students should be the exact same; they can all learn, make progress and achieve. The quickest way to make this cultural is to have the right teachers with the right skill set in front of the students. Leaders need to consider the factors most relevant to their context and engage parents, students and their friends to become more involved. Success breeds success, failure breeds failure. If we can engage students and make a sustained commitment to tackle their academic, personal and emotional barriers, then we are certainly on the right track!

THE NQT



GETTING EVERY DAY RIGHT!

Think back to your time in school and reflect upon the following question; who was your best teacher? When you think of your response you will probably not remember exactly what that specific teacher said, or did, but you will remember the way they made you feel. Emotional memories are difficult to forget! If you ask any student in any school or college across the country who their favourite teacher is, or who the best teacher(s) in the school are, they will very quickly have a response for you. Everyone who teaches wants to be in that cohort and there are simple non-negotiables that must become cultural in your classroom to make it happen.

Most teachers relatively new to the profession have three primary concerns:

1. They want to be liked.
2. They do not want behaviour management issues to stifle their confidence, creativity or passion for their subject.
3. They want to develop their craft fast to have maximum impact on outcomes.

This paper primarily focuses on concern number three. Make no mistake about it; teaching is a tough job. There are internal and external pressures that people out of the profession will never understand. Teaching is more than just a job; it's a way of life, a mind-set, a journey of self-discovery. We have the power to create or destroy! In collaboration with students and parents we can share dreams, calm fears, influence thinking and be remembered for generations.

We hold the future in our hands and with that comes no greater responsibility.



We just simply have to believe in ourselves and others. The educational landscape has changed and we have made the move into the world of linearity, Progress 8, new assessment methodology, increased accountability etc.

How do we simplify and decode the complex interactions that occur in the classroom?

What strategies must a teacher employ to be successful in the classroom?

What are the pedagogical strategies we should be thinking about when planning our lessons?

A simple framework for success - consider what you are being judged against on a daily basis.

P.L.A.C.E.S

P = progress

L = learning

A = assessment for/of learning

C = core skills development

E = employability skills

S = stretch and challenge for all learners

All good NQT and RQT CPD programmes should consider how they are imparting knowledge about the learning process to teachers. The more you understand about an individual's internal and external drivers for learning, the barriers to learning that exist, how to remove them, and how learning actually happens in the brain; the more reflective you become about the manner in which you convey content to students. Learning is a highly personalised and messy business that occurs in the individual student's brain. It encompasses application of knowledge in familiar and unfamiliar context. The problem teachers often face is that they are supplying the lesson content and stimulus from only their perspective; in reality you may have 30 different perspectives in a class to target. In addition, new teachers often make many assumptions that are damaging to the learning process:

- We assume students should love our lessons as much as we do.
- We assume students have effective written communication skills.
- We assume that they value our input.
- We assume information makes contextual sense to them.
- We assume that they know how to revise and learn effectively.
- We forget what it is like to be their age.
- We forget that some may not have home lives to facilitate learning (support, resources).
- We forget that our subject may not connect with them.
- We forget what it was like to have lots of homework to do.
- We forget that students are not yet socially and emotionally mature.

The three fundamental questions to ask following every lesson are:

1. Have the students in front of me made progress?
2. Have they made progress to the right extent?
3. How do I know?

The key to becoming a successful teacher is to ask the right questions of yourself and others - all of the time. Surround yourself with:

- People that make you think about your practice.
- People that encourage you to reflect and self-analyse the impact of what you are doing.
- People who make you think about learning.
- People who provide you with time to think and draw your own conclusions.
- People who remind you of how important you are in a young person's life.

Try using the following questions as a stimulus to make you think about the non-negotiables of outstanding practice – this list is not exhaustive but can be used as a stimulus to plan lessons and reflect upon the evidence you seek for learning on a daily basis.



Progress and Learning

- How do I seek evidence of progress?
- What evidence do the students provide to indicate that they are making progress?
- How much progress, based upon their starting points, are students actually making?
- Do students understand their levels of progress and how that fits into their expected synoptic flight path?
- What is my assessment and monitoring strategy (short, medium, long term) so I possess valid indicators of actual learning?
- How do I create individual context for learning? The information has to make sense in their minds. The only way to do this is to elucidate what context and information they already possess so that it can be successfully built upon
- How do I create a safe environment for learning?
- How credible am I through my student's eyes?
- How do I develop positive relationships with young people to engage and stimulate learning?
- What type of learning role model do I want to be?

Assessment for Learning

- How are the questions I ask designed to probe learning, identify misconceptions and to reinforce prior knowledge?
- How do students assess their own learning and that of others?
- Are group activities having the impact I desire?
- Do students have opportunities to design their own questions to stretch and consolidate their learning?
- Is there evidence that the feedback strategies I use are having an impact?
- What type of feedback do I provide?

Assessment of learning

- + What type of assessment strategies am I using to assess knowledge, application, evaluation, extended writing, summative understanding, long term learning, and skills development?
- + How do I use assessment data to trigger intervention?
- + How do I use assessment data to reinforce my teaching strategies related to previously taught content, current content, future content?
- + How do I use assessment data to promote confidence, resilience and self-reflection within my students?
- + How do I use assessment data to design homework and revision exercises?
- + What type of assessment am I preparing my students to take at the end of their key stage (content, weightings, mark schemes, standards, barriers etc.)?
- + Am I preparing them effectively to succeed?

Remember

Assessment skills require time to develop. Regular assessment progressively develops the skills required to cope with the examination process. Students learn best when the focus of learning is not just tests – we have to find the balance between assessment capability and a love of lifelong learning. Information is much more likely to be retained when the students actually enjoy their learning and understand the links between their learning and future development. Assessment strategies that astutely provide information of what the students currently can and cannot do are essential. In learning, failure can often be used positively to make new learning happen.

We often learn best when we learn from our mistakes. Students with a fear of failure do not learn long term as they should. Develop the abilities of the students to design and mark their own assessments.

CORE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- How are English and mathematical skills being promoted in my lesson?
- Can students use the correct terminology and language to succeed in examined material (orally and written)?
- How do I promote a rigorous written strategy that allows students to showcase their understanding?
- How do I identify and remove barriers to learning associated with weak English and maths skills?

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- How do I promote group work, independence, lateral thinking, critical thinking and reflective self-awareness in my lesson?
- How are these skills made contextual and relevant in the eyes of my students?
- How am I developing the holistic skills set of the individual student so they are successful in their transition to further education and employment?
- How do I encourage students to speak to each other, listen to each other and support each other?
- Are students becoming resilient and resourceful individuals with the ability to cope with the internal and external pressures of our educational and employment systems?

STRETCH AND CHALLENGE

- To what extent are the students being challenged in my lesson?
- Are some students finding my lessons too easy/boring/too hard?
- How does my feedback strategies facilitate progress and further learning?
- Do I seek surface level understanding or true deep processing?
- Is my pace and pitch appropriate for the whole group?
- Do students know how to effectively revise and consolidate learning?

New teachers often feel as if they are jumping from one foot to another as they try to balance the demands of the profession. There is so much to learn over a very short time frame and it can be overwhelming if you do not seek the right support. The people around you should be your 'buffer' in times of need. My biggest tip for new teachers is this; talk, talk, talk, think, think, think! For example, if you want to get better at your questioning techniques talk to teachers who are better than you. We have been modelling successful behaviours since the day we were born so use that to your advantage in your school. Try things out and think about the impact they are having on your daily practice. If it doesn't work scrap it and start again. Never persist with low level teaching strategies that require lots of effort with little gain. Learning takes time, energy, varied activities and contextual reinforcement to happen. If we race through lessons under the duress of time pressures then we run the considerable risk of creating little more than isolated islands of knowledge – this will be extremely prone to rapid forgetting and is not conducive to long term mastery of content or skills development. If we teach our students the skills to become effective learners, and share with them our understanding and experiences of the learning process, we inadvertently prepare them not only for examinations, but for successful integration into the working world ahead. This is why there is no profession on earth like teaching. Enjoy the accountability by understanding how important you are to young people. Remember you never forget a great teacher!

The three most important factors in learning are motivation, motivation, motivation
Christopher Ball



GO D.I.R.E.C.T

In the pursuit of “getting every day right” it is vital that we develop a self-reflective working ethos. Anything less than a conscious commitment to the important is an unconscious commitment to the unimportant.
(Stephen Covey)

A simple model for self-reflection and progression is the DIRECT model. It uses “feed forward” theory to affect change (what will each progress move look like, sound like, feel like at specific times in the future?). In its simplest form it is presented as:

DIAGNOSE (diagnose a need) this need may be identified through lesson observation, professional development requirements, learning walks etc.)

IMPLEMENT (decide upon strategic changes) what are you going to do to meet the identified need? Who are the people or resources that you will need to engage to make the change?

REVIEW (short term) set the future short term goals and review them as you move towards the final outcome. These pre-determined “markers” will prevent you moving back into default position and keep you progressing forward at the edge of your comfort zone.

EVALUATE (long term) at the end of the learning journey; What has worked well? What has changed? How robust was the resource pool? Where do you record the evidence and impact of the change?

COLLABORATE (share the findings) successful changes and resource development should be shared with colleagues, leaders and whole staff as appropriate

TWEAK (minor adjustments) all successful strategies need tweaking as time passes due to the ever evolving nature of our profession and student intake.

With each tweak you will add layers to your teaching strategies.

“The world has gone mad tweeting, we should go mad tweaking”

This model can be utilised by anyone but it is particularly effective in education where we often get caught up in “circular loops of staleness”.

It simply allows us to take charge of our own professional development and use the skills set of others to help us on our way.

“If you don’t know where you are going you will probably end up somewhere else”

“The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide that you are not going to stay where you are”

TOP TIPS TO CREATE AN OUTSTANDING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. Create a collective learning philosophy that is owned and embraced by all. The simple question to ask is “what do you want learning to look like, sound like and feel like in your learning environment”? Once you have decided on the answer how do you go about achieving it?
2. Embed simple effective systems that can be easily tweaked, tracked and evaluated and most importantly understood by all. Never re-invent the wheel, just add more spokes to the one spinning for you.
3. Identify the barriers that prevent progression in your learning community. Actively discuss these and decide on strategies that everyone could collectively employ to break them down. The sum effect of all people having an input will always be greater than the individual.
4. Share and celebrate good practice! Create a culture of learning amongst the staff. No-one is ever the finished article!
5. Use effective strategies to put down “success markers” for the development of quality. If you are on a learning journey with a defined outcome arrive to your destination in style! Ensure rigour and robustness are embedded behaviours rather than words.
6. Everyone is on a personalised learning pathway. Ensure the right people are on the right pathway using the right resources to develop them. Are there opportunities for everyone to make progress? If not, why not?
7. Track, monitor and evaluate everything you do. If there is no impact, there is no point! The quality assurance procedures in place should be such that the core needs of the learners are fully understood by everyone.
8. Impart appropriate accountability to staff through effective performance management and a culture of supportive development. If we are in more control of our annual progression, and develop the required reflectiveness to work effectively in this profession, then performance management becomes more productive and realistic to the individual needs.
9. Move away from 20th century teaching strategies and embrace 21st century learning strategies. How do we utilise the students for planning lessons? What is the difference between teaching and learning, learning and understanding, understanding and embedding?
10. Create a curriculum that is broad, appropriate and can be taught expertly every day. Review provision of a regular basis to tweak where necessary. Keep answering the question; does our curriculum meet our local and national needs?

IF YOU CHANGE NOTHING, THEN NOTHING CHANGES!

“Start small, think big”
David Perkins

DEVELOPING CREDIBILITY AND HIGH STANDARDS

Everyone remembers a great teacher! You may not remember exactly what they said, or did, but you certainly remember how they made you feel. Their impact can last a lifetime and create opportunities that we never thought possible. As any experienced teacher will tell you this is a highly emotional and pressurised profession. The expectations to perform daily, remain positive, adapt to change and embrace accountability can be challenging. Training our teachers with strategies to improve their credibility is symbiotic with the craft of learning; especially for those new to the profession. Students make their minds up very quickly on how they feel about their teachers. Poor first impressions often go unforgiven for a long time! This is one of the primary reasons that I have included content in NQT training programmes on the following single agenda item - 'have you got the X factor'.

The reasons are simple:

1. Without credibility in this profession pedagogy can be largely ineffective.
2. Certain personality traits are favoured by students and therefore directly or indirectly influence learning (correlation not causal relationship).
3. Students quickly choose their favourite teachers and this has a long term impact on progress and learning. The school grapevine is small and highly utilised by students to discuss the traits of their best/worst teachers. There will be an unofficial league table of teachers in your school ranked from best to worst. In truth, experienced staff could either predict it themselves or suggest where they are on it!
4. ITT and traditional PGCE training courses rarely spend much time on developing or analysing a teacher's behavioural and personality traits.
5. Each teacher has a definite personality but not every teacher is a personality in a school.
6. Teaching is emotionally and physically draining and you need mental preparation and support from others to succeed.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What type of person do you have to be to teach?
- What personality traits influence learning?
- What personality traits inspire students?
- Is there a correlation between personality/behaviours and outcomes for learners?
- What is the difference between professional characteristics and personality traits?

Unfortunately there is no manual to train someone how to change their personality, but there are ways to modify it and become a better facilitator of learning. The first steps to change are to understand the changes that need to be made. To support some of the obvious research in this area the outcomes of a short survey of 300 students are highlighted below. The results are very predictable. However, in my experience it's not good enough to know the obvious; great teachers and leaders act upon it!

Age range 11-18

Number of males = 150

Number of females = 150

School types = private, inner city, sixth form college, specialist education, 1 x referral unit

The survey was carried out face to face with students

The questions was asked were:

1. What are the professional characteristics of the best teachers?
2. What personality traits inspire learning?

The reason there were two questions asked were as follows:

Let's be clear you need both, there is overlap, but there are cases where a highly professional teacher does not always inspire learning due to the student experience with teachers that are highly interpersonal. Conversely, there are teachers who students adore due to their personality traits but make little progress due to the teacher's lack of robust professional characteristics. A balance must be struck. In short, the research indicates that students perform better with teachers who displays fluidity. After all, the lines between exam success and holistic development can often be blurred. There is also a correlation between student progress (measured from baseline data) and how they evaluated the teachers with the best professional characteristics and personality traits. The students were not supplied with any examples of either to avoid bias.

It must be noted that both professional characteristics and personality drivers are context driven and must match school expectation. For example, consider the teacher in a high performing private school compared to one in an inner city underperforming school. Which factor(s) are more important to inspire and engage students' learning in these instances? Each school in the country has a defined culture. Teachers who do best in specific institutions are morally and personally aligned to work with students in that environment. The results of this survey are therefore generic but they do encompass student responses from a wide range of very different school types. Only the top five most common responses are included. Their exact impact on learning and progress are difficult to fully quantify but they certainly encompass the 'X factor' package that makes an overall difference. The responses highlight the overlap between perceived professional characteristics and personality traits.

These are simply the student responses and therefore a reflection of their perception. The text in brackets includes supporting dialogue made by the sample cohort.

PERSONALITY TRAITS – LEADING TO PERSONAL CREDIBILITY

- ❑ Humour (improves wellbeing and learning climate. Students are also more likely to follow classroom rules when they know you have a human side – and more importantly you are on their side!).
- ❑ Empathy (students quickly work out who cares and who does not, who cares more and who cares less. This has a more profound impact on a teacher’s credibility and their student’s learning than you think. In simple terms if they perceive that we don’t care than why should they?).
- ❑ Rapport and collaboration (this is paramount! Students respond better to teachers that understand their lives, their community, their hopes, their fears etc. and also share a little about themselves).
- ❑ Temperament (tolerance and patience towards students that are trying but struggling).
- ❑ Trust worthy (this trust refers to the predictions you make about their progress and attainment, the trust they place in you to help them through academic, social and personal difficulties).
- ❑ Whilst the aforementioned characteristics and traits are well known, the idiosyncratic behaviours of great teachers still needs to be decoded for the newest members to our profession. The best teachers are ‘institutionally fit for purpose’. Some schools require strong extrovert personalities that can manage group behaviour quickly and create an energy that inspires learning. Others require highly academic personalities that create constructive environments where self-disciplined students thrive. It seems that fluidity is essential. Teachers that have crystal clear frameworks for expectations are perceived as empathetic and inspire the students to be the best possible version of themselves, are the ones that make the job look easy!

CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP – THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

THE TEACHERS

1. Where is effectiveX.... being taught consistently?
2. How do I know that this consistency is having an impact?
3. How many lesson walkthroughs do I/we carry out per week to make an informed judgement of the quality of teaching and learning in my area?
4. How do I record what I see?
5. How does what I see have an impact on teaching and learning in my subject area?
6. How do I know?
7. What are the priorities for teaching and learning at the individual (subject) level in my area?
8. How are these priorities going to be met and who else should be involved?

THE STUDENTS

1. Who are the students at risk in my subject area?
2. What is being done to challenge this risk?
3. How often are the ‘at risk’ students being supported?
4. Who is supporting them?
5. What are the intervention strategies employed?
6. How effective are the intervention strategies and how do I know?
7. How well are the students achieving in my subject area compared with school expectations?
8. How well are the students achieving in my subject area compared with school expectations?

THE DATA

1. Where do I store assessment and monitoring data?
2. Who has access to the assessment data?
3. What type of assessment data is recorded?
4. What types of assessments are being carried out (formative, summative etc.)?
5. How often is assessment data required/recorded?
6. What are the action points generated from assessment data?
7. How is assessment data used to strategically drive improvement?
8. Are assessment strategies standardised across curriculum and department areas?

THE TEAM

1. How often do I meet my team?
2. What are the consistent messages that need reinforcement and evaluation?
3. Who decides on the agenda of such meetings?
4. How do I reinforce accountability?
5. Do we share good practice and track each other’s progression through the specification?

THE LEADER

1. Do I share my leadership experiences with other leaders?
2. How do I evaluate my leadership skills?
3. What does outstanding leadership look like, sound like, and feel like?
4. How do I reinforce performance management targets of myself/my team?
5. How do I set performance management targets for myself/my team?
6. How do I empower teachers to be leaders in the classroom?



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN LESSONS: MORE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS RELATING TO OUTSTANDING LEARNING

These questions will help observers, coaches and trainees to develop their repertoire of teaching strategies and to assess the extent in which students learn in any lesson.

EXPECTATIONS – Lesson observers should be able to judge the indicators of high expectations through the following:

- How are expectations set?
- Do students arrive on time?
- When the teacher is talking are the students? (or when they do interrupt is it acted upon quickly with minimal disruption to the flow of the lessons).
- Are students equipped with the necessary tools for learning?
- Are the students actively self-motivated to learn?
- Do the students listen intently to each other and support the learning of their peers?

ENGAGEMENT AND CLASSROOM CLIMATE

- How do the students respond to the teacher?
- How do the students respond to each other?
- Do students display an interest in the lesson content?
- How is the teacher's high expectations supporting the delivery of the lesson?

PROGRESS (and application of learning theory)

- How does the teacher seek evidence of progress?
- How do the students demonstrate evidence that they are making progress?
- How much progress have the students actually made (all abilities)?
- Do the students understand the next steps they need to make to improve?

PLANNING AND TEACHING

- Is there evidence that the lesson has been well planned with distinct learning opportunities visible?
- Are transitions in learning managed effectively?
- How are resources utilised to have an impact on learning?
- What are the indicators in the lesson that opportunities to assess progression have been carefully planned?
- How much time does the teacher spend teaching/facilitating learning/interacting with students on an individual/group level/listening to students/providing feedback?
- How clear are instructions?
- Is the lesson engaging/inspiring/contextual (for all abilities)?



DIFFERENTIATION

- How are the different groups of learners in the class being catered for?
- What teaching strategy does the teacher employ to ensure all students have access to the learning objectives?
- Is the strategy successful and how do you know?

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES/AFL

- How do the students self-assess their understanding throughout the lesson?
- What opportunities have been created to assess the learning of their peers?
- How are group activities contributing to the students learning and progress?
- How are groups organised?
- What type of questioning techniques are used by the teacher to check, facilitate and probe learning?
- Are all the questions closed/open/mixed/low level/high level?
- Do questions instigate debate/stimulate discussion/support learning?
- Is there evidence of high quality marking and constructive feedback?

BEHAVIOUR FOR LEARNING

- How do students interact with each other?
- Do they communicate about non-academic material or in the context of their learning?
- Do they enter into learning conversation with enthusiasm or are they reluctant?
- Are they all on task or not?
- Are students looking after their books and equipment?
- Are students seeking opportunities to improve with their teacher in the lesson?

STRETCH AND CHALLENGE

- To what extent are all the learners being challenged in the lesson?
- Do the students find the work easy?
- How does teacher feedback facilitate further learning?
- Does the teacher seek surface learning or true understanding?
- How do they do this?
- Is the lesson pace and pitch appropriate for the learners?

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- How does the teacher promote group work, lateral thinking, critical thinking and reflective thinking?
- How are links to employment/social skills made explicit to the students?
- Are employability skills promoted through the teaching strategy and how effective are they?
- Are core skills (especially English/literacy skills) being relentlessly taught?

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- How are different groups of learners treated?
- Are all groups of learners making expected rates of progress?
- Does the lesson give rise to natural conversation relating to E&D?
- Is it evident that equality and diversity are integrated fully into the learning experience?
- If an E&D issue arises is it dealt with effectively?
- How does the teacher take the time to deviate from lesson plan to deal with an E&D issue?

CORE SKILL DEVELOPMENT – listen to the manner in which students and teacher speak to each other.

- How are literacy skills promoted in the lesson?
- Does the teacher promote key terminology and correct usage in context of examined material?
- How are the students written skills being developed?
- Is there evidence that core skill development (English, maths and IT) takes a prime position in learning?
- How do you know?
- Are students developing their oracy and written communication over time?
- Are students developing their mathematical skill over time?

NOTES

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