



LEARNING & TEACHING NEWSLETTER

Teaching for Learning



How Might We Develop Students' Thinking Skills?

Creating a culture of enquiry in every classroom

Researchers McTighe and Wiggins created a framework in their 2013 publication, *Essential Questions: Opening Doors to Student Understanding*, which offers students a scaffold to think deeply and ask questions which go beyond demanding basic recalled knowledge and encourage critical and creative thinking. According to the authors, an 'essential question' or 'EQ' is open ended, thought-provoking, and points towards important, transferable ideas within (and sometimes across) disciplines. An essential question could be 'What influences creative expression?' as opposed to 'What were common artistic symbols used by the Incas?' Students can be encouraged to create their own essential questions and while this encourages a culture of enquiry, it can also serve to identify any misconceptions they may have which can inform next steps in instructional design.

An interesting takeaway from the McTighe and Wiggins framework is that this strategy can be most effective when educators themselves use essential questions as the focal point in creating units of study. This signals to the students that enquiry is a key focus of their learning and the unit will be intellectually challenging. Take a look at some examples of EQ stems here [▶](#)

Scaffolding for pupil generated EQs

- How would it be different if....?
- What are the reasons....?
- Suppose that....?
- What if....?
- What is the purpose of....?
- What would change if....?
- Had.....would.....have occurred?
- How influential was.....in.....?
- How does.....relate to.....?
- How might.....help us to understand.....
- What does.....reveal about.....?
- Could.....have happened without.....?
- Does.....matter when trying to understand the reasons for....?

Regenerating assessment

How continual and planned formative assessment generates learning gains.

The Issue: Are we measuring performance or learning?

One of the poorest proxies for assessing learning is summative assessment because it might only measure performance as opposed to learning. This is not to say that summative assessment does not have a place; it is a widely accepted empirical measurement of performance. This data can identify learning has taken place if the knowledge and skills assessment requires transference to new contexts. We can share this data nationally and compare students to each other.

But this is the rub: *learning is not a competition*. No one wins at learning and yet some students are frequently judged on their performance based on what educators can measure and plot.

Learning is an on-going process and sometimes educators will find some students that ace summative assessments have only short-term retention of the knowledge and skills tested in that one-shot test.

The Solution: Revitalising Assessment in Action

Educators need a deep understanding of how to support their students to move information and skills from their short to long term memory. They need to demonstrate how to build schema so that their students develop the ability to transfer what has been learned to a different context. If we consider the purpose of assessment as being a tool to identify where students are, a means to facilitate student learning and inform next steps in teaching practice, we can see that continual low-stakes formative questioning in a classroom setting is a valid and reliable option. While it will not generate data for a spreadsheet, it offers something even more valuable to the teacher who can iterate, pivot, and offer a more adaptive teaching and learning experience. Waiting until the end of unit test or final exam is too late to offer this kind of instructional model. The moment to check learning has passed as this is the moment performance is assessed.

Students need their teachers to be responsive to their changing needs so they can move them forward. This is what Stiggins (1991) calls 'assessment literacy'. Thinking of assessment in these terms and taking intentional action can result in teachers experiencing a greater sense of agency and confidence in their ability to guide and support their students using this adaptive process.

The Benefits of Continual Formative Assessment for Learning and Teaching

The information gleaned through continual formative assessment is what we should value highly as opposed to test scores. What educators can do with the formative 'data' is much more impactful than what they might do with summative test scores, such as the setting of students according to ability (the evidence is scant in this area, but anecdotally, this can negatively impact a student's sense of self-worth and be demotivating. Some research has shown that setting can benefit high attaining students. David Didau writes more on this issue in his article, 'To set or not to set?') or make flawed judgements about what a 'good' student is.



Resources to support learning and teaching

- [Using Mode A & Mode B teaching \(6 min video\)](#).
- [How to develop literacy skills using reading for deep understanding \(2.5 min video\)](#).
- [Free digital exit ticket creator and other formative assessment tools from Ziplet.](#)



What is the SQ3R Reading Strategy?



Modelling reading strategies can support all pupils in their processing of information. Try the SQ3R reading strategy as a basic framework where pupils:

Survey - skim read the text identifying any sub headings or topic sentences.

Question - turn any headings or topic sentences into questions.

Read - read for meaning: use the text to help answer the questions.

Recall - pose the questions and relay understanding by answering them.

Review - reflect on the content and consider if it connects with any other reading or learning.

This framework can help pupils make personal meaning of content and grow in confidence as they break down a task into component parts, reducing cognitive overwhelm.

This self-management practice also serves to build **resilience** and **metacognitive** skills which are essential for effective learning.

