
A Learning Enquiry: noticing learning

Most of classroom life is focused on what we DO, rather than on what we learn. Pupils can get along by doing what is asked of them - but they may not notice anything about their process of learning. (One senior teacher in a secondary school said “D’you know, in the whole of my school career I didn’t notice a thing about my learning”).

But pupils **can** attend to their own learning, especially if we support them. They then begin to become more aware that learning is a process and there are variations and patterns. They soon become more self-directing in their learning.

Noticing learning means noticing their own learning experience and finding words to give to it. It’s not necessary to create some new special language for this.

(i) prompts for noticing learning,

- When is it best? Where is it best?
- What helped you in that learning?
- What steps or actions do you take in your learning?
- How did it feel?
- Does what you do and how it feels change as you go along?
- What surprises have you found?
- What hindered your learning?
- What advice would you give someone if they became stuck doing this?
- What do you learn for?
- What do you do with your learning?
- [Add some more]

(ii) processes for noticing learning,

Giving words to experience can be helped by recounting that experience to someone else.

So prompts like those above can be used in processes of exchange, for example:

- two minutes with a “learning partner” at almost any point in a lesson,
- regular use of “chatterboxes” or discussion partners,
- at review moments, for example during a plenary (which does not have to be at the end, and become “the time when the teacher tells us what we have learned”).

Teachers sometimes say that drawing attention to learning interrupts the flow of classroom action and that this is a hindrance to them doing it. Yes it does and it’s necessary to do so if we are to make the step from mere action to learning.

FIND OUT what works with your class to help them notice.

WHAT THEMES emerge from what they notice?

MAKE PUBLIC what you and they find.

A Learning Enquiry: talking about learning

Talking about learning is pretty rare, so it can be difficult to know where to start. One effective strategy is to encourage pupils to tell and re-tell stories of learning experiences. It's slow at first, but the language for talking about learning develops and leads to a rich dialogue.

Some of the prompts which might help include:

- Tell me about a really good learning experience
- What made it so good? What did you contribute?
- What does this tell you about you? About learning?
- How do you make sense of that?
- What puzzles you about that?
- What I notice in your story is ...
- What differences do we see between our stories?

When pupils have had some experience of noticing learning and talking about learning, they can go on to a *wide range of enquiries and questions to address*. For example:

❖ **What do we mean by learning?.** The range of responses is likely to be considerable.

“Learning is a waste of time if they make it more interesting, then maybe” (Peter)

“Learning is listening to teacher and doing neat work” (Jane)

“Learning is cooperating” (Tom, 5 years)

“I think learning is ... you watch, and you teach yourself sometimes or other people or other objects help you, and you like listen, you watch, and you add to what people say” (Juliet, 10 years)

❖ **You as a learner.** Here are some responses from 11 year-olds in Northolt High who were asked “If a friend said to you ‘tell me about yourself as a learner’, what would you say?”

“I learn quickly and it stays in my head” (George)

“The best way I learn is by listening to the teacher but if there is noise around, the teachers words just go through one ear and out the other” (Hamza)

“I enjoy making mistakes and learning from them” (Harry)

“I am good at finding short cuts and providing tactical tips” (Daniel)

“I learn best working with a friend, they can explain it to me without me even asking. We can work together whilst combining answers” (Sarah-Jane)

❖ **What's an effective learner?**

“I think that I am better at learning when I actually do things instead of just reading or writing something down” (Hannah)

“When I'm stuck, I go back and check instead of guessing” (Vikesh)

“[Our teacher] doesn't exactly tell us the answer, otherwise we wouldn't learn anything” (Aysha, 9 years)

WHAT would be a good place to start with pupils you know?.

How will you MAKE PUBLIC what they say?

A Learning Enquiry: keeping learning a public focus in classrooms

Choose any classroom and look around at what is displayed publicly in that room. Examine the materials, notices, posters and so on.

Do they focus on learning at all? In many classrooms the answer is sadly clear – No. The public focus is on products, performance, and resources which supposedly “contain” knowledge.

So how are we to create and maintain a focus on learning, and support it through the public statements of the classroom? How will our environment become one in which our attention is directed to learning? Many answers are possible, and you probably have ideas straightaway.

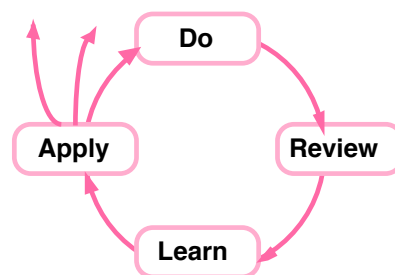
Here are some possibilities from other teachers:

- Display of pupils’ writing on their experiences and insights into their learning, for example through use of learning boards for children to write what they are thinking, e.g.
- Results of investigations into learning, for example displays of children’s ideas on “what helps us learn”
- Posters on themes of learning, e.g.

“Making up my own question helped me to think about what I really needed to know”

- An explicit model of learning, e.g.
- Pupil commentaries on the learning (process) linked with their products on display
- Quality indicators generated by the class for each task / project, and displayed, for example from a year 4 classroom for a written task:
- Use of learning logs and discussion of what they help us notice.

Mistakes are my friends.
They help me learn



“What is quality?”
Neat – easy to read
Proud of work
Lot of set in work
Spelled right
Good thinking

WHAT WILL YOU TRY in your class?

How will you MAKE IT PUBLIC to others?

Chris Watkins

A Learning Enquiry: “what helps my learning”

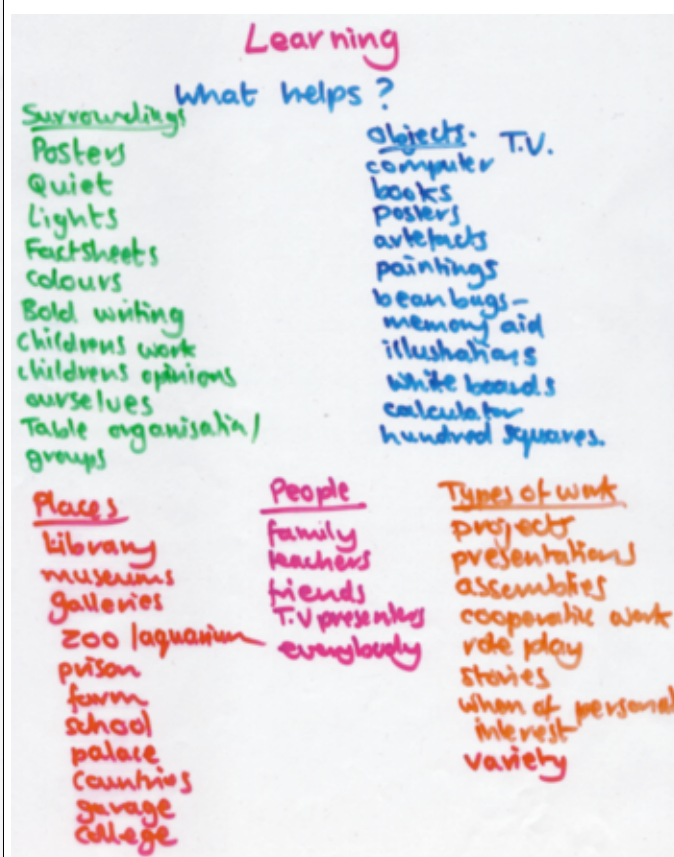
After you have helped your class to start developing a focus on learning, set up a discussion of “what helps my learning”.

Perhaps starting in pairs, go on to collect from the whole groups as many contributions as possible (not evaluating them in any way).

Then ask the class whether the things they have said fall into any groups, and if so develop a display of the various responses in their categories.

Here’s an example from Juliet’s Year 3 class

Here’s an example from her Year 6 class



(the four asterisks indicate the elements which the class identified as most important of all)

Yours will not turn out like this!

Which class might you do this with?

WHEN will you try it out?

Where will you DISPLAY the results in the classroom, so that everyone can refer to what helps them learn?

A Learning Enquiry: Our school's messages about learning

This enquiry is to identify the messages about learning which are communicated on the walls and doors of the building of your school.

What you do:

Walk around the school, corridors and classrooms looking at the printed material there.

Make a note, perhaps using tallies in the boxes below, of the number of times you find the word "learn" or any of its derivations (learning, learned etc)

Also make a note of the other words which invade the space which could be given to learning: especially "work" and "performance" etc

(Before you start you might like to make a guess at what you think the results will look like)

Learn ...	
Work ...	
Performance, achieve etc	

What do the results make you think?

WHEN might you try out an inquiry like this?

Will you do it alone or with colleagues?

How will you MAKE PUBLIC the results of this enquiry to your colleagues?

(try to think of more inventive ways of doing this than "I'll tell them at a staff meeting?!")