

Talking about effective learning

Effective learning in classrooms: an appreciative inquiry

If you ask colleagues to review their experience, they recover much (but not all) of what is known from other sources. For example, using this framework:

Take a few minutes to think of a classroom you know, in which the sense of learning has been really positive. Maybe there has been engagement, excitement, reflection, whatever.

Choose the best experience you can and reconstruct it in your mind's eye. Capture in concrete detail the things that made that experience possible.

When you have made sense of this positive occasion, and how it was made possible, try to capture something important to take forward by completing:

"To me effective learning happens when ..."

Teachers regularly identify the first three of the four columns in the matrix below.

Effective learning: elements in a definition

A lot of current talk about effective learning seems to suggest that there are particular strategies that you can "sell" a learner for them to become effective. This does not fit with the research evidence.

"An effective learner is versatile and can actively utilize different strategies and approaches for different contexts and purposes"¹

This highlights the role of metacognition – the ability to monitor and review one's approach.

Effective learning: promoting it in classrooms

So the four recurring themes², usable in planning, are:

	Active learning	Collaborative Learning	Learner-driven Learning	Learning about learning
Do ↓	Tasks are designed for learner activity, not teacher activity	Tasks in small groups connect to create a larger whole (by roles or by parts)	Learners exercise choice and plan their approach	Learners are encouraged to notice aspects of their learning as they engage in tasks
Review ↓	Learners stop to notice what happened, what was important, how it felt, etc.	Learners bring ideas together and review how the group has operated	Learners monitor their progress and review their plan	Learners describe what they notice and review their learning (goals, strategies, feelings, outcomes, context)
Learn ↓	New meanings and understandings are made explicit	Shared explanations, of both topic group functioning are voiced and explored	Factors influencing progress are identified and new strategies devised	Richer conceptions of learning are voiced and further reflective inquiry is encouraged
Apply	Future action is planned in light of new understanding. Transfer to other situations is examined	Future possibilities for group and community learning are considered	Plans are revised to accommodate recent learning	Learners plan to notice more and to experiment with their approach to learning

¹ Watkins C, Carnell E, Lodge C, Wagner P, and Whalley C (2002) *Effective Learning*, London, Institute of Education School Improvement Network (Research Matters series No 17)
see <http://chriswatkins.net/download/81/>

² Watkins C, Carnell E and Lodge C (2007) *Effective Learning in Classrooms*, London, Sage.
see <http://chriswatkins.net/download/82/>