

Level 6 LOTE - Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

PEEL in Practice: 1300 ideas for quality teaching

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Students demonstrating awareness of their learning This approach was trialed on Year 8 and 9 language students. It was originally set up as a two week trial. We were surprised to find how students view work covered in class very differently to the teacher. This changed some of our teaching practices and led to the insertion of 'The Learning Line' in our Year 7 Language Course Books and a handwritten 'Learning Line' page in binder books at other Year levels. Examples of both of these follow.

How it works We began with six printed copies of the following questionnaire which we distributed in the last five minutes of the lesson: 'Mirror, mirror on the wall - so what did I learn after all?'

1. What did we learn last lesson?
2. What did we do in this lesson?
3. Why did we do this?
4. What did I learn?
5. What could I do to learn this better?
6. What did this lesson have to do with the last lesson?

What surprised us with the responses to #6 was that students focussed on the activity, and not on the content covered by the activity. Therefore, they answered that learning numbers, dates and weather had nothing to do with learning a song about the months and the weather. They saw no connection between learning these topics and playing games with this vocabulary, a task which we teachers felt was reinforcing the learning. As language learning is a cumulative study, working on incorporating previously learned vocabulary and grammar patterns in new topics and applications, we rely heavily on cross-referencing by students! Some students even amazed their peers by wondering loudly - #1 'What did we do this lesson?' Unfortunately, early responses to #2 were often 'I learnt a game/song', or even more worrying, 'We didn't learn anything today, we just played games'. Answers to #3 varied from 'Because the teacher said to' to more thoughtful responses. From #4 we usually learnt that songs and games were enjoyed...but were they the learning activities we had anticipated? Answers to #5 tended to repeat dogma, 'I'll learn this by studying hard/I'll just have to memorise it?', to one sad response, 'I'll learn it by trying harder than I can!' We realised by the end of the first week that we had to ask the student body to brainstorm responses as a whole, to let them discuss some responses briefly and evaluate the insights, before writing their answers - and share ideas for how to learn effectively the content of the lesson. The responses in the second week were much more aware of the reasons for the activities and the aim of the lessons and activities. So now we have added the 'Learning Line' to the back of our Year 7 Language Course Books and set

aside a front page in the binder book of older students. It is still creatively entitled: 'Mirror, mirror on the wall - so what did I learn after all?'

Date:.....

In this lesson we concentrated on:.....

% effort:.....

What I will do to remember it:.....

Of course we need to discuss the aims and objectives of the lesson with students, and we come up with some personal, inspirational methods of reinforcing or remembering work. The amount of sharing and learning engendered by this approach has really reinforced the value of this approach of the Language teachers.

The % effort column is a shortcut method of making students aware of their role in the amount of learning they manage. The honesty with which they answer this question can be confronting - but stay cool, many student proudly announce that they have increased their effort to 30 or 40%! But they actually like to improve their mark in the 'effort' column, and become aware that it needs effort on their own part!

To avoid this approach becoming repetitive, we focus on it for the first fortnight of the year, the final and first week of each Term, and occasionally throughout the year - when appropriate. Students enjoy seeing the reason for learning what was presented in class, and are smug when reminding the teacher that 'We should be filling in our Learning Line' when time isn't set aside in class for it.

This activity helps students to 'See the Context' of their learning, as we fit it in the structure of their 'needs list' developed at the beginning of the year, and ticked off as we progress.

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