Case studies from Leeds schools

USING METACOGNITION TO DRIVE PROGRESS WITH YEAR 13 PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

FOCUS: Improving outcomes for A2 students.

BACKGROUND: Following staffing issues, pupils experienced difficulties during the AS year that resulted in major gaps in their knowledge and limited skills development.

STEPS/TASKS:

1. Teacher analysis of exam marks overall, and in relation to particular questions, showed major issues with skills related to:
- evaluation and analysis of research and theories
- extended writing (essay style questions)
THIS WAS NOT SHARED WITH STUDENTS AT THIS STAGE

2. Students were asked to reflect on A2 work covered so far (since mid- June) and consider their response to the questions:
- What skills do you need to develop to be successful in this subject?
- What do you see as the potential barriers to achieving your learning goals in psychology?

3. On reflection, students identified:
   - EVALUATION as a key area of concern, especially the balance between AO2 skills and AO1, recognising the need to increase the depth and amount of AO2 at A2 – a task made more challenging than usual given their experience of AS.
   - The need to move away from the more superficial techniques of GRAVE and SWAMP to more effective approaches. (Evaluation techniques used to evaluate studies, e.g. GRAVE is Generalisability, Reliability, Application, Validity and Ethics).
   - Note taking from text books and other sources, particularly the need to be selective and focused.
4. The teacher shared the similarity between their reflections and the reality of her observations on their exam performance.

5. Classroom activities were designed to ***enable practice of skills and reflection and on further development of skills*** to enhance progress

   Teacher reassured students that they could develop these skills.

   - Students watched a TED Talk on the 'biology of the anger response and the genetics of aggression' as a vehicle for developing knowledge, but also to consider note taking skills. Pupils discussed how they had made notes and shared tips on how to make the process easier (links to lectures at university and the need to focus/select information carefully).
   - Teacher modelled note taking from text book using PQRST technique (Preview, Question, Read, Summarise and Test) and a visualiser, so students could see the process in action for two sections. Students then used this approach independently for two sections and fed back – half looking at anger management and half looking at token economies, and then sharing with their learning partner.
   - A3 sheet divided into 3 columns (landscape) headed 'what do we know?', 'how do we know?' and 'how confident are we about what we know?' reflecting the skills of AO1, 2

and 3 for the A2 mark scheme. Notes were allocated to each section in response to the question 'Describe and evaluate token economies or anger management as a way of treating anti-social behaviour'. Students used the format to plan the response for the technique NOT focused on in the initial note taking stage (to practice skills).

- Students wrote up the response in timed conditions to reflect the exam experience (allowed to use A3 notes/plan).
- Peer assessment using post-it notes of two 'steals' (things they liked and wanted to put in their work) and one suggestion for improvement.
- Verbal feedback of peer assessment.

This process took place over 4 lessons and the outcome for students were very positive, both anecdotally in terms of their verbal reflections and the teacher assessment of the grade achieved on the extended writing task based on a past paper question.

This is an example of how metacognition can be used to help pupils consider what makes a good learner, assess themselves against this criteria and learn new techniques to address some of the deficiencies identified. The teacher encourages pupils, reassuring them that they can improve their 'skills as a learner' and apply this in Psychology to increase their level of success.

Our thanks to Louise Rodgers, Wetherby High School, for sharing this case study.