

Workshop 4: Speaker Notes: **STUDENTS REFLECTING ON THEIR LEARNING**

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These are the learning intentions for this workshop.

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- The ability to reflect on one's own learning and to engage in goal-setting can help students to take more responsibility for their learning and develop their sense of agency and they are less likely to feel that the teacher is responsible for whether they learn or not.
- By reflecting on their learning students become aware not only of how their learning and skills are developing but they also can identify their strengths and weaknesses and areas where for development.
- Reflection on their learning also helps them become more focused and motivated in their work, improving their self-esteem as they reflect on what they have done well and what they can do to improve. This in turn helps students to become more positive about their learning
- When we give students the skills to look at their own and others' work critically and constructively, they develop a 'nose' for quality, they begin to understand the features of quality in a piece of work. They see areas where they can improve themselves by recognising them in the work of others.
- This analysis of their own and others' work can help them to deepen their understanding of the subject at hand, but it also provides them with skills they can use throughout life in a host of other contexts. As students develop the skill of reflecting on their learning they will be developing a range of Key Skills of Junior Cycle - Managing myself, Communicating, Working with others, and Managing information and thinking.

(See Key Skills Toolkits at www.juniorcycle.ie)

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A number of education experts talk about the importance of developing students metacognitive skills.

In this quote we see that Stobart and Gibbs suggest that when students develop this practice then they are more likely to maintain motivation.

Dylan Wiliam talks about learning to learn as being the most important 21st century skill.

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To begin, please take a look at the quotation from Ian Smith. As the teacher, you cannot do the reflection for the student....there's no use in you knowing where the next steps are for the student...it is about the student taking responsibility

The aim is to involve students as much as possible in the analysis and constructive criticism of their work. It's not all up to us – it's about sharing responsibility.

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- When you enable students to give peer-assessment, the exchanges between students are in their own language, which can enhance their understanding of their work's strengths and drawbacks. Also, students will often accept from one another student criticisms of their work that they would find more difficult to accept if made by their teacher.
- Peer-assessment can also strengthen the student voice in your class and it can help improve communication between you and your students about their learning.
- And finally, through their partner and group work, students are able to provide each other with valuable feedback. Often, when this process is working well, the feedback is more helpful than that given by the teacher, as it enables them to learn from and support each other. The opportunity to discuss, explain and challenge each other enables them to achieve more than they can unaided. This in turn helps them to plan the next steps in their learningNow I know what I need to do to improve on this next time.

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It is also important to remember, and to make clear to students, that assessment is about more than correction.

This quotation from Black and Wiliam supports this. Peer and self-assessment are about more than checking for spelling mistakes, etc. They are about:

- getting students actively involved in the work
- providing them with information about what they have done well and what needs to improve
- helping them to advise each other on how to improve, not just ticking what they got right.

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See the Discussion Cards at the end of booklet 4 for many more ideas on how you can support student reflection in your classroom

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Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper (2001) propose using three simple questions when reflecting on learning: 'What? So what? Now what?'

What?: What have I learned?

So what?: What does this tell me about my strengths and about my gaps in understanding?

Now what?: What can I do to improve my understanding? What are my next steps? What are my targets and goals for moving forward?

Check out *Managing Myself Key Skills Toolkit*, Page 16 – 'Setting goals for my learning' which you will find at this link

http://juniorcycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/Key/ManagingMyself_toolkkit_July2013.pdf

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- For peer- and self-assessment to be effective, students must firstly know what it is they are going to be making judgements on. This brings us back to the cornerstone of sharing clear learning intentions and success criteria.
- Until students become proficient in the process of assessing against these, you will need to model the process. Your students will also need practice at peer-assessment before they can build confidence in assessing their own work. One way of building their skills is to discuss a piece of work (from a different year group or unknown student). Together, highlight the work's strengths, identify areas for improvement, and suggest/agree ways

in which the piece could be improved.

- And finally, it's important that we build the right climate. This includes cultivating an openness about learning from our mistakes. Students need to see that mistakes are a necessary part of improvement. In a classroom with an ethos of mutual respect and one where both students and the teacher talk about learning, students can openly give constructive feedback to one another. Building the right climate also requires us to set expectations about group and pair work. We need to give students guidance on what behaviours we expect them to display in group or partner situations. This could include listening to others and taking turns, for example.

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For students, reflecting on how they have learned can be a more difficult skill to develop than assessing what has been learned or produced. Both are important. Frequently, oral responses are easier and more motivating for students than written reflections, which can be more onerous. Assessment can be encouraged through a short plenary session at the start, during or end of the learning.

You can use prompts to assist this process. Prompts can also be helpful when encouraging students to complete or maintain their own learning logs. When devising prompts, it is useful to think about the effective questioning techniques in the earlier unit.

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That completes the introduction on supporting students in reflecting on their learning.

To conclude, here are some parting thoughts on how to make these work in your classroom.

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Now you are ready to move on to using the workshop materials in booklet 4 where you will find lots of practical ideas on how to support your students in developing the skills needed for reflecting on their learning.