

# Teaching and learning issues

## Goodbye graded observations.

## Welcome support and collaboration.

Following our survey of City Lit staff, in 1819 we are developing a completely different approach to supporting tutor development at City Lit.

We will no longer be visiting tutors using the old cycle of graded observations - ending almost 20 years of this approach, initiated by Ofsted. Although many tutors benefited from the feedback and support, many of you felt the grade was not helpful.

Instead we will be introducing a new way of working with you - working with groups of tutors over time, collaborating to develop and grow in their practice .

There will still be some classroom visits, eg for new teachers ('Advisory Visits') and some that may be part of a plan by the department to support you as professional practitioners. We also hope tutors will start to ask for observations if they feel they need some support. These visits will be developmental and ungraded.

During the year, Deborah McVey will be working with us. She has helped several colleges develop this collaborative approach. She will be running training sessions with our team - now the learning and teaching team - and helping departments as they extend team collaboration. (Some tutors have kindly welcomed a visit from her and members of our staff during November. This was to help the learning and teaching team look at learning in a variety of ways).

City Lit has developed guiding principles for our new approach. They are listed in the box on the right.

As we know, teaching is an art and continually sets us new challenges. We all need to reflect and continually develop. If you are a City Lit tutor, we are asking you to

### Guiding Principles for our new approach



#### *Our purpose:*

To help tutors do what they do even better

#### *Guiding Principles*

#### We aim to

- Focus on learning over time
- Be open and curious (not make judgements based on what **we** would do)
- Respect tutors as professionals
- Be supportive and challenging

participate and collaborate - either in meetings or in online forums - and to be willing to reflect on what's great and trial new (often small) adjustments.

And if you need to come in specially for a meeting or feedback, or take part in a peer visit, we will pay you for your time.

We hope you will find this new approach helpful and inspiring.

## Two useful learning theories

Wendy Moss

There are multiple learning theories! In this issue I have chosen to write about two that stand out for me - how we remember, and social constructivism. I have drawn heavily on Petty: [www.geoffpetty.com](http://www.geoffpetty.com).

### 1. Memory and Remembering

Have you ever muttered to yourself: 'I covered that last week with my class and they don't remember any of it!?' A bit of us is impatient with our learners. Of course the learners are not the problem - it's us! We forget how we remember. We do not remember what we have experienced only once.

To remember we need to have experienced and engaged with information, knowledge or skills frequently and recently. And in order for it to enter our long term memory, we have to experience it again and again over time. If we teach something at the beginning of a course and are confident our learners have 'got it', but never refer to it again, it is likely our learners will have forgotten all about it by the end.

Sometimes tutors feel giving students the information in handouts or online is a substitute. The learner can go back to the information if they need it, can't they? However, do they? Do you? Handouts are a supplementary resource, but not a substitute for, remembering the important stuff.

So tutors need to identify what is **key** for learners to remember as a grounding in their subject or topic: vocabulary, tenses, sequences, processes, and return to them regularly in creative and interesting ways to check everyone has 'got' the foundations of their subject.

Effective teachers, says Petty, 'stress key points at the beginning and end of sessions, have regular recaps and reviews and build new stages of learning on old ones'. More ideas are below.

### 2 Social Constructivism

Petty points out there is a folk psychology of learning which is astonishingly common among learners and teachers. This is the 'transfer of knowledge' theory. He summarises it as follows:

- 'Knowledge is stuff
- The mind is a vessel

- Learning is storing stuff
- Acquisition only requires being reasonably attentive, or even just being there.
- Assessment is stock taking'



Learning in this view involves transfer - the teacher as petrol pump attendant filling student's empty tanks - rather than the learner as someone who brings their own knowledge and experience to the learning

process.

We do not learn by passively receiving, and then remembering what we are taught. Remembering key basic material might be a very important basis for learning (such as the vocabulary for shopping in a language class), but that is not the same as asking for something in a shop confidently in another country.

A simple example given by Petty is as follows:

Researchers studying SAT test in schools found that with a calculator 80% of 12 year olds completed this task:

$$225 \div 15 = 15$$

But only 15% could complete this identical task:

*If a gardener has 225 bulbs to place equally in 15 flower beds, how many would be in each bed?*

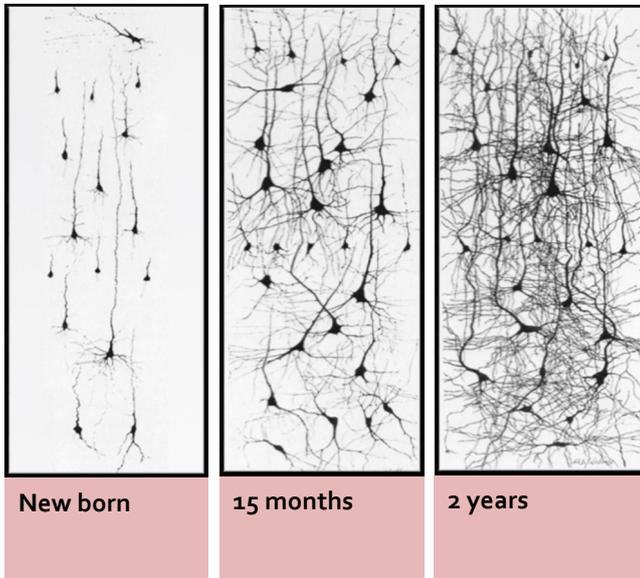
Question A is a knowledge and application problem—what to do after being shown how. Or even remembering how to press the numbers and the key with the divide symbol.

Question B is a synthesis question—it requires problem solving. The learner must first recognise the question as an arithmetic question (and not an algebra, grammar or guessing question) and decide which mathematical operation is needed to answer the question.

Question B is a higher order cognitive question. In Blooms taxonomy of learning, a student moves from basic knowledge and remembering through a series of cognitive stages of applying, analysing, synthesising and evaluating/creating till they have achieved deep learning. Remembering and understanding basic information and sequences are only the start.

## Learning as constructing knowledge

If you attended the tutor conference in September, you will remember Baroness Susan Greenfield showed us a picture of the development of the brain from birth to two years old. Learning and experience result in the building of myriads of connections between neurones in the brain, and in a way unique to us.



Throughout life, we construct new concepts and ideas by fitting new learning into what we already know—by making new connections in the brain and constructing new meanings. This “meaning-making” theory of learning is called ‘**constructivism**’.

This is particularly relevant to us as adult educators because as we get older, our ability to rote learn and remember lessons, but our depth of experience and the number and volume of connections between our

neurones is much richer. So our ability to learn in this way actually improves with age.

## Constructivism and active learning

Petty says ‘If adults experience the same lesson, they come away having made very different constructs’<sup>1</sup>.

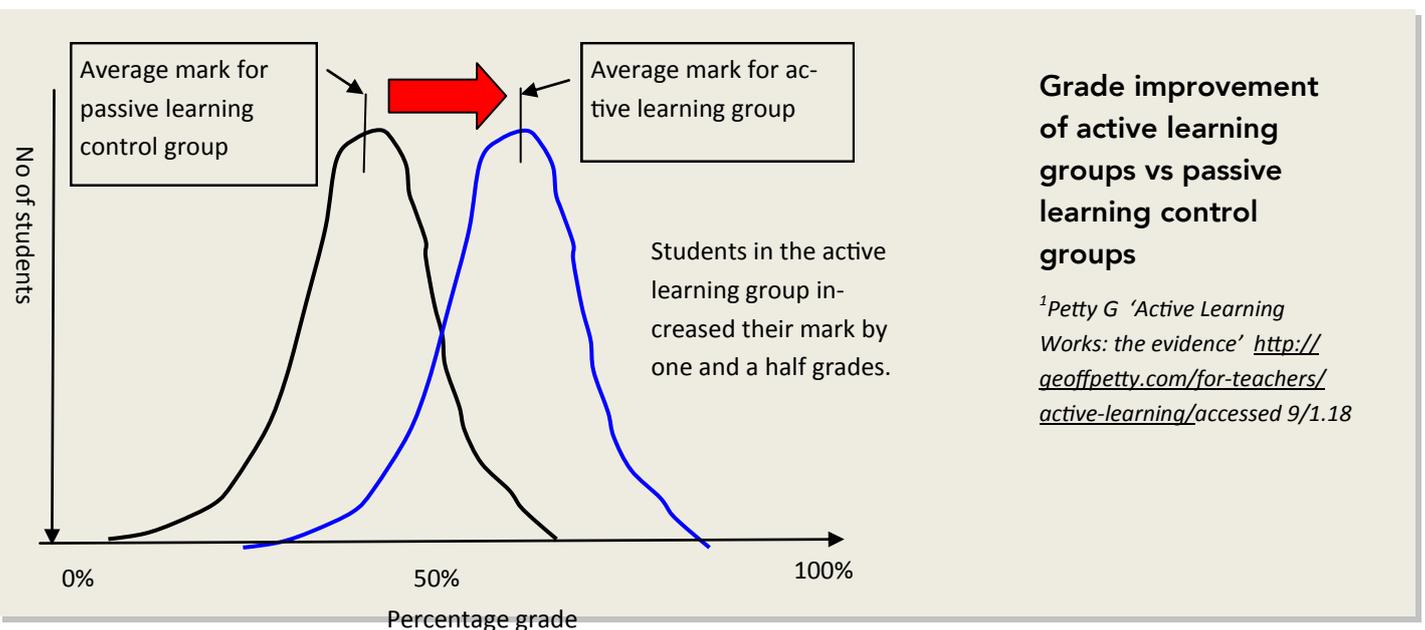
It is important to use teaching methods that

- enable learners to construct their own meaning or interpretation of the material being studied
- allow the learner and the teacher to identify misconceptions, errors and omissions and correct these.

Research shows that active learning enables students to establish neurone connections more strongly than passive methods. Recent experiments with young people have shown that using active rather than passive methods improves student’s achievement by one and a half grades (see below).

Active methods include:

- Eliciting questioning and questioning which encourages students to work things out themselves
- Group tasks which encourages students to share knowledge, explain to each other, problem solve, discuss and peer correct
- Students creating their own summaries of what they have learned eg through a mind map.
- Peer assessed quizzes or exercises where students can discuss answers and correct each other (with guidance)
- Self assessment (with guidance)



## So to summarise and review ...

### 1 Supporting remembering

Theory tells us we need to constantly revisit previous learning in order to embed key knowledge and processes - the material that is the foundation of our subject. We, as teachers, know what these key things are. This could be through:

- Regular recaps and reviews; weekly, mid term and end of course.
- Summaries of learning at the end of tasks and sessions—preferably by learners themselves.
- Careful staging of activities and learning so each stage builds upon the last - learners revisit material as a matter of course as they need it for the next stage.
- Quizzes and mini tests.
- Use of openers where students reflect on how they have used what they have learned outside class.
- Self assessment tasks and peer assessment tasks.
- Well thought out homework.

Repetition in interesting ways will embed key stuff all learners need to remember.

For more ideas go to <https://www.citylit.ac.uk/formative-assessment>.

### 2 Using Active Learning Methods

Active learning as we have seen is more effective at building deep learning as it supports learners in constructing their own meaning.

On most courses at City Lit, we do engage in active, participative learning. But can we tighten this up?

- Are we still missing some opportunities to use active learning methods?
- Do we make sure we 'fill in the gaps' - monitoring to make sure everyone fully 'gets it' - rather than hoping everyone will just conquer the learning in the end?
- Do we fully summarise learning for people after group work or tasks - or do we sometimes leave students having had a nice time but not completely sure what has been learned?
- Do we use supported peer/self correction sufficiently with guidance on what to look for?

Hopefully I have interested you in reflecting on these and similar questions - by yourself, or with colleagues.

## Summative assessment and RARPA

The final topic for this issue is RARPA. We are developing a new and less paper-heavy approach. Alongside the Individual Record of Learning, we will ask tutors to keep:

**Individual group profiles:** a list of learners' individual starting points—targets, motivations, any barrier to learning—and implications for teaching.

**Evidence of achievement of outcomes:** tutors need to demonstrate learners have achieved. But there will be no need to produce records tracking learner progress - though you should still note significant information about individual students week to week.

Departments will also be carrying out a **moderation of RARPA evidence** on a cycle— a few classes each term.

So how do tutors evidence that learners have achieved the outcomes? They simply need to plan an informal summative assessment at the end of the course —a much



'Kurt #rememberingkurtcobain #nirvana', Christopher Catto

lighter touch equivalent of a final portfolio or exam. This could be a final task using all the key material covered on the course e.g. a final full message, a discussion question, a final review exercise or quiz, a presentation, a performance, an exhibition.....

Tutors can record this on paper, in photographs, in a recording or video. In some departments, someone from your department might come to watch your class in action. Your department will help you with how.

Moving to this will mean less paperwork, and ensure our students feel confident in what they have achieved.

This issue is written by Wendy Moss, Manager of Teaching and Learning, [Wendy.Moss@citylit.ac.uk](mailto:Wendy.Moss@citylit.ac.uk). You can read more on constructivism and active learning on