

Transcription: How do we encourage metacognition in the classroom?

Matthew Somerville

Educational Psychologist

Lee Davis

Deputy Director,
Cambridge International Examinations

Pablo Torres

Researcher,
Faculty of Education, Cambridge

Matthew Somerville: I think it is important to create a classroom climate where it is okay to make mistakes, John Hattie says 'mistakes are the essence of learning'. I quite like that expression. And I think that is a good starting place. Like, if children have that view that it is okay to make mistakes, then you can go and look, how do we monitor what we are doing and when we have made mistakes, what can we do about that, what strategies can we use? I think, modelling, so a teacher modelling when they have made their own mistakes is very helpful. Perhaps they are on the white board and go 'Oh whoops, look I forgot to put a full stop here. I'm always checking my sentences at the end of the sentence, and I'm going to go back and correct that', to show that it is quite acceptable to make a mistake in the classroom. Another area that I think helps with the classroom environment, and creating an environment that promotes metacognition, is allowing plenty of time for discussion of strategies. So, what strategies can we use here? What did we do ... what strategies did we do last time we did this activity? Can we think of anything you have done before that might be helpful? And encouraging that discussion amongst the children, so group work is really helpful here. Also devoting time to planning. So, when a teacher is introducing a new task they may begin by saying 'So how are we going to tackle this? What do we need to think about?' And so that is promoting the children planning and thinking about strategies in advance of the activity. And then finally, I think looking at evaluation and self-assessment, so this could be anything from the informal checking of your work to more formalised can you grade your work, I want you to check your work, give it a grade and tell me why you have given that grade.

Lee Davis: One of the key responsibilities for a teacher is to develop a culture, a supportive culture or a supportive environment in the classroom that allows for metacognitive talk, metacognition to be developed by the students. It enables a classroom without fear of failure in front of the eyes of their peers, or the teachers themselves. And it is again, about modelling. What can a teacher do to actually encourage students to question, question where they are before the task, during the task, after the task. And, as I say, ensuring that if a student fails, that student learns from that failure rather than sees that as a way of stopping the learning. One of the strategies a teacher can adopt is, is a very, sort of, simple rule. And, I learned this very early in my teaching career. Essentially you have two rules, one is you don't talk when somebody else is talking, and the second rule for the class is that you don't do anything that gets in the way of somebody else's learning. I think if teachers just applied those two rules I think they would get a long way.

Pablo Torres:

A successful metacognitive classroom is one that looks, very much like an interactive classroom. So, there is a lot of talk going on, it is a very loud classroom, and it is also a classroom where kids are all the time looking at what they have done, self-assessing what they have done, and talking about what they have done.

Lee Davis:

It is about metacognitive talk. You can...If you were to go into this classroom you would hear students verbalising what they are doing in terms of meeting a learning outcome, the strategies that they are following, and whether or not they are working. And then the regulation of that. So 'Oh that isn't working so I'm going to try this instead' and you hear that from all of the class, not just one or two, but actually from all of them. And that I think is really important. Ultimately, of course, you see the difference in terms of student outcomes. It is very clear that implementing metacognition in a classroom has a significant impact on student outcomes, and so we can measure this over time.