

Learning vs Performance



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What's the idea?

Learning is about committing knowledge to long-term memory, not immediate performance.

What does it mean?

There are different technical ideas about what 'learning' means, but we would probably all agree that, even if a student can give a good answer or demonstrate a skill today, that doesn't mean they have learned it. Without strategies to embed knowledge in our long-term memory, we can easily forget things.

Short-term performance can give the illusion that learning has happened but, within any group of students, the degree to which the material will be

remembered long-term can vary significantly. This will depend on what they already knew and the nature of the learning task, in particular the success of the task in connecting new and prior learning.

What are the implications for teachers?

Be very clear that you will only know about the extent of actual learning once your students have had time to forget.

You will also need to consciously guard against the illusory impression of learning

from short-term performance and teach for the long-term. In practice, this means making it your explicit intention that whatever knowledge, skills and understanding you are teaching, students should be able to demonstrate that they've learned it at some point in the future; as well as checking for understanding today, you'll need to plan to check back later.

You also need to teach your students how to remember and practise things without leaving it to chance. Students do not all have good recall and practice strategies, but these can be taught.

TOP TIP / Be explicit with your students that they will need to know the material you are teaching them later and spell out exactly what they need to remember and practise. Retrieval practice is a great strategy for this – you can read more about it [here](#).

Want to know more?

Didau, D and Rose, N Chapter 5 Long-term memory and forgetting in What every teacher needs to know about psychology (2016) John Catt
Nuthall, G Chapter 3 Understanding how students learn and remember what they learn in Hidden Lives of Learners (2007) NZCER Press.

