Remote Learning Myth-busting

Ofsted have recently published advice for schools that aims to bust common myths around best practice for remote learning. Their advice echoes recommendations from the Education Endowment Foundation's 2020 rapid evidence assessment which examined the existing research for approaches that schools could use to support remote learning.

Common myths about remote education (http://bit.ly/3rdKFgf Ofsted, 2021):

- remote education is fundamentally different to other forms of teaching/learning
- remote education is a different curriculum/offer to the content that would be delivered normally
- the best forms of remote education are digital
- the best way to deliver remote education is always through live lessons
- the most important thing is pupils' engagement

Their advice details each of these and offers support for how schools can provide an effective curriculum remotely.

In 2020, the EEF conducted a rapid evidence assessment and developed a series of resources to support remote learning. Their support resources include some initial planning and reflection tools, metacognitive strategies and guidance for communicating with families http://bit.ly/3czdv6Q.
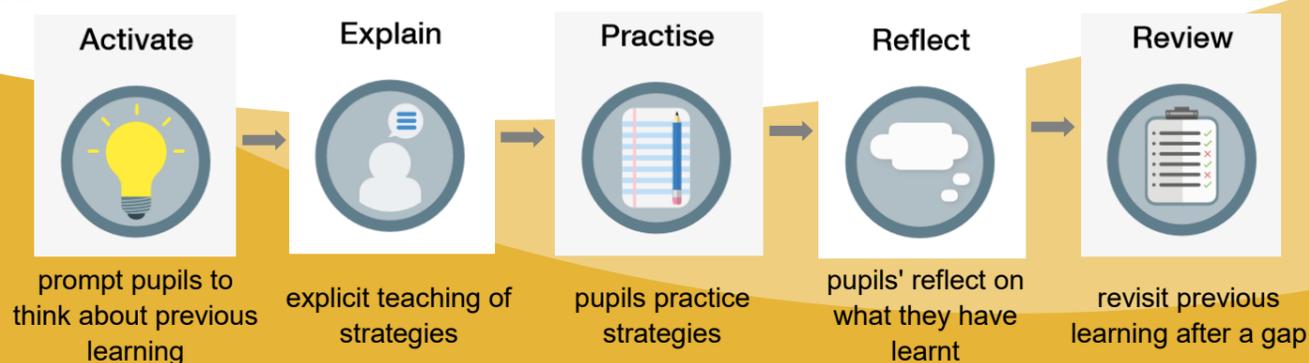
Their key recommendations for remote learning include:

1. Teaching quality is more important than how lessons are delivered
2. Ensuring access to technology is key, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
3. Peer interactions can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes
4. Supporting pupils to work independently can improve learning outcomes
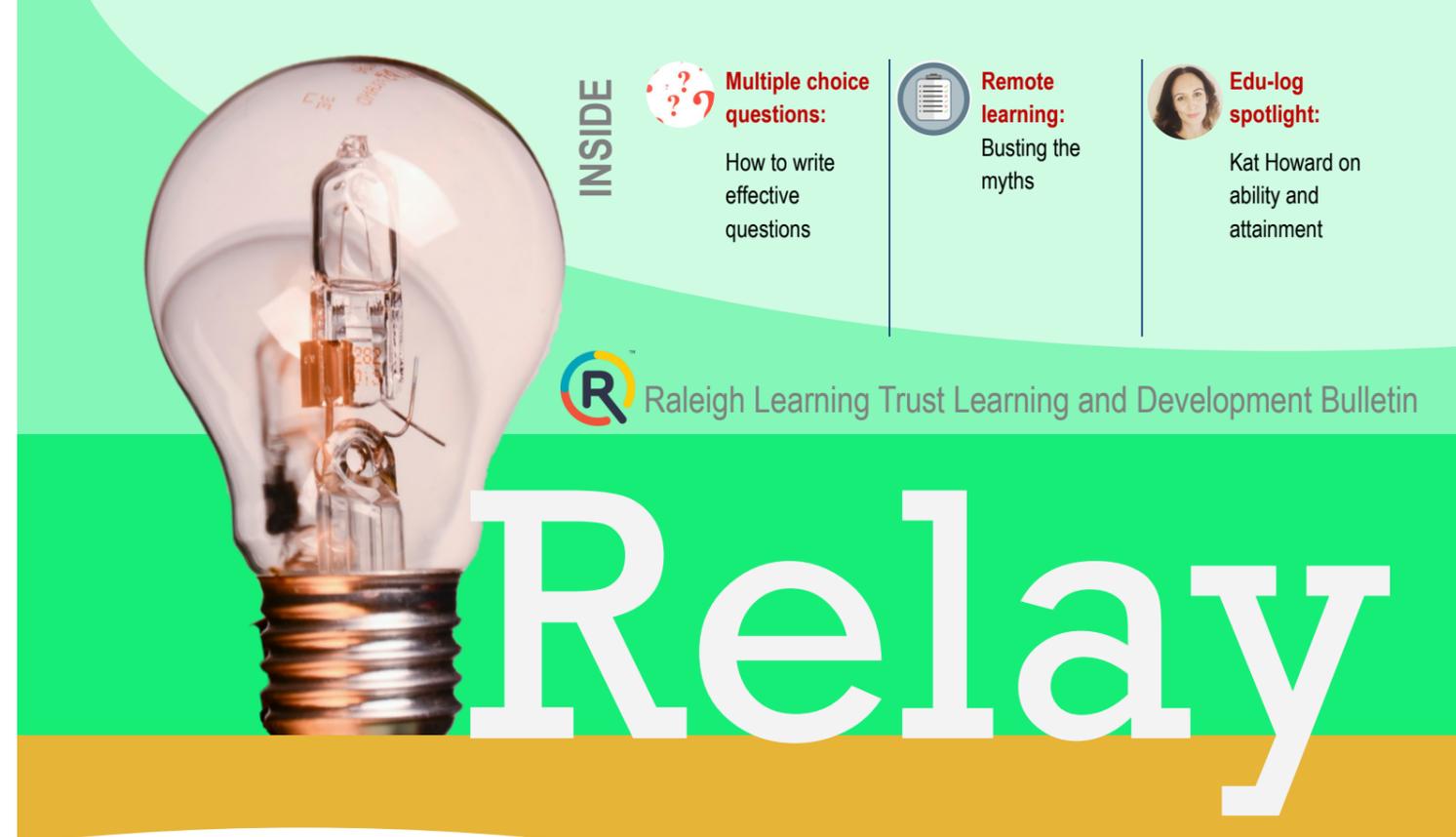5. Different approaches to remote learning suit different types of content and pupils

Alongside their resources for schools are resources schools can share with families to support home routines and valuable learning opportunities, such as shared reading.

Tried and Tested

As part of their support for remote learning, the EEF published a planning framework with examples and as a template. Whilst this is designed to structure pupils' remote learning, the principles can also be applied more widely including for structuring professional development of staff.

Activate	Explain	Practise	Reflect	Review
prompt pupils to think about previous learning	explicit teaching of strategies	pupils practice strategies	pupils' reflect on what they have learnt	revisit previous learning after a gap

Edited by Beth Greville-Giddings

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Relay

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Mental and Emotional Health

In January 2021 the Education Policy Institute and The Prince's Trust published a major study; 'Young people's mental and emotional health: Trajectories and drivers in childhood and adolescence' which reveals new insights into the determinants of young people's wellbeing, including how it is affected by their relationships, background, and use of social media.
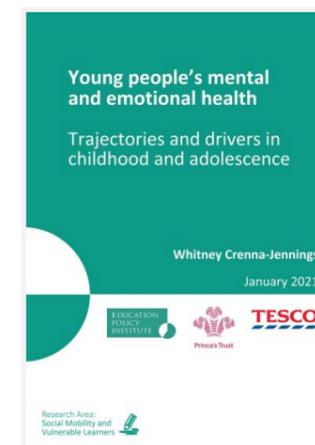
The study reports the personal experiences of young people in England at ages 11, 14 and 17 and shows that the wellbeing of young people declines by the end of their teenage years, and a strong gender divide with girls seeing far lower levels of wellbeing and self-esteem than boys. The report also looks at social media use and the adverse effect this has on the wellbeing of young people.

The researchers discuss factors impacting on mental health and wellbeing, including the likely impact of the pandemic on young people, reporting estimates that 1 in 6 young people now have a probable mental illness - up from 1 in 9.

The report offers policy recommendations to government to help slow further deterioration of mental health and wellbeing.

The full report can be downloaded here: **https://bit.ly/39By4xr**

Young people's mental and emotional health

Trajectories and drivers in childhood and adolescence

Whitney Crenna-Jennings

January 2021

Policy Recommendations

Wellbeing funding to match catch-up funding

4-week mental healthcare waiting time

Build on mental health content in SRE

Encourage all leaders to spend time in AP

Evidence-informed anti-bullying strategy

Increase opportunities for physical activity

Increase funding for mental healthcare

Reduce family poverty

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) can be a great way to find out what pupils know, identify their thought processes and find misconceptions, particularly when remote learning, but writing high-quality MCQs can be hard and takes time to think about.

Writing Multiple-Choice Questions

MCQs have a reputation for being too simplistic, only addressing lower order knowledge or facts, and being unreliable as they are easy to guess. It is however possible to use MCQs to assess higher order knowledge, provide targeted information of pupil knowledge and by considering the structure of questions, make guessing easy to identify.

There is currently an increased interest in MCQs for retrieval practice and the 'testing effect', particularly as part of assessment and feedback of remote learning. MCQs can be shared quickly using quizzing tools or online services and easily reused once developed.

How to write good MCQs

Stem (question)

The stem should be:

- meaningful by itself and present a definite problem
- not contain irrelevant material
- avoid negative phrasing
- be a question or partial sentence

Q: Stem
a) Distractor
b) Distractor
c) Answer
d) Distractor

Alternatives

Alternatives should be:

- plausible
- stated clearly and concisely
- mutually exclusive
- homogenous in content
- be free from clues about which response is correct
- "all of the above" and "none of the above" should not be used
- presented in a logical order to reduce bias
- number of alternatives can vary among items as long as all alternatives are plausible

Follow up questions:

Ask pupils to justify their response

Ask pupils to explain why distractors are wrong

Ask pupils to explain why distractors are plausible

Types of question

Which of the following is true?

Which of the following best describes __?

Which of the following best describes the plot of __?

Which character says the following? "__"

Which character would you describe as __?

Which of the following are phases of __?

How does __ differ from __?

Further information

https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/writing-good-multiple-choice-test-questions/

https://readingallthebooks.com/2015/09/19/memory-an-inset-session/

https://daisychristodoulou.com/2013/10/research-on-multiple-choice-questions/

https://theeffortfuleducator.com/2018/09/26/wabmcq/

Edu-Blog Spotlight

Kat Howard is an English teacher, writer, speaker and Senior Leader at an all-through school in the Midlands she blogs at saysmiss.wordpress.com/ and tweets as @SaysMiss

In her post 'Attainment over ability', Kat Howard discusses the labels we risk putting on pupils as a 'result of a distortion around semantics'.

She offers an anecdote from her own time at school, working in the top set for maths and informed that she would be entered for the intermediate paper due to her 'middle range ability'. She describes the impact this had on her motivation and she worries that the use of 'ability' to describe pupils 'sets the terminology of education on a detrimental free fall where we may have ended up with a misplaced name that does not harm than good.'

She writes that when we use the term 'ability' we are making a judgement that goes beyond an inference about a particular piece of work. When we use terms like 'low ability child' or 'high ability child' with key stakeholders we are discussing how capable the child is and risk this becoming a label that sticks with the child and 'forces them to stay stuck fast as a person who is relatively able, or not. It speaks of the person as the problem, rather than the problem as the problem, but beyond this, it carries an implication that the problem is not resolvable'.

She cites a 2015 THE article by Clare Taylor that discusses 'low ability' as meaning a pupil has limited potential, and how the language people use to describe us 'becomes the language we use to describe ourselves'. She talks about how we should consider the language we use when we are thinking about our curriculum to empower our pupils to go beyond how they see their limits.

If we design our curriculum to expose our pupils to the 'best' of a subject, we can not then give pupils the impression that they aren't able to access it and she states that 'in the same way that our teachers are not the curriculum, our students are not the work: they learn, interpret, articulate our subject to then, over time, reinterpret as their own. By offering support to pupils that is informed by their prior attainment, we recognise that their future attainment is changeable and they have power to determine their next steps.

She finishes with the note the she ended up sitting the higher maths paper and 'it went far better than I (or the teacher) anticipated it might'.

Full post with comments: http://bit.ly/3cE8tWK

Cognitive biases are shortcuts in our thinking but they can make us lose objectivity. Each issue we'll introduce a new bias to help you avoid its pitfalls

Cognitive Bias of the Half-term

Fundamental Attribution Error

The fundamental attribution error (also known as correspondence bias or over-attribution effect) is the tendency for people to over-emphasize explanations for behaviours observed in others according to personality (and how you perceive that person) rather that the situation or context and any other evidence.

People have a cognitive bias to assume that a person's actions depend on what "kind" of person that person is rather than on the social and environmental forces that influence the person.

This could be accepting a viewpoint based on knowledge of the stance someone has taken on something else, or struggling to disagree with someone you usually agree with on a new topic.