What makes learning memorable?

Research into how we can use action, emotion and narrative hooks to enable our students to retain learning successfully.

Colin Sisson
Bluecoat Beechdale Academy
Retaining Learning: Why (why, why)?

Professional

50 – 60 hours a week

Personal
‘Darwinism’ and Neural Science

“We know from neuroscience that the brain will prune out synaptic links that are underused or deemed unimportant. This ‘neural Darwinism’ is one of the most significant strategies we (as humans) have for coping with overload.

But how quickly does it happen and is there anything we can do to ensure that learning stays in the mind beyond the exam?”

Dr Debra Kidd: Notes from the Front Line

- Lesson involved pouring liquids into a large test tube
- With each additional liquid, a new colour emerged

Learning = Liquids can react and change their appearance/original properties when combined with others.
Action, Emotion and Narrative

**Action**: A lesson that requires active participation. Movement or performance of a task.

**Emotion**: Lesson explores, emphasises or provokes an emotional state.

**Narrative**: Lesson involves participation in a narrative that is different to their classroom experience. They may be somebody else or experience someone else’s journey.
<table>
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<th>‘Hook’ to ensure learning is retained</th>
<th>Theorist</th>
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What do our students say?

- Student feedback was collected from a number of classes, both KS3 and KS4.
- Each student was asked to think of a lesson where they could recall a key learning point and what happened in the lesson to achieve it.

Emotion:
Lesson content had an emotional/spiritual theme

Action:
Learning was achieved through participation in an action

Narrative:
Learning was achieved through engagement with a story or fictional situation
Gender Trends: Memorable Lessons

Girls have a wider range of learning triggers (A/E/N all covered in feedback) than boys.

Boys are action-dominant with some emotion (no narrative engagement reported)
Both girls and (some) boys retain lesson content that engages with emotional concepts/triggers.

88% of PP students recognise as important.

Seems to have a link with fairly robust reading ages (10:05-14:03).
“From an evolutionary perspective, it makes sense that things associated with emotion and reward should be especially good at capturing the attention of adolescents. As they begin to seek out the skills required for an independent adult existence, adolescents require new experiences from as many different situations as possible. As a result they begin to show ‘sensation seeking’ behaviours, ones designed to prioritise the novel and the stimulating (this has been reported across many other mammal species as well as humans).”
Learning through Action

- Full cross-section of cohort recognised active lessons as memorable
- Engages students with widest range of reading ages from 5:09 – 17+
- Most effective way to engage and achieve learning with SEN/EAL students
What motivates students to learn?

“Students will be more motivated and successful in academic environments when they believe that they belong and are accepted in those environments”.
Learning through Narrative

- 100% responses were given by girls

- Seems to be significant to students with the higher reading age scores (10:11 – 17+)

“Encouraging students to work through dramatic situations, in fictional roles, enables them to view their own behaviour, and that of other people’s, from unfamiliar perspectives”

Jonothan Neelands: *Creating Democratic Citizenship through Drama Education*

“...young people are able to take satisfaction in creating credible and coherent, alternative worlds and experiences through their own imaginative efforts”
“Memory has some similarities with a search algorithm, in the sense that the more you connect what you learn to what you already know, and the more associations you make to a memory (for example, linking it with a visual image, a place or a larger story), then the mental cues you have through which to find and retrieve the memory again later. This capacity expands our agency: our ability to take action and be effective in the world”.

Brown, Roediger, McDaniel: Making it Stick
Cohort Overview: Where’s The Love?

Year 8
Full range of feedback, though action-dominant

Year 10
Only action and emotion offered

Year 11
Action dominated
Executive Function and the narrowing of adolescent learning?

Three insights from psychological and neuroscientific research which can help to explain why teenagers can do it, but not always:

• Some things are disproportionately distracting for teenagers.
• It’s harder work for them to make careful decisions
• They don’t learn from the environment quite as effectively as adults, so it’s harder to work out when to produce certain behaviours.

https://hobbolog.wordpress.com/2016/05/10/the-age-of-distraction-what-do-we-know-about-attention-during-adolescence/
GCSE English Literature
Revision Day: Character

Noisli
tops
As I entered the classroom I just thought “what the Hell? It felt like a real autopsy. I was just waiting for the bodies…”
Action, **Emotion** and **Narrative** through the use of Green Screen technology:

In KS3 English lessons, green screens allowed students to choose their own backdrops for persuasive speeches...

...while in MFL they provided backdrops for *Linguavision* entries.
BBA Radio
Believe, Belong, Achieve
BBA Radio
Believe, Belong, Achieve
Week 1: Believe
Week 2: Belong
Week 3: Achieve
Week 4: Context
Week 5: Interaction
Week 6: Stress

David Didau’s “Tier Two” vocabulary forms the basis for each show. This allows for an emotional, rather than explicitly academic, theme and interleaving cross-curricula ideas.

Journalists
Editing and Production
Broadcasters
Marketing and Advertising

Four teams of students perform vital roles. These students gather, edit, produce, and promote the content for each show.
So how could you use **Action**, **Emotion** and **Narrative**?

Increase opportunities for ‘**action**’ in KS4 to achieve greater engagement when teaching key concepts.

Use David Didau’s “Tier Two” vocab list and link these **emotional**/abstract ideas to current/future schemes.

Use Green Screen technology to bring lesson content to life and step ‘outside’ the classroom and into another **narrative**.