Building Learning Power

Everyone's talking about it

It seems that everyone is talking about learning – lifelong learning, learning to learn, Primary learning networks, Networked Learning Communities, learning conversations, to name just a few. Learning has become a central strand of DfES initiatives, Ofsted inspections, and NCSL strategies. Learning in the world of education has, at last, become a common enthusiasm.

Moving on in learning to learn

An enthusiasm for better learning has motivated teachers for a long time. In attempting to help students learn more or learn better, we tried to understand learning styles, multiple intelligences, learning modalities, and the like. In attempting to help students improve their organisation of knowledge or the effectiveness of their memory we used practical tools like spider diagrams, mnemonics, and other study skills. These approaches have laid the ground for a deeper, more permanent set of approaches, whose aim is to get beyond learning more, or learning better, to helping students to help themselves become better learners.

What is learning power?

One of these approaches, known as Building Learning Power, was created by Guy Claxton. This maps the territory of learning and shows the different elements of all-round learning fitness. Professor Claxton suggests that there are four major learning dispositions: *Resilience*, the disposition to attend to learning and persist under difficulties; *Resourcefulness*, the disposition to deploy a variety of learning strategies; *Reflectiveness*, the disposition to think about learning and about oneself as a developing learner; and *Reciprocity*, the disposition to learn with and from others. These dispositions are inherent in us all. They are not fixed at birth, or when we leave school; they can be developed by everyone regardless of 'ability', social background or age. There are no limits to extending our learning power.

We might think of the dispositions as being like groups of 'learning muscles'. Just as we can build our physical muscles with the right kinds of exercise, so we can exercise our learning muscles to develop their strength and stamina. Each of the dispositions – the four R's – is made up of a number of learning behaviours, which we call capacities. These are summarised on the page opposite. Because the learning capacities are quite specific in nature, they can be individually trained, nurtured and exercised. On the other hand, when these learning muscles are not exercised, through lack of opportunity or encouragement, they can so easily wither and fall into disuse.

Self-awareness as learners

A central concern of Building Learning Power is with enabling students to become more self-aware as learners, to develop the habits of a successful learner, and to appreciate that they can continually improve those habits. In this approach, teachers and students together generate knowledge about their learning, and produce a stream of ever more fertile ideas about their own ability to be independent learners. The ultimate goal is what has been called *portable learning power* – the ability to learn what we need to in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves.

No flat-packs

The approach, as pioneered by Guy Claxton and TLO, does not aim to provide teachers with neat boxes of resources that can be assembled into set lessons by following sheets of step-by-step instructions. Teachers, classroom assistants, learning mentors, behaviour management consultants, governors, and many others have joined together in TLO courses to understand the principles of the approach, to develop learning enquiries, to reflect on their learning, and to relish the opportunity to put creativity back into teaching. A small proportion of the schools which have started building learning power in their classrooms have agreed to take a risk and share their learning in progress through this book. We hope their adventurous spirit will encourage others to take up the approach.

A great start

Building Learning Power is still near the beginning of a long journey. Its common-sense principles belie a sophistication in teaching behaviours that may take years to perfect. Teachers, though, are excited by, and enjoying, the journey. They are already reporting changes in student behaviour – increased motivation, fewer behaviour problems, and a far greater enthusiasm for learning. They are also reporting leaps in students' attainment, and an eagerness in themselves to remain in the profession.

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Learning-power muscles

The Learning-Power Dispositions

Resilience
The emotional aspects of learning
Feeling

Resourcefulness
The cognitive aspects of learning
Thinking

Reflectiveness
The strategic aspects of learning
Managing

Reciprocity
The social aspects of learning
Relating

The Learning-Power Capacities

Absorption
Being able to lose yourself in learning – becoming absorbed in what you are doing; rapt and attentive, in a state of 'flow'.

Managing Distractions
Recognising and reducing distractions; knowing when to walk away and refresh yourself. Creating your own best environment for learning.

Noticing
Perceiving subtle nuances, patterns and details in experience.

Perseverance
Keeping going on in the face of difficulties, channelling the energy of frustration productively. Knowing what a slow and uncertain process learning often is.

Questioning
Asking questions of yourself and others. Being curious and playful with ideas – delving beneath the surface of things.

Making Links
Seeing connections between disparate events and experiences – building patterns – weaving a web of understanding.

Imagining
Using your imagination and intuition to put yourself through new experiences or to explore possibilities. Wondering *What if ...?*

Reasoning
Calling up your logical and rational skills to work things out methodically and rigorously; constructing good arguments, and spotting the flaws in others'.

Capitalising
Drawing on the full range of resources from the wider world –other people, books, the Internet, past experience, future opportunities ...

Planning
Thinking about where you are going, the action you are going to take, the time and resources you will need, and the obstacles you may encounter.

Revising
Being flexible, changing your plans in the light of different circumstances, monitoring and reviewing how things are going and seeing new opportunities.

Distilling
Looking at what is being learned – pulling out the essential features – carrying them forward to aid further learning; being your own learning coach.

Meta-learning
Knowing yourself as a learner – how you learn best; how to talk about the learning process.

Interdependence
Knowing when it's appropriate to learn on your own or with others, and being able to stand your ground in debate.

Collaboration
Knowing how to manage yourself in the give and take of a collaborative venture, respecting and recognising other viewpoints; adding to and drawing from the strength of teams.

Empathy and Listening
Contributing to others' experiences by listening to them to understand what they are really saying, and putting yourself in their shoes.

Imitation
Constructively adopting methods, habits or values from other people whom you observe.