

# 3

## The ideal learning culture

6 *Motivation is the most important factor in determining whether you succeed in the long run. What I mean by motivation is not only the desire to achieve, but also the love of learning, the love of challenge and the ability to thrive on obstacles. These are the greatest gifts we can give our students. 9*

*(Dweck, 2006)*

Over the years during which our understanding and practice of formative assessment have so far evolved, it has been clear that strategies and techniques have very little impact if the *culture of the classroom* does not support the philosophy or ethos of the key principles. We can list the component parts or key messages of formative assessment, but the appropriate learning culture consists of less tangible elements. The elements which most often arise in discussion in my learning teams and in other continuing research are dealt with in this chapter. What seems to matter the most are:

- How teachers and pupils view ability and consequently their learning potential;
- What teachers and pupils think the ideal learning environment should consist of, and effective strategies to create and sustain that learning culture.

### How teachers and pupils view ability and their learning potential

Much research carried out by Carol Dweck and others (e.g. Dweck, 1975, Weiner, 1984; Weiner, Heckhausen and Meyer, 1972) shows that pupils differ in whether they regard their successes and failures as the

result of certain factors. Boys are more likely to attribute their successes to ability and their failures to lack of effort and bad luck. Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to attribute their successes to effort and their failures to lack of ability. Girls, especially, if they feel unsuccessful, are liable to suffer from low confidence which, if it continues, results in what Dweck (1975) calls 'learned helplessness'.

Dweck built on this work and has now established – through thirty years of studies involving thousands of children and adults from all walks of life – that what matters the most, in terms of motivation, is whether we see ability as *fixed* (an entity learner) or *growth* (an incremental learner). In short, people with a 'fixed' mindset will only tackle tasks which they know, in advance, they will succeed at. People with a 'growth' mindset not only willingly tackle difficult tasks, but thrive on them. Examples of both mindsets, in terms of their characteristics and the repercussions, are given below. Our aim, of course, must be to develop a *growth* mindset – for ourselves, for all adults involved in working with children, for parents and all our pupils.

### The 'fixed' mindset

Characteristics of a 'fixed' mindset	Repercussions
My intelligence is a fixed trait – I have a certain amount of it and that's that.	I worry about how much intelligence I have and it makes me interested in looking and feeling as if I have enough. I must look clever and, at all costs, not look stupid.
I feel clever when things are easy, where I put in little effort and I outperform my peers.	Effort, difficulty, setbacks or higher performing peers call my intelligence into question, even if I have high confidence in my intelligence, so I feel stupid.
I need easy successes to feel clever.	Challenges are a threat to my self-esteem, so I won't engage with them.
I don't want to have my inadequacies and errors revealed.	I will withdraw from valuable learning opportunities if I think this might happen.
Even if I'm doing well initially, I won't be able to cope with a problem or obstacle.	I readily disengage from tasks when obstacles occur.

## The 'growth' mindset

Characteristics of a 'growth' mindset	Repercussions
Intelligence is something I can increase through my own efforts.	I am keen to work hard and learn as much as I can.
I acknowledge that there are differences between people in how much they know and how quickly they master things.	I believe that everyone, with effort and guidance, can increase their intellectual abilities.
I love to learn something new.	I will readily sacrifice opportunities to look clever in favour of opportunities to learn something new.
I am excited by challenge.	Even if I have low confidence in my intelligence, I throw myself into difficult tasks – and stick with them. I set myself goals and make sure I have strategies to reach them.
I feel clever when . . .	I am fully engaged with a new task, exerting effort to master something, stretching my skills and putting my knowledge to good use (e.g. helping other pupils learn).

People with a fixed mindset need to constantly prove their ability, proving that they are special or even superior, whereas people with a growth mindset believe that intelligence can be developed through learning – something which brain research has proved to be true. In one study (Dweck, 2006), people were asked hard questions and given feedback about their answers. Their brain waves were monitored to see where they were interested and attentive. People with a fixed mindset were only interested when the feedback reflected their ability, when they were told whether they were right or wrong. When they were presented with information which could help them learn, they showed no sign of interest, even when given the right answer for something they had got wrong. Only people with a growth mindset paid close attention to information that could stretch their knowledge. For them, learning was a priority. Even for people with a growth mindset, failure can still be painful, but the big difference between them and people with a fixed mindset is that they don't believe that failure defines you. It is rather a problem to be faced, dealt with and learnt from.

## Self-esteem

Before I outline strategies for encouraging a growth mindset in ourselves and our pupils, we need to be clear about our understanding of self-esteem. All parents, hopefully, want their children to have a basic sense of self-worth – to know that they have our respect and love, but after that self-esteem is something *they* are in charge of and we can only facilitate. High self-esteem happens for those with a growth mindset when they are using their abilities to the fullest in something they value, rather than showing that they are better than someone else.

## Strategies for developing a growth mindset – for teachers, parents and all involved in education

### Modelling a growth mindset

We need to model our own growth mindset and love of learning by emphasising processes of learning, the importance and excitement of meeting challenges, putting in effort and using strategies which help us learn. We need to teach children that intelligence can be developed. We need to transform 'difficulty' into 'new or deeper learning' and avoid expressing sympathy when children encounter failure or difficulty. We need to show enthusiasm about challenging tasks and ensure that failure is followed up by celebration of what has been learnt by the experience, in terms of new strategies needed. By doing this, we help ensure that challenge and effort are things that *enhance* self-esteem rather than threaten it.

Teachers with a fixed mindset often give lower achievers less demanding work in order to preserve their self-esteem – making sure they succeed, telling them how clever they are . . . and dooming them to fall further behind. This approach also ensures that these pupils will only feel successful when they can do things easily.

With a growth mindset, you tell pupils the truth. If they don't have skills or knowledge, or if they are underachieving, this is not a sign of something shameful, but a sign that they need to work harder or be helped to find new strategies. By giving pupils greater access to tasks (i.e. increasing the level of support within the task itself), for instance, they instantly have greater access to the success criteria used in formative assessment.

## Praising effort and achievement rather than ability or personal attributes

Praising pupils' intelligence harms their motivation and their performance. Children love to be praised for their intelligence and talent, but if this is the norm, the minute they encounter an obstacle their confidence drops. If success means they are clever, then failure can only mean they are not! This hooks them neatly into a fixed mindset. Dweck (2006) gives some examples of well-meaning comments and what pupils actually hear:

'You learned that so quickly! You're so clever!  
*If I don't learn something quickly I'm not clever.*

'Look at that drawing! Is he the next Picasso or what?'  
*I shouldn't try drawing anything hard or they'll see I'm not.*

'You're so brilliant! You got an A without even studying!'  
*I'd better stop studying or they won't think I'm brilliant.'*

Any feedback we give pupils clearly needs to support a view of ability as incremental rather than fixed. We need to praise pupils for **what they have accomplished and the strategies used**, such as practice, research, persistence, evaluating and making improvements: '*Well done, that is a beautiful rainbow, especially the way you've worked so carefully at blending the colours*', '*Fantastic. You worked so hard at that problem.*'

With my own three-year-old daughter, I have been able to see at first hand the impact of the language used to encourage and praise. Before I read *Mindset*, by Dweck, I was more likely to absent-mindedly tell her how clever she was at all her infant achievements, like crawling and walking. Luckily, those things are now mastered and are no longer part of a learning journey. When she first completed an easy jigsaw, however, I again told her how clever she was – and saw the exact repercussions described by Dweck. The moment she now encounters any form of difficulty with a jigsaw, she expresses displeasure and says '*You do it!*' She refuses to have a go if I tell her to try again. We now only use the word *clever* to describe something inanimate, rather than to describe her ability ('*The way that hot air balloon works is so clever*') and again, she copies our use of the word ('*That's clever! The cooker rings a bell!*'). I have found it particularly effective to focus my praise on learning, telling her how good it is that she is learning to... write, read, use paints, cut out, use a potty, etc. She copies this language about things she still has to work at, with pride and enthusiasm ('*Look Daddy! I am learning to wind the tape measure*'). The words we use clearly form attitudes and beliefs.

So what *do* you say when someone completes something quickly and perfectly? At home, you would just acknowledge that it had been achieved, with no mention of any related intelligence. Dweck states that speed and perfection are the enemy of difficult learning, so, in the classroom, we would respond by apologising for wasting their time in giving them something which was not challenging enough. Children need further learning experiences, rather than to do things they find easy.

A set of commonly devised strategies for dealing with challenge can be a useful visual prompt for enabling pupils to be self-sufficient, such as:

#### **When something really makes you think . . .**

1. Don't worry or panic.
2. Remind yourself that, if it makes you think, you are learning.
3. Read the success criteria again and check exactly where you are having difficulties.
4. Look at any finished examples to see what other pupils have done.
5. Ask your talk partner for advice.
6. Use class resources to help solve the problem, such as a thesaurus or number line.

#### **Avoiding external rewards**

The fixed mindset is perpetuated by the use of external rewards, mistakenly given to pupils to boost their self-esteem, when the opposite actually results. A considerable number of studies (e.g. Dweck, 1989; Elliot and Dweck, 1988) show that *performance goals* – such as house points, gold stars, class ranking or comparison with others, smiley faces, wanting to win positive judgements about your performance, and so on – lead to pupils who:

- avoid challenge when they have doubts about their ability compared with others;
- tend to create an excuse for failure;
- tend to see ability as fixed;
- concentrate much of their task analysis on gauging the difficulty of the task and calculating their chances of gaining favourable ability judgements;
- attribute difficulty to low ability;
- give up in the face of difficulty;
- become upset when faced with difficulty or failure.

Lepper and Hodell (1989) found that external rewards have a detrimental effect on intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic rewards can be seen as a 'bribe' which skew motivation. They adversely affect performance, encouraging pupils to complete tasks as quickly as possible, and include only those features which are needed in order to gain the reward. Children who are used to rewards tend in future not to choose activities where there are no rewards to be had, and also prefer less demanding tasks. Intrinsic motivation, or a growth mindset, promotes more effective, deeper and longer-lasting learning.

Gerry Miller, the coordinator of the North Tyneside Learning Team for 2007, was particularly interested in the implications of fixed and growth mindsets and had introduced teachers to Carol Dweck's work before the team first met. As a result of the extra experimentation in schools which stemmed from this focus, I asked both Gerry and one of the teachers involved in working with her class on developing a growth mindset to write about their findings for this book. Gerry Miller's interesting account is given first, followed by Angi Gibson's, a Deputy Head and Year 6 teacher (11 year olds).

## **The importance of a growth mindset in raising achievement and aspirations**

*Gerry Miller, North Tyneside EAZ director*

When I came across Carol Dweck's research in her book *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality & Development* (2000), I realised that we need to overtly promote the growth mindset if we are to develop truly resilient, self-sufficient learners.

If I had known of Carol Dweck's work when I was teaching in secondary schools, I would have said to the bottom set I used to teach something like this:

*'This is set 3 out of three. You are in this group mainly because of some poor literacy skills. We are going to work extra hard to improve your literacy skills at the same time as we learn about history, and have some fun along the way. We are going to do the same work as the higher sets, and our aim is to do better than many of those in set 2. If you achieve that, you will have the chance to move up. The best way for us to be successful is to work together and support each other so that everyone will be successful.'*

It was interesting to note that, when asked what these students found useful in lessons, they often said things like: 'Learning how to spell key words as I'm not a good speller' or 'Learning where to put the apostrophe'. This was useful feedback to me, as it told me that they valued help with literacy skills and recognised this was where they needed to improve the most.

In my dealings with pupils now, mainly Year 5 and 6 (10 and 11 year olds), I use the following strategies to encourage 'fixed mindset' learners to become 'growth mindset' learners:

1. Ask children to discuss with talk partners **what we mean by intelligence**.

Some will come up with **fixed mindset ideas**, such as:

- *How smart you are.*
- *Inborn ability to learn complex ideas.*
- *The ability to survive with the least effort while still doing really well.*

Others will come up with **growth mindset ideas**, such as:

- *Studying hard.*
- *The amount of knowledge you possess and how you use it.*
- *How much effort you put into something.*

2. Ask them when they **feel smart**:

**Fixed mindset ideas:**

- *When I don't make mistakes.*
- *When I finish my work first.*
- *When I get easy work.*

**Growth mindset ideas:**

- *When I don't know how to do it and it's pretty hard and I figure it out without anyone telling me.*
- *When I'm doing school work because I want to learn to get smart.*
- *When I'm reading a hard book.*

3. Use Dweck's list of **characteristics of the different mindsets** to stimulate

discussion with children on what it means to be an Entity Learner or an Incremental Learner.

4. Explain how the view on **intelligence** has changed over the last ten years – many people used to think it was fixed, but most educationists now see it as something that can be changed through learning.

5. Discuss the **importance of challenge** and having a go at difficult tasks – we shouldn't be afraid to get things wrong, because that's how we learn. If work is easy, it means we are not learning – if it's hard, we need to keep trying, as that is how we learn.

6. Discuss **role models** with children of people who have achieved success through hard work. Children often equate success with innate ability rather than hard work and imagine that clever or skilful people can be successful without working hard. An example is English footballer Alan Shearer – not considered one of the most skilful players when he was in junior teams, but very hard-working, determined and focused: he believed he would succeed and was prepared to put the effort in to get there.

7. Discuss possible **pressures on us not to work hard**. Some people think it is 'cool' not to work hard. These people are unlikely to achieve much. 'Swot' is a four-letter word!



8. Discuss the **importance of resilience**. Many children want to give up when the work gets hard, or want the teacher or Teaching Assistant to come and help them as soon as they get stuck. The more they can learn to use a variety of strategies to overcome difficulties without help from an adult, the more they are likely to succeed in more difficult tasks as they get older. We should celebrate mistakes and praise those who stick at a task and don't give up.
9. **Compare our brain with our muscles** – the more we use it, the stronger it gets.
10. **When we move up to High School** it will help if we are incremental learners because:
  - We will probably find some subjects harder than others. It is important that we don't give up when we find it hard.
  - We will be out of the 'comfort zone' of our primary classroom – this is when those with a fixed mindset sometimes struggle.
  - We will have lots of different teachers – we want to show them that we are willing to have a go, and that we don't need an adult to help us whenever the work gets difficult.

## Becoming Incremental Learners

Angi Gibson – Deputy Head at New York Primary School, North Tyneside

New York Primary is recognised as being within a super output area of deprivation, with the highest percentage of NEETs (16–18 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training) recorded. Once pupils enter education they soon assume an attitude that they are as they are, and what we see is as good as it gets. These low aspirations are confirmed within the family, often supported by anecdotes that mother, father, brother and sister were also 'no good' at school – and so the myth perpetuates. This mindset must be challenged, as the school faces a raising standards agenda.

With my Year 6 class, it became clear that until some of my pupils' self-worth and personal capacity issues were tackled, success and achievement would remain out of their reach.

I first asked my pupils to complete the *Implicit Theories of Intelligence Scale for Children – Self-Form questionnaire*, included by Carol Dweck in her book *Self-theories* (2000). The results, as of September 2006, were as we feared: **only 18% of the class had a growth mindset, 11% were borderline and 71% had a fixed mindset**. These results were proof of the need to change!

I began my journey by realising very quickly that there was **NO** one-step method to success! I found that the best way to promote the growth mindset with my children was through an amalgamation of various strategies.

The techniques that I used to implement change were first and foremost:

### 1. Building self-esteem and belief in self-ability

## 2. Reinforcing and encouraging steps of learning

### 3. Celebrating an awareness of self-recognition

These three strategies were promoted and adopted through using the following teaching techniques:

- Target setting (SMART)
- Peer teaching (buddies)
- Assessment for learning
- Meaningful praise – recognising how their learning was moving on
- Recognising wrong answers as being a positive thing, something to learn from
- The 5 R's for learning: Resilience, Responsibility, Resourcefulness, Reasoning and Reflectivity-Reflexivity (Smith and Call, 1999)
- Less teacher talk – more pupil talk
- Positive self-narrative and visualisation
- Increasing roles of responsibility within and around school through increasing the pupils' sense of belonging, self-worth and importance
- Managing the moment of impulse – good questioning techniques, etc
- Problem-solving, mind-mapping/templates, hierarchy of questions
- Collecting facts before making judgements
- Regular review, post-analysis of work and emphasis on perfect practice.

I began to record our incremental learning journey into a checklist:

- Goal-setting through visualisation
- Using all data to target-set for incremental improvement
- Share and negotiate the curriculum with the pupils
- Give parents knowledge of the curriculum (in parent speak)
- Share national curriculum targets with pupils and parents
- Use posters and visual resources as aids for incremental learning
- Check regularly how familiar pupils are with content of posters
- Realistic tests practice throughout the year
- Teach skills of how to mark and assess own work (learning/success criteria)
- Talk about emotions during learning and tests
- Teach relaxation and have a range of movements and/or techniques (brain gym/take 10/activate body and mind)
- Use music for mood and atmosphere
- Morale-boosting self-talk before tests
- Celebrate all successes.

Through training, the majority of my pupils were noted to be incremental learners when re-tested in January 2007. The results were as follows:

- 85% growth mindset
- 4% borderline
- 11% fixed mindset

The effect of this on their learning was phenomenal! The majority of my pupils were now totally tuned into learning – hungry for it, even. They were no longer just content with finishing a piece of work: it had to challenge them. Their newly-found learning goals and standards enabled them to think like an incremental learner. Their mindset is now:

- I thrive on challenge
- I throw myself into difficult tasks
- I am self-confident
- I have learning goals
- I like feedback on my performance so that I can improve
- I react to failure by trying harder
- I engage in self-monitoring
- I can ignore the low aspirations of my peers
- I believe that intelligence is not fixed
- My intelligence can be improved through learning.

What was truly amazing was the fact that I, the teacher, was seen as the last resort (instead of the first) that the pupils would approach for help. The first was now their buddy, then their table buddies, and finally the teaching and non-teaching staff. It freed us up tremendously! It gave us the time that we once never had, yet should have had, to guide and keep the pupils on track.

Due to the changes implemented, the pupils absolutely thrived upon the programme: their confidence and self-belief was overwhelming, they were not scared of challenges any more – they were welcoming them! They were learners with a growth mindset!

## What the ideal learning environment should consist of, and effective strategies to create and sustain it

William (2006) states that the key features of an effective learning environment are that it creates **pupil engagement** and it is **well-regulated**. In the context of learning, *well-regulated* refers to **guiding learning to the appropriate goal**. We can also add to this the importance of **dialogue and active reflection**.

**Active pupil engagement** is an indicator of real learning taking place. Pupils learn best when they have a slightly difficult task which they have to work at (Vygotsky's '*zone of proximal development*', 1978), which leads them into a state of 'flow'. Knowing they can cope with difficulties makes pupils seek challenges and overcome further problems. '*Flow*' is an interesting term which usefully describes how engaged a person is in an activity, the level of absorption, how rapt or engaged they are in their learning (Claxton, 2002).

## Establishing the requirements for learning

In order to ensure effective engagement, reflection, dialogue and appropriate guidance, we need to create, with pupils, the best environment for those elements and therefore for effective learning to take place. As with all formative assessment, pupils need to be actively involved in deciding, with teachers, what they need.

The best place to start exploring the ideal learning environment is by talking to pupils about their lives and their learning. This is Diana Pardoe's (2005) advice in her publication *Towards Successful Learning*, which I recommend as an excellent resource for this purpose. Her work involves a model of successful learning, synthesising formative assessment and the Critical Skills Programme as well as her own substantial work with teachers and pupils. Following her aim of '*teachers and learners engage together in high-quality learning conversations*', she suggests the following questions are asked of pupils to begin the process of establishing a positive climate for learning:

1. *What do you want your teacher to be like?*
2. *What do you want the classroom to be like?*
3. *So what are you going to do (in order to enable your teacher and classroom to be as you wish)?*

Pupils could decide the answers to these questions alone, through jottings, through talk partners – and then, critically, the answers must be *shared* so that everyone can see them and a class list of answers established.

The next step is for pupils to work in small groups to identify what *helps* them to learn (movers) and what *stops* them from learning (blockers).

**What helps you learn?** (Three minutes to brainstorm ideas and a further three minutes to discuss and then prioritise the top three ideas from the group.)

**What stops you from learning?** (Again, three minutes to brainstorm ideas and a further three minutes to discuss and then prioritise the top three ideas from the group.)

It is very important that those engaged in this activity respond to the questions from their own perspective as learners. For example, when teachers are working together, they need to consider how they feel as adult learners, not how they think the children in their classes feel about learning. From the lists created, group members then explore together what successful learners do (see Fig. 3.1).

It is important that the question is phrased '*What does a successful learner do?*' so that the responses given include a verb, such as *listens, thinks, tries hard, asks questions* or *reads*. This emphasises that specific actions are required to become successful in learning. From the verbs used, specific observable behaviours can then be identified that illustrate the action. For example:

You have said that a successful learner listens.

**What does that look like/sound like in our classroom/staffroom/school?**

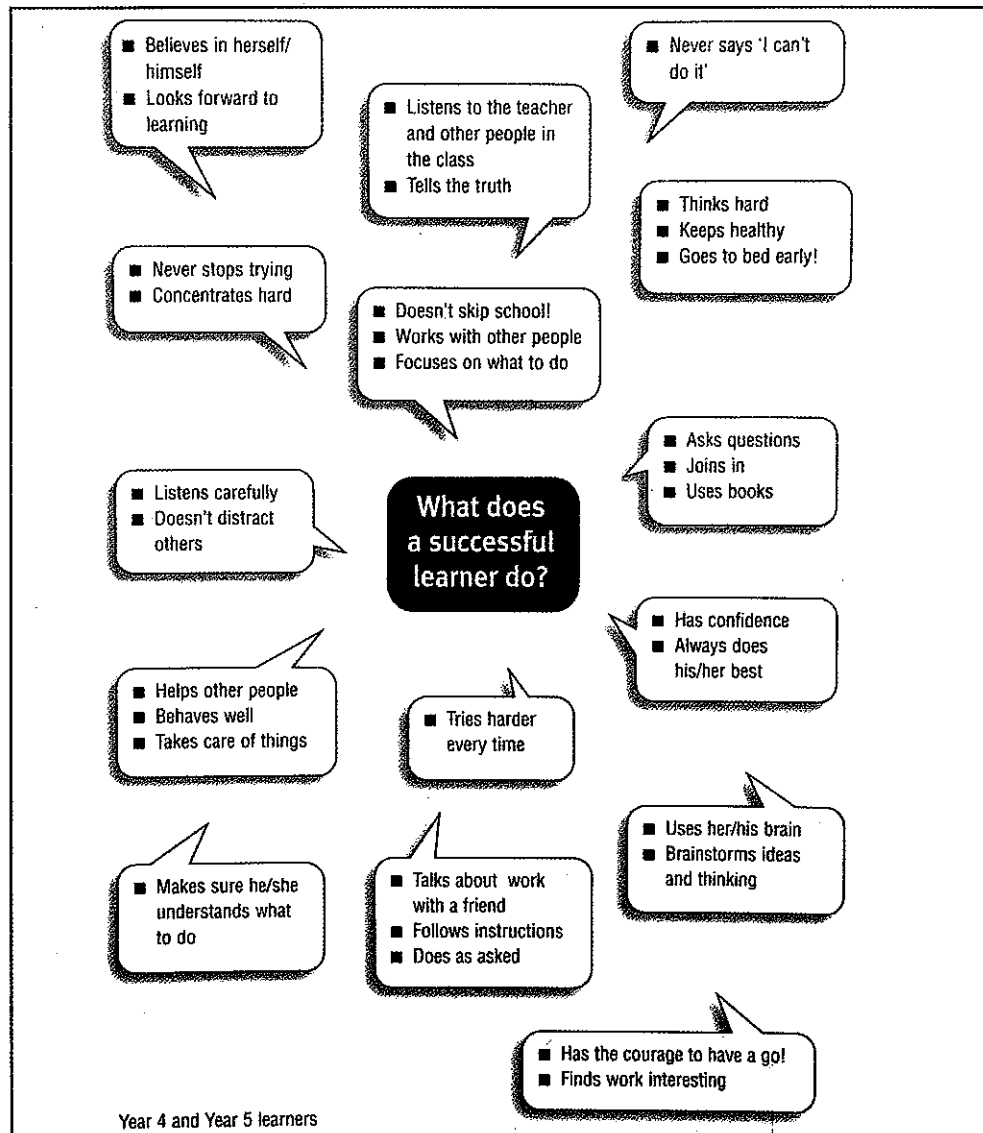
You have said that a successful learner takes care of things.

**What does that look like/sound like in our classroom setting?**

You have said that a successful learner makes sure he/she understands what to do.

**What does that look like/sound like in our classroom/school?**

(reproduced from Pardoe, 2005, by kind permission of Continuum)



**Fig. 3.1** Children's responses (from Pardoe, 2005)

## Taking it further: learning how to learn

### Pupils

Much research has been done in the last decade about the importance of pupils learning about learning, or *meta-cognition*. **Pupils need not only the ideal learning environment, but also the skills to be able to control their own learning.**

David Hargreaves (2004) outlined three significant gateways to 'personalised learning': student voice, assessment for learning and learning to learn. He defines 'student voice' as: *'How students come to play a more active role in their education and schooling as a result of teachers becoming more attentive, in sustained or routine ways, to what students say about their experience of learning and of school life.'*

In Chapter 4 there are a number of quotes from pupils about their experiences and opinions of having talk partners. They are excellent examples of pupils actively exercising 'student voice'.

Guy Claxton's (2002) book *Building Learning Power* is well known amongst teachers for his four learning-power dispositions:

**Resilience:** *absorption, managing distractions, noticing and perseverance*

**Resourcefulness:** *questioning, making links, imagining, reasoning and capitalising*

**Reflectiveness:** *planning, revising, distilling and meta-learning*

**Reciprocity:** *interdependence, collaboration, empathy and listening, imitation*

In order to become higher-order thinkers in a modern world, Claxton believes children need to be helped to develop the power of learning in these four areas. In analysing the four areas, I was able to link them all with different aspects of formative assessment:

- **Resilience:** the ethos of an incremental mindset and engagement as active learners.
- **Resourcefulness:** talk partners, effective formative questions to pupils which result in high-quality thinking and discussion; pupils engaged in peer- and self-evaluation and class analysis of what constitutes excellence; success and improvement against criteria; and pupils involved in deciding what and how they want to learn at initial planning stages and throughout a unit of work.
- **Reflectiveness:** all the evaluative reflective processes involved in formative assessment.

- **Reciprocity:** talk partners and following ground rules for those; evaluating talking and listening and making improvements; talking and listening skill-building.

One teacher from the Moray Learning Team, Julie Oatridge, describes exactly how she uses Claxton's dispositions alongside principles of formative assessment:

## Learning Muscles

The children in my class are used to working with learning intentions and success criteria, but I felt that some of their working habits needed to be improved. Having looked at Guy Claxton's learning dispositions and the four 'capacities' into which they are subdivided, I felt my class really needed to do work on **resilience**, particularly **managing distractions** and **absorption**. I spent ten minutes introducing Claxton's work to the children by using his analogy of going to the gym to work on muscles and strengthen them, and how it is the same with our learning muscles. By strengthening our learning muscles, it will help us to be better learners.

I showed them all the dispositions and the capacities, but said we would just focus on a few to start with. I have all these component parts of the four learning dispositions laminated on individual labels and colour-coded. **Managing distractions** was chosen first, as I felt some pupils were distracted easily. For 20 minutes with talk partners we discussed what distractions there were in the classroom: these were listed, and then we acted out how we could manage these distractions and the effectiveness of these strategies.

On our learning wall, where our learning intentions and success criteria are, we now have 'Our learning muscle is ...' and then the 'managing distractions' laminated label. During the lesson I will remind the children that we are focusing on 'managing distractions' and ways that we can do that. I also give encouragement if I see a child managing a distraction well.

*'Well done, I saw that Michael was trying to distract you, but you said you were busy and went back to your own learning.'*

*'Thank you, brain break manager, you could see we needed a break and engaged us in a brain gym activity to refocus us.'*

Just as we talk about our learning intentions and success criteria, I just add in about the learning muscle we are working on. At the end of a lesson I ask the children on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being brilliant) how effective they were at working at a particular muscle. The children then show me with their hands their score. I then ask a few children how it felt working this muscle. Responses show that they felt they were more focused on their work and more in control of their learning, and were pleased that they had used tactics to keep them on task.

After a week I introduced another capacity – **absorption**. Again we discussed the capacity with talk partners and came up with reasons why we needed to focus on this capacity. The

label was added to our learning wall and was again mentioned in lessons, and encouragement was given when I saw children totally absorbed. We discussed how it felt to be totally absorbed and how the lesson just flew by when they were totally engrossed.

As each week goes by, I add another capacity. We are at the stage now where the capacities we have focused on are still on the learning wall under their disposition, and I now ask the children which particular muscle they are going to focus on to help with their learning. This is done at the beginning of each lesson. Some muscles relate more to some lessons than others, so they are the ones we specifically focus on. Children like the fact that they are in control of improving their learning, so instead of just being in class they are now working to become better learners. I also give examples of how, as an adult, I still have to use these muscles, and which ones I am working on.

### *Teachers and other educators*

This book aims to help teachers see themselves as equal learners in every aspect of formative assessment. It seems incongruous to attempt to create the ideal learning environment for pupils if these principles are not also reflected in the learning environment for all adults working in the school. Andy Hind (2007) lists the following ingredients of 'an emotionally intelligent organisation':

Motivation of all individuals regularly monitored	Work/life balance encouraged and monitored	A culture of 'openness' and 'security'	Clear and agreed direction for future developments	Individuals demonstrate 'awareness' and 'responsibility' for development
Change handled effectively and welcomed by all	Clear and effective communication	Every member feeling valued and respected	Trust and challenge flow throughout	Shared and agreed values regarding core purpose

He describes change in three ways:

**Shallow change** impacts on policies, documents and resources.

**Deep change** impacts on skills and knowledge.

**Profound change** impacts on attitudes and behaviours.



This certainly resonates with the wealth of teacher feedback I have collated over the last ten years. Formative assessment strategies and techniques in place indicate only shallow change unless teachers' skills and knowledge are developed and, ultimately, they change or hone their attitude and behaviour regarding *the role of the pupil and the teacher*, so that active learning through formative assessment can flourish.

### Letting go . . .

Control in the classroom features regularly in feedback discussions on Learning Team feedback days. For many teachers, getting pupils to generate success criteria which are then used by them to evaluate their work, and discussing questions asked with a talk partner, significantly changes the locus of control. Instead of the *teacher* doing most of the talking, and telling, it is the *pupils*. Having success criteria and being involved in the constant process of analysis – whether of previous pupils' work or reviewing existing work – means there is a continual handover from teacher to pupil. One secondary teacher from the Birmingham Learning Team described his development, after one term of introducing success criteria and talk partners, as follows:

*'The whole process has helped me learn that I am still becoming a teacher. I started off teaching by just surviving and making sure that I was totally in control. Now, nine years down the road, I have for the first time realised that I can give some of that control to the students. I am now letting them in on the secret and letting go of my own insecurities in my teaching.'*

### Reflection

- Do you have a fixed mindset (an entity learner) or a growth mindset (an incremental learner)?
- What about your pupils?
- Can you think of what might have made you develop either a fixed or growth mindset from your past: e.g. the phrasing of praise or encouragement, or the message that ability was fixed for good, or that you were 'intelligent'?
- Do you think that external rewards really work in making pupils effective self-motivated learners?
- How much say do your pupils have in determining the ideal learning environment?
- Which of Claxton's four learning dispositions are most in need of attention in your class/es or school?
- How far have you let pupils have control of the learning in your own classroom?