Chapter 11

The impact of BLP: Does it work?

In this chapter we explore:

- the effect of BLP on students’ academic performance
- Ofsted inspectors’ observations
- independent evaluations of BLP schools
- some action research by BLP teachers
- students’ self-perceptions
- teachers’ and others’ perceptions of students
It is well-nigh impossible to draw hard-and-fast conclusions that prove that BLP has had specific effects on students. Nevertheless, there are a variety of kinds of evidence that, taken together, give us increasing confidence that the approach is having beneficial results. They include the following:

1. **Students’ performance on tests and examinations.** Whilst the practices of BLP are not aimed directly at raising standards as traditionally defined, but at building wider transferable dispositions towards learning, it is vital that we can show that these practices do not damage or jeopardise results—or may even improve them.

2. **Inspection reports.** It is not explicitly in the brief of Ofsted inspectors to look for the development of learning-oriented habits of mind—their main concerns are with achievement and safety—but it would be encouraging to find that they notice and approve of the effects of BLP strongly enough to make comments in their reports.

3. **External evaluations.** A similarly objective source of evidence can be provided by external evaluations of BLP. We report the results of several of these.

4. **Action research projects.** Small-scale research projects, in which teachers rigorously evaluate for themselves the effects of BLP-related changes and interventions in their classrooms, provide very useful fine-grain evidence both of impact and implementation. A good many of these have been dotted about in previous chapters to illustrate the finer points of BLP.

5. **Students’ perceptions of themselves as learners.** Whilst are there are all kinds of well-reported problems with focus group interviews, self-report questionnaires and the like—are respondents taking them seriously, for example, or are they merely telling you what they think you want to hear?—it is clearly useful to know if youngsters feel as if they are being helped to become more resilient, resourceful, imaginative and so on.

6. **People’s perceptions of the process.** Although testimony from leaders, teachers, TAs and parents does not, by itself, constitute incontrovertible evidence for BLP, nevertheless it would be helpful to know if they are seeing positive effects on their students. We have also noted comments schools have made on students’ behaviour more generally.

We provide some evidence on each of these in turn.
1 Students’ performance

'Students' test performance—best results ever! BLP really does work!'
Rachel Macfarlane, Headteacher, Walthamstow School for Girls

Before we present the data on student achievement, one crucial point may need reiterating. The point of BLP is not to raise conventional results; it is to expand the range of valued outcomes to include the development of the confidence and capacity to learn all kinds of things, out of school as well as in. Expanding young people’s capacity to learn, and their appetite for learning, is seen as a valuable end of education in its own right; not just as a way of improving scores on existing indicators.

So the question of critical importance is: does attention to these BLP objectives interfere with performance on more conventional indicators? Do the results hold up, when we try to teach in a way that produces more confident, sophisticated and independent learners, or do they suffer? If we can show that examination performance is preserved, that will give heart to teachers and school leaders who sympathise with the BLP spirit, but are anxious not to jeopardise their ‘standards’. So if the results stay the same, while learning power improves, that is a success. If they do not go up, that is not a failure. We have found that the pressure on schools to raise standards is so intense, it can be hard for teachers to hold onto this perspective.

Having said that, it would be nice—and not terribly surprising—if the results did actually improve. It would not be much of a shock to discover that young people who are better able to manage, review and plan their own learning, and who are more resilient and resourceful in the face of difficulty, do better on the tests. Indeed, the research that we mentioned in Chapter 2 from John Hattie and others suggests that this is indeed what happens. We will see whether our own data corroborates this.

We present the data that we have gathered graphically. These graphs show the SATs scores for a range of primary schools, and the GCSE scores for a range of secondaries. The data is presented in the form of multiple base-line graphs from the period one year before the introduction of BLP to the most recent available data for each school (2009 or 2010 for primary schools and 2010 for secondary schools). The use of multiple base-line graphs ‘across settings’ (i.e. in different schools) is applicable as schools introduced BLP at different times. This kind of graph enables easy comparison of SATs and GCSE attainments between schools over time.
Primary schools

Graph 1 shows the total SATs points for the seven participating primary schools, together with the average points for English primary schools for the same period. It is clear that two of these schools, Bransgore and Bushfield, were too new to BLP to show any post-BLP trends. The others show a mixed picture. Mosborough, Princeville and Simpson, with very different starting points, show marked improvements in their SATs scores. Both Princeville and Simpson, with very low levels of achievement compared to national norms, deliberately undertook BLP with the aim of improving standards, as well as expanding children’s capacity to learn.

The Princeville story is particularly noteworthy. Between 2003 and 2006 their SATs results had deteriorated dramatically and the school was at risk of being placed in special measures. A new headteacher discovered that the psychological foundations of BLP resonated well with her own educational values, and introduced BLP to her staff and school community in 2007 as the way to improve the school’s SATs results. The impact has been, in her own words, transformational. Pupils who were well behaved but passive learners have become enthusiastic, confident and resourceful learners, and in 2008 and 2009 attained above national average SATs results. The schools’ 2009 Ofsted inspection graded the school ‘good’ with ‘outstanding’ elements and in the same year Princeville was reported to be the third most improved primary school in the country.

St Mary’s CE Primary School in Swanley seems to show a dip in their SATs performance following the introduction of BLP, though their latest result provides clear evidence of overall improvement. The headteacher’s account of the results is as follows:

- St Mary’s is a one-form entry school and consequently is susceptible to variability in the learning capacities of Year 6 pupils who sit SATs. 11+ passes in different years can range between 2 and 6 pupils out of a class of 30. This has a significant effect on SATs results.
- Coupled with this is the fact that St Mary’s is located in Swanley, one of the most disadvantaged communities in Kent. It has a mobile population, including 50% Roma traveller families, and high incidences of parent illiteracy.
- Unlike many neighbouring schools in more affluent communities, the school does not run extended school activities for SATs coaching.
- The school’s contextual value added (CVA) results are in the top 10% of similar neighbourhood schools; the school received acknowledgement for its commitment to BLP from Ofsted.

In this form the evidence clearly indicates that, over time, all schools’ SATs results improved after starting BLP. The rate of improvement of all schools was better than the corresponding national average rate for the same period.
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Graph 1

BLP primary school Key Stage 2 total SATs points from year prior to start of BLP

Graph 2

BLP primary school Key Stage 2 total SATs points for year prior to start of BLP; year BLP started and latest year when data available
Secondary schools

Graph 3 below shows the percentages of pupils who obtained 5 or more GCSE Grades A*–C from the 9 BLP participating secondary schools from the year prior to the start of BLP to 2010. The graph also shows average percentages for English secondary schools for the same period. Clearly, GCSE performance at Dr Challoner’s Grammar School and Westcliff High School for Girls has not changed since the introduction of BLP as their annual performance is consistently 99% or 100%. Interviews with school leaders revealed that, for these high-achieving schools, their primary motivation for introducing BLP was paradoxically to overcome pupil dependence on an ‘exam results’ focused curriculum and on ‘outstanding’ classroom teaching. Both schools were increasingly concerned that their ‘intelligent’ and ‘exam successful’ pupils tended to be passive learners and often struggled to apply their knowledge and capabilities in situations other than those familiar to them in school. In contrast, the newly appointed senior management team at George Pindar Community Sports College introduced BLP specifically to raise pupil attainments and avoid special measures. Graph 3 shows that since the introduction of BLP the school has consistently achieved national standards.
The A*–C percentage is a relatively crude measure of a school's performance. A more sensitive and revealing indicator is the school's total GCSE points score, and these results are shown in Graph 4. This more valid account of the impact of BLP on GCSE exam performance shows that exam performance in all schools improved following the introduction of BLP, albeit at different rates. (The complete England Average total GCSE point scores are not available but the scores for 2004, 2005 and 2007 are 336, 347 and 374 respectively, suggesting a slower rate of improvement than for BLP schools.) Even the high-achieving Dr Challoner’s and Westcliff showed improvements on this measure. The table of secondary school Ofsted ratings (page 253) shows that the two schools with the most improved total GCSE points scores, George Pindar and Westcliff, also showed significant improvements in Ofsted gradings.

The strong and immediate correlation between the introduction of BLP and an increase in GCSE points scores in secondary schools—stronger even than in the primaries—seems somewhat surprising. There are more teachers to convince that BLP adds value to pupil learning, and we have found that some subject departments take more convincing than others. There may also be greater perceived risks in a secondary school, especially in ones that are 'performing well', as the fear of a sudden deterioration in
performance is real. Set against this, however, our interviews reveal very high levels of commitment of secondary senior leadership teams, often led by a headteacher acting as a BLP champion, to implement change. All the BLP secondary schools in our sample have given priority to staff training in BLP and have established highly motivated steering groups to promote systemic and cultural change throughout the school. Additionally, giving priority to data feedback, staff mentoring, regular cycles of review and building relationships with other BLP schools may all have contributed to these unexpected findings.

A remarkable effect

One example of the effect of BLP on pupils’ exam performance was reported by Park View Community School in Chester-le-Street, County Durham. On 25th January 2010, England’s biology A-level students sat the first of their two exam papers. The following day thousands of these students launched an on-line protest saying that the exam was unfair, and over 3,000 students sent furious messages to a Facebook group about the exam set by AQA. Pupils described the exam as a disgrace, saying it bore no resemblance to specimen papers and feared it could jeopardise their chances of a university place. One student said:

‘I’m actually more upset than angry, I’ve worked so hard and need an A to get into the university I’ve applied for, no chance of that now, thanks AQA for potentially ruining my life with your ridiculous paper!’

(Guardian 26 January 2010).

But interestingly there were no complaints from A-level biology students at Park View, who wondered what all the fuss was about! They had studied and prepared for the exam using BLP principles. They understood deeply the need to persist in the face of difficulty, to try another tack if their first one failed, to take time to reflect on their learning, and to stay calm and make best use of whatever they already knew. The biology staff at the school had ensured that their students were able to apply their subject knowledge and understanding to any possible set of exam questions.

The students acknowledged that the paper was challenging, with many unfamiliar elements, but they had made intelligent attempts at all the questions; demonstrating, according to their teachers, remarkable resilience and resourcefulness under difficult circumstances. When the exam results were published, the students found that they achieved among the highest marks of all schools in the country. 42% of Park View pupils obtained an A grade on this paper compared with 22% of students in similar schools and 27% of students nationally. Pupils achieving A to C Grades at Park View were 77% against 55% for similar schools and 60% for all schools. Interestingly, in the same paper in January 2011, 89% of Park View pupils
achieved A to C grades against 53% in similar schools and 59% in all schools. This highlights success with a broader spread of ability ranges than just A grade students. The school’s specific objective has been to improve the performance of middle-ability students using BLP.

## 2 Inspection reports

If BLP were jeopardising, or even damaging, pupils’ levels of attainment, we would expect that to show up in Ofsted reports. So checking how BLP schools have fared in their inspection from before they introduced BLP to afterwards is useful. In the tables on page 253, we have listed these gradings for the BLP schools where the relevant data has been available. You will see that there is no evidence of decline or concern, in fact quite the reverse. The introduction of BLP is quite often associated with improved grading by the inspectors.

But this is, again, a rather crude measure. It would be more interesting to see whether the inspectors, trained to be impartial and perceptive observers of schools, have seen anything noteworthy about the learning-related attitudes and habits of the pupils in BLP schools. If they are impressed enough to comment on these features of young people’s engagement with learning, that would constitute strong evidence for the positive effects of BLP. To assess this, we have trawled the body of schools’ Ofsted reports since they began their BLP journey. In the panel on page 254, we have added a few of the kinds of comments that recur and underpin our bullet list below.

Some inspection reports are happy to name BLP explicitly, and to attribute gains to the use of BLP. Others prefer to speak about the approach in more generic terms, but the thrust of their comments is the same. Overall, we have found no instances where inspectors comment critically on the introduction of ‘learning to learn’ initiatives such as BLP. On the contrary, it seems to be overwhelmingly the case that they value the kinds of changes in young people that BLP aims deliberately to cultivate. In reports, as illustrated in the quotations on page 254, inspectors have repeatedly commented positively upon several different kinds of impact of BLP on the students, including:

- The systematic, tangible development of long-lasting, transferable, learning-related habits of mind such as resilience, initiative, independence, concentration, collaboration and overall confidence as learners
- Students coming to see themselves as lifelong learners, and being prepared effectively for ‘real life’ as well as for examinations and further study
• Students’ levels of engagement and enthusiasm for even quite challenging learning
• The positive effect of learning confidence on students’ behaviour in school
• Students’ levels of articulacy and maturity in thinking and talking about their own learning, and their understanding of the learning process itself
• The involvement of students in organising, planning, conducting and evaluation their own learning (and a concomitant reduction in formulaic, over-controlled or worksheet-based teaching)
• Students’ ready ability to offer examples of how BLP-type teaching helps them learn more effectively both in and out of school
• Students’ involvement in the development of whole-school approaches to more powerful learning
• A positive effect on staff planning, learning and collaboration, as well as on the students

As a footnote to this discussion of Ofsted inspections, we would like to remind you of the words of Michael Whitworth, Principal of Wren Academy in North London, which we quoted in Chapter 3. When the inspectors came to call, a number of teachers retreated into more conventional ways of teaching that did not accurately reflect the BLP ethos of the school. But the students gave the game away. Michael recalls that the inspectors said, in effect, ‘Hang on a minute: there’s a mismatch here. We’re seeing predominantly quite defensive lessons, not much risk-taking. But your children are talking a completely different game! The teaching we are seeing can’t be representative of what the children are getting!’ And this discrepancy prompted the inspectors to take a deeper look at the culture of the school as a whole—and to improve their evaluation as a result.
### Ofsted grades of secondary schools that participated in the BLP review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year BLP introduced</th>
<th>Date of Ofsted Report</th>
<th>Pre-BLP Ofsted grade</th>
<th>Post-BLP Ofsted grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Pindar Community Sports College</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>12/06 &amp; 07/10</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park View Community School</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>04/08</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Paul's Catholic School</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>01/06 &amp; 09/08</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park High School</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>03/06 &amp; 02/09</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good and Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walthamstow School for Girls</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>04/07</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Challoner's Grammar School</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>11/07</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay House School</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>04/08</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westcliff High School Girls</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>09/08 &amp; 11/10</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landau Forte College</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>10/08</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ofsted grades of primary and infant schools that participated in the BLP review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year BLP introduced</th>
<th>Date of Ofsted Report</th>
<th>Pre-BLP Ofsted grade</th>
<th>Post-BLP Ofsted grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Princeville Primary School</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>07/07 &amp; 09/09</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastway Primary School</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>03/07 &amp; 07/10</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpson School</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>01/05 &amp; 03/10</td>
<td>Special measures</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Mary's CE Primary School</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>01/07 &amp; 12/09</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayland Primary School</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>10/05 &amp; 01/09</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushfield School</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>03/08 &amp; 11/10</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bransgore CofE Primary School</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>01/08</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosborough Primary School</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>06/06 &amp; 02/09</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A selection of comments from Ofsted reports

‘Pupils have a highly developed knowledge of themselves as learners, become confident and want to do well…’
Nayland Primary School (Outstanding, October 2008)

‘Pupils display high levels of self-awareness and reflection... An emphasis on developing skills for learning promotes their independence and equips them very well for teamwork…’
Bushfield School, Milton Keynes (Good, June 2010)

‘Pupils share the vision of school leaders that education is about the development of wider skills and attributes as well as excellent academic.’
Wren Academy (Outstanding progress, March 2010)

‘Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have particularly benefited from being trusted to learn more independently.’
Eastway Primary School, Wirral (Good, June 2010)

‘Their insights into themselves as learners are quite extraordinary... Perhaps the most remarkable feature of pupils’ achievement is that they have a very firm grasp of how to learn... Pupils have a wonderful preparation for life in the future.’
St Vigor and St John Primary, Somerset (Outstanding, February 2007)

‘In many lessons, careful attention is given to encouraging the development of independence, whether this be simply in collecting resources or in tackling problems.'
Christchurch Primary School, Bradford-on-Avon (Good, October 2001)

‘One pupil said, ‘If it’s easy, it will be boring’, thus reflecting the school’s ethos and the collective drive for continuing improvement…’
Cannon Lane First School (Outstanding, September 2008)

‘Parents report favourably on the growing confidence of their children, and the development of skills that prepare students for the world of work is exemplary... Students’ enthusiasm for learning makes a major contribution... they work cooperatively with each other and achieve well.’
Park High School, Harrow (Outstanding, May 2009)

‘Pupils are willing to take risks in their learning... various groups in the school take very active roles in leadership, for example the Eco-squad and the Student Leaders.’
Wren Academy (Outstanding progress, March 2010)
3 External evaluations

Formal inspections are not the only source of external evaluation of the effects of BLP. Over the years, a number of schools, colleges, local authorities and 'education action zones' using the BLP framework have commissioned independent evaluations of the effectiveness of the approach. These have been extremely valuable to us, being both broadly reassuring and also very useful in helping us to develop the approach. To give a flavour of these evaluations, and the results they reported, we give summaries of five of them: the Bristol Education Action Zone, Solihull and Newport Local Authorities, Luton Sixth Form College, and St James School, Exeter. As you will see, several common messages and issues emerge.

Bristol Education Action Zone project (2005)

In 2003, several schools in Bristol Education Action Zone (BrEAZ) decided to adopt a BLP approach to raising pupils' attainment, attendance and attitude. Schools in BrEAZ had three times the national average of children on Free School Meals and high levels of unauthorised absence and of underachievement. The project ran from June 2003 to February 2005. Joint funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the DfES Innovations Fund allowed teachers to be trained in BLP, and also supported an independent evaluation of the project by Professor Joan Whitehead and colleagues at the University of the West of England (UWE). Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, they monitored perceptions of BLP by staff and students, factors affecting the success of implementation, and the effect of BLP on students' attendance, attitudes and achievement.

The most common reaction from classroom teachers was that BLP offered a congenial framework within which to bring together a range of approaches with which they were familiar—Emotional Literacy, Learning Styles, SEAL, Thinking Skills and so on. One said,

'It's put the icing on the cake. It's pulled all the strings together. It's not totally brand new but at the same time it's not old either. It's made it all clearer'.

The flexibility of the BLP framework was also attractive to many of the teachers. They appreciated the fact that they were encouraged to think about how to put it into practice and 'make it their own.' One of them summed it up like this:

'What I've learned from BLP is that it's not about having a strategy that you're going to use year in, year out. The whole point of BLP is that you evolve what is right for the children you are with...'

The effect of BLP on pupils' performance in test situations was noted by several teachers. Julian Swindale observed that BLP children were
significantly more resourceful and resilient under examination conditions than those who were not used to BLP.

‘The maths SATs paper this year had lots of reasoning. The class did brilliantly at those questions... even children who would not previously have attempted them. All the children who’ve been doing BLP attempted every question from all sorts of angles, even though they might not have got the right answer. The children were much freer, much more courageous. And if they don’t find a solution one way they’ll find another solution some other way’

Julian Swindale, Ashley Down Infant School, Bristol

And he further commented

‘I had a very able mathematician arrive in the class, but every time she saw a question she couldn’t do she said “I can’t do it; I’ve not been taught it in my last school,” and put a line through the question.’

Only a few of the schools involved were able to gather statistically analysable self-report questionnaire data from their pupils. However, the data that was gathered showed a general increase in all of the four R’s across the time course of the intervention, with reflectiveness (not surprisingly) showing the largest proportionate increase. Without properly constituted control groups, though, it is hard to show that this does not represent a general Hawthorne Effect rather than specific increase in self-reported learning power. There is a good deal of testimony from teacher interviews in the report (such as the quote above), however, to suggest that observable improvements have taken place in the intelligence and persistence with which pupils tackle problems, and the fluency with which they talk about their learning both to themselves and with each other.

St James School, Exeter (2006)

In September 2006, St James School in Exeter implemented a course called Learning for Life (L4L) for Year 7 students based closely on the BLP framework of capacities. During the second half of the following Spring Term, the school commissioned two researchers from the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education to evaluate the success of the programme, mainly through questionnaires and focus group interviews conducted with groups of students, staff and parents. Their overall conclusion was that

‘there is strong evidence that the lessons are developing students’ ability to learn and to reflect on that learning, and that their experience in L4L lessons is having a beneficial effect elsewhere in the curriculum and, for some, in their life outside school.’

Reflecting the lessons we have learned about leading the implementation of BLP, which we discussed in Chapter 8, the researchers noted that the
impact of the stand-alone course would have been significantly greater if ‘more members of staff had been included in the planning of L4L lessons to improve the general understanding of staff’ and if ‘other teachers reinforced the L4L vocabulary and learning approaches in their own subject areas’. We have consistently found that such stand-alone courses built on BLP principles can contribute to the effectiveness of a broader culture change programme, but cannot create that shift by themselves.

Newport (2006)

In Wales, Newport Council supported the development of BLP across the whole authority. A report to the Council in July 2006 notes:

‘Building Learning Power is an initiative that is having a positive effect in 38 schools in Newport. It helps pupils become better learners in and out of school and there is evidence that it is improving resilience and teamwork in classrooms. It helps all children, especially those who used to lose heart when ‘stuck’. BLP is an important new way of increasing pupil improvement and inclusion… The majority of the teachers who have taken part in the initiative so far have reported a significant change in pupils’ attitudes and approach to learning in a relatively short time. Classrooms have been transformed and children as young as Reception are starting to take ownership of their own learning…. Several teachers comment that the different thing about BLP is that it has an effect on absolutely all the children leading to a more positive working environment.’

Solihull (2008)

After two years of working with BLP, twelve schools—ten primaries and two secondaries—in Solihull were subject in 2008 to an independent evaluation commissioned by the local authority. Overall, the initiative had been well-received. In every school ‘it was clear that BLP engagement had made an observable difference to the learning environment, pupil confidence and attitudes towards learning’. Many of the schools said that ‘their end of Key Stage outcomes had shown improvement since they had engaged with BLP’, although hard evidence of a causal link was difficult to come by. The evaluation noted strong evidence for the following changes that were observable across schools:

• Pupils’ perseverance in the face of difficulty has improved markedly. They are more likely to see mistakes as a natural part of learning and not to worry if they get things wrong to start with. One secondary student remarked, ‘If learning is hard, that means it’s at your level’. A younger child said, ‘I used to cry when I couldn’t do my work. I don’t any more’.
• Pupils show greater interest in the process of learning, and in how their BLP capacities can help them in out-of-school activities, and—especially in secondary schools—in their lives after they leave school. One said ‘The 4 R’s will help us when we leave school’. Another said: ‘As we get older we’ll depend on learning to learn more’.

• Students show greater collaboration and have learned naturally to coach each other.

• The lower-achieving students particularly have seemed to benefit in terms of confidence, perseverance and their interest in ‘how to get better’.

• Classroom environments have changed to stimulate students’ resourcefulness and independence. Resources are more available and pupils encouraged to make use of them as needed.

• Staff conversation and planning has shown a shift from ‘teaching’ and ‘behaviour’ to a greater focus on pupils’ learning.

Overall messages

By and large, these evaluations speak for themselves. Though some are initially sceptical, teachers at all levels of education generally find the ideas behind BLP appealing, practical and effective. They see BLP not as a whole new way of doing things, but as an accessible and coherent framework that enables them to knit together a wide range of different initiatives. There is widespread agreement that talking to students about the way they learn, identifying the different ‘learning muscles’, and designing activities with these in mind, has a beneficial effect on their engagement, attitudes and attainment.

From four-year-olds to sixth-formers, and from high-achievers to those with identified learning difficulties, many pupils themselves clearly welcome the opportunity to focus on the process of learning, and to strengthen the habits of mind that enable them to learn more effectively. Pupils can become highly articulate about their own learning, and are able to give examples, from inside school and out, of how a greater awareness of their own learning helps them learn more successfully. Some of the learning muscles are more obviously relevant and accessible than others, however. And some of the comments hint at gender differences which, if they are substantiated by further research, will clearly help us to target BLP more effectively.

4 Action research projects

Over the roughly ten years of BLP’s life, we have been lucky enough to get support from several local authorities, including Cardiff and Oxfordshire, for around 250 teachers to carry out action research projects in their
classrooms and schools on many different aspects of the BLP framework. In addition, we have collected dozens of reports from teachers who have carried out BLP-type investigations for their masters' dissertations or BLP Foundation Courses, or who were simply keen to try out some new ideas in their own classrooms.

These teachers' willingness to help us test out our conjectures, and to develop practical tools and techniques to help pupils develop their learning-oriented habits of mind, have greatly enriched and strengthened the BLP framework. Such small-scale, classroom-based projects enable us to explore the fine grain of BLP in a way that the larger-scale evaluations which we have just described often do not. Many of the 'seeds' and 'tools' that now make up the practical resource base of BLP began life in the classrooms of teachers who, having 'got the BLP bug', started to invent and trial new ways of building learning power for themselves. We have found that teachers who want to build their pupils' love of learning also tend to be imaginative, inquisitive and experimental in their own lives as well. We think it is no coincidence that John Hattie's review of research, which we outline in Chapter 1, links 'teachers who are learners about their own teaching' with 'students who become their own teachers'.

We have used a good many of these action research reports to illustrate particular points in earlier parts of the book. Here we describe a few more.

**Cardiff (2001–2005)**

Over the course of four years, the Cardiff School Service funded and supported a total of 168 action research projects on BLP across all phases of education. Some of them gave rise to provenly successful tools for building the learning power of young children—such as Eleri Miles's now famous toy hamster Hattie. Hattie—introduced to the reception children at Caerau Infants as a 'powerful learner' in her own right—was also the guardian of a cupboard full of things the children might be able to make use of if they were stuck, or bored. Hattie helped a target group 'become more confident and independent, ' and they were also 'seen accessing toys independently... and working with other children with a new-found sense of self-worth and achievement.

Kevin Thomas's Year 6 pupils at Peter Lea Primary School benefited from direct tuition and conversation about their listening skills. Both independent observations of the children, and their self-report questionnaires, confirmed that, over the course of a few weeks, 'they have now created an atmosphere where their learning has become enhanced by their listening skills. The Headteacher, fellow teachers, supply teachers and myself have all noticed huge improvement in the children and the classroom climate. '

Lorraine Smith worked with her very passive Year 6 pupils to build up their 'questioning muscles'. After some modelling and discussion about different
types of question, the children in pairs had to prepare a presentation, and the rest of the class asked them questions about what they had presented. Lorraine rated their questions in terms of type and quality, and noted a significant improvement. Lorraine presented her findings to the rest of the staff, and as a result, 'all teachers are designing an action research project looking at enhancing students' questioning across the curriculum and across the Key Stages.'

**Oxfordshire**

In 2003–4, the Esmée Fairbairn Trust generously supported a project with Oxfordshire County Council called 'Playing for Life', in which some 70 early years teachers carried out action research investigations into how they could better support the development of the ‘4 R’s’ in young children. The settings varied from rural to urban and from centres for very young children with profound multiple learning difficulties to high-achieving primary schools. A variety of measuring tools were used to assess any change in the children, including the Positive Attitudes to Learning Scale (PALS) and the Child Involvement Scale from the Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project. The project was conceived and orchestrated by the Senior Adviser for Early Years, Julie Fisher, and overseen by two academics, Dr Alison Price from Oxford Brookes University and Dr Tony Eaude from Oxford University. The projects were written up and published by the National Primary Trust in 2006.7

A number of findings emerged. Giving children language like 'stickability' or 'using your learning muscles' was shown to be effective in enhancing their resilience and resourcefulness. Designing opportunities where there were very clear expectations about, for example, how long they would have to stick with their chosen activity, helped them, as one child put it, to 'strengthen my learning stamina.' Adult modelling of the 4 R’s also seemed to rub off on the children’s own attitudes to learning. As a result of one study, Denise Walters and Laura Hockling at John Hampden Primary School in Thame concluded,

'We must model resilience to our children. We need to think about how we react when things go wrong, and show elements of frustration and then triumph as we work through how to make it right.'

The opportunity to 'play' with more difficult materials like numbers and sums, before being taught how to 'do them right', resulted in children becoming more confident, resilient and imaginative mathematicians, according to Amanda Smith of Appleton Primary School. She changed her teaching to allow the Year 1 children extended periods of time to play with activities of their own choosing. Assessing the children after a half term of this new way of working, she found that 'all six of the target children
showed increases in the area of concentration, curiosity and perseverance. Parents reported children volunteering to do number work and additions at home, and also commented on their children 'who had been timid but now talked about, enjoyed, and wanted to do maths at home.' One of Amanda’s main findings was that

'The children exceeded expectations by doing [choosing for themselves] work that would not have been set for this age group.'

And giving children more opportunities to plan and manage their own learning—provided there was enough adult support to ensure that things turned out encouragingly in the end—increased the children’s perseverance and resourcefulness. Karen Braund, a Year 1 teacher at Barley Hill Primary School, also in Thame, for example, concluded:

'The children have become more able to be independent learners. They are able to stick at a task. I have seen them using skills that they have practised and transfer them to other areas. In the ‘writing factory’ they will [now] often come back to something that they have done before, either to finish it or to refine it in some way. The children are more confident. They will talk about their own learning and they are more able to help each other. They encourage each other and suggest improvements...'

Some of the project also highlighted adult behaviour that seemed not to enhance the 4 R’s. Pat Bolton and Sue Vermes at Headington Nursery School, for example, observed that

'The least successful interventions were when adults involved themselves uninvited by trying to talk with children who were already demonstrating high involvement levels.'

While Deborah Johnson at Aston and Cote C of E Primary School discovered that 'intervention in the form of “Why don’t you try this?” seems to stop the children thinking and imagining [for themselves].' In trying to be helpful, teachers can unintentionally disrupt children's existing powers of resilience and resourcefulness. BLP teachers often ask themselves, 'What's the least I can do to get this child's learning going again?' rather than ‘How can I use this as an opportunity to teach them something I want them to know?'

**Individual teacher research projects**

To conclude these illustrations of the kinds of enquiries that BLP teachers carry out, and to balance the predominance of examples from primary schools in the two local authority projects, here are a couple of examples that illustrate how BLP ideas are being explored in different areas of the secondary school curriculum. Many projects that might have appeared in this section have already been described earlier in the book.
Malcolm Lay is a highly-qualified football coach—Head Coach of the Milton Keynes Dons Football Academy for 15/16-year-olds—who teaches PE and sports at Denbigh School. He focused on a Year 12 group from the Football Academy programme who were aiming to get a BTEC Diploma in Sport. Malcolm homed in on the learning muscles of ‘attentive noticing’, ‘reasoning’, ‘imitating’ and ‘distilling’, to see if his students could boost their learning by watching and discussing video footage of their own training sessions and practice games. He was able to assess their progress by comparing the school’s target grades for each student with the current ‘working at’ levels which they were displaying. Working with these older, but not necessarily academically oriented, students within the BLP framework, Malcolm found that most of the students far exceeded their target grades, with ‘much of the work that was produced being at a good Level 3 standard’. Three students with poor GCSE grades, who were predicted to gain Merit at BTEC, were found to be working at Distinction level. Overall, Malcolm concludes his report:

‘The most valuable part of the process [of the research] was witnessing learners develop their personal skills and qualities. As well as becoming increasingly adaptable, resourceful and resilient, the whole group were noticeably more self-confident in communicating their findings [in presentations].’

Drama at Park High

Philippa Long teaches Drama at Park High School in Harrow. Her results are good, but quite a high proportion of her Year 8 students—especially those of Asian origin—have imbibed the strong belief that school is mainly about getting good grades in high-status subjects, and ‘don’t see the point’ of drama. Philippa wondered whether this attitude would be affected if she made the BLP learning capacities more explicit and visible in her lessons. For example, she had them reflect on the learning capacities which they had been using in each lesson, and then discuss where, in out-of-school life, these skills would be of use. She monitored the students’ achievement levels, and gave them an attitude questionnaire before and after her trial period (lasting half a term). She did the same with a control class who did not have the same emphasis on BLP, but who were otherwise taught in the same way.

To her satisfaction, the BLP group showed significantly greater engagement with and valuing of Drama at the end of the half-term. But more to her surprise, they also made twice as much progress in terms of their achievement. 78% of the BLP group progressed by a least two sub-levels, whereas in the control group only 38% made the same degree of progress. Philippa’s conclusion?
‘Although this has been a relatively short-term study... clear differences can be seen between the attitudes of students at the start and the end of the Scheme. The inclusion and explicit use of BLP within Drama lessons has led to an increased interest on the part of the students, a greater respect and recognition for the subject in terms of skill development, and has had a real and noticeable effect on assessment grades.’

5 Students’ perceptions

In the panel overleaf we show just a small selection of student comments that have been collected over the years.

6 Teachers’ and other people’s perceptions

Many of our sources of evidence—the Ofsted reports, the independent evaluations, and the action research studies—have made use of the impressions and perceptions of school teachers and leaders, and the students themselves. As part of our own commissioned evaluation, carried out by Dr Ian Millward, we also interviewed a large number of people about their impressions and experiences of BLP. Here we present a small sample of these impressions. They echo very strongly the perceptions that have emerged from the other data sources.

As BLP is a process of long-term culture change, many of our teachers were cautious about drawing conclusions about impact on their results. For many of them, it was simply ‘too early to tell’. However, they are unequivocal in their view that BLP has had a positive impact on various aspects of students’ attitudes and behaviour in school. The leadership team at Bushfield School in Milton Keynes, for example, noted a variety of shifts in the ways their children engage with learning.

‘Lesson observations have recorded impact on learning, engagement and behaviour. For example, the way children learn together has been transformed. Real collaboration now takes place and children are increasingly articulate about what collaboration involves, and aware of the different roles they and their peers can take in groups. They can—and spontaneously do—reflect upon their group’s effectiveness with increasing insight, and, as a result, stay more focused upon the task and are better at resolving conflict for themselves.

‘Their concentration has measurably improved. (Children self-assess regularly on their ability to stay focused, and this data is collated over the whole-school.) One day I (the headteacher) walked into a Year 3 classroom. The room was absolutely silent, except for some gentle background music. The children were engrossed in writing
Students’ perceptions

(Teacher: How do you learn best?) ‘We learn from our brothers and we learn from our mistakes and we learn from each other.’

(Sara, 6)

‘If something’s hard you don’t want to say ‘Oh this is hard, this is hard, I’ll just skip this.’ You try because the best thing is, if you don’t try what’s the point? Because when you grow up you might come to some answer you’ll still not know, so you can’t skip it then.’

(Daneisha, 6)

‘Before I was very independent, and much preferred working on my own. But now I’ve discovered the benefits of working with others as well. It’s made me more of an all-rounder.’

(Hannah, 9)

‘In football, you have to use your empathy muscles. It makes you more aware of other people, and makes you a better team player. And BLP has helped me stop and think what I’m going to do with the ball. I’m more tactical.’

(Alex, 10)

‘It doesn’t matter what my friend has done or got right, my effort is what is important.’

(Emma, 6)

‘BLP is quite hard because you have to think about yourself. But it’s not impossible—you really can change your habits!’

(Ellie, 8)

‘BLP has helped me be a better learner at home. Like if you’ve been focusing on one of the learning muscles in school, when I go home I think, ‘How could I use that here?’ When I go to swimming club, I think, maybe I could try harder, or ask more questions.’

(Madeleine, 12)

‘I am a lot more resilient when working in my Big Write now—I used to give up quite easily, but now I really stick at it.’

(Ali, 8)

‘BLP has helped me to see that when things change, it is mostly really interesting! I feel a lot more enthusiastic about going up to secondary school than I think I would have before.’

(Emma, 11)

‘I find it easier to describe how things work—BLP has made my mind clearer.’

(Oscar, 10)

‘In my old school they just gave you harder and harder worksheets. But here they really stretch you to learn in different ways. You get lots of encouragement, so you learn to keep going and ‘dig deep’ when things get difficult. Now I always like to see if I can take things one step further.’

(Tom, 15)
independently and intently. No one stirred or even turned to look as I walked in, so I said “Hello, you all look busy. What are you doing?” One child turned slowly from his writing and said, most politely, “We are being absorbed, Miss Curtis, and you are being a distraction”!

‘We have also noticed, in our conversations with children, that they are increasingly making links between their learning inside school and their learning outside.’

Several of our school leaders commented on the fact that, though the gains in pupils’ confidence and sophistication as learners are hugely valuable, the journey is not without its difficulties. The headteacher of St Mary’s Primary School in Swanley, Kent, for example, commented that, because approaches like BLP are not yet mainstream, it can take a degree of courage to adopt them wholeheartedly. She said:

‘Although Ofsted recognise its [BLP’s] value, it doesn’t yet have the Secretary of State’s seal of approval which, in my view, has made the last two years sometimes feel a bit risky. But we are fully sold on the big picture of BLP—learning should be a preparation for the challenges and opportunities of life—and so much of it isn’t! BLP changes attitudes and has the potential to change lives. It empowers staff and pupils alike. It enthuses every professional who sees it ‘live’.

Again, the headteacher at Bushfield School emphasised the fact that BLP is asking teachers to change their habits, and this takes time and dedication. She said,

‘BLP isn’t quick or easy—it takes resilience! Teachers have to unlearn some of their old habits, and take time to consolidate new ones. BLP is actually as much a learning journey—one of individual and collective self-discovery—for teachers as it is for students.’

She also pointed out a hazard with BLP that other schools should be ready for: once the pupils begin to discover and develop their learning power, and their ability to plan and manage their own learning, it can be impossible to go back.

‘We have found that pupils, once they get a taste for BLP, become more demanding of quality learning experiences which really stretch them, and in which they have a say.’

Other schools, both primary and secondary, have noted the same hunger amongst the majority of students to take charge of their learning, and to take on more and more demanding challenges.

Gordon Hamilton, the headteacher of Mosborough Primary School in Sheffield, commented on the particular value of BLP for children who are starting from a low level of self-confidence as learners. In his words,
'We have found that BLP encompasses all areas of learning—academic, practical and social. We really do feel that “The 4 R’s” can equip our children for life. Especially, children who regard themselves as poor learners can be helped to realise they are good at learning in other ways, which improves their confidence to “have a go” at things they would naturally shy away from.

But what about secondary schools—especially those that are full of bright, articulate, high-achieving young people? Do they find any benefit of BLP, or do they agree with Gordon Hamilton, that its main value is to the lower-ability pupils? As the attainment graphs at the beginning of this chapter showed, such schools may have little room to show any improvement in their results. At Dr Challoner’s Grammar School, for example, close to 100% of students gain five good GCSEs including English and Maths. So—confident that BLP has not jeopardised their levels of attainment—they must be looking for other kinds of benefits. This is how the headteacher puts it:

‘As a high performing specialist school and a selective boys’ grammar, the impact of BLP on results will be marginal and extremely difficult to measure with any certainty. However, we have seen a real impact of BLP on the ‘qualitative’ nature of our output, such as Year 13 UCAS personal statements, students’ own reflections on their learning, and the involvement of students in key decision making in the school. Boys’ confidence as learners has improved, especially in the younger year groups, as has the ability to discuss and reflect upon their learning and identify their own areas for development.’

The head of another high-achieving school, Wren Academy, puts it slightly differently. He sees the twin outcomes of good results on the one hand, and growing self-awareness and maturity on the other, not as separate and parallel, but as closely intertwined. He said:

‘BLP is working. Ofsted judge the academic progress made by our students to be greater than that of students in like schools. Our students are achieving very highly and BLP has been a central part of their experience from the beginning. There is substantial evidence, from Ofsted and other visitors, that our students are exceptionally articulate and confident learners. They have a maturity and an understanding of their learning that is quite unusual. They’re really quite exceptional. And BLP is largely to thank for that.’

Some schools have also noticed improvements in students’ general behaviour since they began their BLP journey. As always, it is risky to conclude a causal relationship, but there are some grounds to suspect that students who feel more confident and capable learners might be less
inclined to drift off task or 'muck about' when they face difficulty. Landau Forte College in Derby, for example, noted that:

'Behaviour has improved. Referrals to our Learning Support Centre are significantly down, freeing up time for LSAs to be in learning sessions.'

Other secondary leaders commented on the beneficial effects of BLP on their staff, and the way they learn and plan together, as much as the ultimate benefit to students.

'Overall impact of BLP in our school:
- greater communication between teachers
- better cooperation and learning through peer observation (with less fear of peer observation)
- improved lesson planning sheet, emphasising the learning 'stretch' that students will experience
- improved learning experience in the classroom'

Dr Paul Hayman, headteacher, Westcliff High School for Girls

Overall, our schools have found that any initial scepticism on parents' part usually gives way to support and enthusiasm. In a focus group at Bransgore C of E Primary School, parents talked about the differences they had noticed in their children since joining the school. One said,

'Mollie lacked confidence in herself at her old school, but here she has become so much more happy and enthusiastic. She'll try things now that she wouldn’t have dared to before.'

Another said,

'Here, there is a real focus on empowering the kids. They learn to handle degrees of freedom and responsibility that I would not have thought possible. They learn to enjoy stretching themselves, and they grow in their confidence and maturity—you can just see it.'

And again, the same kinds of development are also being observed, and valued, at Dr Challoner's. Their review stated that,

'Parental reaction, through information evenings, has been extremely positive, as has that of governors and other visitors to the school. Many are intrigued and enjoy visiting the school to see the ways in which the BLP message is communicated.'

The perceptions, small-scale enquiries, larger evaluations and Ofsted reports quoted above are drawn from across the ten years we have been working with schools. The beneficial and sometimes surprising results which they show are all due to the commitment, passion and interest of headteachers and teachers who are working to make the big ambition of BLP work.
Chapter 12

Taking stock and moving on

In this chapter we explore:

• our reflections on the BLP journey
• why BLP works
• the challenges ahead
In this final chapter we would like to offer some reflections on our journey with Building Learning Power so far, and a few thoughts about what the next steps might be.

We think we can say—and we hope, having got this far, you will agree with us—that BLP has been quite a success. Teachers and school leaders in a wide range of schools and colleges have found it to be practical and helpful in pursuing their own educational visions and values. It works in nurseries, primary and secondary schools, and in at least some sixth form and further education colleges. It seems to work with boys and girls, and with low, average and high-achieving pupils. It works in areas of considerable deprivation and in the ‘leafy suburbs’. It works in Milton Keynes, Cardiff and the Isle of Man. And it works in Argentina and Chile, Australia and New Zealand, Thailand and Malaysia, and Abu Dhabi and Dubai. We have testimony from thousands of teachers in hundreds of schools that BLP has evolved into a set of ideas and practices that genuinely help them to provide what they consider to be the heart of twenty-first century education.

But what is it about BLP, exactly, that has caught their attention—where other, superficially similar approaches, have not? What have we learned, from thousands of hours in schools, running workshops, and listening to teachers and their students, about what twenty-first century education can and should be, and how we can take practical steps—in the midst of all the real pressures and constraints—to move from ‘here’ to ‘there’?

The elements of BLP: why it works

BLP tries to be clear and precise in its aims. It has a well-articulated vision of education as a preparation for living in a turbulent world, where the major challenges are those of dealing with high levels of uncertainty, complexity, opportunity and responsibility. With our cultural emphases on the virtues of ‘social mobility’ and ‘aspiration’, with the choices and hazards afforded by digital technologies, with a daily plethora of conflicting images about how to live and what to value, and with the decline of traditional sources of stability and guidance: with all of this to cope with, young people need to be helped to learn how to think, imagine, persist, evaluate and collaborate. Where some other approaches are more broad and ambitious in the virtues they espouse, BLP focuses on the life skills of learning. We think that is the bit of the jigsaw puzzle that it is a school’s business to concentrate on. Not everyone agrees with us, but many do; and at least we are clear about our goals.

But BLP is also about helping schools do what they are more used to doing: helping young people to gather information, understand concepts and do as well as possible in examinations. The trouble with more idealistic initiatives that don’t address the ‘standards agenda’ is that they tend to be marginal.
They live *alongside* the mainstream concerns, either within a school, or as a separate ‘alternative’ school; they tend not to impact on the bulk of lessons, which continue to be seen as more ‘important’ or ‘high status’. With its BOTH / AND philosophy, BLP tries to work new priorities into the mainstream thinking and functioning of a school. We believe that, unless that happens, initiatives about ‘key competencies’, ‘character capabilities’ or ‘wider skills’ are doomed to remain peripheral and ephemeral.

BLP tries to couch its messages in language that is congenial, accessible and appealing to students, parents and teachers. But we believe that the language is very important, and we have tried to make our vocabulary more vernacular, without losing its precision or rigour. Like us, some schools and local authorities have had to learn to be ‘bilingual’, using fancier or more formal language to persuade policy-makers of the seriousness and validity of the BLP approach, but translating that into a more accessible set of terms when talking to those on the ground whose understanding and support is crucial if the approach is going to take root. We have found that we are more likely to touch people’s hearts and values, and thus get their buy-in, as well as their rational understanding, if we try to keep the language more straightforward. Some other people seem to think that you won’t be taken seriously unless your publications look dull and your speech sounds pompous, but that is not our experience.

This brings us to another virtue of BLP: it is voluntary. It is not an ‘initiative’ that has been taken up by administrators and legislators and mandated. We mostly talk directly to schools—unless we find, as we sometimes do, an especially sympathetic local authority—because they can choose, in the light of their own values and priorities, whether BLP is for them. Schools decide for themselves whether they are going to buy the BLP books or go on some of the BLP courses, and we think that the fact that this puts them in the driving seat is a good thing. It is much harder to get the climate of curiosity and experimentation in a school—which is vital if deep change is to happen—if the school does not like and own the direction in which change is taking them. The history of educational innovation is littered with the withered remains of initiatives that were scattered abroad from ‘on high’, but which never took root.

Many schools are attracted to BLP’s blend of values, science and practicality—heart, head and hands, if you like. They respond to the passion and commitment of BLP, but also appreciate the hard-headed underpinnings from the learning sciences. Assuming we have read the research right, teachers and schools feel that BLP is underpinned by good, up-to-date thinking about the young mind, what it is capable of, and how it changes and develops. The thinking of the giants on whose shoulders BLP stands is of real interest to many schools, and they find that taking an
interest in this research, and discussing its implications within the school, is a natural adjunct to the messages of BLP itself.

We think that one of BLP’s attractions is the balance between the well-developed tools that we can offer schools, for designing and planning their own evolution, and the flexible and critical attitude which we encourage them to have towards those tools. We find that schools like to have their imaginations fired by practical illustrations and suggestions, and are grateful for the framework of the ‘learning muscles’, for example, that helps them think more clearly about the habits of mind they want their students to develop. But, once they have got their heads around the approach, they really welcome the encouragement to customise and adapt the tools and frameworks to their own situations. They like being treated as partners, with useful things to contribute, rather than as being simply told what to do. They have, many of them, had too much of that. So, more and more, we offer our experience to schools in ‘could-be’ rather than ‘is’ language. The risk is that schools may, inadvertently, use their discretion to introduce a ‘lethal mutation’—a change that seems innocuous but is actually contrary to the spirit of BLP—and it does happen. But we think this risk is preferable to the complementary risk of trying to exercise too tight a control.

Schools often respond warmly to BLP’s attempt to be comprehensive in its approach to learning, finding it a helpful umbrella under which they can gather a host of previously disparate initiatives such as SEAL, or the personal learning and thinking skills. It helps them develop a more coherent and sustainable model of their curriculum that integrates a range of different values and modifications. Instead of seeing the social and emotional aspects of learning as ‘yet more things to be fitted in’, BLP helps to weave such considerations into the daily life of lessons. When things are hived off or bolted on, their impact tends to be limited. The fact that BLP aims to be deep, coherent and sustained appeals to schools and teachers who have become fed up with approaches that they have come to see as piecemeal and superficial. And this reminds us of the point that many school leaders impressed on us about the importance of their readiness for something like BLP when they first met it. Consciously or unconsciously, they were already looking to go deeper. This means, inevitably, that BLP is not for everyone. Some schools, deep down, still only want a more efficient way of getting ‘good results’, or just like to collect badges and logos that they can put on their notepaper and home pages: these quickly tend to find BLP ‘too hard’, and move on. However, BLP is there for schools when they are ready to take widening their ambitions seriously, and make that jump into the twenty-first century.

Part of that deepening brings schools to the realisation that what is needed is not just a matter of changing teaching technique, or tinkering with the
timetable, but rather a change in culture at the level of the whole school, and habit change by everyone who works there. Part of what makes BLP appealing to schools who have reached this point is that it talks in those terms. Out of our years of working with schools, we have distilled useful things to say, not just about teaching methods, but about the way every aspect of a school can be adjusted to support those processes of habit and culture change. Small, concrete things like displaying more of pupils' work-in-progress, talking more about learning and less about work, re-thinking the nature of professional development and the role of learning assistants. Talking about all these facets of the life of a school (and many more) gives teachers and school leaders a host of ideas to try out that they might not have thought of on their own. We are able to tie many little adjustments, of many different kinds, into an overall vision of where a school is going, and how it is going to get there. And schools that are ready for the culture change approach are keen to collect these seeds of ideas, and go back and re-grow them in their own soil.

Over the years, BLP has become something of a seed merchant, harvesting a broad range of examples and ideas from the innovating schools we work with, and helping to package and broadcast them more widely. Samples of these seeds have been scattered throughout this book, as you will have found. Many more can be found in our publications and online resources.

The final element of BLP that we should mention is the one that may provide our growth-point for the future. It is the attempt to connect what happens in school with the wider world in which young people live, and in which they will have to make their way as adults. About half will go on to college or university; about half will not. Some will make good use of the scholarly habits which their education cultivated in their working lives; a good many will benefit from their skill and pleasure in reading, their ability to write in different ways, and their real-world numeracy—but the niceties of essay-writing and equation-solving may not be of much use.

Whatever their paths in life, however, their habits of determination, concentration, imagination and collaboration will certainly be of use. It is the job of twenty-first century schools not just to build those habits in the context of school, but to make sure they are transferred outside the school gates and used in the worlds of family, work and leisure. This means recruiting the interest of parents and employers in building learning power. We began to show how these relationships can be fostered in Chapter 10. But there is more researching and experimenting to do if we are to be sure that the skills of learning translate into real-life dispositions and attitudes. The job of building Building Learning Power continues. We would be very pleased if you were to join us in this most vital of explorations.