

Building the habits of... Effective Contributors



Curriculum for Excellence: the educational balancing trick

Scottish schools are more fortunate than many others in having, in CfE, a curriculum that pays balanced attention both to the higher purposes of educating young people for their future lives, and to the more obvious classroom business of curriculum areas with knowledge and specific skills to be inculcated and acquired.

But keeping the balance is always challenging. The ever-present pressure of the day-to-day, plus eventual qualifications, can squeeze out attention to the longer-term, higher-order learning and dispositions.

Yet the two sides can work synergistically instead of competitively, in concert rather than in conflict ...

CfE says that Effective Contributors are:

- an enterprising attitude
- resilience
- self-reliance

and that they can:

- communicate in different ways and different settings
- work in partnerships and in teams
- take the initiative and lead
- apply critical thinking in new contexts
- create and develop
- solve problems



Uniting the models of CfE and Building Learning Power All powerful learners cultivate a set of key learning characteristics. Effective Contributors, as described by the CfE, would deploy a subset of these characteristics, the most important of which are highlighted in the diagram below.

Collaboration: Working constructively with others to seek compromise and build consensus. Able to adopt different roles within teams.

Empathy: Paying heed and accommodating others' points of view. Putting themselves in other peoples' shoes

Listening: Listening sensitively, critically, and attentively to draw key information and read between the lines

Imitation

Reasoning

Imagining

Making links

Questioning

Capitalising: Drawing on a full range of resources from the wider world – people, books, the internet, past experience, future opportunities etc.

Noticing

Absorption

Managing distractions

Perseverance: Being determined to keep going, channelling the energy of frustration, and knowing that learning is often a slow and uncertain process

Interdependence

Distilling

Revising

Planning

Meta-learning: Knowing yourself as a learner, able to talk about and reflect on the learning process

Learning behaviours to build powerful Effective Contributors

Effective Contributors

This resource sketches an approach that schools and teachers could use to deliver the CfE promise of helping young people to become Confident Individuals .

We see 'Effective Contributors' as socially aware, skilled team players with the ability to lead and manage others through challenges..

There is a lot of learning for a young person to get through in their school career — a powerful learner can expect to learn more, faster, and more thoroughly. Which, by the way, should help hugely with the 'outcomes' side of the curriculum balance.

The BLP approach



There are two main parts to the approach:

A a model of a learner and learning, in terms of a set of characteristics that work together to make a person a highly capable learner; we use 'learning power' to describe the effect. (Several of these characteristics appear in this card.)

B a view of the kind of pedagogy that will nurture and strengthen the learning characteristics in young people.

These are bound together by the fundamental idea that '**learning is learnable**', and by explicit, detailed discussion of how learning works, supported by a rich repertoire of words and action.

The architecture of

Classroom cultures

Relating – How you relate to your students; gradually sharing more of the responsibility for learning with them

- **Surface the learning process**
 - » Train the tricky bits. Talk about it, nudge it along
- **Expect students to access resources independently**
 - » Ensure students have to anticipate and find the resources they need to solve problems
- **Generate team commitment**
 - » Show that teams rely on diverse contributions from individuals who are all pulling together towards common goals

A shift in relationships



Talking – How you talk about learning; the sort of language content and style you use to enhance and explain learning

- **Conflict resolution**
 - » Ensure group work encourages discussion and debate, conflict resolution and consensus building
- **Persuasive language**
 - » Build the vocabulary of influence and suggestion
- **Personal contribution**
 - » Enable students to talk about effective collaborative strategies and evaluate their personal contribution to group tasks

A shift in learning language



Constructing – How you construct learning activities; the tasks and classroom routines you use to build positive learning habits

- **Strengthen perseverance**
 - » Don't provide ready solutions; encourage teams to stick with challenges when immediate outcomes aren't forthcoming.
- **Move teams around**
 - » Don't let teams grow stale; require students to work in different ways with different people; value all constructive contributions.
- **Offer enquiry-based challenges**
 - » Present topics as a series of questions to be explored

A shift in how learning is constructed

Celebrating – What you celebrate about learning; what you prize, recognise, display; the outward signs of beliefs about learning

- **Value openness and honesty**
 - » Make sure students feel free to talk about how they think and feel
- **Develop a teamwork code of practice**
 - » Display and use a teamwork code of practice which you have developed and agreed with your students
- **Challenge the relevance of arguments and opinions**
 - » Require sound and speculative reasoning to substantiate ideas and attitudes
- **Prize effort**
 - » Ensure students understand what 'making an effort' means in practice.

A shift in what is celebrated and valued

Making the shift

Students will first need to embrace the language of learning and be offered opportunities that enable them to become conscious of using their learning behaviours. Teachers need first to gradually shift the culture of the classroom and devolve more responsibility for learning to students. Later they take a more forensic approach to designing classroom activities using the learning behaviours to deepen engagement and understanding.

For many teachers this shift is likely to call for changes in practice. Take it steady! Think about what you might...

Stop

Over-scaffolding learning

Start

Introducing thorny subjects to discuss a range of attitudes and ideas

Start slowly

Combining groups of students who wouldn't normally work together

Experiment with

Training teamwork skills

Effective Contributors



Starters – to prepare the way for team learning. For example:

Think Pair Share

This is a well-known strategy for ensuring that students build up to learning in a team. It is the pair bit that is important – it gives students the chance to try out their ideas on a trusted friend before going public.

One way of using this might be to:

Pose a question or problem, give students 1 minute to think individually about their own personal response; give 2 minutes in pairs to compare their first reactions with a partner; give fours 3 minutes to share their views in a group.

Why do it? To prepare students to contribute and amend their ideas to the group.

Thinking routines – to embed learning behaviours. For example:

What is happening here? What makes you say that?

The first question in this routine is flexible: it is useful when looking at objects such as works of art or historical artefacts, but it can also be used to explore a poem, make scientific observations and hypotheses, or investigate more conceptual ideas (i.e., democracy). The first question invites students to describe what they notice, see or know, but it is the supplementary question (What makes you say that?) that requires them to build explanations. It promotes evidence-based reasoning.

Why do it? To help students to go beyond saying what they think and begin to explain and justify their thinking – the beginnings of reasoning.

Activities – to stimulate use of the learning habits. For example:

Ideas factory

Invite students to become famous inventors who are going to come up with a new gadget to help other people. It must be useful and commercially viable. Use mindmaps to show the needs of their potential customers and gadgets that could be invented to meet the needs. What materials would they need to make it? Who do they know with the skills to help? Where might they find out relevant information? Success criteria for the task should focus on the way groups have thought about using resources rather than on the finished gadget.

Activities – to stimulate use of the learning habits. For example:

Use display to record key learning strategies

Set aside an area of display where students are asked to share any strategies or 'top tips' that they have found particularly helpful in their own learning. For those offering the 'top tip' it is a distilling activity, but the resulting gallery of 'top tips' invites students to adopt the successful strategies of others.

Teacher Talk – to nudge learning habits and open possibilities. For example:

- “What are you expecting to achieve?”
- “What will it **look like** when you have done it?”
- “Who is going to be **responsible** for how the team gets on?”
- “How are you looking at things **differently** now?”
- “What’s the best **decision-making** method here?”
- “This might need a **rethink**”
- “Some people seem to be sitting back and letting others do the work. How can you **encourage everyone** to take part?”

Using ‘Could be’ language rather than ‘Is’ language leaves open the possibility that things might not be cut-and-dried, that other avenues might need to be explored. It immediately invites students to be more thoughtful, critical, or imaginative about what they are studying.

How could you use more ‘could be’ language in your classroom ?

Effective Contributors are likely to:

Enjoy working with other people

Share ideas generously

Suggest changes to how teams work

Add ideas to build on previous ones

Know when to compromise and when to stick with their ideas

Communicate with clarity to a range of audiences

Adopt various roles when working in a group

Produce convincing explanations

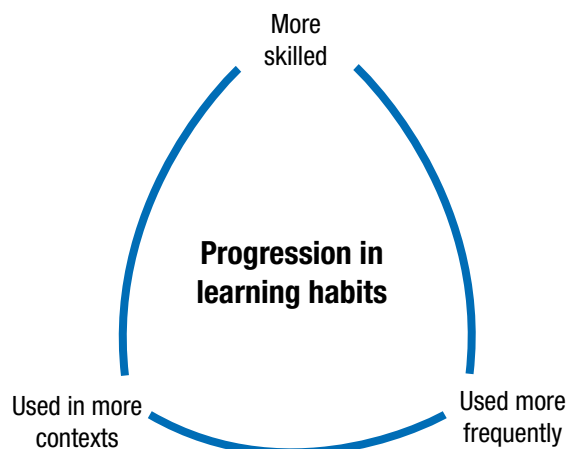
Work effectively with others and on their own

Growing learning behaviours

From behaviours to habits

If the big ambition of the Curriculum for Excellence is to work, the learning qualities suggested have to become more than 'can-do' skills; they have to become habitual tendencies that students adopt in learning. The point is to grow and develop these behaviours to become dispositions or habits. Thus over time, students get better at persevering, questioning, reasoning, changing their ideas and so forth. They use these behaviours more frequently and in a wider range of contexts. They become powerful Successful Learners not just in school but for a lifetime of learning and employment. Curriculum delivery becomes the how of Scotland's 'Developing the Young Workforce'.

Three aspects of progress in building learning habits



I can't	Tell me	I'll try	I see why	I make sure	I am
Few social strategies. At best, cooperative rather than collaborative		Collaboration			Team player. Adopts many different group roles. Valued team member
Unaware of the impact of what they say on others		Empathy			Communicates effectively in a wide range of contexts. Considers what to say before saying it. Alert to audience reactions to what they say
Talks rather than listens. Listens for own ends. Makes early judgements on partial information		Listening			Picks up messages 'between the lines', responds empathetically
Isolated and inward looking. Sees little point of consulting others		Interdependence			Has a network of positive learning relationships with a range of people
No coping strategies. Lacks self-belief. Daunted by difficulty		Perseverance			Relishes challenge. Has a range of strategies to ensure success
Unaware of how others do things. Likes to stick with familiar tools		Capitalising			Exploits every possible opportunity. Creates and improvises. Finds new ways of doing things

This diagram outlines possible starts and ends of the growth of an Effective Contributor. From the unskilled, untrained learner on the left to the learning-powered learner on the right lies a progression that can be mapped. The titles across the top identify the progressive phases of skill and attitude towards their learning which students need to be guided through.



Find out more:

You can find out more about how the learning habits of Building Learning Power could help with growing Responsible Citizens (as well as Confident Individuals, Successful Individuals and Effective Contributors) at blp.how/4caps. That also has an expanded on-line version of this card, plus three more for the other CfE capacities (all free of charge).

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Building Learning Power

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