

building the habit of...

Collaborating



The New Challenge

Ofsted now recognises the need for schools to:

- provide their own compelling data of a trajectory of improvement
- successfully promote and support children's 'self confidence, self awareness and understanding how to be a successful learner'.

This together with the current interest in character led education all point to the opportunity for schools to cultivate the habits and attitudes that underpin success and thereby build students' learning characters.

About Learning Habits and Character

Learning habits are the routine ways in which we think and act when faced with life's experiences and challenges. They are second nature to us. Some habits make us very productive and effective; others cause us to learn in constrained and limited ways. Habits are indeed part of our character.

We acquire habits through use: ways of behaving become habituated. If we have a well formed **Collaborating** habit, we will have a tendency to use it in all learning experiences. The more we experience the value of a particular habit, the more we will tend to use it throughout our lives.

Like it or not, teachers do help to form a learning character. The ways in which young people perform and behave are influenced by the way teachers orchestrate and guide learning. Deliberately fostering an effective learning character in students is a renewed common purpose for education, shared between students and teachers, parents and society more generally.

A well formed **Collaborating** habit involves being **ready, willing, and able** to:

Work effectively with others towards common goals, acting flexibly in response to circumstances.

Seek to understand what others are saying; sharing, challenging, supporting and building on ideas.

Hold and express opinions coherently, compromising and adapting when appropriate.

Adopt different roles and responsibilities in pursuit of agreed goals and the well-being of the team.

Act pro-actively and responsibly; exercise initiative, see opportunities, and persevere in the face of difficulties.

“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.”
– Michael Jordan

Young people with the habit are likely to:

Set worthwhile and realistic team goals

Enjoy working with others

Be self-aware

Put the needs of the group above their own

Listen actively

Ask open-ended questions

Borrow and imitate ways of doing things

Be inclusive

Be generous and open-minded

Monitor and evaluate team progress

Manage conflict and controversy effectively

Quick Wins

- » Use displays to identify and support effective group-work habits.
- » Set open challenges in preference to prescribed activities.

Pairs and groupwork

- » Start lessons with kinaesthetic, visual or aural challenges and ask students in pairs to consider 'What are we noticing?', 'What questions are we asking ourselves?'
- » Invite pairs to engage with tasks before starting a whole class activity.
- » Use peer reflection and assessment.
- » Let pairs teach themselves how to juggle, spin plates, use a diabolo, etc. (see www.businessballs.com).

Whole-class time

Develop student discussion leaders

Adopt a fresh approach to classroom discussion through *leaderless discussion*:

- » Arrange the seating so that all students can see each other.
- » Raise a topic for discussion and ask students to pose a driving question, supplemented by 'What makes me ask this?'
- » Start with one willing student's question.
- » Invite others to respond and observe the following conventions:
 - Restate and supplement the question
 - Express a point of view with justifications
 - Invite responses
 - Those who wish to respond put up their hands and are nominated by the previous speaker.
- » The process continues without teacher intervention.

This is a useful 'grow your own' collaboration exercise.

Forming the habit

activities to develop Collaborating

Role-play a planning meeting

- Present proposals for converting a local pub into a Tesco convenience store.
- Students, in pairs, develop role positions to represent: residents, local shopkeepers, town councillors, young people, senior citizens, Tesco representatives, etc.
- Link the roles to the collaborative habits (overleaf).
- Conduct a public meeting in role, chaired by one of the class. Engage in role yourself.
- After 30-minute meeting, students in groups of four distil the main arguments
- Complete paired evaluation.

Research and presentation teams

- Show a provocative video clip on a topic, e.g. GM foods.
- Students distil what they know, questions they need to have answered, using Post-it notes.
- Gallery these points for whole-class discussion.
- Divide the class into groups of four to research the arguments for and against.
- Introduce groups to the roles they will need to fulfil. Require group planning and role distribution. Make resources available, suggest varied presentation methods and set time limits.
- After groups have engaged for 15 minutes, say, encourage them to glean from other groups. Encourage revisions and modifications.
- Finally have each group present, and be assessed for outcomes and process.

See overleaf for some related assessment ideas.

Marble Run

- Provide a box of straws, old newspapers, sellotape, a ball of string, scissors... and a marble
- Task: design a marble run that will keep a marble moving **without touching the surface** for as long as possible.
- Create groups of three for the activity and allow 15 minutes for completion.
- At the end of the activity provide a reflection sheet to evaluate how teams collaborated, and discuss the ingredients of successful collaboration:
 - How successful was the outcome? How did the team get started? Did leadership emerge? How could the team's work be improved?

Emotional Climate to build a Collaborative learning character

Interpersonal relationships

- » High levels of inclusion, acceptance, affection, support, and trust build group cohesion.

Goal setting

- » Goals motivate group behaviour — they are set so as to be desirable, achievable, rewarding,

Self-evaluation

- » Peer evaluation of individual work is part of everyday classroom activity.
- » Group activities routinely include evaluation and reflection stages.

Decision making

- » Groupwork activities provide opportunities to experience different methods of decision-making.

Teachers as character builders

Learning habits form part of our character and develop through use and practice (deliberate or otherwise!). But desirable habits will survive and flourish better if students are aware of them, realise their value and strive to improve them.

Cultivating habits involves:

- Providing rich and varied **occasions** for **exercising** learning habits
- **Infusing** learning habits into lessons to enhance content understanding
- Recognising and **celebrating** the use and **growth** of learning habits
- **Enabling** students to identify how and when to use learning habits
- Expecting students to take ownership of and **responsibility** for their learning habits
- **Exploring** the development of learning habits with students.

Teachers are influential character builders and need to be mindful of how they help students form, replace, re-form and strengthen their learning habits.

Are your teaching habits helping students' learning habits? Are you building learning characters who will succeed in life?

Take it steady! Think about how and when you might:

Stop/avoid:

- Organising students into groups yourself
- Being obsessed with subject content
- Being the central learning resource
- Worrying about controlling information and ideas.

Experiment with:

- Modulating the pace of group-work
- Changing groups in mid-stream
- Competition and cooperation between groups
- Saying 'Where will you go from here?'

Start/do more of:

- Being aware of when and how **you** work in groups
- Noticing how long you are the focus for learning
- Exploring with students the difference between collaboration and cooperation
- Planning for group-work in lessons
- Developing — with students — a teamwork code of practice.

Start slowly:

- Making paired reflection a habit
- Moving students around
- Setting open-ended group-work challenges
- Observing how students are learning
- Taking time to construct productive groups
- Training groupwork skills.

Roles and responsibilities

- » Whole-group involvement in setting goals and deciding action.
- » Flexible roles and responsibilities are encouraged.

Controversy and conflict

- » Controversy and conflict are seen as a positive key to students' involvement, the quality of decisions and the continuance of the group in good working condition.

Talk to nudge Collaborating

Teacher talk - as a learning coach

(To ensure students do the thinking for themselves.)

Choose different groups today so that you work with different people.

Who is going to be responsible for how the team gets on?

Remember, you'll need to do more than just co-operate.

Who's keeping an eye on your deadline?

Time to check you are on the right lines.

Are you making the most of everybody's talents?

Anyone not happy with how things are going?

What's the best decision making method here?

Student self-talk

(As the skill becomes a habit, and as the habit shapes part of the learning character, look out for students who say (or think) the following)

Can I take different roles this time?

I think it would be really helpful to hear your ideas, ...

I think I agree with what ... suggests, but how do the rest of you feel? Are we missing something?

What would I do differently if I were leading the group?

Are we still trying to work out how to get on, or are we performing as a team?

We need to look at each other more.

It's OK to disagree, but we could handle it better than this.

Strengthening the habit

Student self-review

In order to strengthen learning habits, it is important for students and their teachers to reflect on the specific attributes that contribute to a well-formed habit.

Ipsative and formative approaches to reviewing learning habits place students at the centre of the process of developing their learning habits and strengthening their learning character.

Essential team roles

Coordinator	says	'OK, what are we aiming to do, and who's going to do what?'
Idea shaper	says	'If we try it this way, and start by ...'
Gatherer	says	'Where do we get material? Who can we ask?'
Checker/monitor	says	'Are we on the right lines?'
Completer/finisher	says	'We still need to do ...'
Quality controller	says	'How could we improve this bit?'

Public prompts to support team roles

There are numerous ideas for team roles. Here's one to get you started.

Jeff's Personal Statement

'Our team got there in the end. We all gathered ideas and information once Sid had given us some creative ideas to shape our thinking. Sian coordinated us really well. It was my job to see that we stayed on task and focused. We just about finished on time thanks to Sylvie chasing loose ends and tying them up. I'm not sure we paid enough attention to improving the quality of our work as we went along, though.'

(Links to 'Research and presentation teams' activity.)

Reviewing learning habits in the team

Team Bluebird _____ October 09

	1	2	3	4
We noticed small details and patterns				
We kept going, tried things out, learnt from mistakes				
We coped with distractions				
We got "lost" in what we were doing				
We asked questions of each other				
We made links between things				
We used a range of resources				
We thought things through logically				
We imagined how things might be				
We agreed our goals and made plans before we did things				
We stopped and took stock every so often				
We changed our plan if we had a better idea				
We thought about how we learned				
We worked well with each other				
We learnt from how other people in the group did things				
We listened carefully to each other				
We put ourselves in other people's shoes				

Our targets for improvement:

(Links to 'Marble Run' activity; and many others!)

Observing team input	Jan	Jawaid	Jill	Jackie
Taking a position				
Making a relevant comment based on others' responses				
Supporting a position with evidence				
Presenting factual information				
Drawing other people into the discussion				
Helping to move the discussion forward				
Recognising contradictions in other people's arguments				
Making an analogy				
Asking clarifying questions				

This example evaluation sheet is based on assessment criteria quoted by Ron Ritchhart in *Intellectual Character* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002):

Collaborating

These At-A-Glance cards are based on the practical framework of learning capacities and habits known as Building Learning Power. The framework provides a clear picture of what it takes to be a good learner. The purpose of the approach is to grow students' Learning Character and Habits. In so doing Building Learning Power develops the appetite and ability to learn in different ways, and shifts the responsibility for learning to learn from teacher to student.

Find out more: www.buildinglearningpower.com

