

Imagining



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 **Imagining** 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 **Imagining** habit involves being **ready, willing, and able** to:

Invoke still and moving pictures of the world as it might be in the future (or might have been in the past).

Use the mind as a theatre in which to play out ideas and possible actions experimentally.

Think creatively and openly in a range of circumstances to meet a variety of different needs; make the most of the unpromising and unlikely.

Use a rich variety of visual, aural and sensory experiences to trigger creative and lateral thinking.

Explore possibilities speculatively, saying 'What might ...', 'What could ...' and 'What if ...?' rather than being constrained by what is.

Retain a childlike playfulness when confronted with challenges and difficulties.

Capture experiences and note down ideas — in a variety of forms — as they occur on a variety of occasions.

Be aware of intended outcomes whilst adopting a flexible approach to realising goals.

Rehearse actions in the mind before performing them in reality.

“**Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.**”
– Albert Einstein

Young people with the habit are likely to:

Be attentive to details and notice subtleties

Get lost in a 'could be' world

Stay curious

Enjoy and value day-dreaming

Ask 'What if ...?'

Make unusual links between things

Adapt and change constructively

Take risks

Enjoy uncertainty

Say 'How could we do this differently?'

Contribute fresh ideas in group work

Quick Wins

Stimulating the imagination

- » Use music to create atmosphere and stimulate imaginative thinking.
- » Provide varied, unexpected and ever-changing visual experiences — on whiteboards, classroom walls, in ideas banks, through web-links, etc.
- » Read vivid prose and poetry that captures details, moods and atmospheres.

Capturing ideas

- » Encourage students to brainstorm or mind-map and keep notebooks or Post-its of interesting ideas to feed their creativity. Do this collectively and individually.
- » Elect one student 'Plant of the Day', whose job it is to suggest unlikely ideas.

Exercising the lateral mind

- » Use de Bono's possibility thinking activities (see *Po: Beyond Yes and No*).
- » Play connections games using twin packs of cards or wall matrices to list and link random objects.
- » Play '101 uses of ...' at the start of lessons.

'What if ...' challenges

- » Provoke students to think 'What if... we ran out of oil in 25 years... we lived in a two-dimensional world... we all lived for exactly 70 years... tennis balls were heavier... we had two moons...'
- » Encourage students to build collaborative spider diagrams that explore the possible ramifications of such eventualities.
- » Extend the imagining in creative presentations using a variety of media.

Forming the habit

activities to promote **Imagining**

Open the mind's eye

- » Ask students to visualise, for example, a snowy mountain peak until the image fades — discuss how long this could be sustained
- » Now visualise hovering over the mountain and exploring the terrain by helicopter — the experience will have lasted longer
- » Now provide students with a guided visualisation of the mountain that triggers their imaginative faculties — discuss the features of this experience
- » Enable students to identify the ways of triggering their own imaginations when provided with stimuli. Invite them into a city at night, or the alimentary canal, ...

Play the prediction game

- » Show video clips of e.g. Beckham and Wilkinson preparing to kick a ball, as well as other sports and entertainment people rehearsing ahead of action.
- » Discuss what they are doing to 'play the movie' in their heads before they do the deed.
- » Explore occasions when this could be useful in students' own lives.
- » Identify the triggers and habits required when anticipating the right action.

Telling stories

- » Provide a written stem statement... A man walks into a room with a suitcase in his hand... invite one student to carry it on: each student continues from where the previous one left off
- » Create a scenario... There are no windows, water drips into a bucket, two people are seated back to back... improvise the dialogue between the people
- » Play a song with a strong narrative content... She's Leaving Home... interview the imagined protagonists
- » Explore a painting with strong emotional (Guernica), or narrative (The Will Recovered), or, abstract (Miro and Kandinsky) content and recreate the story within.

Emotional Climate to build an Imaginative learning character

Stretching comfort zones

- » Students are used to playing outside their comfort zones, so that they develop the habit of taking risks and experimenting.
- » Learning experiences often include elements of surprise and unpredictability.

Celebrating unusual ideas

- » Be inclusive of all suggestions, and celebrate quirky ideas.
- » Unlikely and unusual suggestions are welcome.

Engagement through all the senses

- » The environment offers a rich and varied sensory experience.
- » Different kinds of music elicit different moods for imaginative tasks.

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:

- Being driven by subject content
- Asking all the questions
- Saying 'That's right'
- Avoiding the uncomfortable
- Providing solutions too readily when students are stuck.

Experiment with:

- Using different media in the classroom
- Making links and thinking in metaphors
- Being a little less prepared
- Saying 'What if ... ?'

Start/do more of:

- Valuing imagining as part of your subject area
- Inviting students to really experiment and speculate
- Exercising lateral thinking habits
- Encouraging thinking out loud
- Using 'could be' language rather than 'is' language.

Start slowly:

- Cultivating your own imagination
- Playing creative thinking games
- Catching students unawares
- Looking out for possibilities
- Offering opportunities for students to explore a wider picture.

Creative insight

- » Considering a problem from different angles can help to reformulate it so that new approaches to solutions emerge.

Fallibility is OK

- » Be seen yourself to take risks, experiment, and get things wrong.
- » Model playful fallibility.

Talk to nudge Imagining

Teacher talking as a learning coach

(To ensure students do the thinking for themselves.)

What would happen if ...

What distracts you from getting in touch with your imagination?

Make sure you hear what's going on beneath the surface.

Note things down that interest you.

What makes you laugh, and why is it funny?

Find what are good ways to help you to focus your imagination.

Are you really noticing what's happening ...?

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)

My ideas scrapbook has things that will trigger ideas for ...

... gets me into an imaginative frame of mind.

I could talk this through with ... to get some ideas flowing.

I wonder how ..

I did this by visualising ...

Banksy helps me see the world differently. Who else does?

Am I exploring things that interest me as much as I could?

What's the most interesting thing I've discovered recently?

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.

Here is one way of keeping the Imagining habit alive and growing.

Imagination top to toe

Autonomous

Generates rich and stimulating ideas
Knows how to trigger imagination autonomously
Capitalises on a wide range of internal and external resources
Thinks speculatively with an open mind
Has an infectious and playful sense of humour
Rehearses actions internally before performance

self-generating

spontaneous

innovative

playful

discerning

original

Increasingly independent

- Able to imitate distinctive ideas
- Builds a bank of resources on which to draw to trigger imagination
- Makes constructive connections between experiences
- Is aware of intended outcomes before beginning a creative task
- Produces original if somewhat predictable outcomes

independent

open

constructive

imitative

resourceful

With support and stimulation

- Is prepared to respond to stimulation from others
- Can see connections between diverse experiences
- Begins to see how things might turn out
- Can recognise the value of imagining
- Imitates features of other people's work with some discretion

predictable

serious

willing

responsive

cautious

dependent

Self-review statements

Justin

I'm good at coming up with new ideas and I enjoy using my imagination to think creatively. I like using music and the visual arts to get my creative juices flowing. I like trying things out and doing things that are a bit left-field. People say I've got a wicked sense of humour I just think I'm a bit quirky. My best piece of work recently was an experiment for testing heat loss on mountains.

My target for improvement is to make more use of a notebook to hold onto ideas instead of risking losing them.

Jeanne

I'm really discovering that I've got an imagination. I'm getting excited by just what there is out there to stimulate me. I use the internet to follow my interests and hunches. My work in all my subjects is becoming more original and less like a version of my teachers' ideas. My best piece of work recently was a maths puzzle that I designed to help younger children understand Fibonacci numbers.

My target for improvement is to challenge other people more when I think their ideas are clichéd.

Jo

I need to be helped to get my imagination going but once I get started I'm quite surprised by some of the things I come up with. I enjoy seeing the links between things and how things fit together. I wouldn't call myself a naturally imaginative person but I'm beginning to realise we all need to use our imaginations at school and at home, and in our social lives. People see me as reserved but I do offer ideas more in groups. My best piece of work recently was when I wrote a Mirror-style article about *Macbeth*.

My target for improvement is to start trying to capture ideas that get my imagination working.

Try these three levels for describing students' imagining capacity.

Students' essential characteristics at each level of progress.

Three students' personal statements, related to the three levels of progress.

Imagining

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

