

Building the habit of...

Me-Learning

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 **Me-Learning** 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 Me-Learning habit involves being ready, willing, and able to:

Use a well-formed vocabulary to talk about the process of learning and how learning works.

Understand how they learn, playing to their strengths and improving areas of weakness.

Learn from learning itself, mulling things over, and learning from experiences in order to avoid mistakes in the future.

Reflect on and draw out useful lessons from experiences and identify key features that might be useful elsewhere.

Actively seek to transfer new learning into other settings; think about where else they might apply the learning.

“If history always repeats itself, and the unexpected always happens, how incapable must Man be of learning from experience?”

—George Bernard Shaw

Young people with the habit are likely to:

Have an accurate view of themselves as learners

Understand how they can improve as a learner

Be confident, interdependent and self-aware

Have a love of learning

Want to understand where they went wrong

Willing to try different ways of doing things

Retain a sense of the big picture

Be thoughtful

Ask questions that get to the heart of the matter

Forming the habit

activities to develop... Me-Learning

Quick Wins

Create opportunities for reflection

- » Pay equal attention to *what* has been learned and *how* it has been learned in plenaries and review points. Encourage students to pick out the key information in what others say. Summarise. Build in moments for reflection whenever possible

Establish Reflecting as a classroom routine - Going for Three:

- » Begin each lesson with 'Tell me Three ... things we learned last lesson; ways we learned last lesson; things we still need to find out; things you hope to achieve today'.
- » End each lesson with 'Tell me Three ... things we learned today; learning skills we used today; things we need to do next lesson; ways you could become a more effective learner' etc.
- » Ensure that students tell *you* three. Do not lapse into doing it *for* them !

Distil detail

- » Ask students to make notes on postcards or post-its – large enough for the key points, but too small for unnecessary detail.
- » Encourage students to discuss what *must* be on the postcard, and what can be safely considered 'detail'.

Headlines: a routine for capturing Essence.

This routine draws on the idea of newspaper-type headlines as a vehicle for summing up and capturing the essence of an event, idea, concept, topic, etc. The routine asks one core question:

If you were to write a headline for this topic or issue right now that captured the most important aspect that should be remembered, what would that headline be?

Consider following it up with the challenge of writing the first paragraph only of the newspaper article, the one that lays out all of the key information relating to the headline.

Conversions:

If information is currently framed in any of the following, challenge students to change it into another format of their choosing: text; mind map; flow diagram; storyboard; graph; venn diagram; ranked bullet points/list; video; teacher explanation; revision notes etc.

Consider limiting the number of words that can be used – forcing students to limit words and/or employ images instead encourages them to distil what is really important and salient.

Converting from one medium to another requires students to identify the key features. It can only be converted if it is understood, so this technique promotes deep learning. It helps students to create revision notes for themselves, and in their preferred learning style.

We learn best when ...

The teacher begins by talking about what they know about themselves as a learner. No need to go into too much detail, or it may limit students' ideas – just enough to get them going. Try things like 'I learn best when I think ahead', or 'I learn best when I put in lots of effort' etc.

Pupils work with a partner. One talks about when they learn best, while the other produces a spider diagram capturing the main points. Then they swap places so that each generates their partner's spider diagram.

Use the spider diagrams as a basis for exploring similarities (and differences), and to produce a class spider diagram showing 'how we learn best'. Make it into a display that can be referred to by yourself and by pupils.

Emotional Climate to build a Me-Learning character

Assessment for Learning

- » Is alive and evident in all classrooms
- » Students review both learning content and process in every lesson

Learning is co-constructed

- » Some planning and delivery is done by students for students, with limited teacher support

Display

- » Celebrates learning in progress and emphasises the learning processes used

Review points are student led

- » Students have opportunities to distil what they have learned and how they have learned it for themselves

Talk about how students are learning

- » Draws attention to the successful ways in which students are learning

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:

- Doing plenaries yourself
- Telling students what they did and how they did it
- Telling students what you taught

Experiment with:

- Planning and constructing the learning **with** the students
- Allowing students to become experts and teach alongside you
- Encouraging students to keep their own learning log
- Having students constructing help cards for other students

Start/do more of:

- Placing responsibility with the students to summarise **what** and **how** it has been learned
- Allowing students to distil the learning for themselves
- Giving 'small-number' type questions – 'Tell me the three main reasons for . . .', 'Which two events did most to shape . . .' etc.

Start slowly:

- Recording key learning moments and achievements
- Using students as 'learning detectives'
- Using online self-assessment tools, to help students to identify their own key areas for learning development

Reflection and review points are ongoing

- » Not all 'plenaries' come at the end of the lesson – review and recap points are built in regularly and as necessary.

Students take responsibility

- » For themselves, for their own learning, and for the learning of their peers.

Talk to nudge Me-Learning

Teacher talk - as a learning coach

(To ensure students do the thinking for themselves.)

What are the three most important things you have found out?

Think back to when you . . .
What did you learn from that?

Think back to when you . . .
How did you tackle it then ?

Can you describe how you learned that ?

Build in a moment to review what you have done and how you have done it

What went well? What could be improved? What lessons can we learn from this?

Where else could you use this skill, knowledge, idea?

Useful words- essence, bottling, boiling down, bare bones, panning for gold.

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)

How am I going to do this ?

What has worked in the past ?

The main thing here is . . .

What was useful about that experience?

I've done that before - where else could I use it?

I made a mistake with that last time. How can I avoid that ?

How does this fit with the big picture ?

What *must* I do ?

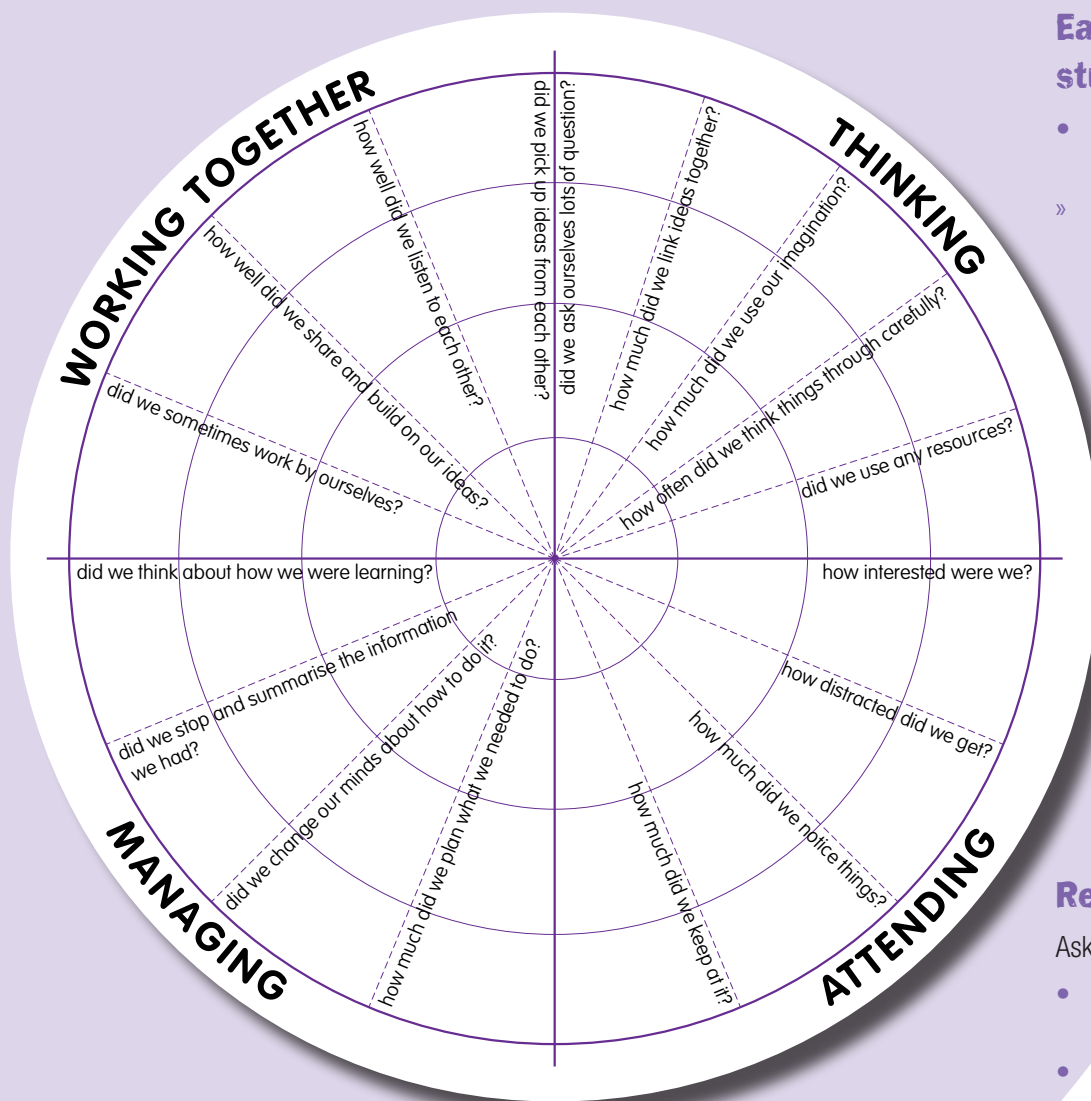
Strengthening the habit

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 Me-learning habit alive and growing.



Learning Power Rating Wheel

Early reflection tool for students

- Use in lessons or as a home-learning task.
- » colour in how frequently each behaviour was used (see 1-4 grading)

Later reflection tool for students

- Use as above but ask 'how well' rather than 'how frequently' the behaviour was used

This would need to be preceded by discussions about what 'well' actually means. This lies at the heart of progression – what skilfulness actually looks like.

Reflection tool for teachers

Ask yourself

- which behaviours am I triggering in lessons?
- Which behaviours are getting regular attention?
- Which behaviours need greater attention?

Can you afford not to find out?

Me-Learning

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

