

building the habit of...

Questioning



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

Be curious about all experiences, refusing to take things at face value.

Ask questions in the head as well as out loud.

Dig beneath the surface, asking why something is happening as it is: How can this be? What causes events to fall out as they are? When have things happened like this before?

Be comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity; enjoy different points of view and contrary evidence.

Play with ideas and possibilities.

Be systematic and adopt a logical approach — exploring a line of thought purposefully; posing questions that follow a rational path towards an emerging goal.

Be socially aware in asking questions of others, exhibiting genuine interest in other people.

Challenge others' points of view, and maintain or change one's own opinions appropriately.

“**Knowledge is having the right answer. Intelligence is asking the right question.**”
– unknown/anonymous

Young people with the habit are likely to:

Seek first to understand

Ask questions of themselves first

Keep an open mind

Use a range of questions to suit circumstances

Know when to stay silent

Know what questions to ask, when, and how

Say 'Do I agree with this?'

Stay curious

Relish getting to the bottom of things

Listen to understand what others are saying

Challenge for clarity and understanding

Emotionally Engaged • Cognitively Diverse • Socially Adept • Strategically Active

Quick Wins

Questions on display

Create question walls in the classroom to illustrate and prompt questioning. Display, for example:

- » Student-posted questions about current topics that need resolution.
- » 'The Question of The Day'
- » Different types and purposes of questions.
- » Questioning routines that the class have defined.
- » A lexicon of questions for use when exploring and enquiring.
- » A list of questions for use to get started, or unstuck.
- » Annotated student work and pictures to provoke questioning.

Question cards

Make cards on specific topics to scaffold and stimulate questioning, for example to:

- » Generate student ideas and engagement
- » Support autonomous involvement
- » Enable collaboration
- » Encourage connected thinking.

Questioning routines

Develop questioning routines with students:

- » 'What do I know about this already?'
'What do I need to know?'
'What questions could I ask, to find out?'
- » Make regular opportunities for students to generate their own questions.
- » Build in moments when students are required to say 'What am I asking myself about this?'
- » Promote peer assessment so that students pose questions of each other.

Forming the habit

activities to provoke Questioning

Build a three-level questioning habit

'ReQuest' is a structured process for deepening questions. For example, start with the painting *The Arnolfini Wedding* by Jan van Eyck:

- » **On-the-line questions:** ask questions about the picture for which the answers can be seen just by looking closely at the picture: 'How many candles are there?' 'What kind of room is it?' 'What is on the wall behind the people?'
- » **Between-the-lines questions:** questions whose answers can be inferred by looking at the picture: E.g. 'What is the relationship between the two people?' 'How long ago was the picture painted?' 'What time of day is it?'
- » **Beyond-the-line questions:** questions whose answers need to be elicited by making interpretive links from the picture: E.g. 'What did the artist think of his subjects?' 'Is the number of candles significant?' 'How does perspective work in the painting?'

De Bono's *Six Thinking Hats*

Exploring an issue in a variety of ways

- » Distribute, for example, a piece of direct marketing material for students to critique.
- » Invite the students to wear the six thinking hats:
 - White Hat — Facts and information: What do I know... what's happening?
 - Yellow Hat — Positive judgment: What are the positive features and why?
 - Black Hat — Critical judgment: What are the negative features and why?
 - Green Hat — Alternatives and learning: What is possible?
 - Red Hat — Feelings and emotions: How do I feel about this?
 - Blue Hat — The big picture: What hat should we use now?
- » Make sure that students take enough time wearing one hat before moving on to another.

Coach your students in thinking in this way when faced with unfamiliar material.

'Six Hats' in Wikipedia gives an excellent introduction to using the hats; or buy the book!

Emotional Climate to build a curious learning character

Celebrating questioning

- » Good questions are valued, as well as good answers.
- » Staff, and other students, draw attention to good questions by individual students.

Safety to disagree

- » Disagreement is seen as an interesting situation from which to learn, not as a personal rejection.

Enquiry-mindedness on display

- » You share your own enthusiasms and enquiries, modelling curiosity and questioning.
- » Displays of work include interesting 'work in progress' — lines of enquiry, fruitful (or discarded) questioning sequences, and so on.

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:

- Over-preparing lessons
- Being predictable
- Needing, or appearing, to know all the answers
- Talking too much
- Providing answers when students are stuck
- Posing closed questions, with just one 'right' answer.

Experiment with:

- Being as ignorant as the students
- Asking why without using the 'Why' word
- Wild tasks and enquiry-based learning with unpredictable outcomes
- Students leading the learning.

Start/do more of:

- Modelling your own curiosity
- Saying '... could be ...'
- Asking 'What do we know about questions?'
- Offering opportunities to speculate and ruminate.

Start slowly:

- Creating more opportunities for questioning
- Inviting students to identify the objectives for lessons
- Building lessons round an intriguing 'driving question'
- Asking students: 'What questions are you asking yourself?'
- Using questioning frameworks.

Time to think things through

- » Open-ended challenges
- » Learning involves open-ended 'wild' tasks and enquiry-based challenges.

Learning through driving questions

- » Lessons are designed and built on intriguing questions.
- » Lessons are adventures into the unknown

Talk to nudge Questioning

Teacher talking as a learning coach

(To ensure students do the thinking for themselves.)

That's an interesting / insightful question.

I don't really know myself yet.

I wonder what / who we could ask to find out?

What questions did we ask last time?

Is this a good enough answer? Might there be more to it?

Are there any other possibilities?

Are you sure that statement / answer / comment is sound?

What else might you want to know?

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)

I'm not sure I believe that.
What else could explain it?

How can I find out? Who can I ask?

How does ... connect with what I already know?

I must find out what other people think ...

On the one hand ..., but on the other ...

Do I really know what's going on here?

I don't understand it at the moment, but I'm working on it.

Is this point of view really reliable?

I'll need to chew this over a bit more.

Be strong, say what I think even if other people seem to know the answer.

Slow down; don't just ask the first thing that comes into my head.

Don't give in when other people sound like they know things.

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.

Self-assessment by <i>Jake</i>		Do I use these in school, and where?		
For the three broad kinds of questioning:		Y	N	Where?
Data-gathering Questions				
» Count: How many times has this occurred?		✓		maths, science
» Describe: What is happening here?		✓		English, history
» Match: When have I met this before?		✓		maths
» Name: What do I call one of these?		✓		DT, science, PE
» Recite: What are the rules for this?		✓		PE, maths
» Select: Which ones would I choose to use?		✓		DT
» Recall: What do I know already?		✓		science, maths, geography
» Tell: What is the key feature?		✓		
Processing Questions				
» Reason: Can I give a reason for this?		✓		English and history
» Compare: How is this like something else?		✓		art, English, music
» Contrast: How is this different from something else?			✓	can't remember doing that
» Solve: How shall I address this problem?			✓	teachers tell us
» Sort: Can I group things together?		✓		maths, geography
» Distinguish: What sets this apart?			✓	can't remember doing that
» Explain: Why do I think this is?		✓		science, DT
» Classify: How does this link with other things I know?		✓		
» Analyse: What is making this happen?			✓	science, DT
» Infer: What else might be happening here?		✓		English
Elaborating and Applying Questions				
» Estimate: How long do I think it will take?		✓		projects
» Forecast: What is likely to happen?		✓		science, English, DT, a lot
» If/Then: If I do this then what will take place?		✓		DT
» Apply a principle: Can I use any practices that I know work?			✓	Don't understand
» Speculate: What are the possible results and solutions?			✓	
» Predict: What do I think will happen?		✓		English
» Judge: Which is the best one?		✓		DT, drama
» Imagine: What will it look and feel like?			✓	
» Evaluate: What has been the most effective way?		✓		DT

The questionnaire above is based on a lexicon of questions developed by Art Costa and colleagues.

Activating and Engaging Habits of Mind edited by Arthur L Costa and Bena Kallick; Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2000.

Questioning

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

