



LEARNING POWER HEROES

A Scrapbook of Ideas by
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Learning Power Heroes

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CREATING A LEARNING CULTURE

In this section we meet the schools and hear about how they have used the idea of Learning Heroes to create a powerful learning culture in the school.

Firstly, we see how younger children have been introduced to their learning powers through the use of puppets, and how these imaginary learning heroes have influenced and enhanced pupils' engagement with learning.

Then there are examples of how schools have used famous people as learning heroes to good effect, and how children have been encouraged to see themselves as learning heroes.

Later examples show how a school celebrates learning-to-learn behaviours in assemblies and star books, and how, over time, such celebrations have moved in emphasis: from celebrating outcomes to celebrating learning behaviours.

We learn too about how schools are making good use of learning walls, scrapbooks and 'split page' books to help children reflect on and better understand themselves as learners.

And finally we are treated to lots of little ideas that have helped schools grow their learning-powered culture.



LEARNING POWER HEROES

IMAGINARY LEARNING HEROES



MILAN REFLECTIVE

Milan is a real planner. Before starting a task he thinks carefully about what he needs to learn, any obstacles that may get in his way and what he needs to be successful. He is a flexible learner who asks himself questions about how well things are going, and he isn't afraid to change his plan when necessary. Milan can look back on his learning, tell everyone how he learned, and pick out the most important parts to use again. He watches other children carefully and helps them to be reflective too.



BILLY RESILIENT

Billy is not interested in an easy ride because he knows that this will not move his learning on. He likes to be challenged and is 'up for anything!' That doesn't mean that he is a brain box; he just sticks at his learning and tries a range of methods until he gets there. Sometimes he takes a break and comes back to a task later when his brain has had a rest. Billy can get absolutely lost in his learning and even his best buddy, the class clown, can't distract him because he has learned to block out things that could sidetrack him from his goal. He also has eagle eyes and notices everything!



SYLVIE RESOURCEFUL

Sylvie can't stop herself from asking questions. She wonders about everything so much that she's had to learn how to find answers from a wide range of sources. She loves to 'Google,' an encyclopaedia is a treasure to her, she watches TV to store up information and if she cannot find out for herself she is confident enough to ask others. She even asks her granny by text! Sylvie likes to imagine what the outcome might look like when she starts something so that she knows what she is working towards! She can take a step-by-step approach to learning, and link what she has learned before to new learning.



POLLY RECIPROCITY

Polly loves to learn with other people. She encourages everyone in her group to take on a role and get involved, but she can also see when it would be best to learn on her own. Polly likes to watch and listen to others and imitate their successes. But she isn't sneaky about it, she will congratulate her friends on their great ideas and ask if she can use them to help her. She can put herself in someone else's shoes and tries to feel how they feel, so her classmates love to work together with her.

USING IMAGINARY LEARNING HEROES TO INTRODUCE LEARNING BEHAVIOURS TO YOUNG CHILDREN

WHERE WE STARTED

With our younger learners we wanted to find a way of referring to learning capacities that was more than a flat wall display: something that was fairly permanent, but could be moved; something that was interactive and that caught the children's interest. We found some discarded puppets, two boys and two girls — just what we needed!

WHAT WE DID

We introduced Polly Reciprocity, Milan Reflective, Sylvie Resourceful and Billy Resilient one at a time to the children and talked about the kinds of learning powers they each had. Teachers used the puppets to ask questions and make suggestions at the start of a learning activity, or comment on the children's learning and nudge them along.

The puppets have little bags containing suggestions and comments and stickers to give to the children when congratulating them. For example, Sylvie might give a 'Sylvie's Hero' sticker for asking great questions.

HOW IT DEVELOPED

The puppets were invited into assembly, and we were surprised by how much the older children identified with the puppets' learning powers. The older children asked for posters to remind them of the four characters and they talked about their own learning behaviours in terms of how they were like Polly, Milan, Sylvie and Billy. Later they wrote stories about the characters and made animations for the younger children.

IMPACT ON THE CHILDREN

Having an imaginary learning hero character to whom they could relate learning capacities helped the children to 'see' what these behaviours looked like. Thus Polly showed them how to be a good listener and how to look at something from another person's point of view.

The characters helped the children in a friendly way, rather like a super-peer role model: e.g. Billy encouraging a Nursery age boy not to give up on a rather tricky puzzle.

Nursery and Reception children now go and find the relevant puppet and tell them about their learning using amazing language!

We didn't expect the older children to take to the puppet characters; but they found the whole thing amusing and it has caused them to talk to the younger children about their learning and be supportive.

OVER TO YOU

- How might you use or adapt this idea for your own class?
- Do you have some old puppets lurking at the back of a cupboard?
- What sort of imaginary characters would your children take to?
- Which well-known imaginary characters act in these ways and would fit the bill?
- How would you introduce these characters to your children?
- Would you use the same characters in every class?
- Could older children suggest and vote for imaginary characters that would become the class's learning heroes?

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LEARNING HEROES IN THE CURRICULUM

In this section we find out how the idea of learning heroes has been incorporated into the curriculum, and the impact this has had on learning.

Firstly we see how the ideas have been put into practice in literacy, to improve story writing across the school or to develop children's imagination as they explore characterisation.

An ambitious outdoor project led by Kent's Outdoor Education Unit shows how the children's favourite learning heroes formed the basis of learning zones, collaborative challenges and maths problem-solving activities. The children were able to empathise with their learning heroes throughout the challenges and their confidence in maths has grown enormously.

Science too has been given the learning heroes treatment, and a cross-curricular project drew a wide range of subject areas together as children went about designing, making, writing and singing about their imaginary learning heroes.

Finally we are treated to a further selection of little ideas from across the curriculum, which help to grow children's awareness of their learning power.



USING FABLES, MYTHS AND COMICS



WHERE WE STARTED

In Year 5 we wanted to focus primarily on developing resourcefulness with the children in Literacy. Using warm-ups, as described on page 13, resourceful learning capacities were introduced at the start of a lesson as part of the learning intention: for example, to make links between characters in different fables. The children began by exploring heroes, collecting pictures of their own role models and making notes about their own resourcefulness. As a class they created mobiles that celebrated and explained resourceful characteristics.

WHAT WE DID

Fables

The first unit explored was Fables. We use the integrated approach to Literacy and so follow the structure of reading, analysis, capturing ideas and writing. After reading a range of fables and identifying their organisational

and language features, we invited the children to explore the characters and imagine what might happen if characters from different fables were to meet.

Using their imagination the children created new experiences for the tortoise and the hare. They were given questions to consider such as 'What might happen if the fox intercepted the hare?' The children collaborated to generate ideas, and decide which was the best.

Keeping within the characteristics previously identified, the children thought about how the characters might feel, what they might do, and what the outcome could be. They shared ideas, listened to each other and decided to create a role-play of their solution.

They then selected their best idea and planned the new fable using story maps. From this they built up the story from modelled, scribed, and supported to independent writing.



WHAT WE DID

Myths and Legends

Moving on from fables we encouraged the children to think about how Odysseus might have been resourceful. They thought about his qualities and skills using their knowledge of the character.

From this they designed their own mythical character, again with a focus on them being resourceful. Their new character was then to meet Odysseus; allowing the children to plan for a new myth.

IMPACT ON THE CHILDREN

The children's enthusiasm for learning has developed considerably. They are able to reflect on and apply resourceful learning behaviours in a range of contexts. This, in conjunction with the integrated teaching approach, has had a direct impact on the children's writing. Their fables and myths are imaginative and well planned; truly exploring character has allowed them to reflect on what they might do in different contexts.

The children are able to explain clearly how they are learning, and are developing an impressive range of strategies to help them move forward.



WHAT WE DID

Comics

Our work on learning heroes linked well with our book week where we were asking children to write in the style of a given author. We decided to explore the work of Roger Hargreaves and produce comics in the style of the Mr Men and Little Miss stories.

Whilst reading Mr Men stories we looked at extending the children's knowledge of characterisation through learning heroes. We considered what traits, skills and qualities Little Miss Reciprocity would have. Paired talk allowed children to delve deeper and decide how the characters might show their learning power in a range of contexts. We thought about settings, plot, and actions the character might take in each different element. This allowed for lots of powerful vocabulary development.

Using role play, hot-seating and telephone conversations with the characters we built a clearer picture of how the characters might behave. This in turn enabled the children to capture ideas for writing. We then used the Mr Men theme to create comics based on learning heroes. The children chose between Mr Resourceful and Miss Resilient.

IMPACT ON THE CHILDREN

The children were really excited about writing the comics and felt personally attached to the characters they had created. Strong understanding of characterisation enabled them to spend more time focusing on structure, organisation and layout, and developing the style of Roger Hargreaves. The quality of writing improved greatly as a result.

The children also have a greater understanding of the capacities: they can now recognise the learning behaviours they are using in everyday situations and identify improvements they need to make. They use the language of learning in their class discussions and describe themselves in these terms too.

OVER TO YOU

- How could you introduce learning heroes when planning a literacy unit?
- Which story characters exemplify learning capacities you have identified as needing development in your children?
- Could you invite real heroes into the school to develop, for example, newspaper reports?
- Could the children interview the hero using questions that explore their learning power?
- How about children writing biographies of famous learning heroes?

A RANGE OF IDEAS



Science with a Difference

Science is a subject area that fits seamlessly with the development of learning skills, particularly in developing the capacity to reason, imagine and make links.

Scientist Motivators

We assign certain scientists to particular science topic areas and use these scientists as motivators for the children's learning. We consider how the scientists had to relish a challenge, link knowledge together, see what pieces were missing and then use their imagination in deciding what the missing piece might be. Scientists have to be great planners and adapters and sometimes they work in partnership with other scientists or experts.

Teachers said things like *'What would Louis Pasteur have done when his experiment went wrong, would he have given up? Would he have changed it slightly?'*

Teachers began to assess science learning in the voice of Charles Darwin when children had been categorising animals, or as Sir Isaac Newton during a topic on forces. Using a big picture of an appropriate scientific hero and a speech bubble the teachers appear around the classroom, comment on the children's learning so far and give hints or tips on how to move forward.

Empathy muscles were stretched by carrying out an investigation as if the children were Albert Einstein. Some crazy white wigs and white coats created atmosphere!



Detective Science...

Scientists have a lot in common with detectives. The children found out about some famous detectives or invented some detective characters of their own and then used these to help with science learning. They looked for clues and pieced them together in a scientific investigation. They had to interview others to get information and compare one account to another for anomalies. They were developing their questioning, distilling and reasoning skills the whole time.



Murder Mystery Science...

We start a science topic in a completely different way by inviting the pupils to a 'murder mystery party'. Characters are assigned to each member of the group in advance and they are asked to develop the role and wear a costume or carry a prop. Each character in the murder-mystery science lesson has a clue (or a red herring). They are interviewed by the investigator or gossip in corners to piece the picture together.

We take time after the lesson to discuss why we have chosen this way to begin learning a science topic. The children stretch their meta-learning muscles and explain how a scientist gathers information and makes discoveries piece by piece just as they did.

We challenge the children to use the greatest number of learning muscles during a science topic. They keep an account collectively as a whole class.



Visiting Scientists...

We found out from parents whether they use science in their jobs. We happened to have a dad who worked in forensics and he proved to be a super interviewee during Science Week. Equally valuable was input from a midwife mum, and an uncle who worked for a famous household cleaning-products company. The children asked them about their learning at school, how they used science in their jobs and whether they had to keep learning all of the time. School science suddenly became linked to real life and these family members were held in high esteem as learning heroes.



Imaginary Experiments...

The kinds of scientific investigation that pupils can carry out in school are limited to the safe and possible. Mr Fantastic from *The Fantastic Four* took his team up into space and accidentally caused them all to assume super powers by exposure to extremely high levels of radiation. He then worked tirelessly to find a way to turn 'The Thing' back into Ben Grim. Somewhat more exciting than growing a healthy broad bean plant.

We invited the children to design an imaginary experiment as if they were scientist superheroes. In imagining the scenario and the problem, hypothesising about the solution, and designing an experiment to test their theory, pupils were using all of the same learning skills but in a much more heroic imaginary situation. This was a wonderful challenge for our more able pupils.

OVER TO YOU

- Could each of your classes 'adopt' a famous scientist as a learning hero? The beginning lessons of the school year could focus on a class biography of the chosen hero.
- Might you assign an appropriate scientist to strands of science learning, e.g. Sir Isaac Newton and forces, and use them to motivate and nudge the children's learning behaviours.
- How about adding a bit of humour to science lessons with an old deerstalker and a pipe, or a policeman's helmet and a notebook, to costume your scientific investigators?
- Have you any real-life scientists in your school or local community who could help to anchor your pupils' learning in everyday life?
- Do you have a school website or a virtual learning platform where young science heroes could set challenges for one another?
- How about a giant test tube display that fills up as the children stick on Post-its® of learning muscles stretched during a science topic. Different colours for the 4 R's might be good too.

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