

## Section 4: Building Learning Power (BLP)

### How can we help young people become better learners?

**‘Since we cannot know what knowledge will be needed in the future, it is senseless to try to teach it in advance. Instead, our job must be to turn out young people who love learning so much, and who learn so well, that they will be able to learn whatever needs to be learned.’**      **John Holt**

There are five core beliefs at the heart of BLP thinking:

1. The purpose of education is to prepare young people ‘not just for a life of tests, but for the tests of life.’
2. This purpose is valuable for all young people, no matter where their perceived strengths lie.
3. Society is full of risks, uncertainties, challenge and change; young people need the confidence to ‘face difficulty and uncertainty calmly, confidently and creatively.’
4. Education is not just about academic achievement. Real-world intelligence is something that people can be helped to build up.
5. Building learning powered schools is ambitious, but it is vital, challenging and do-able.

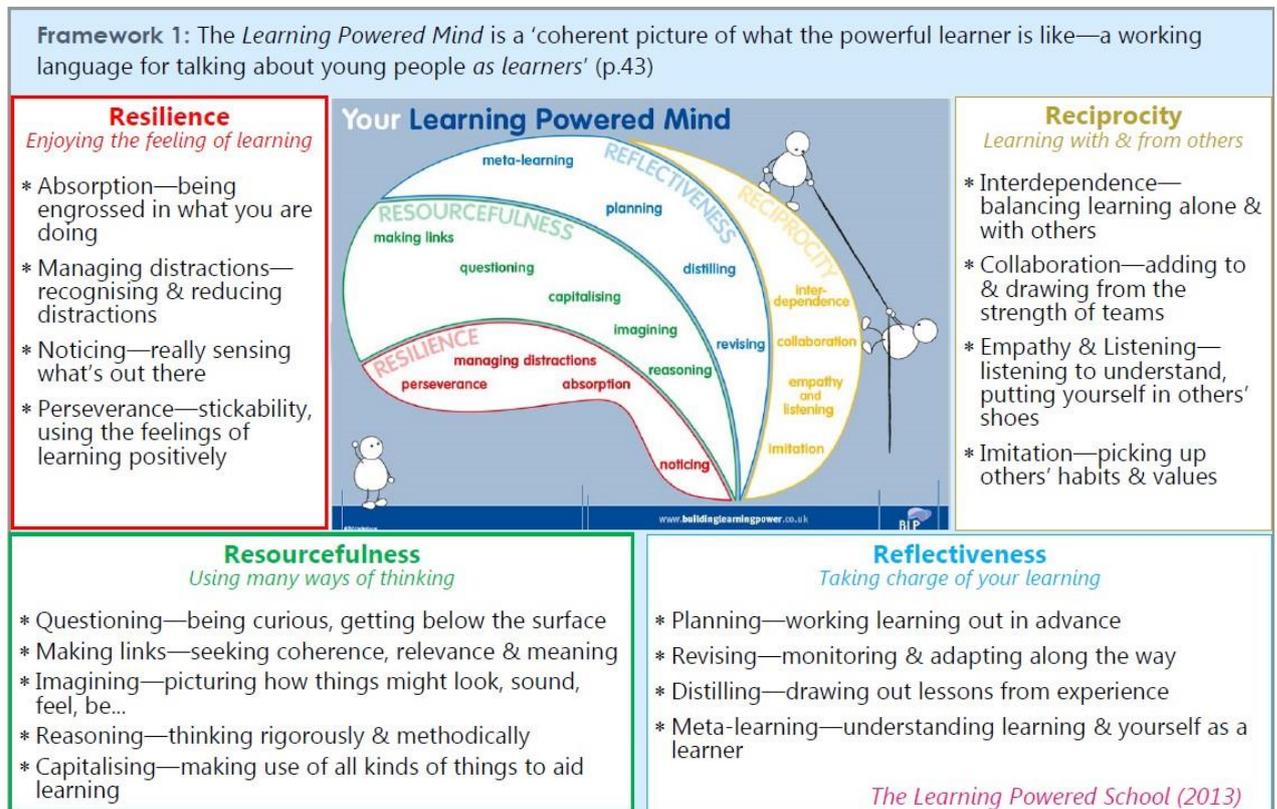
Building Learning Power is an approach to help young people to become better learners, both in school and out. It is an attempt to refocus schools on preparing youngsters better for an uncertain future. Building Learning Power requires a culture shift in both classrooms and school more widely - that systematically cultivates habits and attitudes that enable young people to face difficulty and uncertainty calmly, confidently and creatively. Through coaching and reflection students become more confident of their own learning ability and ultimately learn faster and better.

#### ***Two BLP frameworks***

Within this context, BLP provides two frameworks. The first is a coherent picture of what the powerful learner is like. The second is a route map of how schools can build the constituent dispositions of the powerful learner.

## The first framework

The image of the powerful learner – doesn't claim to be a comprehensive theory of learning power. Rather it aims to be a pragmatic tool that illustrates some of the ingredients of learning power and provides a basis for discussion. Many schools who have made use of this framework have developed and customised it in a host of creative ways.



This framework is essential, if teachers are going to think precisely and creatively about how they can become more effective 'learning power coaches'. Using the analogy of a fitness coach in a gym such coaches are able to construct broad, balanced and effective exercise regimes that will help people get fitter, because they have a model of what the different ingredients are that go to make up 'fitness'. BLP assumes that a working model of learning power helps teachers design targeted, effective activities that, over time, add up to greater confidence and capacity in facing all kinds of uncertainties and challenges. Just as fitness is a basic springboard for all kinds of more specific physical skills, so learning power is a general-purpose launch-pad for all kinds of more specific learning activities – both in school and out. So the first framework provides a design template for that launch-pad which schools can then extend in their own ways.

For an explanation of the four R's and the individual capacities refer to the pdf at:

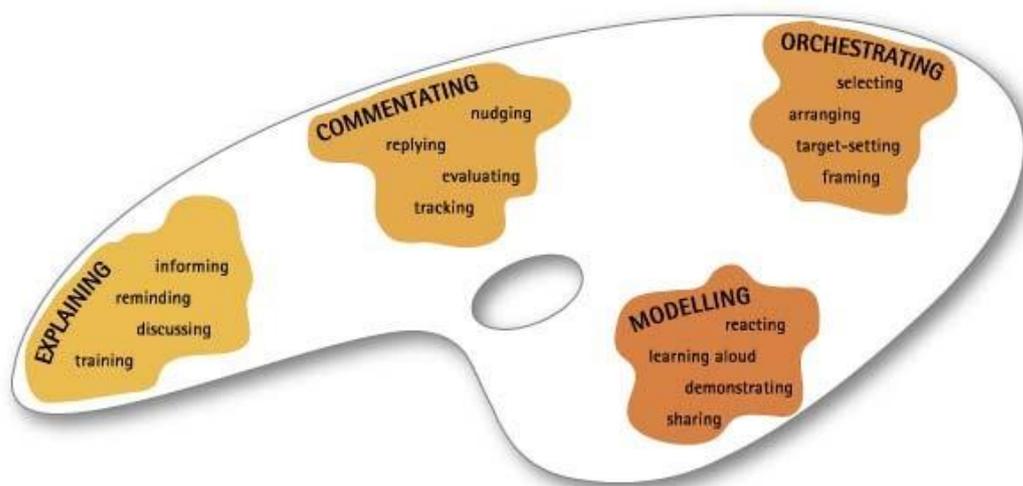
[http://www.buildinglearningpower.co.uk/how\\_its\\_done.html](http://www.buildinglearningpower.co.uk/how_its_done.html)

Building Learning Power was devised by Guy Claxton (Professor of Learning Sciences). Claxton thinks students need to be 'ready and willing' as well as 'able'. To develop learning power teachers need to become 'learning coaches'. Good coaches support athletes in pursuing goals; as good learning coaches teachers can give students feedback, encourage

them to stretch themselves and provide a good personal model. Students cannot be forced to want to learn, but a good learning coach can raise their motivation.

### The second framework

The second framework maps the ingredients of a school and classroom culture that help to cultivate those habits of mind. If we want young people to become better at concentrating, say, what does that suggest about the way we structure our lessons? If we want them to become more willing to take risks in their learning, and more tolerant of making mistakes, how should we alter the way we mark their work, or the choices we make about what to display on the walls of the classrooms and corridors? If we want youngsters to become better at giving supportive feedback to each other, and at learning how to take such feedback without getting defensive – what does that suggest about how we might let them see more of us, the teachers, engaging in peer observation and discussion? And so on.



**Framework 2:** The *Teachers' Palette* provides an overview of the different aspects teachers can use to build up learning muscles

*Building the Foundations of Learning Power, TLO (2014)*



**So what can teachers do? (Source - Guy Claxton. *Building Learning Power*. TLO Limited, 2002)**

Teachers can promote learning power through:

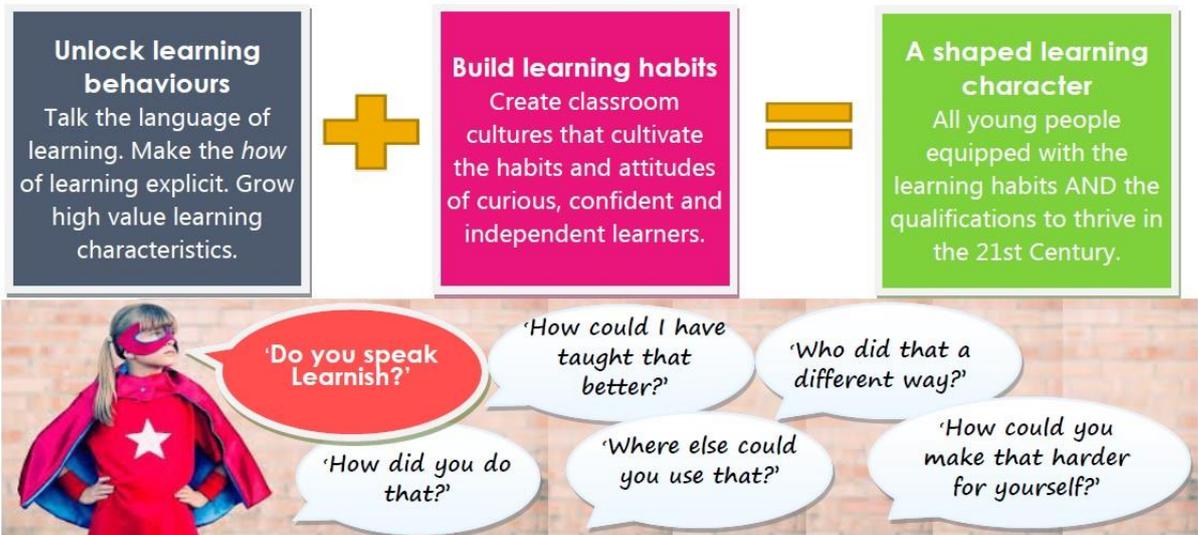
- a) **EXPLAINING** - what they explicitly value and discuss with the whole class;
- b) **COMMENTATING** - how they talk to groups and individuals about their learning;
- c) **ORCHESTRATING** – the activities they select; and
- d) **MODELLING** – what they themselves model about learning.

These two frameworks gives teachers and students a 'big picture' to hang on to, the picture on the box, as it were, to provide a context whilst they are working on one small corner of the learning power jigsaw puzzle. The first framework, which we called originally the Learning Power Brain, reminds everyone that they don't have to work on exercising all the learning muscles at once (just as you don't try to do your stretches while you are on the running machine). We can zoom in on 'managing distractions' knowing that, in due course, the big picture will remind us to work on building up 'empathy' or 'reasoning' as well.

The second framework, called the Teachers' Palette, provides a complementary overview of all the different aspects of their work which teachers can use to build these learning muscles. There are many layers, we have discovered, through which a school can build up a culture that nurtures the development of inquisitiveness, responsibility and independence. This framework provides a basis for long-term planning. Some of the layers may be relatively easy for a teacher or a school to get to work on straightaway. With others it may take a bit of thought to see how the pupils (or the governors or the parents) will need to be 'prepped' in order to be ready to start taking the necessary steps.

Just as learning power is made up of a number of different interwoven elements, so is the school culture that cultivates learning power. As the image shows, there is good reason think that the way teachers talk is important, as is the visibility of their own learning habits. The design of activities, the structuring of space, the accessibility of resources, and the messages of the visual environment are all important too. And it is not just teachers who embody the principles of learning power: so too do learning support assistants, midday-supervisors, administrative staff, governors and parents. A learning powered school helps everyone to know how to add to the nutrient medium – the culture – in which its pupils are immersed.

## The Learning Power Equation



### A teacher’s perspective –

#### What have I done to introduce BLP to my classroom?

(Article from Dave Evans, originally published in The T&L Bulletin)

BLP has four groups of attitudes and behaviours that are called Resilience, Resourcefulness, Reflectiveness and Reciprocity. I started by introducing two aspects of Resilience to science set 9K4. The two aspects were ‘perseverance’ and ‘managing distractions’. After a short introduction students were asked to assess their own resilience and to identify something that they were going to try to do during the lesson to improve their resilience. One student who has noticed a positive effect of BLP is Owen. Owen is now more aware of what distracts him during lessons and has come up with some strategies to minimise the effect of these distractions such as moving and working on his own or taking a two minute break outside the room. As a teacher BLP has changed the way that I try to manage the behaviour of students like Owen. Instead of me telling Owen that he is behaving inappropriately I can ask him if he is being distracted and what he is doing to minimise the effect of the distraction on his learning.

<b>EXPLAINING – telling students directly and explicitly about learning power</b>	
Informing	making clear the overall purpose of the classroom
Reminding	offering on-going reminders and prompts about learning power
Discussing	inviting students’ own ideas and opinions about learning
Training	giving direct information and practice in learning: tips and techniques
<b>COMMENTATING – conveying messages about learning power through informal talk and formal and informal evaluation.</b>	
Nudging	drawing individual students’ attention towards their own learning
Replying	responding to students’ comments and questions in ways that encourage learning to learn
Evaluating	commenting on difficulties and achievements in learning-positive ways
Tracking	recording the development of students’ learning power

### What am I planning to do next?

My next step is to gradually increase the number of the BLP learning behaviours that I am encouraging students to be aware of and to develop. I have started this with my year 8 set 1 science class. They are currently doing a research project looking for evidence that there has been water on Mars. I have introduced them to the idea of Capitalising to make them aware that there are sources of information other than the internet that they can use.

I asked Joe to say how being aware of BLP has affected his learning. This is what he said, "Managing distractions is very important as it makes you focus in class. This has helped me to do more work. When you make a good environment for learning this is when you get the most done in class therefore you gain higher grades. Perseverance makes you face difficulties in different lessons. It also makes you manage your anger or energy productively. You have to be resourceful when doing a research task using all resources you have can maximise the amount you find out when especially using text books as you know the information in there is right unlike the internet where anyone could write on there so it might not be right."

### Student perspectives

"My first experience of BLP was in a core RE lesson- our task was to take a learning capacity and think of a celebrity who demonstrates that habit. This would enable us to understand how we could adopt and develop these skills ourselves. The power which we were given was 'empathy and listening'- immediately we decided on President Obama because he works in a team and has to show that he understands the electorate's feelings and worries. Next, we had to advertise Obama as an example of empathy- this challenged us because we had to use the building learning power of resourcefulness to produce the poster; as we had to take apart the skill of 'empathy and listening' and think of examples that demonstrated Obama's prowess of this learning capacity." **Harry**

"I was first introduced to BLP in GCSE Art, each lesson we focus on a different capacity, Mrs Pritchard uses building learning powers to help us become a better learner, she explains which learning power we are using at the start of each lesson and then makes us evaluate how we have used the power in our work. I especially remember using the learning power disposition of resilience, which is when you carry on through thick and thin, we mainly use the capacities of absorption and noticing, these help us in art, as we can get into a state of 'flow' and notice mistakes in our work." **William**

### ORCHESTRATING - selecting activities and arranging the environment

Selecting	choosing activities that develop the four R's
Framing	clarifying the learning intentions behind specific activities
Target-setting	helping students set and monitor their own learning power targets
Arranging	making use of displays and physical arrangements to encourage independence

### MODELLING – showing what it means to be an effective learner

Reacting	responding to unforeseen events, questions, etc. in ways that model good learning
Learning aloud	externalising the thinking, feeling and decision-making of a learner-in-action
Demonstrating	having learning projects that are visible in the classroom
Sharing	talking about their own learning careers and histories

### How we feel BLP could develop in school:

- Put BLP in the context of the lesson- integrate BLP capacities and dispositions into learning objectives to engage students into actively assessing their strengths and weaknesses with regards to the BLP principles.
- Art and Geography have good examples of how to use BLP in the curriculum.
- Ensure that the use of BLP is appropriate to the individual ability of students- to avoid seeming patronizing.
- Use BLP evenly across the board to ensure habits are developed properly and built upon specifically in each lesson.

### Positive conclusions from our experience:

- The key ideas of the BLP program; the dispositions and capacities ought to vastly improve the learning of pupils.
- Through the understanding of the key BLP principles students should be able to contribute more fully to the class, as well as work better together without disputes.
- The key capacities do reflect important aspects involved in learning, and so all pupils should be able to develop their learning skills and improve their attainment as a result of understanding their learning processes.
- Subtle references to BLP should be used in lessons to engage students better- without losing their interest.
- It is definite that teachers are extremely supportive of Building Learning Power as a concept to aid the developments of students into excellent and successful learners.