

# Building the habits of...

# Ambitious Capable Learners



## Successful Futures: a new curriculum for Wales

The new curriculum is shaped by four statements of purpose that emphasise the importance of longer-term outcomes designed to equip young people to thrive in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. The first of these purposes states that young people should develop as **Ambitious, Capable Learners**, ready to learn throughout their lives, and the subject of this resource.

### Ambitious Capable Learners:

- set themselves high standards and seek and **enjoy challenge**
- build a body of knowledge and have skills to **connect and apply** that knowledge in different contexts
- are **questioning** and enjoy solving problems can **communicate** effectively in **different** forms and **settings**
- **can explain** the ideas and concepts they are learning about
- can use number effectively in different contexts
- understand how to interpret data and apply mathematical concepts
- use digital technologies **creatively** to **communicate, find and analyse information**
- undertake research and **evaluate critically** what they find
- **are ready to learn throughout their lives**

This resource sketches an approach that schools and teachers could use to deliver the Welsh Curriculum promise of helping young people to become Ambitious Capable Learners.

**Uniting the models of Successful Futures and Building Learning Power.** All powerful learners cultivate a set of key learning characteristics. Ambitious, Capable learners would deploy a subset of these characteristics, the most important of which are highlighted below.

**Reasoning:** Using logical skills to work things out rigorously. Constructing and presenting persuasive arguments and spotting flaws in others.

**Empathy:** Understanding others; putting themselves in other peoples' shoes so that they can communicate effectively with a variety of audiences.

**Interdependence**

**Collaboration**

**Imitation**

**Listening**

**Making links:** Seeing connections between disparate events and experiences to weave a web of understanding across subjects and ways of working.

**Capitalising**

**Questioning:** Asking expansive and incisive questions to delve beneath the surface.

**Imagining:** Using imagination and intuition to explore possibilities playfully, wondering 'what if'.

**Noticing**

**Managing distractions**

**Absorption**

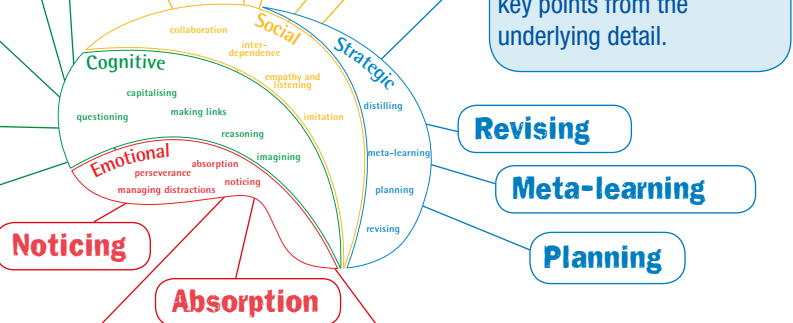
**Perseverance:** Being determined to keep going, channelling the energy of frustration, and knowing that learning is often a slow and uncertain process.

**Distilling:** discerns what is, and what is not, important, able to separate key points from the underlying detail.

**Revising**

**Meta-learning**

**Planning**



## The BLP approach



There are two main parts to the approach:

- A** a model of a learner and learning, in terms of a set of characteristics that work together to make a person a highly capable learner; we use 'learning power' to describe the effect. (Several of these characteristics appear in this resource.)
- B** a view of the kind of pedagogy that will nurture and strengthen the learning characteristics in young people.

These are bound together by the fundamental idea that '**learning is learnable**', and by explicit, detailed discussion of how learning works, supported by a rich repertoire of words and action.

## Wider Strategic Skills

The Successful Futures' view of Ambitious Capable Learners covers a range of learning habits:

- **cognitive** habits which help learners handle information effectively
- **social** habits which help them work profitably with others
- **emotional** habits which help them manage the feelings of learning positively.

Building Learning Power adds a fourth aspect to this recipe for success: **Strategic**, or meta-cognitive, learning habits.

In the case of an Ambitious Capable Learner, these strategic habits would include **Distilling**, where a learner draws out useful lessons from experience and applies these to new situations.

## Learning behaviours to build Ambitious Capable Learners

# The architecture of

# Classroom cultures

## Making the shift

The teacher's role becomes one of surfacing learning; to make learning public; to train some of the tricky bits; to talk about it; to recognise and celebrate it as it happens; to nudge it along, assisting students to grow their learning behaviours; and to design activity to stretch a wide range of learning habits. This uncovering of learning ensures students discover, use, understand and translate their learning behaviours into learning habits. For many teachers this shift is likely to call for changes in practice. Take it steady! Think about what you might...

**Relating** - Shifting how you relate to your students; gradually sharing more of the responsibility for learning with them

- **Support students as directors of their own learning**
  - » Enable students to create their own learning goals and pursue their own lines of enquiry.
- **Make the learning process visible**
  - » Encourage students to access resources independently to solve problems.
- **Build a community of enquiry**
  - » Provide more opportunity for students to question so that they feel comfortable doing so.

**A shift in relationships**



**Talking** - Shifting how you talk about learning; the sort of language content and style you use to enhance and explain learning

- **Develop a language of learning**
  - » Talk about and explore the process of learning; the 'how to' more than the 'what' achieved.
- **Talk is about the future**
  - » Provide opportunities and time for students to discuss what they are hoping to achieve.
- **Encourage active listening**
  - » Ensure everyone is aware of and understands what is being said before drawing conclusions.

**A shift in learning language**



**Constructing** - Shifting how you construct learning activities; the tasks and classroom routines you use to build positive learning habits

- **Build in time to reflect on learning**
  - » Incorporate reflection on the what and how of learning so that students can observe and regulate it.
- **Make challenge commonplace**
  - » Activities are designed to ensure that all students work at the edge of their comfort zone.
- **Rising to high standards**
  - » Design activities, with clear success criteria, that enable students to aspire to and meet high standards in all aspects of their learning.

**A shift in how learning is constructed**

## Celebrating

- Shifting what you celebrate about learning; what you prize, recognise, display; the outward signs of beliefs about learning

- **Celebrate well-constructed arguments**
  - » Require sound and speculative reasoning to substantiate ideas.
- **Prize effort**
  - » Ensure students understand what 'making an effort' means in practice.

- **View 'stuck', difficulty, and mistakes as positive features of learning**
  - » Flip the concepts of stuck, difficulty and mistakes from negative to positive. Students regard stuck as an interesting place to be, difficulty and mistakes as a natural part of learning.

**A shift in what is celebrated and valued**

## Stop

Thinking of learning only as outcomes

## Start

Enabling students to justify their thinking

## Start slowly

Re-framing and valuing - stuck, challenge, mistakes etc.

## Experiment with

Discussing long-term goals

# Classroom activities and talk to nurture Ambitious Capable Learners



**Starters – to engage learners. For example:**

## Driving questions

Begin with questions to stimulate curiosity: 'Why don't people stay at home?' rather than 'We're doing Migration'; 'Why doesn't the rain wash the colour out of grass?' rather than 'We're doing chromatography'. 'What could I do if I lose my memory?' 'Where in the world is this?' 'Which animals can we learn from the most?' 'What shape is time?' 'What's the colour of wonder?'

**Thinking routines – to embed learning behaviours. For example:**

## What is happening here? What makes you say that?

The first question in this routine is flexible: it is useful when looking at objects such as works of art or historical artefacts, but it can also be used to explore a poem, make scientific observations and hypotheses, or investigate more conceptual ideas (i.e., democracy). The first question invites students to describe what they notice, see or know, but it is the supplementary question 'What makes you say that?' that requires them to build explanations. It promotes evidence-based reasoning.

Why do it? To help students to go beyond saying what they think and begin to explain and justify their thinking – the beginnings of reasoning.

**Activities – to stimulate use of the learning habits. For example:**

Build a three-level questioning habit.

'Re-Quest' is a structured process for deepening questions:

- » On-the-line questions: ask questions for which the answers can be seen just by looking closely at something.
- » Between-the-line questions: questions whose answers can be inferred by looking at something.
- » Beyond-the-line questions: whose answers need to be elicited by making interpretive links from the source.

**Activities – to stimulate use of the learning habits. For example:**

Strategy games:

- » Use games that require strategy and logical thinking. From Noughts and Crosses to Chess, from Hangman to Backgammon, such games help to develop and refine reasoning skills. Many appear in the form of maths investigations and problems: Frogs, Tower of Hanoi, Nim, Connect 4, etc.

**Teacher Talk – to build ambition. To develop the ability to:**

- "Imagine what would happen if..."
- "What else **might be** happening here?"
- "What does this **remind you of**?"
- "**Where/when else** might you use this?"
- "What **questions** are you asking yourself?"
- "How do you **think** (s)he will react?"
- "What is (un)**important** here?"
- "Can you **explain** why you think that?"
- "Ask yourself **what makes you think this evidence is reliable**?"
- "**Give it a go** and see what happens..."

Why do it? To encourage students to build the confidence to develop their own goals and pursue them with tenacity.

Use '**Could be**' language rather than 'Is' language to leave open the possibility that things may not be cut-and-dried, that other avenues may be worth exploring. This immediately invites students to be more thoughtful, critical, or imaginative about what they are studying. **How could you use more 'could be' language in your classroom?**

**Ambitious Capable Learners are likely to:**

Set their own achievement goals

Put in the effort needed for attaining high standards

Apply their learning in different contexts

Be logical and thoughtful

Ask 'What if?' questions

Not take things at face value

Be skilful 'finder outers'

Communicate with clarity to a range of audiences

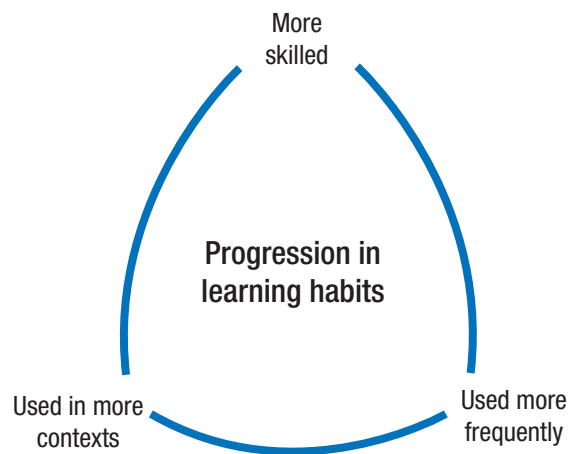
Pull together a range of ideas as a coherent whole

# Growing learning behaviours

## From behaviours to habits

If the big ambition of Successful Futures is to work, the learning qualities suggested have to become more than 'can-do' skills; they have to become habitual tendencies that students adopt in learning. The point is to grow and develop these behaviours to become dispositions or habits. Thus over time, students get better at persevering, questioning, reasoning, changing their ideas and so forth. They use these behaviours more frequently and in a wider range of contexts. They become powerful Ambitious Capable Learners not just in school but for a lifetime of learning and employment.

### Three aspects of progress in building learning habits

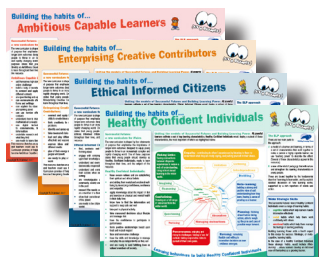


I can't	Tell me	I'll try	I see why	I make sure	I am
Little sense of ends or goals or working towards something purposefully.		Perseverance			Ambitious, long-term goals drive them to persevere.
Lack of life experiences inhibits understanding.		Making Links			Recognises knowledge systems as provisional/ever-changing.
Expects to be given answers. Fears asking questions.		Questioning			Seeks and questions new experiences/knowledge to achieve unique results.
Jumps to conclusions. Unable to say why they think like that.		Reasoning			Constructs and presents persuasive arguments and spots flaws in others.
Unaware of the impact of what they say on others.		Empathy			Listens sensitively beyond the words and responds empathetically.
Firmly based in reality. Has no language to deal with imagination.		Imagining			Challenges and scrutinises the status quo to bring about innovation.
Can't see the wood for the trees.		Distilling			Draws out useful lessons from experience to use elsewhere.

This diagram outlines possible starts and ends of the growth of an Ambitious Capable Learner. From the unskilled, untrained learner on the left to the learning-powered learner on the right lies a progression that can be mapped. The titles across the top identify the progressive phases of students' skill and attitude towards their learning.

**Don't delay ... Find out more about *Building Learning Power* today and claim your 5 FREE student learning profiles.**

The BLP Toolbox awaits you and your school's investment in the 'Successful Futures' of new generations in Wales. [www.blp.how/success](http://www.blp.how/success) builds on the messages introduced by this card and takes you into the world within which teachers are preparing to deliver the new curriculum.



**Building Learning Power**

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