

Learning Powers

Building Learning Powers

- **A big ambition**
- **Building learning power is about helping young people to become better learners, both in school and out.**
- It is about creating a culture in classrooms - and in the school more widely - that systematically cultivates habits and attitudes that enable young people to face difficulty and uncertainty calmly, confidently and creatively.
- Students who are more confident of their own learning ability learn faster and learn better. They concentrate more, think harder and find learning more enjoyable. They do better in their tests and external examinations. And they are easier and more satisfying to teach.
- Building Learning Power prepares youngsters better for an uncertain future. Today's schools need to be educating not just for exam results but for lifelong learning. To thrive in the 21st century, it is not enough to leave school with a clutch of examination certificates. Pupils/students need to have learnt how to be tenacious and resourceful, imaginative and logical, self disciplined and self-aware, collaborative and inquisitive.

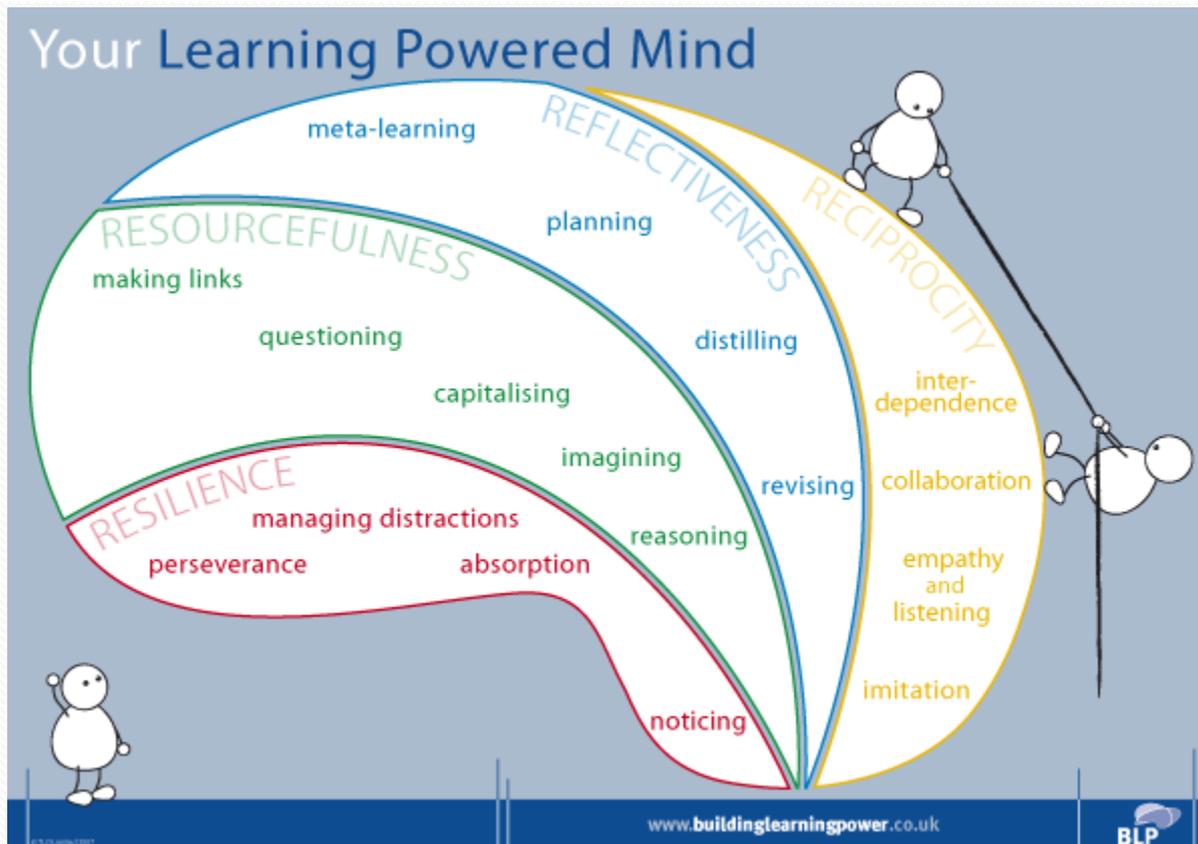
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- **BLP schools have been pioneering ways of taking this ambition really seriously**
- **Three core beliefs**
- Building learning power is based on three fundamental beliefs
- BLP believes that the core purpose of education is to prepare young people for life after school; helping them to build up the mental, emotional, social and strategic resources to enjoy challenge and cope well with uncertainty and complexity
- BLP believes that this purpose for education is valuable for all young people and involves helping them to discover the things that they would really love to be great at, and strengthening their will and skill to pursue them.
- This confidence, capability and passion can be developed since real-world intelligence is something that people can be helped to build up.
- These three core beliefs are particularly relevant in societies that are full of change, complexity, risk, opportunity and individual opportunity for making your own way in life.
- This challenge is nowhere near being met yet. We need to go beyond the wish lists of 'wider skills' or 'key competencies'. What is needed has to be seen as a gradual, sometimes challenging but hugely worthwhile process of culture change by schools and habit change by teachers.

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- BLP has a clear social, moral and philosophical rationale. It puts at the heart of education the development of psychological characteristics that are judged to be of the highest value to young people growing up in a turbulent and demanding world. And it has a robust scientific rationale for suggesting what some of these characteristics might be, and for the guiding assumption that these characteristics are indeed capable of being systematically developed.
- **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.

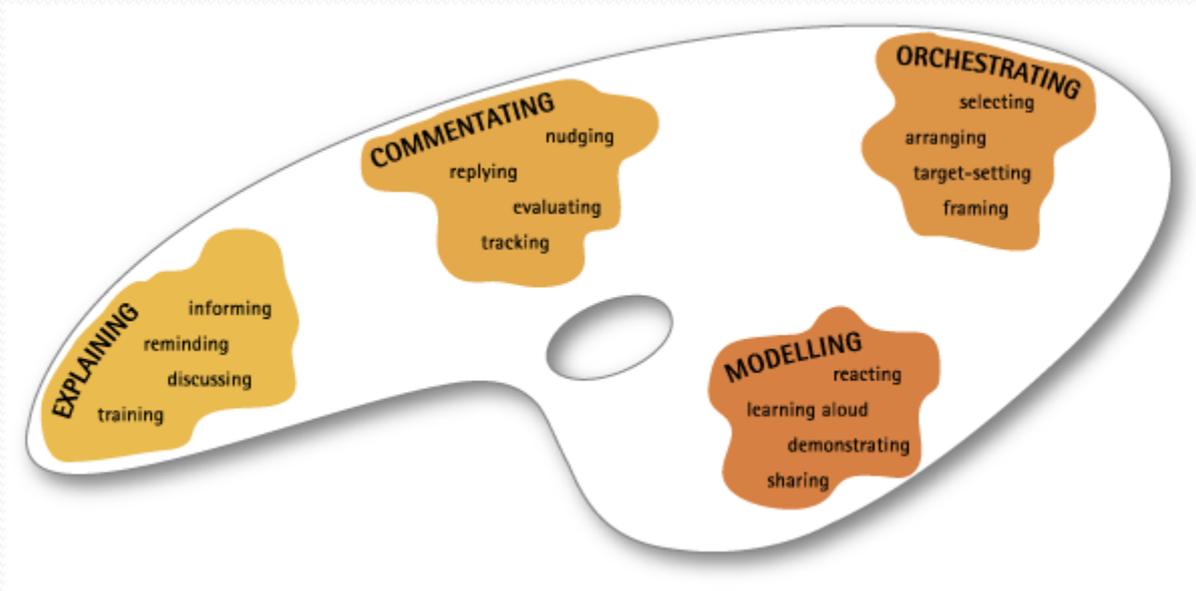
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- **The second framework**
- The second framework maps the ingredients of a school and classroom culture that help to cultivate those habits of mind. If we want young people to become better at concentrating, say, what does that suggest about the way 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.

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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 to 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 Bishop Wood Approach

Bishop Wood School is working with other schools in Tring to share the language of Learning Powers. Bishop Wood School are encouraging children to use 4 Learning Habits and for each Learning Habit there are a set of skills – it is these skills that the children will be choosing to practise.

Each week two children will be chosen at random from each class. The children will chose which skill they wish to practise that week and will say how they have done this in the following Praise Assembly. The skills will be ticked and signed off on their certificates.

1. Determination

Don't be afraid to get it wrong
Have a desire to improve
Find a solution
Be resilient

2. Independence

Take responsibility
Use your initiative
Be organised
Review your own progress

3. Curiosity

Be inventive
Be open minded
Challenge accepted views
Take risks

4. Communication

Have a voice
Work within a team
Value different opinions
Listen