



Ridgeway *Digest*

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Learning to Learn

Our role is not just to educate children, or to view them as empty vessels that are to be filled with knowledge, but rather to develop in children the learning dispositions and mindsets to be able to learn for themselves, whatever the future may hold.

Our approach to educating children is founded on the principle of developing a love for learning in our pupils and providing them with the skills to be able to learn throughout their lives. It is substantiated by research that shows the combination of a desire to learn and having the ability to do so are very powerful in enhancing children's success in the short and longer term. So, what are the theories behind this and how are they applied at Ridgeway?

First, we should consider the difference between knowledge and learning. While acquiring knowledge and having it at one's fingertips is not undesirable, developing a disposition for learning is far more powerful in preparing children for life. Sir Richard Livingstone, the British scholar, said: *"The test of successful education is not the amount of knowledge that pupils take away from school, but their appetite to know and learn."* As we explored in the first *Digest*, in the modern world, knowledge is easy to acquire: it is knowing what to do with it that is more powerful and valuable. Therefore, learning must encompass more than simply the acquisition of knowledge or facts. Learning should be a conscious process by which children: make deliberate and active choices, have a growing awareness of the skills they are utilising, and reflect on the learning process to seek ways for future improvements. As a school, we feel a responsibility to ensure this is a key feature of our approach to developing children. In the words of David Perkins (Research Professor of Teaching and Learning, Harvard Graduate School of Education), *"Doing well at school does not make you a better thinker. You can get good results with high standards and still lack resilience, resourcefulness and the ability to organise and evaluate your own learning."*

Building Learning Power (BLP) was devised by [Professor Guy Claxton](#), a cognitive scientist whose research explores how people can become better at learning. The aim of BLP is to help children become better learners, both in school and out. It centres on the development of four learning dispositions, known as the four R's: Resilience, Resourcefulness, Reflectiveness and Reciprocity. A range of skills sit underneath these broad headings (such as absorption, perseverance, making links, reasoning, planning, distilling, interdependence, collaboration etc). The development and application of these skills is what can set apart two children with high academic success. Claxton stresses that a fundamental aspect of the BLP approach is: *"creating a culture in classrooms – and in the school more widely – that systematically cultivates habits and attitudes that enable young people to become better learners, and face difficulty and uncertainty calmly, confidently and creatively."*

BLP must not be simply an add-on, or something to which we make cursory references, but must be an embedded component of school practice. So what does this look like in the classroom? Teachers will design learning activities that challenge and develop learning powers (e.g. tasks requiring high levels of communication and collaboration, of those that require children to make links or apply reasoning). The key is for those skills to be referenced explicitly throughout the task, so children are conscious of when and how well they are applying them. Verbal feedback given to the children will relate the curriculum learning **and** the quality of the learning dispositions demonstrated **and** the increased learning capacities of pupils. Post-learning, time is spent reflecting specifically on the learning powers applied and how children feel they have developed them, so they are fully aware of their own skill set and next steps. Throughout, teachers make learning power capacities visible to the children in both general and individual ways. In our classrooms, talk about the process of learning, the nature of oneself as a learner, and one's improvements and intentions for oneself as a learner is continual and natural; the focus of discussion is on the 'how' of learning, more than the 'what' or 'how much'.

The second key component of our approach is the **Growth Mindset Theory** proposed by [Professor Carol Dweck](#). This centres on whether individuals have a **Growth or Fixed Mindset**. Those with a fixed mindset hold the belief that intelligence is attributed to fixed traits and therefore ability is set and cannot change; they tend to be interested only in feedback on their success in activities to the degree that it serves to reinforce their underlying ability. In school, we often see the **fixed mindset** present itself in two ways: those with a negative self-view and those with a positive (but limiting) self-view. The self-view might be about themselves as a learner generally (and applied to all subject areas/activities) or for specific subjects. Those with a fixed mindset might have a very negative self-view of their intelligence and believe that this can never be improved. A child in this position will avoid tasks they deem themselves "not good at", because they think they will fail and, therefore, trying will be a waste of time. Whereas a child with a positive (but limiting) self-view will seek only to tackle challenges that reinforce this self-view. They relish tasks that can be completed quickly and successfully, because finishing first and being the 'best' are crucial in maintaining that self-view. Tasks that require effort or for which the solution is not immediately obvious are fraught with risk for these individuals. What if they cannot find the solution? What if they do not get it 'right'? What if they do not finish first? If I have to put in effort, does it mean I'm not 'clever'? On the other hand, someone with a **Growth Mindset** believes intelligence is driven by learning, effort and training, therefore your ability can be developed. They are confident that with effort they will be able to learn the skill or knowledge, and then improve their performance.

So, if a growth mindset is desirable, what can educators and parents do to foster it? If adults seem to attribute success to inborn or innate abilities, children will come to develop a fixed mindset: "You passed because you're clever." If adults attribute success to effort and practice, children will be more likely to develop a growth mindset: "You passed because you worked really hard." Dweck stresses that, although very important, effort and perseverance are not enough alone to see improved outcomes. How we praise children plays a crucial role in shaping a child's view of themselves and therefore their mindset when approaching learning. Person-orientated praise reinforces a fixed mindset, whereas **task or process orientated praise, combined with acknowledgement of effort, reinforces a growth mindset**. At school, we try to focus our praise and feedback on specific aspects of either the learning or a child's attitude/approach. At home, it is worth at least reflecting on what your praise focusses on and what this therefore reinforces: is it person or task/process-orientated praise?

Task or process orientated praise

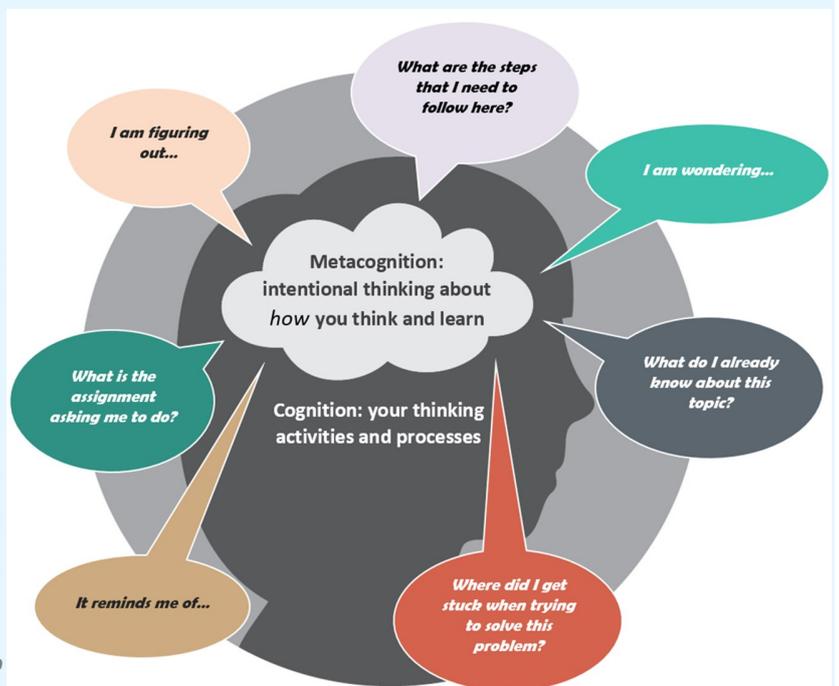


Neuroscientific research by Moser et al (2011) found that, *"How well people bounce back from mistakes depends on their beliefs about learning and intelligence. For individuals with a growth mind-set, who believe intelligence develops through effort, mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and improve. For individuals with a fixed mind-set, who believe intelligence is a stable characteristic, mistakes indicate lack of ability...growth-minded individuals also showed superior accuracy after mistakes compared with individuals endorsing a more fixed mind-set."* Their research also led them to conclude that those with a growth mindset are more attentive and respond more proactively to errors, while they also found a direct link between growth mindset and academic success.

The final element of research that underpins our practice relates to **Metacognition**, or in its simplest form: consciously thinking about thinking. It relates to the way in which learners monitor, purposefully direct and review their own learning. In his book **'Visible Thinking'**, **Professor John Hattie** (who also featured in our first Digest), states:

"The aim is to make students active in the learning process, until they

can seek out optimal ways to learn new material and ideas, seek resources to help them, and set appropriate and more challenging goals for themselves."



At Ridgeway, we support children in developing their self-awareness as learners so that upon approaching a task they actively draw on their knowledge of: their abilities and attitudes, the strategies that are effective and available, and the type of activity in which they are about to be engaged. As children progress through tasks, they are empowered to improve their metacognitive knowledge (of themselves, strategies and tasks), as well as their subject knowledge and skills.

When considering the 'Why?' behind the choice to underpin our practice with BLP, Growth Mindset and Metacognition, it is worth noting the work of the psychologist **Albert Bandura**. He described **self-efficacy** as, *"People's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives."* In relation to this, **Dr Jane Webb-Williams**, a leading early childhood expert has found that, "People with high self-efficacy approach

difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats, they set challenging goals for themselves and maintain commitment to achieving these goals, they sustain effort even when faced with failure and quickly recover after setbacks, they develop an intrinsic interest in activities, and they attribute failure to factors which are adaptable e.g. insufficient effort or skills... Self-efficacy beliefs strengthen when: children are encouraged to set their own goals, when teachers give frequent and immediate feedback, when pupils attribute success to their own level of effort, when progress is monitored daily, and when social comparative feedback communicates that others can master the material. In addition to an increase in self-efficacy beliefs, performance also increases.”

Our approach strives to embed and develop a sophisticated combination of skills and self-awareness in children. Due to their nature, these skills and attributes are not easily measured (so will not appear in any numerical scores or test outcomes) and are often displayed in very subtle, almost imperceptible, ways. Over many years, we have heard from parents of our former pupils that what they learnt and developed at Ridgeway *beyond the curriculum*, is what sets them apart from other children (irrespective of academic ability). Parents have often commented (often as a result of them going on tours of secondary schools, or once they have left and settled into their secondary settings), that Ridgeway children are set apart from others by their attitude to learning and the breadth and depth of skills they possess that are beyond the traditional curriculum.

We fundamentally believe that the long-term benefits of a curriculum underpinned by the principles of Building Learning Power, Growth-Mindset and Metacognition will empower our children with the self-efficacy, confidence, ability and self-awareness to give them the best opportunities for success in whatever path they choose in life.