



# LEARNING POWER HEROES

A Scrapbook of Ideas by  
Raegan Delaney, Leanne Day and Maryl Chambers



We are built to learn by imitation. Evolution has equipped us with brains that are designed from the moment of birth to do what people around us are doing. When a baby sees you make a fist or a smile the neurons in her brain make her ready to do the same thing.

It's through this kind of unconscious osmosis that children learn the habits of language and culture into which they have been born. Without any instruction from us, their brains start moulding themselves to the social world around them. They pick up the speech sounds and accents they hear and the emotional reactions they see being modelled. By watching us they learn to be frightened of what we are frightened of, to ignore what we ignore, to find funny what we laugh at.

And in just the same way they learn to learn in the way their parents, carers and teachers learn. If they grow up around people who



love to debate round the dinner table they will imbibe the habits, rules and pleasures of debating. If they watch adults being experimental, inquisitive and tenacious in their learning these habits will rub off too. If their role models have no time for ideas, or become angry the minute their efforts are frustrated, that too is what they will learn.

So we must be careful to be at our learning best around young children, especially if they like or admire us, for their 'heroes' are the people whose habits they will find most contagious. Capitalising on this rubbing-off of learning habits gives us a powerful way of influencing children's development — for good or ill.

It is not just us: learning heroes (and heroines) come in all shapes and sizes. Celebrities like David Beckham can be heroes not just because they are handsome and successful



but because they overcome set-backs and put in the hard hours of practice. Characters like Gandalf, or even Tinky-Winky, can impress with their tenacity or thoughtfulness. A child's grandmother can be a source of inspiration through her ability to invite calm discussion of a vexed issue in a stressed family. Children can be helped to see admirable characteristics in their playmates. And most importantly of all, every child can be their own Learning Hero, as they feed off the memories of their own resilience and resourcefulness.

This book shows how primary schools are capitalising on children's powers of imitation, to help them build strong foundations for their own learning lives. I hope you will find much to admire and to imitate in these pages.

*Guy Claxton*

## WHAT IS BLP?



**A Practical Framework**  
Over the last five years or so, schools across the UK have been introduced to an approach to learning-to-learn known as Building Learning Power. Many schools are now putting that approach into practice. This eminently practical framework of learning dispositions and capacities (see opposite) was researched and put together by Professor Guy Claxton. It offers teachers a real opportunity to help all their students to become confident, capable, creative lifelong learners.

**A Good Learner**  
The Learning Power framework provides a clear picture of what it takes to be a good learner. The purpose of the approach is to grow students' learning character and habits. In so doing, Building Learning Power (BLP)

develops the appetite and ability to learn in different ways, and shifts the responsibility for learning to learn from the teacher to the learner.

**A Transforming Culture**  
Making learning power work often involves transforming the culture of the classroom and the climate of the school. A common language for learning is adopted across the whole school; staff model learning themselves by sharing their own difficulties, frustrations and triumphs in learning; students come to understand themselves as growing learners and consciously improve their learning habits; teachers assume the role of learning-power coach, offering students interesting, real and challenging activities to enable them to create their own knowledge and stretch their learning habits.

**A Creative Approach**  
The BLP approach does not aim to provide teachers with neat boxes of resources that can be assembled into set lessons. Headteachers and staff are encouraged to work creatively with the principles and examples of practice in order to grow and personalise the approach for their own students. The following pages reveal creative and practical examples of some ways in which four schools have done this: growing and stimulating students' understanding of learning, stimulating enthusiasm for learning, transforming teaching, and building students' lifelong learning habits.

*Be ready to be inspired!*

## THE LEARNING POWER FRAMEWORK

### THE LEARNING POWER DISPOSITIONS

**Emotional Engagement**  
**RESILIENCE**  
Feeling, Attending

**Cognitive Range**  
**RESOURCEFULNESS**  
Thinking

**Interpersonal Involvement**  
**RECIPROCITY**  
Relating

**Strategic Responsibility**  
**REFLECTIVENESS**  
Managing

### THE LEARNING POWER CAPACITIES

**Absorption**  
Being able to lose yourself in learning — becoming absorbed in what you are doing; rapt and attentive, in a state of 'flow'.

**Managing Distractions**  
Recognising and reducing distractions; knowing when to walk away and refresh yourself. Creating your own best environment for learning.

**Noticing**  
Perceiving subtle nuances, patterns and details in experience.

**Perseverance**  
Keeping going on in the face of difficulties, channelling the energy of frustration productively. Knowing what a slow and uncertain process learning often is.

**Questioning**  
Asking questions of yourself and others. Being curious and playful with ideas — delving beneath the surface of things.

**Making Links**  
Seeing connections between disparate events and experiences — building patterns — weaving a web of understanding.

**Imagining**  
Using your imagination and intuition to put yourself through new experiences or to explore possibilities. Wondering What if ...?

**Reasoning**  
Calling up your logical and rational skills to work things out methodically and rigorously; constructing good arguments, and spotting the flaws in others'.

**Capitalising**  
Drawing on the full range of resources from the wider world — other people, books, the Internet, past experience, future opportunities ...

**Interdependence**  
Knowing when it's appropriate to learn on your own or with others, and being able to stand your ground in debate.

**Collaboration**  
Knowing how to manage yourself in the give and take of a collaborative venture, respecting and recognising other viewpoints; adding to and drawing from the strength of teams.

**Empathy and Listening**  
Contributing to others' experiences by listening to them to understand what they are really saying, and putting yourself in their shoes.

**Imitation**  
Constructively adopting methods, habits or values from other people whom you observe.

**Planning**  
Thinking about where you are going, the action you are going to take, the time and resources you will need, and the obstacles you may encounter.

**Revising**  
Being flexible, changing your plans in the light of different circumstances, monitoring and reviewing how things are going and seeing new opportunities.

**Distilling**  
Looking at what is being learned — pulling out the essential features — carrying them forward to aid further learning; being your own learning coach.

**Meta-learning**  
Knowing yourself as a learner — how you learn best; how to talk about the learning process.

## RAEGAN DELANEY



*Raegan has contributed numerous examples of practice from her own school.*

*Leanne has contributed a range of examples of practice from schools she has worked with in Kent.*

I have been involved in primary education for twenty-two years in this country and overseas as a teacher, a school leader, a consultant partner and most recently a SIP. I am passionate about children's learning and committed to sharing this with children, other teachers and school leaders.

I have been head teacher of Nayland County Primary School since September 1999. Nayland was a good school when I was appointed and the challenge of taking an already successful school to new heights has been a delicate process. A cultural change that embraces risk-taking for teachers as well as pupils has been a key feature of improvement. In September 2005 OFSTED considered Nayland an outstanding school, describing leadership as 'outstanding ... outward looking and eager to get involved with any new initiatives that have something important to offer the pupils.'

'Building Learning Power' has offered all of our children the opportunity to take charge of their own learning and to have fun developing the skills that will keep them learning for life. The balance between the 'what' and the 'how' of learning has enabled every child, regardless of age or abilities, to feel empowered and grow in confidence, motivation, self-esteem and power!



### Maryl Chambers

Maryl Chambers has spearheaded the development of TLO Limited's Building Learning Power programme, helping bring Guy Claxton's ground-breaking work to schools and teachers. Maryl is one of the founders of TLO, where she has applied her wide experience of designing learning-focused training to creating and developing the innovative programmes for which the company is renowned. She is co-author of many of TLO's publications.

## LEANNE DAY



I began my teaching career in Liverpool where I taught for eleven years, spending eight years as Deputy Headteacher at St. John's C of E Primary School in Sefton. In 2005 I joined Kent's Advisory Service as a centrally based Advanced Skills Teacher. In this role I worked in partnership with teachers to develop creative approaches to teaching and learning; a major part of this being the implementation of Building Learning Power. I supported teachers, through modelling and coaching, in actively developing BLP in their classrooms. I went on to lead on the development of BLP, providing support to Advisory Service Teams, School Leadership Teams and teachers through the development of county-wide learning networks and a series of county conferences.

For me BLP has brought a new dimension to teaching and learning. Making learning to learn really explicit seems so obvious now and something I really couldn't teach without. BLP enables children to find ways for themselves, it gives them confidence to have a go and increases independence. Seeing children take great strides in their learning and being able to explain clearly how they got there is extremely rewarding.

### Nayland Primary School

Nayland County Primary School Suffolk is a semi-rural first school on the Suffolk–Essex border, catering for 145 children from nursery to Year 4. The school population is quite diverse but with a low percentage of children entitled to FSMs and below average special needs. Children enter the Foundation Stage broadly in line with national abilities but attainment at KS1 and Year 4 milestones are significantly above national expectations.

The staff pride themselves on their willingness to keep learning about learning. They have established an action research culture as part of this commitment to their learning partnership with 10 other local schools. The school bumped into BLP when the head teacher chanced to meet teachers from schools in Bath at an NCSL event, and returned totally fired up.

The learning partnership, HELP (Helping Effective Learning Partnerships), sent out a search party to visit these schools in Bath



and hear from the children whether Building Learning Power was all it was cracked up to be. As well as the obvious benefits to the learners, BLP has sharpened the teachers' focus and helped them to ensure they consider the impact of everything they do in school in terms of how it moves learning forward.

*In this unique book, four schools share the development of learning power through the use of learning heroes. The schools are on an exciting, never-ending, learning journey and have been kind enough to share their ideas so far.*

### Ashford South Primary School, Ashford, Kent

Ashford South Primary School has 250 children on roll and serves an area of high social deprivation. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and there has been a recent influx of EAL pupils. Attainment on entry to the school is lower than the national average.

Several teachers have attended a BLP Foundation Course and this ensured the approach became contagious. Conversations took place naturally in the staffroom, helping keep the momentum going.

Staff hold learning walks each term which involve walking around the school and sharing their learning environments. Each teacher talks about what they are doing and how. This 'in it together' approach has helped build everyone's confidence.

### Christ Church C of E Primary School

Christ Church is a two-form entry Primary School with 420 children on roll, situated near the centre of Folkestone. The eastern part of Folkestone is considered an area of high social deprivation, and 95% of the pupils come from this area, with 31% of pupils eligible for FSM.

The Headteacher trained as a BLP trainer in 2005. Since then he has been committed to ensuring that all teaching and support staff are trained in and understand the importance of BLP and how to use it. A rolling programme of training has allowed time to develop ideas and ensure consistency. This has enabled newly trained members of the team to see BLP in action and deepen their understanding.

Year 6 teachers began exploring the use of learning heroes in September 2007. The impact on the children has been tremendous and they have now begun to extend this learning throughout the school.



### Staplehurst Primary School, Kent

Staplehurst Primary has 396 pupils on roll, who come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Almost 90% are White British. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties. Their journey with BLP began in June 2005 when two teachers attended Kent's Creativity Conference where they were inspired by Professor Guy Claxton.

Teachers attended a BLP Foundation Course and began to drip feed ideas and coaching to other staff. The language of learning was slowly developed with the children which helped them to begin to talk about how they learn.

Further training took place and the approach was relaunched in the school in September 2007.



*Learning Power Heroes*

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- Famous Learning Heroes
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- Pupils as Learning Heroes

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- Learning-Power Assemblies and Star Books
- Boaster Posters and Other Celebration Ideas

#### FINDING OUT ABOUT LEARNING POWER

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#### A LEARNING POWER CULTURE

- A Miscellany of Ideas

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### LEARNING HEROES WHO TRANSFORM LEARNING

#### TRANSFORMING LEARNING

##### Learning Hero Headteachers

- Nayland Primary School, Suffolk
- Christ Church C of E Primary School, Folkestone

##### Learning Hero Teachers

- Year 6 Teacher, Christ Church C of E Primary School
- Year 6 Teacher, Christ Church C of E Primary School
- Reception Teacher, Nayland Primary School

##### Pupils as Learning Heroes

- Year 2 Pupil, Bures Primary School
- Year 4 Pupil, Nayland Primary School
- Year 6 Pupil, Christ Church C of E Primary School
- Year 6 Pupil, Christ Church C of E Primary School



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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?

## IMAGINARY LEARNING HEROES



### FATHER CHRISTMAS

The children chose Father Christmas as a learning hero in the week before Christmas. They had fun exploring how he was challenged in his job, ensuring all the presents were delivered on time. These are some examples of the children's evaluation of Father Christmas's learning power:

- **Capitalising:** Father Christmas capitalises on the elves' skills when deciding who should make different toys.
- **Planning:** Father Christmas plans really well; he decides what needs to be done, when and by whom. He draws a map of his route on Christmas Eve and records times to arrive at certain places.
- **Perseverance:** Father Christmas is very good at persevering; he makes sure he has a clear idea of what he should be doing and keeps on going until he finishes. He takes a break when he needs to and listens to music to help him concentrate.
- **Revising:** Father Christmas thinks about what he did last year to help him this year; he revises his route and reorganises the workshop.



### SAM SATS

In the run up to SATs week the children developed their own imaginary learning hero Sam SATS. They talked about how he would behave in the SATs tests. For example he would:

- **Plan:** Sam plans his writing carefully, thinking about the genre in terms of structure and organisation and the effect on the reader. He also takes note of the time to help him make sure he has time to finish the test. He tries to answer every question, knowing a good guess might get him a mark.
- **Question:** Sam questions himself about which method to use to answer a Maths question.
- **Notice:** Sam notices how many marks a question is worth and uses this to help him decide how to answer it.
- **Persevere:** Sam keeps on going and doesn't give up.
- **Imitate:** Sam imitates his teacher and his classmates to help him revise previous learning and make sure he has a method he can use well.



### CHARLIE BUCKET

Children attributed the following learning capacities to Charlie Bucket from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl:

- **Reasoning:** Charlie makes logical decisions about what's right and what's wrong to help him make the best choice. Charlie reasons with himself.
- **Questioning:** Charlie questions himself about how to get a golden ticket.
- **Imagining:** Charlie uses his imagination to create pictures in his head about what Willy Wonka's factory might look like.
- **Making Links:** Charlie makes links between the actions and behaviour of other children in the chocolate factory and the things that happen to them.
- **Capitalising:** Each year for his birthday Charlie is given a bar of chocolate, which he likes to make last. He makes best use of his resources, he capitalises on them.

## USING IMAGINARY LEARNING HEROES TO DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNING POWER

### WHERE WE STARTED

Our Year 6 children knew what building learning power was and could name the four R's. However, their knowledge and understanding of the learning capacities was superficial. We hoped that using learning heroes as a stimulus would motivate and enthuse the children, help them to explore the learning capacities and develop strategies of their own.

### WHAT WE DID

Initially children collected pictures and examples of their heroes. Having evaluated learning, the teachers decided to focus on developing the children's resourcefulness and began to discuss how their heroes were resourceful. Teachers modelled examples and encouraged children to add their own ideas to a class learning wall.

Alongside this, 'warming up for learning' sessions were introduced first thing in the morning to allow children to explore learning capacities and build success criteria for them. Teachers draw on this throughout the day.

### HOW IT DEVELOPED

Learning heroes are now changed fortnightly in consultation with the children. The children thought it would be a good idea to use heroes for different projects they are studying so, for example, Jenner was a learning hero when the children were learning about micro-organisms.

A class book of learning heroes is being developed which holds all the heroes explored together with the children's comments about them.

### IMPACT ON THE CHILDREN

Children now talk about learning and are really excited about learning rather than doing. Involving the children in the decision-making process of selecting the hero has shown them that their ideas and opinions are valued. The children have the language to talk about learning and draw on past and present learning heroes frequently.

#### A warm-up activity: Using imagination

Remember to:

- Look carefully at the objects
- Think about what they might be used for
- Think beyond the obvious
- Make creative suggestions

Provide the children with a range of objects. What might they be used for? Encourage the children to think of as many uses as possible, beyond the obvious. Introduce one at a time, what can we do if we use more than one at a time?

Discuss what the children did to be imaginative. Generate strategies.

### OVER TO YOU

- How might you use or adapt this wider use of learning heroes?
- Might this idea help your pupils to better understand the learning capacities?
- Would changing the learning heroes fortnightly work for your class?
- Are you aware of which learning capacities your pupils need to work on most?
- How might you find out if not?
- Find more ideas for using learning heroes in literacy, science and maths in Section 2.
- Find out more about learning warm-ups on page 25.