

Building the habits of...

Successful Learners



Curriculum for Excellence: the educational balancing trick

Scottish schools are more fortunate than many others in having, in CfE, a curriculum that pays balanced attention both to the higher purposes of educating young people for their future lives, and to the more obvious classroom business of curriculum areas with knowledge and specific skills to be inculcated and acquired.

But keeping the balance is always challenging. The ever-present pressure of the day-to-day, plus eventual qualifications, can squeeze out attention to the longer-term, higher-order learning and dispositions.

Yet the two sides can work synergistically instead of competitively, in concert rather than in conflict...

Uniting the models of CfE and Building Learning Power

All powerful learners cultivate a set of key learning characteristics. Successful Learners, as described by CfE, would deploy a subset of these characteristics: some of the most important are highlighted in the diagram below.

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

Interdependence: Learning alone or with others; understanding where to step forward or take a back seat; confident to ask for help when appropriate.

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

Collaboration

Listening

Imitation

Revising: Being flexible, revising plans in the light of change, monitoring and reviewing how things are going.

Capitalising

Empathy

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

CfE says that Successful Learners are:

- enthusiastic and motivated about learning
- determined** to reach high standards of achievement
- open** to new thinking and ideas

and that they can:

- use literacy, communication and numeracy skills
- use technology for learning
- think **creatively** and independently
- learn **independently and as part of a group**
- make **reasoned** evaluations
- link** and apply different kinds of learning



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

Noticing

Absorption

Managing distractions

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

Learning behaviours to build powerful Successful Learners

Successful Learners

This resource sketches an approach that schools and teachers could use to deliver the CfE promise of helping young people to become Successful Learners.

We see 'Successful Learners' as the key capacity of the four that make up CfE's Purpose: not because it is of more ultimate value, but because it will contribute hugely to achieving the other three.

There is just a lot of learning for a young person to get through in their school career — a powerful learner can expect to learn more, faster, and more thoroughly. Which, by the way, should help hugely with the 'outcomes' side of the curriculum balance.

The BLP approach

There are two main parts to Building Learning Power:



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 card.)

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.