

# How coaching can support learning in schools

## What is Learning to Learn?

Learning to learn is what happens when individuals and schools work from the belief that learning is a set of skills that can be improved.

The charity Campaign for Learning<sup>1</sup> describes Learning to Learn as "a process of discovery about learning. It involves a set of principles and skills which, if understood and used, help learners learn more effectively and so become learners for life."<sup>2</sup>

Why is this important? As John Holt<sup>3</sup> said, we can't predict the future, so we need to be creating learners who are able to adapt. Also important, if instead we work from the belief that learning is a fixed talent, when people fail they are sent the message "if you can't do this now, you never will; so give up!".

The Campaign for Learning commissioned research that set out to answer the question: "How can we help pupils to learn most effectively and so give each one the best chance to achieve his or her full potential?" The results from the phase 1 report showed that this happened when:

- learners are treated with respect - know what they are going to learn and why,
- learner is engaged,
- learner can learn and use their learning in a variety of ways and contexts,
- learner acknowledges their ability to learn.

These results were backed up by a project in which students became 'learning detectives'<sup>4</sup>. This project also found that student's valued:

- motivation; learners had to take responsibility,
- pictures, models, interactive whiteboards, animation, colours all added to learning,
- fun.

The psychologist Carol Dweck has been investigating the difference that personal beliefs about learning can make. If students are taught in a way that encourages a belief that their abilities are innate and can't be changed then their performance suffers as soon as they encounter difficulty. On the other hand, if students believe that their learning is a skill that can be learnt they are more likely to take responsibility for their learning and show resilience when encountering difficulties<sup>5</sup>.

In summary, the most effective learners:

- acknowledge that their skill of learning can be improved,
- are motivated to take responsibility for this task,

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1. <http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk>  
2. learning to learn phase 1 report 2000. Download from [http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learninginschools/projects/learningtolearn/phase\\_1\\_and\\_2.asp](http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learninginschools/projects/learningtolearn/phase_1_and_2.asp)  
3. American author and educator: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Holt\\_\(educator\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Holt_(educator))  
4. <http://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/learning-to-learn-changing-the-curriculum-3014>  
5. mindset - the new psychology of success: Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

- learn in an environment that is respectful, engaging and fun.

## Learning to Learn in the real world

Here we see how Learning to Learn was applied positively in 3 schools.

The staff and governors at Melcombe Primary School are committed to developing a "learning to learn school"<sup>6</sup>.

What results have they seen? The Ofsted report is revealing. "The pupils' personal development is outstanding because of the school's strong emphasis on helping them to grow in self-esteem, self-confidence and self-knowledge. They know very clearly what is expected of them and respond to their teachers with enthusiasm and effort. They have excellent attitudes to learning and are developing a good range of learning skills. They feel respected and included. As one of them said, 'We're always listened to. No-one ever feels left out.' Another commented, 'If you respect someone they respect you back.'<sup>7</sup>"

The school also scored very highly<sup>8</sup> in the personal development and well-being section of the Ofsted report. It is these values that represent the learner's ability to adapt and become successful learners for life rather than high scores in specific subjects.

Wilmington Girl's school reports that "There is a real sense of staff and students learning and working together to build a better community of learners and a better future" following the adoption of a learning to learn program.<sup>9</sup>

In the third school (name not supplied in the phase 1 report), a target group of Year 9 pupils were exposed to a range of Learning to Learn strategies. These pupils consistently performed better in a range of tests relative to the comparison group, which was matched on academic ability<sup>10</sup>.

## How does Learning to Learn fit in with national strategy

The DCSF national strategy of "personalised learning" has many parallels with the aims of Learning to Learn. In particular, we have seen that Learning to Learn endorses "teaching approaches that recognise and respond to individual differences in the ways that pupils learn"<sup>11</sup>, and from the DCSF: "Personalised learning means high quality teaching that is responsive to the different ways students achieve their best."<sup>12</sup>

The learning to learn approach values the learner knowing what they are going to learn and why, as well as acknowledging their ability to learn - they can "be treated as partners in their learning, with joint responsibility for participating in the design of their learning"<sup>13</sup>.

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6. <http://www.melcombeprimaryschool.com/index.html>

7. [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxedu\\_reports/display/\(id\)/100242](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxedu_reports/display/(id)/100242)

8. 7 grade 1 and 2 grade 2

9. <http://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/learning-to-learn-changing-the-curriculum-3014>

10. learning to learn phase 1 report. page 18.

11. learning to learn phase 1 report. page 7.

12. <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/personalisedlearning/about/>

13. <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/personalisedlearning/about/>

## How coaching can support Learning to Learn

"As directors of learning, teachers need to create the right climate for learning. The climate in individual classrooms is vastly affected by whole school climate and school learning culture.<sup>14</sup>"

The Campaign for Learning recommends that "Learning to Learn should always be implemented as an enquiry based investigative process, rather than a 'how to' solution to effective teaching and learning.<sup>15</sup>"

One way to support Learning to Learn in schools is to have a facilitator or coach working on site with the staff and children.

The coaching relationship aims to be an enquiry-based process. What are the beliefs of the teachers and how does this affect the classroom? Does changing these beliefs alter the learning environment? What works best? And how can the principles be embedded into the culture of the school?

learning-to-learn.org.uk is a coaching business that aims to support teachers and schools through a collaborative coaching relationship<sup>16</sup>.

## Other approaches

Antidote<sup>17</sup> is a company that aims to highlight the importance of emotional literacy in our society. Their process is to get an overview of a school through an online internet-based survey. They then support the school in creating and embedding strategies that make learning even better.

The Campaign for Learning<sup>18</sup> charity aims to create a passion for learning that sustains people for life. As well as their campaign work, they offer a range of services that support learning. They have also carried out research that supports the Learning to Learn concepts.

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14. learning to learn phase 1 report. page 6.

15. learning to learn phase 1 report. page 4

16. <http://learning-to-learn.org.uk/blog/aim/>

17. <http://www.antidote.org.uk>

18. <http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk>