

Fairholme Learning Muscles

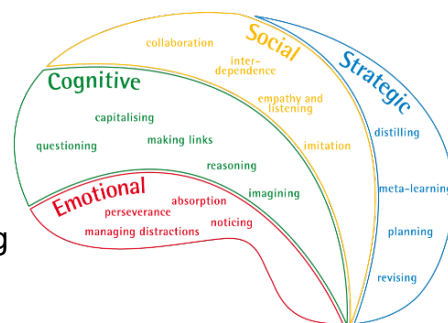
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Rationale

At Fairholme, we believe learning behaviours are important to developing successful and lifelong learners. These need to be modelled, taught explicitly and promoted within our curriculum; they form part of our classroom ethos, learning ethos and link to the school's values and pedagogical approaches. We are aware that children may not be taught "learning skills" or "habits" at home. We hope that this understanding will begin to spill over into life outside school, where families will be able to reinforce these ideas by encouraging the children to use their learning language in their everyday lives. Focusing on learning muscles and learning habits which encourage children to see themselves as learners and to realise that they can learn to be good at learning raises aspiration, ambition and self-esteem.

What is the idea based on?

- Building Learning Power – the original pioneering work of Professor Guy Claxton
- An extensive body of research into learning and the brain
- Recent research into the key dimensions of learning habits



Building Learning Power (BLP) is a whole school approach to life learning which is part of every area of school life. It is based on the idea that we are all capable of becoming better learners.

“An approach to help young people to become better learners both in school and out... it's about creating a culture that cultivates habits and attitudes that enable young people to face difficulty and uncertainty calmly, confidently and creatively.” (Professor Guy Claxton – founder of BLP). This is not a change in curriculum and does not essentially change ‘WHAT’ we teach the children. This approach concentrates on ‘HOW’ the children are learning and focuses on the qualities of a good learner.



At Fairholme, we have taken the principles and content of the Building Learning Power approach and adapted them to align more closely with the way we teach and with the experiences of our children. We have included key learning habits which we have found, from experience, children benefit from developing and practising to enable them to learn even more effectively. Teaching these strategies takes time, thought, and a bit of ingenuity to perfect and is part of our whole-school approach to learning. All year groups promote the language and vocabulary of learning muscles, skills, power and habits, and adapt them to suit the age of their children.

What is it all about?

Good behaviour needs to be taught explicitly, and so does good learning behaviour. By regularly drawing attention to effective learning behaviours, we can work together across school to:

- Develop children's learning character and habits
- Develop a common language for learning across the school. The language is used in all classrooms, with all children and is part of our day-to-day teaching,

- Focus on learning muscles and learning habits which encourage children to see themselves as learners and to realise that they can learn to be good at learning
- Model and teach strategies explicitly that will help them become good at learning throughout life – good learning behaviour is a life skill in employment as well as in school.
- Enable children to approach difficulties in learning without fear of failure.
- Help children to see learning as a process – to recognise that ability is not fixed, but something that can be improved with hard work and practice.
- Celebrate making mistakes and learning from them
- Help young people to build a coherent picture of what it takes to be a good learner and help themselves to become better learners
- Provide a basis and stimulus for regular discussion about how we learn and what helps us to learn even better
- Develop the appetite and ability to learn in different ways
- Prepare young people for a lifetime of learning
- Shift responsibility for learning to learn from the teacher to the learner
- Engage teachers and students creatively as researchers in learning

Mistakes are
PROOF
that you are
TRYING

We want children to know that they are all good at something, that making mistakes is part of learning and life, that mistakes create learning opportunities, and that they can get better at the things that they find a challenge. This approach permeates the culture of the school and learning, in the same way that our school values, code of conduct, behaviour policy, and so on are part of our ethos.

What effect does developing students' learning behaviours have?

- raised achievement
- improved behaviour
- increased student and teacher motivation
- increased enjoyment in learning
- established habits of lifelong learning
- enhanced creativity

What do our learning muscles and learning habits look like?

We talk about 'learning muscles' which the children are encouraged to 'stretch' within their everyday lessons and activities and apply to different aspects of their learning. Our Fairholme Learning Muscles are organised into three main areas:

- **Building respectful relationships (learning is a social activity)**
- **Being curious and aspiring to learn more**
- **Becoming independent**

Within each area, we have key learning muscles and habits that we model and discuss with the children. The idea is that these are all muscles that we can exercise and develop – and we make links between exercising the physical muscles in our body (through exercise and PE to stay healthy) and exercising the muscles in our brain to help us learn even more effectively. We have identified twelve key learning muscles, skills and habits that we focus on, which fall under the three main areas mentioned above:



- **Building respectful relationships (learning is a social activity)**
 - Collaboration
 - Listening
 - Contributing
- **Being curious and aspiring to learn more**
 - Noticing, editing and improving
 - Questioning and curiosity
 - Making connections (making links)
 - Imagining
- **Becoming independent**
 - Perseverance and resilience (including strategies for being stuck)
 - Reasoning
 - Managing distractions
 - Planning
 - Resourcefulness



Collaboration: You understand the ground rules of team work; you are able to work effectively as part of a pair or team; you share, take turns, listen and respond appropriately; you manage your feelings when working with others.



Listening: You put yourself in other people's shoes to see the world from their point of view; you show you are listening by eye contact and body language; you recognise feelings and thoughts behind someone's words.



Contributing: You share your thoughts and opinions readily, listen to others and develop ideas with them. You take turns, share information and enjoy the interaction with others.



Noticing, editing and improving: You notice how things look, what they are made of, or how they behave; you can identify significant detail. You are ready to edit and revise your plans as you go along, monitor how things are going, and change your plans when you've had a better idea.



Questioning and curiosity: You are curious about things and people; you often wonder why; you play with ideas, asking "How come?" and "What if?"

Making connections (making links): You look for connections between experiences or ideas, you find pleasure in seeing how things fit together, you make patterns.



Imagining: You picture how things might look, sound, feel, be; you let your mind explore and play with possibilities and ideas.

Perseverance and resilience (including strategies for being stuck): You are not put off by being stuck, you keep on going despite difficulties and find ways to overcome them, you recognise that learning can be a struggle.



Reasoning: You create logical arguments; you deduce what might happen; you look for evidence.



Managing distractions: You value your learning and can concentrate on a task for a reasonable amount of time, enabling you to deepen your understanding, even if the learning seems tricky. You are able to ignore interruptions and encourage your friends to stay focused as well as yourself.



Planning: You think about what you want to get out of learning, you plan the steps you might take, you access which resources you may need.

Resourcefulness: You make use of a full range of resources from the wider world – other people, books, equipment, the internet, past experience, future opportunities, and more.



How can teachers promote and develop learning muscles and habits?

- Every classroom will display visuals for all twelve learning muscles/habits and these will be referred to regularly.
- Explicitly model, teach and draw attention to learning muscles that adults and/or children are using and comment/narrate them, how they are being used, and the impact they are having.
- Praise - that focuses on the effort and achievement to do something (praise children when they persevere but also encourage them to take a brain break when they have had enough).
- Look at routines – what can be changed to increase children’s resilience?
- Show children that you don’t always know the answer (getting stuck is good!).
- Instil the ethos that we learn from our mistakes and that it is good to make them.
- Remind children that learning can be messy and there will always be ups and downs.
- Talk about the ‘learning pit’.
- Encourage questions.
- Rather than asking a child what they are doing, ask them what they are learning.
- Promote language and vocabulary associated with learning, learning muscles, learning habits and learning routines.
- Link the Fairholme Learning Muscles and Learning Habits to the school values and code of conduct.
- Choose a focus learning muscle for a period of time – this could be in a particular lesson, for a day or a week.
- Give certificates in celebration assemblies to praise when children have used or developed particular learning muscles or habits. Children could be encouraged to award these certificates to adults too.
- Alongside lesson learning objectives, consider indicating a learning muscle as well.
- Ask the children to be learning detectives, and spot positive learning behaviours that they see in other children during a lesson.

More information can be found in the Learning Muscles folder on the school network, which also contains useful ‘At a Glance’ guides for some of the learning muscles mentioned here (these are based on the original Building Learning Power approach developed by Guy Claxton but have lots of useful, relevant and practical ideas that link very well with our adapted approach).