THE LEARNING POWER APPROACH

Teaching Learners to Teach Themselves

Guy Claxton

Foreword by Carol S. Dweck

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Foreword by Carol S. Dweck

Many people now recognise that the drill-and-test focus in our schools is not preparing students for the modern world. This increasingly unpredictable world requires a zest for challenging ill-defined problems, an ability to see things through, and the resilience to bounce back from setbacks. It requires the desire and the ability to do this over and over and over.

Although many agree that schools are not equipping either our low or high achievers well enough for the real world they will meet after they finish school or college, far fewer have suggested practical alternatives. Into this comparative void rides Guy Claxton and his colleagues with their Learning Power Approach. This approach combines research-tested learning techniques that can be implemented in any classroom, and it includes these all-important factors: provoking curiosity and imaginative thinking, promoting "metacognitive" skills (such as reflecting on one's strategies and planning new ones), encouraging determination and perseverance, and fostering collaboration in the learning process.

In other words, the Learning Power Approach places the student in the centre of an exciting, purposeful, and social learning environment – not an environment in which students are required to memorise things they may not understand, for reasons they may not understand, and to do so in isolation from other students. You can just feel your heart sink as you go from the description of the Learning Power Approach to the Business as Usual Approach.

There are many reasons to believe that what the Learning Power Approach offers is so important. Here are just two.

First, it teaches generalisable qualities of mind – not just facts and formulas that apply in specific cases, but learning "mindsets" and skills that apply to many tasks and problems that students will encounter both now and in the future in all parts of their lives. For example, students in these classrooms (such as those in the Expeditionary Learning (EL) schools in the United States; see https://eleducation.org) may often do projects that require them to learn about meaningful issues (such as issues in

their community), formulate the problem in a manageable way, do research into possible courses of action, and make recommendations, including ones that they and their peers can act on. They may also present oral reports on their work to the school and community. How could this not be more useful in the long run than memorising decontextualised facts and formulas that bear little relation to what they will encounter in life?

Second, more and more of our students are experiencing mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Too often I am hearing of first or second graders who experience such high levels of anxiety about schoolwork that they do not want to go to school. The testing culture is now reaching down into kindergarten, with many students, younger and older, believing that these tests measure something deep and permanent about their intelligence and their ability to succeed in the future. Rather than places of joyful learning, many of our schools become places of dread. In contrast, classrooms that embody the Learning Power Approach can become places of tremendous eagerness as students question, explore, delve deeply, and collaborate in the service of learning. Upon entering such a classroom, you may hear laughter or squeals of excitement, or you may hear nothing as students devote intense concentration to the compelling problems they're grappling with.

So, you might ask, what's the problem? Why isn't every classroom using the Learning Power Approach?

Well, I think there's one big reason: the current incentives for schools, teachers, and parents. In the United States, schools are often evaluated and rewarded (or punished) based on their students' standardised test scores. Teachers, too, are often evaluated and rewarded on the basis of their students' test scores. I recently learned of a teacher who created a joyful and effective learning environment for her summer school students, using many of the principles of the Learning Power Approach. However, during the actual school year, with the test hanging over her head, she used a more structured drill-and-test approach. She felt it was a risk for her and for her students to do otherwise. Observers reported that the difference in anxiety between the summer and school-year classes was palpable.

The irony here is that schools that adopt a version of the Learning Power Approach often have *higher* test scores. Good test scores are a natural by-product of deeper and more effective learning. Furthermore, in Learning Power schools teachers are free to

experience why they became teachers in the first place. They did not become teachers to force-feed facts and formulas to anxious and depressed students. They became teachers to see their children avidly learn and successfully grow their brains.

Parents, too, can play a role in perpetuating the drill-and-test approach. Many parents see high test scores as ways of ensuring their child's place in top schools in the future. They may not want to risk new teaching methods that may not pave the way to these schools. Yet the same parents are puzzled when their child moves back home after university rather than confidently taking on the world. In the end, shouldn't parents prefer an education that prepares their children for life?

You will cherish this book. It's full of engaging and informative classroom examples, and the recommendations rest on solid foundations, such as research on mindsets, interest, metacognition, grit, and collaborative learning. Guy Claxton, himself a noted cognitive scientist, is a knowledgeable and entertaining guide to the future of teaching. I urge you as teachers not to stand by as the world changes but our teaching does not. I urge you to be leaders in the crusade to transform education, so our students can thrive now and in the future – starting with your own classrooms. This book will help you begin your journey.

Carol S. Dweck,
Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology, Stanford University

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Carol Dweck has long been an inspiration for my work, and her offer of a foreword was extremely generous, given so many calls on her time. Other gurus of mine – giants on whose shoulders I have tried to stand – include David Perkins, to whom this book is dedicated, Art Costa, and the late Neil Postman. Over the years, many friends, colleagues, and authors have challenged and enriched my thinking about education. They include Ron Berger, Mark Brown, Margaret Carr, Maryl Chambers, Margot Foster, Michael Fullan, Paul Ginnis, John Hattie, Faye Hauwai, Bill Lucas, Deb Merrett, Karin Morrison, Kath Murdoch, James Nottingham, Graham Powell, Ron Ritchhart, Chris Watkins, Val Westwell, and Dylan Wiliam. Even some of those who temperamentally or ideologically disagree with me have helped me sharpen my thinking and deserve my thanks. They include Katharine Birbalsingh, Daisy Christodoulou, David Didau, Kathryn Ecclestone, Martin Robinson, and Chris Woodhead.

Many school teachers and head teachers have helped me to understand where my ideas work and where they don't, and have been a huge source of practical wisdom. Far too many to name exhaustively, they include Hugh Bellamy, Sue Bill, Matthew Burgess, Robert Cleary, Liz Coffey, Andrea Curtis, Reagan Delaney, Robyn Fergusson, Gemma Goldenberg, Bryan Harrison, David Kehler, John Keohane, Debbie Marchant, Sarah Martin, Karen McClintock, Andy Moor, Kellie Morgan, Judith Mortell, Bojana Obradovic, Leah O'Toole, Tom Sherrington, Annabel Southey, Nicole Styles, Adam Swain, Luke Swain, and Michael Whitworth. Becky Carlzon in particular has been

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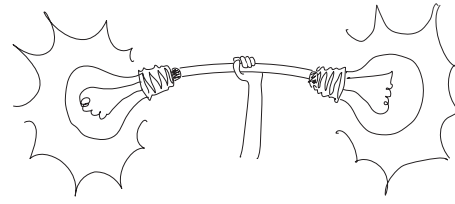

Chapter 1

The Origins of the Learning Power Approach

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.

Mahatma Gandhi

It wasn't until I was working on my doctorate in cognitive psychology that I began to unlearn to be taught. DPhil supervision in the Oxford University Department of Experimental Psychology was, in the early 1970s, a very loose affair. I had three supervisors over the course of the four years it took me to complete my thesis, all of whom practised a form of benign neglect. It was entirely down to me to make an appointment to see them, and, when I did, the response was usually some form of "very interesting – what do you plan to do next?" What guidance I got came mostly from protracted coffee-break conversations with other graduate students, and especially from conversations with the three young bloods with whom I shared an office, Stephen, Nigel, and Roger.

We read and argued. We thought up and carried out many experiments that never saw the light of day. And in the process, we were rehabilitating our learning faculties. We were learning to be curious, and to develop and discipline that curiosity through critical thinking and wide reading. We were developing longer-term interests and stretching our willingness to persist in the face of difficulty and confusion. We were learning to collaborate and discuss, to disagree robustly while remaining friends, and to reflect critically and fruitfully. We were learning to be creative and imaginative, dreaming up possible theories to explain whatever we were interested in. We taught

ourselves to design and critique experiments and to pick holes in our own and everyone else's arguments. We made dozens of mistakes and learned to learn from them. Above all, we were learning to trust our own minds: to believe that that we wondered was worth wondering, what we thought was worth thinking. We were learning to develop and rely on our own (collective and individual) resources. We were regaining the confidence – which we had all had as small children – to dive in, have a go, follow our noses, and engage in trial and error (lots of error), but honing those attitudes into sharp, sophisticated research skills. We were learning to be powerful learners. (And we all went on to become productive and successful academics.)

It was a challenging, uncomfortable, and exciting time. We had to break free of all the habits and expectations that our previous education had embedded in our minds. We had to give up expecting a teacher to design learning for us, rescue us when the going got tough, tell us the "right" answers, or train us in how to write an A-grade essay. In the absence of that benign, authoritative, guiding teacherly presence, we had to learn how to become our own teachers. And so I will always be grateful to my supervisors for their neglect.

When I left Oxford I imagined a career as a psychology academic, but, to pay the bills, I took a temporary job teaching psychology at the University of London Institute of Education. I quickly discovered that the real-world challenges of helping people learn to become schoolteachers were more satisfying, and indeed more intellectually interesting, than designing finicky little laboratory experiments – so I have never left the world of education. And those earlier experiences of education – of learning, and then eventually unlearning, to be taught – have shaped my work ever since.

It quickly dawned on me that everyone – not just academics – needs those powers of confidence, curiosity, and imagination that I had been strengthening at Oxford. No artist, no engineer, no plumber, no care worker is going to be followed throughout their lives by a kindly teacher marking their work and showing them how to close the gap between their current performance and a more advanced form of expertise (like passing an exam). If I had become a chef instead of a prof, I think I would still have needed those abilities.

Admittedly, in some workplaces there are line managers, annual appraisals, and learning and development departments offering some advice and training. But if we are going to take advantage of those offerings to grow our expertise, we will need a

mindset that has the confidence and enthusiasm to learn on our own. Even more, if we are to craft "trajectories of excellence" through life – as a parent, a lawyer, an athlete, or a gardener – we will have to design and manage those learning journeys for ourselves. We will need to notice what it is we need to get better at, and to think about how best to acquire the knowledge and skill we currently lack.

When you look at traditional education, we don't seem to be doing very well at turning out those independent thinkers and learners. Of course, some people turn out to be powerful learners despite their schooling, but many more do not. Their minds are shaped for the worse by their time in classrooms. No one, to my knowledge, has ever gone into teaching saying, "My passionate commitment is to do everything in my power to turn out young people who are apathetic, passive, extrinsically motivated, dependent, dogmatic, timid, fragile, and credulous." However, I have seen far too many schools that have unwittingly developed exactly these dysfunctional attitudes – in high as well as low achievers. Under pressure to raise grades, they have felt obliged to teach in a way that creates such closed and anxious minds. They may bemoan the lack of creativity, initiative, or entrepreneurship in today's young people, yet respond by trying to paste some special activities over the top of routine teaching methods that are the real culprits. Not surprisingly, such sticking plasters are largely ineffective.

Such schools are neither run nor staffed by bad people. As I say, no one in their right mind sets out to create these attitudes. Yet these attitudes are the very antitheses of the mindsets that today's young people are going to need.

Apathetic means you are lacking in curiosity and wonder.	Instead of apathetic, you will need to be *curious*.
Passive means you are uninterested in learning unless required to engage in it by someone else.	Instead of passive, you will need to be *proactive*.

Extrinsically motivated means you are interested only in getting marks, grades, and praise for what you have learned; not in the glow of satisfaction from having mastered something tricky or produced something you are personally proud of.	Instead of extrinsically motivated, you will need to be *intrinsically motivated*.
Dependent means you are unable to engage in learning unless constantly instructed, reassured, and corrected by a teacher.	Instead of dependent, you will need to be *independent-minded*.
Dogmatic means you are addicted to right answers and unable to think about complicated or uncertain things that aren't black and white.	Instead of dogmatic, you will need to be *thoughtful* and *open-minded*.
Timid means being so frightened of making mistakes that you are unadventurous and conservative in your approach to learning, willing only to tackle things you already believe you can be successful at.	Instead of timid, you will need to be *adventurous*.
Fragile means you are likely to get upset or go to pieces if you get confused or don't get good grades.	Instead of fragile, you will need to be *robust* and *resilient*.
Credulous means you accept uncritically whatever authoritative-sounding statements come your way.	Instead of credulous, you will need to be *critical* and *sceptical* of what you hear and read.

Until recently, there was a prevalent view that chasing grades and building mental capacities were somehow at odds with each other. Without really thinking about it, some educators thought they had to choose. Am I going to go for the grades, in which case I have to adopt a rather didactic, teacher-directed style, or am I going to try to build those elusive "21st century skills", in which case the grades might suffer? This either/or thinking is an example of what we will call *limiting assumptions* – beliefs that we may not even recognise as beliefs, but that limit our horizons and aspirations: our sense of what is possible. And what *is* possible, according to the research, is to teach in a way that hits both targets: higher grades *and* positive, empowering attitudes towards learning itself. The Learning Power Approach is about turning this possibility into a day-to-day reality – in every school in the world.

And what *is* possible, according to the research, is to teach in a way that hits both targets: higher grades *and* positive, empowering attitudes towards learning itself.

Gradually the idea of "learning power" was born, and I developed it through a number of books: *Live and Learn* in 1984, *Teaching to Learn* in 1990, and *Wise Up: The Challenge of Lifelong Learning* in 1999, in which I brought together all the research that underpins the idea of learning power. A friend of mine, Graham Powell, who was working as a professional development adviser to teachers at the time, read *Wise Up* and suggested I boil it down into a practical book for teachers, so in 2002 *Building Learning Power* was published by a small British education provider, TLO Limited (TLO stood for The Learning Organisation). For the next 12 years, I worked closely with TLO to develop practical training and resources for teachers that would help them put the ideas into practice in their classrooms.

Though I am no longer closely associated with TLO, and my own thoughts have moved on, I think Building Learning Power (BLP) remains an excellent example of what I am calling here the Learning Power Approach (LPA). There are now thousands of schools around the world that have put BLP into action. Many hundreds of these are scattered around the United Kingdom, but there are also chains of English-speaking

schools in South Africa and Argentina; a network of schools in Ireland; a cluster of rural primary schools in the forests of Silesia in Poland; early childhood education centres across New Zealand; groups of independent schools in Victoria and New South Wales, Australia; and international schools in Amsterdam, Budapest, Dubai, Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City, Suzhou in China, and Santiago in Chile. (The work of some of these is described in a book that Bill Lucas, Ellen Spencer, and I published a few years ago called *Expansive Education*.[1]) My colleagues and I are now developing Learning Power International to coordinate and strengthen the spread of the LPA around the globe.

As we researched more, we naturally discovered earlier pioneers who had been thinking along the same lines, as well as a variety of other groups around the world, especially in the United States, who had been developing very similar – or apparently similar – approaches. I divide those approaches into four categories: nuclear family, godparents, friends and neighbours, and near misses.

Nuclear Family

The nuclear family – those approaches that exemplify the LPA most clearly – include several of the approaches that have come out of Harvard University's Project Zero, especially those originated by David Perkins and his colleagues. There is the Intellectual Character/Visible Thinking initiative, now led by Ron Ritchhart, and the work on Studio Thinking, focusing on learning habits of mind through arts education, led by Lois Hetland and colleagues. Also influenced by Perkins and his co-director of Project Zero, Howard Gardner, there is what is now known as EL Education, originally Expeditionary Learning, led by Ron Berger, which focuses on the development of a craftsman-like approach to learning in all learners. There is the pioneering Habits of Mind approach, originated by Art Costa and his long-time collaborator Bena Kallick. There is Chris Watkins's elegant work on the powerful effect of getting students to tell their own stories of learning, and the implications

1 Bill Lucas, Guy Claxton, and Ellen Spencer, *Expansive Education: Teaching Learners for the Real World* (Melbourne: ACER Press and Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2013).

of narrative approaches for the development of the learner-centred classroom. And there is the careful work of Philip Adey and Michael Shayer on their Cognitive Acceleration programmes in science and maths (CASE and CAME).

And I would include as family members some of the more venerable initiatives out of which our current understandings have grown. There is the seminal Project for the Enhancement of Effective Learning (PEEL), founded by Dick White, Jeff Northfield, John Baird, and others at Monash University in Australia in 1985, and continued to this day by Ian Mitchell. In early childhood education there is the Hundred Languages of Childhood approach developed at Reggio Emilia in Italy. There are the pioneering approaches of the highly influential International Baccalaureate, and the global chain of Round Square schools, inspired by the German educator Kurt Hahn, not to mention earlier roots in the work of Maria Montessori and Johann Pestalozzi.[2]

We are now able to articulate, more clearly than these pioneers were able to, the character traits that underpin powerful learning, and to provide a robust foundation in cognitive science rather than just philosophy. But all of the nuclear family members share a concern to articulate what the core learning dispositions might be, and to target teaching and school culture deliberately and explicitly to build those dispositions, while also raising more conventional indicators of achievement.

Godparents

The "godparents" are those who have made seminal intellectual and academic contributions to the development of the LPA, but who have not themselves been associated with the promotion of particular practical strategies for teaching and learning. Among the godparents are, obviously, David Perkins himself – a constant

2 You can find information on key works by all those named in these paragraphs in the references at the back of the book. For Kurt Hahn, see Nick Veevers and Pete Allison, *Kurt Hahn: Inspirational, Visionary, Outdoor and Experiential Educator* (Boston, MA: Sense Publishers, 2011). For Reggio Emilia, see Carolyn Edwards and Lella Gandini, *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2011). For Pestalozzi, see Joy Palmer (ed.), *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education: From Confucius to Dewey* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2001). A selection of practitioners' websites is noted at the end of the book as well.

fountain of thought-provoking ideas, arguments, and terminologies – who laid a cornerstone of the LPA with his work on learnable intelligence. There is Carol Dweck and her army of collaborators, whose monumental body of work on growth mindset has shown the extent to which certain unconscious belief systems restrict people's learning ability, and also the relative ease with which these beliefs can be surfaced, challenged, and changed. More recently there is Angela Duckworth's work on the important concept of grit. And perhaps I should include here such giants as the Americans John Dewey and Israel Scheffler, and the Scottish educationalist John Nisbet.

Friends and Neighbours

Among "friends and neighbours" I would include a whole range of kindred-spirit initiatives across the world. They include the Expansive Education Network, co-founded by Bill Lucas and me, and now led by Bill at the University of Winchester; Kevin Bartlett's Common Ground Collaborative; P21, the Partnership for 21st Century Learning; Whole Education, led by David Crossley and Douglas Archibald; John Abbott's 21st Century Learning Initiative; the Tools of the Mind approach developed by Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong; the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI); Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children (P4C); Bob Burden's Thinking Schools International; Paul Ginnis's *The Teacher's Toolkit*; James Nottingham's *Challenging Learning*; Jane Simister's Future-Smart; Mary Jane Drummond and colleagues' Learning Without Limits; David Price's Engaged Learning; the UK Royal Society of Arts' Opening Minds project; and Australian Kath Murdoch's approach to inquiry-based learning. There are many more, and forgive me if I have not mentioned your favourite.

Near Misses

Among the "near misses" are some currently very popular approaches to the improvement of teaching and learning that focus more single-mindedly on raising achievement – literacy and numeracy levels, examination scores and grades, and performance on international comparisons such as the PISA tests. Sometimes, despite their rhetoric, these near misses neglect to promote teaching methods that actually, effectively, address the development of learning power. In practice, for example, many formative assessment and assessment for learning (AfL) approaches focus predominantly on what teachers can do to help students close the gap between their current performance on the conventional curriculum, and the level of performance that high-stakes tests require. Though the original writings of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, the two originators of AfL, envisaged something much closer to the ideals of the LPA, many practical versions have reverted to an obsession with raising grades.

John Hattie's *Visible Learning* techniques likewise derive from research that evaluated different teaching methods overwhelmingly in terms of test scores. Impressive though this research is, it still works on the assumption that conventional kinds of test scores are the most important outcomes of schooling. By failing to engage with the – admittedly tricky – issue of how to evidence the development of learning attitudes and dispositions, Hattie's work strongly steers teachers towards getting those grades. (Over the course of the series of books of which this volume is a part, we will introduce and discuss various approaches to assessing the development of such attitudes. It *is* tricky, but that does not mean it can't be done, and many promising starts have already been made.[3])

Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion* strategies too are targeted at academic achievement. It is clearly all about getting more kids, especially from low-income backgrounds, to college. The strategies are grouped under headings like "Setting High Academic Expectations" and "Planning That Ensures Academic Achievement". (There is a category for "Building Character and Trust", but it comes seventh in his

3 See, for example, research in the references by myself and New Zealand academic Margaret Carr, as well as the review paper by Angela Duckworth and David Yeager. One of Art Costa and Bena Kallick's books, *Assessing and Reporting on Habits of Mind* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2000), is full of practical examples.

list of nine and is quite undeveloped.) Mastery Learning, deriving from the theories of eminent educator Benjamin Bloom, again emphasises ensuring high levels of academic achievement for all students, and fondly hopes that, as a result, confidence and a love of learning will somehow automatically accrue, though there is no evidence to support that belief. Meanwhile, some approaches to character education take a more moralistic stance, focusing on sex, drugs, and health education. Service education also talks of character development, but without a clear sense of what exactly the "desirable residues" of experiences of service are expected to be, nor of how success in their cultivation is to be evidenced.

Even some of the earlier work on thinking skills I now see as a near miss, because it tried to tackle thinking and learning as if they were mainly matters of consciously applied strategy or technique. All you needed to do was learn how to produce a neat "spider diagram" or how to make use of other types of visual diagrams for organising ideas on paper (or screen), and that made you a better thinker. But by and large, research has shown that such techniques tend not to become embedded in the way people actually think. They become "tricks" that students *can* call to mind and use when prodded, but that do not, of themselves, change underlying beliefs and attitudes. We have to tackle the problem of how to help people think and learn better at a deeper level: their habits of mind.

Many of the LPAs, like my own BLP, have become widely known and successful "brands". But it seems to me that it is high time to distil the common messages out of these kindred initiatives, and to create a broader alliance between them. The LPA is therefore not another brand; rather, it is an attempt to synthesise and synergise a variety of approaches that are already well developed and increasingly well evidenced. It is an umbrella, a broad canopy under which teachers who are used to more specific versions feel they can camp comfortably, as well as an introduction and an invitation to the millions of teachers around the world who know that education ought to be a proper preparation for life in a tricky world, and not just a blind obsession with grades and college and university entrance.

The Learning Power Approach provides teachers with a guide to keep at their side during the decades ahead as they navigate the as-yet-unimagined changes that will be imposed on our schools in the future.

Sir Tim Brighouse, former London Schools Commissioner
and Chief Education Officer for Birmingham and Oxfordshire

Rich with practical examples of what teachers and school leaders can do to support our pupils to develop the right mindset for success, *The Learning Power Approach* is a must-read for all educators who care about ensuring our young people develop the character and resilience to enjoy learning, as well as be great at it.

Andy Buck, Founding Director, Leadership Matters

The Learning Power Approach restores faith in the fullest ambition for what can be achieved when we engage inclusively to empower children, young people, and teachers through education.

Professor Dame Alison Peacock, Chief Executive, Chartered College of Teaching

There's something in *The Learning Power Approach* for everyone, whether you're an experienced teacher or an NQT, and it is written in such a way that you'll find yourself having finished the book before you even know it. Thoroughly recommended.

Andrew Morrish, Chief Executive, Victoria Academies Trust, author of *The Art of Standing Out*

The Learning Power Approach is a very important book indeed. Few, if any, people over the years have provided as consistent or intelligent a voice as Guy Claxton when talking about the need for a deep and genuine education. This book really nails the subject.

Sir Anthony Francis Seldon, FRSA, FRHistS, FKC

Whether learning a skill, acquiring new knowledge or developing emotional resilience, building learning power is the route to success and *The Learning Power Approach* shows you how to go about it.

Peter Hyman, Executive Head Teacher, School 21

In *The Learning Power Approach*, Guy Claxton clearly illustrates why a focus on building the competence and inclination to learn well needs to be a fundamental part of the educational approach of all schools.

Tristian Stobie, Director of Education, Cambridge Assessment International Education

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