

**Guy Claxton and Becky Carlzon**

# **POWERING UP CHILDREN**

**The Learning Power Approach  
to Primary Teaching**



**Foreword by  
Ron Berger**

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# Foreword by Ron Berger

All educators and families agree on this, and research consistently affirms it: the character of children has a profound effect on their academic and life success. Students who are respectful, responsible, courageous, and compassionate do better in school and life. Students who show determination and resilience in their learning, who have high standards for craftsmanship in what they do, are better equipped for everything that comes their way.

Remarkably, many schools feel that they cannot focus on these skills and habits during the school day because there is just not enough time. They see time in school as a trade-off: we can focus on academic learning to prepare for exams – the measure of our accountability – or we can focus on cultivating student character. Given limited time, character must be put aside. The irony is that these things are not separate. Focusing on character at the same time as academics builds students who are stronger at both. They work together: the dispositions that make students good and effective human beings also make them successful learners. We don't need to choose.

In *Powering Up Children: The Learning Power Approach to Primary Teaching*, Guy Claxton and Becky Carlzon bring together a vision, models, and resources to help primary teachers build classrooms where “learning dispositions” are explicitly cultivated in concert with academic skills and content. This book provides a framework for a “learning-powered classroom” and fleshes out that framework with concrete strategies and models that primary teachers can put to use right away. In every chapter I found myself nodding in affirmation: this is how a classroom should be.

All teachers understand that the biggest determinant to student success lives in each student themselves: how committed and determined they are to succeed; how much confidence and clarity they have in order to improve; what strategies they have in order to move forward. We often mistakenly attribute a student's strengths in this realm to innate qualities or family background – a student is either motivated or not – it is an individual issue. In truth, we adjust to the cultures we enter. If a school or classroom community expects more of students, challenges them and supports them

## Powering Up Children

more deeply, believes in their capacity and refuses to let them drift, students behave entirely differently. They step up. We can create classroom cultures, school cultures, of high standards and success for all students.

*Powering Up Children* describes what a classroom culture of high standards for academics and learning dispositions can look like, and uses models and stories to make that clear. It provides instructional strategies and templates that teachers can use, and, just as importantly, coaches teachers to move beyond a teacher-centric classroom to one in which students take significant responsibility for their own learning. It supports teachers to gradually release responsibility to students to set goals, critique their own and each other's work, and to reflect on their challenges and growth.

Students are capable of much greater things than we imagine. *Powering Up Children* is an excellent guide to building schools and classrooms that empower teachers to challenge and support children more deeply, to believe in them more authentically, and to bring out their best as scholars, citizens, and human beings.

Ron Berger, Chief Academic Officer, EL Education

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# Introduction

This book on the Learning Power Approach (LPA) is for primary, or elementary, school teachers.<sup>1</sup> But it is not for all of them. It is only for those who are really serious about teaching in a way that builds character alongside delivering the traditional curriculum. It is for teachers who are hungry for ideas and information about how to do that, and ready to change their way of being in the classroom to achieve that end. Let us explain.

School is about more than examination results. Everyone knows that. Everyone agrees. No school proudly claims on its website, “Send your children to us and we will squeeze the best grades we can out of them, by hook or by crook. And that is all we care about.” If pressed, every school protests that “we are not just an exam factory, you know”. There is always some acknowledgement that forming powerful habits of mind in children matters too: that we all want them to grow in confidence, kindness, resilience, or “mental agility”. “Fulfilling their potential” doesn’t just mean “getting top marks”. We want good results, but we want *results plus*: grades *plus* a character that is ready for the challenges and opportunities of the mid to late 21st century, as best we can predict what those will be. We can’t imagine a school that wants *results minus*: children with good grades but who are timid, dependent, unimaginative, and unadventurous.

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We want good results, but we want *results plus*: grades *plus* a character that is ready for the challenges and opportunities of the mid to late 21st century.

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1 Throughout the book, we will tend to use our native UK terminology of primary schooling, years, and key stages – except when referring to case studies from other educational systems. The UK system runs from “Reception” (which children enter at age 4, roughly) through Years 1 (5–6-year-olds), 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 (10–11-year-olds). Often these are divided into two “Key Stages”: Key Stage 1 comprises Years 1 and 2; Key Stage 2 comprises Years 3 to 6. In the USA school years are called “grades”, and they tend to be one year “behind” the English years, so fifth grade corresponds roughly to Year 6.

The key question is: what does that *plus* amount to? What exactly do we want our kids to be *like* when they leave our class, or move up to their high school? And how exactly is our school – and especially our teaching – going to look different if we take this plus as seriously as we could? How are we going to teach maths differently if we want our children to be growing an adventurous and creative spirit at the same time? How are our displays of children’s work going to look different if we want them to develop a sense of craftsmanship – a genuine pride in having produced the best work of which they are capable? We all want our children to become more resilient – to be inclined and equipped to grapple intelligently with things they find hard. So how are our forms of assessment going to tell us whether we are succeeding; whether our Year 4s are indeed more resilient than they were in Year 3?

Lots of teachers and school leaders espouse these values. Some of them have thought through – in detail – exactly what it will take, and set in motion – with the requisite degree of precision – the necessary changes. But many are still hesitant, awaiting clearer guidance and support from departments of education or academic “thought leaders”. Or they have got a firm hold on part of the challenge, but not yet figured out the whole if it. They work on resilience, but not imagination; on collaboration, but not concentration; on self-esteem, but not critical thinking; or, conversely, on higher order thinking skills, but not empathy.

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The LPA shows in systematic detail how to go beyond the soundbites and the posters to create classrooms that really do grow robust, inquisitive, imaginative, and collaborative learners – lesson by lesson, week by week, year on year.

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It is this detailed and comprehensive help that the LPA provides. It is for teachers and schools that really want to take the plus seriously, and have begun to realise the implications of doing so. They know that “team games” are not enough to grow collaboration; that becoming a good collaborator is as much to do with the way in which we teach English as it is to do with sports day. They know that a few fine words on the home page of the school website, or in a policy document on teaching and learning, are not enough. They have quickly realised that some glossy posters downloaded from Pinterest about growth mindset and the power of *yet* are not enough. You have to “live it, not laminate it”, as the Twittersphere pithily puts it!

For example, Sam Sherratt, who teaches the Primary Years Program of the International Baccalaureate (IB) in Ho Chi Minh City, wrote in his blog back in 2013, “All too often, in IB schools, the Learner Profile [a list of desirable attributes] exists in the form of displays and catchphrases, but doesn’t exist as a way of life, as a code of conduct or as an expectation for all stakeholders. We are not going to let that happen at ISHCMC [his school]!”<sup>2</sup> The LPA shows in systematic detail how to go beyond the soundbites and the posters to create classrooms that really do grow robust, inquisitive, imaginative, and collaborative learners – lesson by lesson, week by week, year on year.

So this book is crammed full of practical illustrations, advice, and hints and tips. It is designed for busy primary teachers who want to get started on the LPA journey, and for others who have already made good progress but may feel a bit stuck for fresh ideas or are wondering about the next step to take. And there is always a next step. As our understanding of the LPA has deepened, the horizon of possibility keeps receding in front of us. The further you go in training children to take control of their own learning, the deeper the possibilities that are opened up.

Depending on where you are on your journey, some of our suggestions will be very familiar to you, and some might seem rather pie in the sky. The spot we try to hit, as

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The further you go in training children to take control of their own learning, the deeper the possibilities that are opened up.

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much as possible, is the area in between “I do it already. Tell me something new”, and “in your dreams, mate”: the spot where you sense a new possibility for tweaking your existing style and it feels plausible and doable with the real live children you teach. That’s what we want you to be on the lookout for. So if something seems familiar, we invite you

to think about how you could stretch what you already do just a little more. And if a suggestion seems far-fetched it may nevertheless spark a train of thought that leads to a more fruitful idea.

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2 Sam Sherratt, “Parent Workshops: The IB Learner Profile”, *Making PYP Happen Here* [blog] (7 October 2013). Available at: <https://makingpyp happen here.wordpress.com/2013/10/07/36/>.

In a talk he gave a while ago that Guy attended, David Perkins suggested that each of us is either more of a “do-think-do” person – someone who likes to dive in, give things a go, then reflect and try again – or a “think-do-think” person – someone who prefers to gather all the information, then gives things a go and thinks again.<sup>3</sup> Whichever you think you might be, we hope that you can use the ideas outlined in this book as a guide to improving your LPA practice. Feel free to dive into whichever chapter is most appealing to you, although we do suggest reading the whole book from cover to cover at some point!

The LPA is not a set of rigid “recipes for success”; it is a set of tools, ideas, and examples that we hope you will critique and customise to suit your own situation. All we ask is that you hold fast to the spirit and the values while you are developing your own version. Sometimes we have seen people introduce – without meaning to – the “lethal mutation” that kills the spirit. For example, if you slip into seeing the LPA mainly as a way to rack up those conventional test scores, you have missed something really essential. Rather, we develop habits of mind like resilience and resourcefulness mainly *because* they are valuable outcomes of education in their own right – and then we keep an eye on making sure that the results go up too.

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We are aiming to develop strong mental habits in our children that will stand them in good stead for a lifetime, and that takes time and consistency.

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The LPA is very far from being a quick fix or the latest fad. It is actually quite demanding because it requires us to re-examine our natural style of teaching, and to make small but real experiments with our own habits in the classroom. As Sir Ken Robinson has said, “If you want to shift culture, it’s two things: its habits and its habitats – the habits of mind, and the physical environment in which people operate.”<sup>4</sup> The LPA requires some honest self-awareness and reflection, and that can be quite effortful and sometimes even uncomfortable. We told you the LPA wasn’t for everyone!

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3 Guy has asked David if he has a published reference for this idea, but he can’t find it!

4 Cited in Ron Ritchhart, *Creating Cultures of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015), pp. 230–231.

But our experience tells us that nothing less will do. Just adding some shiny new techniques on top of business as usual – what we call the “tinsel approach” – does not work in the long term because the same underlying messages of the medium persist. We are aiming to develop strong mental habits in our children that will stand them in good stead for a lifetime, and that takes time and consistency. Habits take months, even years, to develop and change. Children’s development depends on the day-to-day cultures we create for them to inhabit, not on something special we remember to pay attention to every so often. And to create those cultures, we teachers have to be conscious, resilient, and imaginative learners too.

The beauty of the LPA, though, is that it relies on a series of adjustments that are worked into your natural style one by one, gradually and cumulatively. You are not being asked to transform yourself from a leopard into a tiger overnight. It is evolution, not revolution. The LPA is a direction of travel, supported by signposts and resources to guide you along the way, and everyone can go at their own pace. The good news is that, on the journey, teaching the LPA way becomes highly satisfying and rewarding. A roomful of enthusiastic, resourceful learners, who are keen to sort things out for themselves, is a sight to behold – and a joy to teach. Instead of doing a lot of informing, explaining, and interrogating, your role develops a subtler side to it in which you spend more time nudging and challenging the children to “go deeper”.

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In every context in which Becky has taught, this is exactly what she has found – small tweaks to her practice have often made the biggest difference. For example, just by positively and consistently weaving in the language of the LPA, as we will show in Chapter 5, children have quickly locked on to “what learning is about” and realised how they can explore and express their own learning. An illustration of this occurred when a new child started in Becky’s class in the middle of the academic year. By the end of his first day he was talking about how he was going to challenge himself, who he had been collaborating effectively with, and what he had learned from his mistakes that day. Children are usually very quick to pick up cues from adults and their peers.



Children can also surprise us. For example, when reflecting on their learning process, the 5- and 6-year-olds in Becky's class have been known to make comments such as:

*"I'd prefer to collaborate today because I need to share ideas with a friend."*

*"I noticed everyone was really absorbed in their learning today because the classroom was so quiet."*

Because this book is designed to be really practical, there isn't much in the way of background or rationale about the LPA in it. We only say a little about where the approach comes from, what the scientific underpinnings are, and what the evidence for its effectiveness is. You will find all of that, if you are not familiar with it already, in the first book in this series, *The Learning Power Approach: Teaching Learners to Teach Themselves* (published by Crown House in the UK and Corwin in the US). The only thing worth noting here is that the LPA is not another "brand" competing for your attention in the crowded education marketplace. It is our attempt to discern the general principles behind a number of initiatives that have been developing, often independently of one another, over the last twenty years or so. It is a new school of thought about the kind of teaching that effectively stimulates the growth of agile, tenacious, and inventive minds – as well as getting the grades. You will find examples and ideas from a wide range of sources, and from different countries, as well as from our own research and practice.

The book you are reading now is actually the second in a series of four books, of which *The Learning Power Approach* is the first, providing the background to the approach. This volume will be followed by two other, equally practical, books: one for high school teachers, and another for school leaders. But we wanted to focus the first of these books on younger children because those vital qualities of mind – the general-purpose "learning muscles", as we call them – are being shaped most powerfully, for good or ill, in the early years. Set children on the right trajectory in their primary school and they will have a precious asset for life – even if, as sometimes happens, they go on to find themselves in a high school that is not yet as ready to welcome their independence and maturity as it could be.

Will the LPA work in your school? We are sure it will. We have seen it work well in early years settings in disadvantaged areas of New Zealand; in remote rural primary schools in the forests of Poland; in international schools in Bangkok and Buenos Aires; and in big urban primary schools across the UK, as well as in private preparatory

schools in the Home Counties and in special schools in London and Birmingham. The examples, tools, and techniques with which this book is crammed have been tried and tested in a wide range of settings.

But you will probably still have to experiment with them in the specific conditions of your classroom and often make adjustments to get them to work. Every school and every class is different; there's no getting around that. One size rarely fits all. The key is to be ready to adapt the ideas to each context and to be open to problem-solving and to sharing your LPA journey with your learners.

For example, when Becky moved from teaching in a Reception class in Bristol, England, to teaching business English in Argentina, it took a few months

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... those vital qualities of mind – the general-purpose “learning muscles”, as we call them – are being shaped most powerfully, for good or ill, in the early years.

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before she could really make headway with developing her students as learners as well as fluent English speakers. But by patient trial and error she found methods that worked to get them to take more responsibility for their learning.

She invented marking schemes which built curiosity around mistake-making and also developed a willingness to be more playful with the English language. She found ways to tap into her students' imaginations and make her lessons more attractive to them. One of her business classes invented new smoothies and sent videos of their creations to the renowned smoothie brand Innocent in the UK to see what they thought. To their delight, Innocent replied with their own video! In the process, Becky's students learned about phrasal verbs, improved their pronunciation, and developed their instruction writing – as well as building accuracy with language, reflection skills, and the ability to collaborate with colleagues. While learning how to teach in this new context, Becky was constantly asking herself questions like:

“How can I build my students as strong, collaborative, and reflective learners?”

“Is there a different way I could approach this to build persistence and learning from mistakes?”

“How can I make learning English more meaningful to my students?”

“How can I hand more responsibility over to my students?”

“How can I encourage my students to push and challenge themselves and not take the easy option?”

By experimenting with different possible answers to these questions, Becky was able to apply and develop the LPA in a new and unfamiliar context.

A learning-power classroom has many varied sides to it. Teachers lay the furniture out in a different way. They choose different things to display on the walls. They involve the children more than usual in designing their own learning. They use a specific vocabulary when they are talking to the children, and encourage specific kinds of talk between the children. They create particular kinds of activities and challenges. They comment on children’s work and write reports differently. Over time, we have distilled a clear set of design principles that teachers can follow if they want to make their classroom a highly effectively incubator of powerful learning.

The central chapters in this book are structured around thematic clusters of these design principles, and generally follow a common format:

1. First we explain why the design principles we are focusing on are important; including what’s in it for you – the teacher – and what’s in it for the children.
2. Next, we offer a menu of practical low-risk tweaks to classroom practice that enable you to engage with the design principles and experience some quick wins.
3. Then we give you some ideas about how to embed the principles more deeply in the ongoing life of your classroom, including some rich lesson examples from across the primary age range, and from different school subjects.
4. Finally, we address some of the common bumps and issues that may crop up along the way, and offer some advice on how to creatively adapt and modify the LPA until it begins to bear fruit.

And with that, let’s now dive into Chapter 1 and see what the LPA is all about.

## Chapter 2

# The Learning Power Approach in Action

After that overview, we now want to throw you straight into some LPA classrooms, so you can get a feel for what the LPA looks, sounds, and feels like. We are going to describe three lessons in different subjects, with children of different ages, so you can see how flexible the LPA can be, but also get a sense of what is common to them all. We will describe the lessons, offer you some reflections about what is going on, and what the teachers' intentions are, and then pose some questions for you to wonder about. At the end of the chapter we will tie the threads together using the design principles that we outlined in Chapter 1.

Remember that the three teachers you will meet in this chapter are quite experienced practitioners of the LPA, so you will see a lot of subtlety and flexibility in their use of the approach. Over time they have learned how to think on their feet so they can capitalise on what is going on in the classroom, and customise their comments and directions accordingly. As with the formation of any new habit, this level of fluent expertise takes time to develop – so if the LPA is new to you, don't expect to be able to do what these teachers are doing overnight. In the rest of the book we are going to slow the journey down and take it step by step. This chapter is just to orient you to the potential of the approach, and give a sense of where we are heading.

## What Does the LPA Actually Look Like?

Our first example comes from Becky's Year 1 classroom in Christ Church Infants School in Bristol in the UK. Here is a description of the lesson. We have written it from the standpoint of an observer, so you can imagine yourself being in the room, watching what is going on.

It is near the beginning of the year and the children need to consolidate their knowledge about ordering the numbers from 1 to 10. Of course, as in any class, there is a wide range of understanding. Some children can already order the numbers up to 10 very easily; others struggle to get beyond 5. The key challenge is to engage and stretch all children and, in the process, help them to learn that they can independently stretch themselves without the “OK” from their teacher. Since it’s the beginning of the year, the children are still in the early stages of exploring what makes a good learner. For example, they have been getting used to collaborating with a range of different children for a good few weeks, and they are also beginning to understand what it means to challenge themselves.

In order to deepen the children’s understanding of ordering numbers from 1 to 10, Becky has gathered a range of resources that could be ordered in that way. These include standard primary school mathematical equipment, such as Numicon, felt number tiles, Multilink cubes, clocks, and also some natural objects like leaves, sticks, and stones. In fact, Becky asked a classroom assistant to go outside with some children with special needs before the lesson and count and collect sets of natural objects to use in the lesson. After a few warm-up activities, such as simply practising counting forwards and backwards, Becky asks the children to find a “learning partner” to sit next to, and then arrange themselves in a big circle. She reminds them that good learning partners are not necessarily their best friends, but are children who they know will help them to concentrate and learn. She tells them that it is always good to challenge yourself and be brave enough to learn with someone new.

Once the children are in a circle, she asks them to discuss with their partner how many different ways they could use the resources to build a number line from 1 to 10. She asks them if they can develop a plan to build a number line from 1 to 10 in as many different ways as they can think of. During the discussion Becky circulates, listening to and extending the children’s ideas and facilitating talk. She makes comments and asks questions like:

“I wonder if you can think of another way to do that.”

“How could you make that even trickier for yourselves?”

“What steps might you take to make that number line?”

“What could you do if you have finished?”

“What would you do if someone else wanted to use those resources?”

After the talk in pairs, the children share their ideas with the whole circle. Becky makes it clear to them that this is a really important time to listen as they might want to borrow good ideas from their friends, or they might pick up ideas that they can add to their own plan. She asks a few children to share their ideas, carefully picking some more basic examples and more in-depth, tricky ones. For example, one pair say they would like to order number tiles from 1 to 10 and another adds to that by saying they could count out objects on top of the tiles to match the numerals. Another pair say they really want to challenge themselves to see if they can make times on the clocks and order them!

Once a few ideas have been shared, Becky lets the children go off to put their plans into action. She circulates around pairs of children, commenting on, questioning, and nudging them to develop their ideas. She is also acting as an “idea fertiliser”, sharing ideas between groups of children and sometimes with the whole class. For example, when children think they have completed the task, she makes comments like, “I wonder if you can spot any ideas other children are using and use them to make yours even better ...” As she wanders round, she takes photos of the children learning, planning to use them in the review at the end of the lesson.

The children’s ideas range from making towers of Multilink cubes and ordering them, chalking numbers and matching the correct amount of sticks to each number, ordering the cardboard clocks by moving the hands to make different times, and using an abacus to “make a number line that goes back and forwards”. The children are already getting into the spirit of the LPA because you can hear them saying things like:

“We chose the clocks because they were the trickiest, didn’t we?”

“I know! I’ll get us a number line to check the numbers!”

“Let’s write the numbers and count out some objects. What should we use to count?”

For the last ten minutes of the lesson, the children gather round the interactive whiteboard. Becky chooses some photos to focus on and discuss in more detail. Again, she values simpler ideas alongside ideas where the children have really extended themselves – for example, by ordering times on the clocks, the children eventually made a number line, ordering clocks by the hour, and then extended themselves to make some of the clocks say half past, quarter past, and quarter to. One child suggests making a display of all of their ideas, so after the lesson Becky prints some of the photos and displays them with the title, “How many ways could you make a number line from 1 to 10?”

There are many aspects of this lesson that illustrate the philosophy and practice of the LPA. The aim is to teach in a way that encourages the children to learn how to “do it for themselves”. Why? Because if they learn how to take risks and push themselves in their learning, and to recognise and enjoy the buzz of learning something new, they will become more proactive and robust and will no longer need someone else to either push or reassure them. Not only does this mean the children progress more quickly, it also makes the teacher’s job easier as the children start to drive their own learning.

Getting the children to choose their own learning partners, and to keep daring to find new ones, is a deliberate ploy to strengthen their ability – and willingness – to collaborate well with each other. In many classrooms, children are encouraged to gain a feeling of security by sitting in the same place, and always working with a chosen partner – their best friend perhaps – with whom they feel comfortable. But this security makes children vulnerable to change, so Becky continually encourages them to discover ways of working well with new partners, and to consider for themselves the benefit of working with a wide range of other learners with different views and habits to their own.

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The aim is to teach in a way that encourages the children to learn how to “do it for themselves”.

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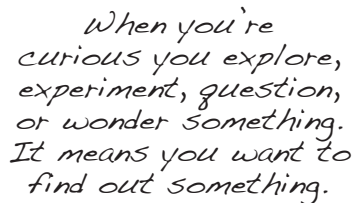
This kind of steady, “drip, drip” stretching of habits develops throughout the year. To begin with, some children find learning with new partners difficult – because it’s unfamiliar and “risky”. But the ones who find it difficult are the ones who need it most, as they are typically the ones with weak socialising muscles that need exercising. If we avoid this difficulty, or don’t plan to provide these children with opportunities to learn with new friends, we are doing them a disservice as those learning muscles will stay weak, although of course this doesn’t mean they will instantly enjoy the experience of changing partners. By encouraging children to constantly seek out new partnerships, they are learning how to make new friends, to gain confidence, and to explore the value of learning with lots of different children.

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In an LPA classroom, borrowing or even stealing each other’s ideas, customising and enriching them in the process, is actively encouraged!

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Notice also the kinds of open-ended questions and comments that Becky uses, continually nudging the children towards thinking for themselves, exploring different pathways and possibilities, and taking greater responsibility for their own learning. Her use of “I wonder ...” invites children to wonder along with her; it stretches their curiosity. When she says “I wonder if you can spot any ideas other children are using and use them to make yours even better ...” their noticing and mimicking muscles are being stretched by being asked to adopt useful ideas from others as well as making use of what’s going on in their own heads. In an LPA classroom, borrowing or even stealing each other’s ideas, customising



*When you're curious you explore, experiment, question, or wonder something. It means you want to find out something.*

and enriching them in the process, is actively encouraged! There is always something useful to learn from others, and imitation – provided it is not mindless copying – remains a useful resource for all of us throughout our lives.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *Cognitive Gadgets*, Cecilia Heyes argues that this kind of “social learning” is one of the most important learning strengths anyone can have.

Other questions nudge children, pushing them to think about the problem in a different way, or to extend their thinking. When Becky asks, “How many different ways could you use these resources?” she is deliberately using language that pushes the children towards a more imaginative and creative engagement with maths. Using and modelling this language demonstrates that there is not one correct answer but various avenues of thought to be explored. This is not only good for their understanding of maths, but also for getting them used to dealing with a complex world.

By her manner, Becky is trying to ensure that children who differ widely in their current levels of confidence and ability all feel welcomed and valued in her classroom. When children are feeding back their ideas in the big circle, she is deliberately choosing some simple ideas and some more complex ones. This allows a safety net for less-confident learners and also models how all the children can really challenge and extend themselves. Getting some of the children with special needs to go and help an adult forage for useful resources for the lesson gives those who might find it harder to engage some extra time and encouragement to warm up and practise their thinking. It also gives those children a feeling of contributing to the lesson and gives Becky a chance to praise them in front of the class for being helpful.

You can see many ways in which these subtle, or not so subtle, hints and nudges are paying off in terms of the children’s attitudes towards their learning. Children who say, “We chose the clocks because they were the trickiest, didn’t we?” are clearly learning to relish challenge. The child who says, “I know! I’ll get us a number line to check the numbers” is demonstrating their resourcefulness. The child who suggests making a public display of all their ideas is beginning to think like a teacher. And Becky encourages this sense of ownership and participation by picking up the children’s ideas and running with them. In an LPA classroom there are thirty brains generating and sharing ideas about how to make learning better, not just one!

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In an LPA classroom there are thirty brains generating and sharing ideas about how to make learning better, not just one!

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## Wondering

What learning-power teaching do you think has happened in the few weeks before this lesson? What could the children have spoken about? How might the teacher have helped the children begin to build an idea of what good learning looks like?

Since the children choose their pairs, they are mixed up in a way the teacher couldn't have planned. What do you think the advantages of this could be? What could some of the sticking points be? How might you try to overcome these?

Can you see similarities to Becky's teaching in your own practice? What are they? What ideas are new? Can you see the value in them?

How might you adapt a lesson this week to encompass some of the elements of this example? Is there another context in which you could start the learning off with a question and allow the children to collaboratively investigate?

Our second example comes from Michelle Worthington's Year 3 class in St Bernard's RC Primary School near Chester in the UK. Here is the description of a lesson which combines English and history, as well as the development of the children's learning power.

The children have been learning about the history of Pompeii for a few weeks. Michelle has planned a series of lessons that will lead up to some detailed descriptive writing and storytelling. She begins the lesson by telling the children that they will be going on a journey in space and time, far away from their classroom to the city of Pompeii. A few children grab each other at the mere thought!

Michelle shows the children a list of the different learning muscles and asks them, "If we are going to Pompeii, what learning muscles might we use?" The children have a discussion with their learning partners. These learning partners were

chosen at random at the beginning of the week. When they gather together to discuss as a class, the children offer ideas such as using their noticing muscles to look for clues and their imagination muscles to explore what they see.



The children close their eyes, and Michelle leads them through a short guided visualisation of their journey to Pompeii. When they open their eyes again, there is a detailed illustration of Pompeii projected on the interactive whiteboard. Michelle prompts the children, “What do you notice? See if you can look really closely and notice something no one else will see.” Again, the children share ideas. They really do go into detail! One notices tiny thin cracks up the walls of some of the buildings, another notices a bird cage, rocking from side to side. Michelle draws the children in to using their other senses, “What do you smell? How does it feel to be here?” As the children begin to picture and feel the scene, they start fanning themselves from the heat, scratching from the imaginary ash, and coughing on the imaginary smoke.

She then asks the children to put themselves in the shoes of the people in the scene, “You are now one of those people. What might you do?” The children offer ideas about hiding, running, and escaping in boats. She nudges them further. “How are you feeling?” The children agree that they are terrified. They decide that, even though they will be running in the direction of the trouble, they must run for the boats to try to escape. The children get up and run for cover! The tables become boats and they all get inside. Children are beckoning their friends to join them. One child is hanging from the rafters, looking forlorn, jumper pulled over her head as protection from the ash raining down. They are really in role! Michelle ends the role play element by telling the children to cover themselves in blankets and sleep.

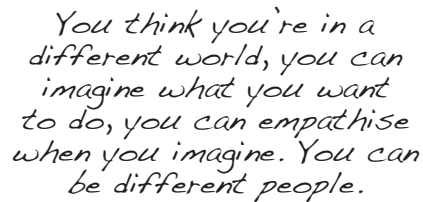
As they “wake up”, she asks them, “What are you wondering?” and hands out pieces of sugar paper cut into speech bubble shapes. The children collaborate in pairs or small groups to write down all of their wonderings. They are now invested in role and are writing heartfelt questions, like “What has happened to my family?” and “Has the city survived?” There is a focused buzz in the room. Michelle circulates, discussing ideas with the children and opening up the story and dialogue further.

The children are finally shown a video of an exploding volcano, followed by another detailed illustration of Pompeii, this time from the point of view of a boat at sea, looking back at the destruction of the city. She hands out photocopies of the same picture with magnifying glasses, which will help the children notice the tiniest of details. They are asked to write their own noun phrases to describe the scene. Michelle reminds them to make links to previous lessons, in which they have explored descriptive language, and draws their attention to the anchor charts that they created as a class. Again, Michelle circulates, supporting children who need it and extending ideas and descriptions. Once the children have had a chance to write down some ideas or sentences, she nudges them further, saying, “I’m going to challenge your noticing skills even further. You’re getting really good at noticing details in pictures, but one area you find it trickier to use your noticing muscle in is your own writing. Can you try to challenge yourself to notice your own mistakes? Perhaps you can share your writing with your learning partner

and see if you can help each other improve?" Children look back at their writing and several pairs take up her suggestion.

The lesson ends with the children sharing their best noun phrases. Michelle also reflects back on the learning muscles that have been used. She points out that they have really stretched their noticing muscles, but have also been using their immersing, imagining, and empathising muscles. As the children go to lunch, Michelle leaves them on a cliffhanger, letting them know that they do survive the volcano, but that is all she can tell them for now.

Again, let's take a closer look at what Michelle is up to in this lesson, and why. She starts by engaging the children's interest by telling them that they are going on a journey. Hooking their attention with something that intrigues them is not special to the LPA, of course; it is just good teaching. But Michelle quickly goes on to get the children thinking about the kinds of learning that such a journey might require, or make possible. She prompts them with a list of the learning muscles, which they are already familiar with, and gets them to try to anticipate which ones they think they might need – or which might be stretched – on the journey. They are primed to be thinking about learning as well as about Pompeii.



*You think you're in a different world, you can imagine what you want to do, you can empathise when you imagine. You can be different people.*

By saying "Which muscles might we use?" rather than, for example, "Which muscles will you need?" she is inviting the children's curiosity about the learning they might be doing. She wants them to think, not to be told. She is signalling that this isn't a "right answer" type of question, but one to be investigated. And by saying "we" rather than "you", she is including herself as an explorer and "wonderer", along with the children. The linguistic tone itself encourages the children to use their imaginations – as does her use of the guided visualisation, to get the children's imagining muscles warmed up. Notice too that Michelle, like Becky in the first example, is encouraging the children

to develop their confidence and ability to think and learn well with an expanding variety of different partners. Their collaborating muscles are getting a workout too.

The illustration of Pompeii is used as a stimulus for the children to stretch their noticing muscles. Michelle challenges them to look so carefully that they might even spot something that no one else has noticed. Handing out some magnifying glasses later on reinforces the idea that their job is to be meticulous detectives, alert to the tiniest of clues as to what is going on in the illustrations. And she links this physical attentiveness to the pictures in front of the children to their developing ability to imaginatively embellish the scenes for themselves – can they enrich their mental pictures with sounds, smells, and, especially, their feelings? Incidentally, this skilled ability to reinforce perception with imagination is a key tool that many creative adults such as engineers and poets talk about.<sup>2</sup> Not only are the children viscerally engaged, but their minds are being stretched in a variety of increasingly useful and sophisticated ways.

Then Michelle invites the children – again in pairs or small groups – to represent some of this rich harvest of wondering and imagining in words and phrases. She

prompts them to draw on their memories of previous learning about descriptive language, and to make use of their own self-generated anchor chart – a display on the classroom wall with suggestions about how to talk productively to each other when exercising their collaborating muscles. And she challenges them to swivel their attention and apply their noticing muscles to their own writing, so that

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It is an important element of the LPA that children are helped to become not just more accomplished learners, but also more articulate and aware of their own learning.

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they can help each other to detect mistakes and polish phrases. You may have noticed that not all the children are ready for this next stretch of their ability to collaborate

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2 See, for example, Bill Lucas, Janet Hanson, Lynne Bianchi, and Jonathan Chippindall, *Learning to Be an Engineer: Implications for the Education System* (London: Royal Academy of Engineering, 2017); and Anne McCrary Sullivan, Notes from a marine biologist's daughter: on the art and science of attention. *Harvard Educational Review* (2000), 70(2): 211–227.



and reflect well together – but some are, and over time this mood of self-help is likely to become contagious in the classroom.

Michelle ends with a feeling of accomplishment as the children share the noun phrases of which they are most proud. They then reflect on the lesson, and the kinds of learning that have been going on. They review the learning muscles they have been using – noticing, collaborating, imagining, self-evaluating, and practising, for example – and discuss how the lesson has helped them to refine and sharpen those learning dispositions. It is an important element of the LPA that children are helped to become not just more accomplished learners, but also more articulate and aware of their own learning, so that they are better able to transfer what they have learned to other contexts and situations.

## **Wondering**

What basics of learning and behaviour does Michelle need to have in place in order to be able to teach this lesson? How might she have established those basics?

The children in this lesson have gone beyond mere engagement; they have become deeply invested in their learning experience. How has Michelle actively created this investment? What did she use to draw the children in?

This lesson focuses on developing children's noticing skills. How do you think this important skill could be developed in and out of school? Can you think of other lessons or contexts in which you could develop this learning muscle?

Could you adapt this lesson to develop or focus on different learning muscles? Concentrating? Empathising? Critiquing?

Our third and final example takes us to Mariyam Seedat's Year 6 classroom in Sandringham Primary School in East London. The class is in the middle of a series of geography lessons, exploring the topic of environmental damage. The topic will conclude with the children making animated videos of environmental change. The children are working in groups of four. Mariyam has designed the groups carefully

so that they have equal numbers of boys and girls, and also so the children in each group have varied current levels of attainment. The groups have already decided on an environmental topic they would like to explore and have collaboratively researched their topic both in school and as homework. One group is looking at the environmental impact of urbanisation. Another is researching deforestation. A third is finding out about water pollution. In this lesson, the children are planning how they are going to put together their animations and thinking about what resources they will need.

Mariyam brings her Year 6s to the carpet and they discuss a slide she has projected onto the interactive whiteboard. On the slide, she has outlined the stages of the Pompeii project. The children discuss what they have done so far and what they might need to do next. They discuss the meaning of some key words, such as “props”. When the children explain their ideas, Mariyam asks them to stand up, express their ideas articulately, and project their voices. When one less-confident child struggles, she warmly encourages him to rethink and try again. There are sentence starters stuck onto the bottom of the interactive whiteboard, which the children naturally use to expand on ideas in discussion. For example, one child defines props as “extra objects that have a part in this story” and another child adds, “I agree with you, and you also use props in plays and theatres.” Mariyam stretches the children’s descriptions by asking them to add detail, give examples, and be specific.

After discussing the overall plan and coming to a shared understanding of their next steps, the children go off in their groups to plan how they are going to create their animation and what resources they are going to need. The class is immediately abuzz with chatter and action! To begin with, the children excitedly – and very naturally – discuss how they are going to organise themselves. All the groups organise themselves in quite different, but efficient, ways. One group works as a whole team, discussing ideas, then writing them down on the large sheets of sugar paper they have each been given to record their planning. They explain, “We all have creative ideas and we want to share them.” Another group assigns roles, “Two of us are writing down the ideas and two of us are adding to the resources list as we go. It means we don’t forget anything.” One group splits

into two pairs, “We’ve done it like this so everyone gets a part and no one is doing nothing.” When asked how they make sure they are all thinking along the same lines, at first they look confused, then later solve the problem, “When we write an idea, we make sure we say it out loud so it’s not repeated.”

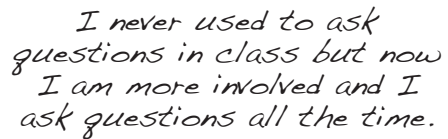
With the groups organised, they get on with collaborating to plan their ideas. Again, each group’s approaches are different. Some draw sketches of ordered scenes, others describe what they are going to do. Many label and annotate their ideas. Different children take on different roles. Some are writers, some draw, some generate ideas, and many children swap and take turns. They understand their roles and the thinking behind them. Roles continue to grow and change as the task goes on. Some children take on the role of overseer, pushing their group to think of new ideas and solutions. They ask questions like, “So, what’s going to happen in this bit?”, “We’ve done these bits, but what’s next?”, and “I like this idea, but how are we going to do that?” They play around with different ideas by asking questions like, “What will happen if ...?” This all stems quite naturally from the children.

When the children have had a good amount of time to brainstorm and think through their plans, Mariyam provides each group with a writing scaffold to formalise and present their plans. The children transfer their ideas onto this A3 sheet, filtering out ideas they no longer need, and refining what they have already written. Since the sheet is smaller than the sugar paper, now only one child can write at a time. The children are quite quick to pick up on this and reorganise themselves accordingly. One girl says, “While they write, we can add to our plan.” Other children explain how they have planned to take turns so that everyone gets a go.

At the end of the lesson, Mariyam explains that she will have a look through the plans and double-check that they are “doable”. It might mean that next lesson some of the plans will need a few tweaks to bring the children’s ideas into reality, but that’s fine because it’s all part of the process.

In this series of lessons, the teacher is stretching the children's ability to choose, design, and carry out an extended project. They are being introduced to new levels of responsibility, but not in a way that threatens to overwhelm them. Mariyam is carefully scaffolding the lessons so that the challenges are manageable, and the children will create a successful product in the end. Her use of the slide that summarises the stages of the project, for example, helps the children to keep the big picture in mind as they delve into the details and different steps, and also builds their capacity to think strategically. She is simultaneously coaching their communication skills as she gets them to stand up and speak as clearly as they can. Her commentary makes them aware of the skills needed to be a confident and effective speaker. The visible array of sentence starters – such as, “I agree with you and ...” – help to train the children in the ways of productive communication.

Mariyam is also upping the ante by getting the children to work together in groups that vary both in individual levels of achievement and in gender mix. It is clear that she has thought carefully about which children to put together so that the resulting varied groups will be manageable and productive – although she is always ready to step in when the children seem unable to sort things out for themselves. The fact that they are able to start self-organising, and come up with different but effective ways of doing so by themselves, is a testament to the coaching work that has gone on before.



*I never used to ask questions in class but now I am more involved and I ask questions all the time.*

Mariyam encourages this autonomy, but is also ready to nudge or challenge the children – for example, to “be more specific” – with a well-judged question.

These children's ability to slip in and out of different roles in the group is also a reflection of the way in which they have been taught. At this stage they are able to adopt and assign these roles fluently and spontaneously; however, previously these roles will have been discussed and assigned by the teacher to make sure that every child gains experience of taking responsibility and developing leadership qualities. At Sandringham School, all the teachers are skilled at making sure different children – and, importantly, shyer children – take on different roles within a group at different times.

Notice that Mariyam doesn't provide a template for the children to write up their plans until after they have had plenty of time to develop their own ways of thinking. In a traditional classroom, the teacher might have given out this template at the beginning of the process, and thus channelled the children into being compliant rather than creative in their thinking. By collaboratively sharing ideas beforehand, the children have experienced a rich planning process, which could be quite similar to a brainstorming session in real life – in a business meeting, perhaps. The LPA constantly seeks to design learning activities that stretch those capabilities which will be genuinely useful to the children later in life. And the children clearly enjoy this creative process.

### Wondering

Some teachers see this kind of lesson and say, "I wish my children could do that but I've tried and they just can't work together." What do you think Mariyam has done before this lesson, slowly and continuously, to enable the children to collaborate effectively and positively in this way? Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that Sandringham is in one of the most deprived boroughs in London, yet they refuse to use their children's, admittedly very challenging, backgrounds as an excuse for lowering their expectations of what they can achieve. If they can develop this kind of disciplined learning power in their learners, we think anyone can!

Designing a series of lessons in this way works well with geography or history research projects. Can you think of a way in which you could extend this design to other subjects and topics? How about for extended writing projects in English or maths investigations?

We didn't say much about what the teacher is doing while the children are getting on with planning their projects. What do you think her role is? What kinds of questions might she ask?

Mariyam purposefully mixes the children into groups of four, with two girls and two boys. In what other ways could you group your children? How could you go about it? What could be the advantages and disadvantages of each?

What kind of “learning language” is being used in this lesson, by both the children and their teacher? How could you highlight this language so that the children could capitalise on it and use it again?

If your class isn’t used to collaborating yet, what small steps could you take to acclimatise them to learning with different children in different contexts? What could the sticking points be? How could you pre-empt and plan for them?

What are the benefits of gradually teaching children to learn together in this way? In school? Out of school? For life?

## Summary

We hope that these examples have sparked your interest and given you a taste of the LPA in action. We are especially keen that you start to notice some of the subtle ways in which LPA teaching differs from some more familiar, more traditional approaches – approaches that may work well for building knowledge and expertise at layers 1 and 2 of the learning river, but which may neglect, or even have adverse effects on, what is going on down at layer 3, where longer-lasting attitudes and dispositions towards learning itself are being shaped. We’ve seen how LPA teachers are alert to opportunities to give their children manageable amounts of responsibility for their own learning. We’ve also seen how quite subtle shifts in teachers’ use of language can create corresponding shifts in the children’s attitudes towards difficulty, and how a variety of hints, prompts, and visual tools can support the development of learning power. We’ve even got a sense of how long-term dispositional goals can be woven into the practical life of the classroom. And we hope that you are reassured that all this can be done alongside the development

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Quite subtle shifts in teachers’ use of language can create corresponding shifts in the children’s attitudes towards difficulty.

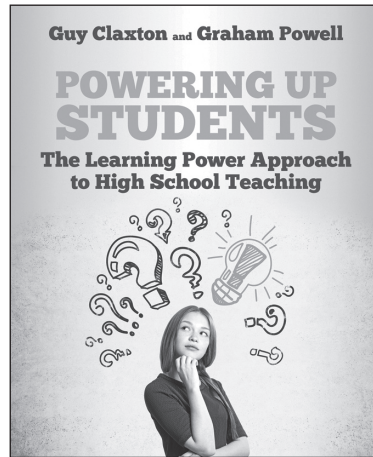
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of accurate knowledge, robust understanding, literacy and numeracy, and intellectual expertise.

Now that we have, hopefully, whetted your appetite – and affirmed some of the approaches you may already be using with your children – let's zoom in on the different aspects of LPA teaching, and show you how you might deepen your practice in each of these areas.



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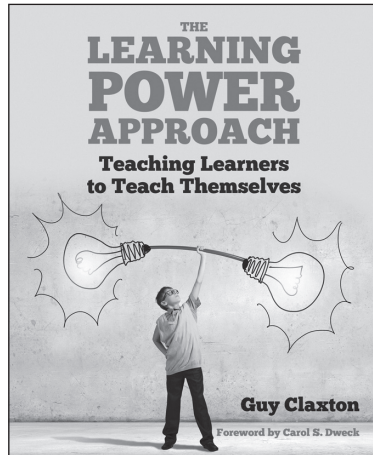
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Complemented by engaging and informative classroom examples of the Learning Power Approach (LPA) in action – and drawing from research into the fields of mindset, metacognition, grit, and collaborative learning – *The Learning Power Approach* describes in detail the suite of beliefs, values, attitudes, and habits of mind that go in to making up learning power, and offers a thorough explanation of what its intentions and guiding principles are. Furthermore, in order to help those who are just setting out on their LPA journey, Guy presents teachers with an attractive menu of customisable strategies and activities to choose from as they begin to embed the LPA principles into their own classroom culture, and also includes at the end of each chapter a “wondering” section that serves to prompt reflection, conversation, and action among teachers.

All teachers, as well as school leaders and educational innovators, will find enormous value in this book. Its provocations will spark new ideas, challenge some existing thinking, and provide clarity about new ways forward.

Martin Westwell, Chief Executive, South Australian Certificate of Education Board, Australia

A must-read for anyone with the true calling of a teacher and a curious mind.

Ana María Fernández, educator and creator of the VESS Educational Model, USA

*Powering Up Children* should transform the thinking of all primary school teachers and policy makers, both in my native Japan and indeed across the whole world.

Asato Yoshinaga, Associate Professor, Kokugakuin University, Japan

A must for all primary school educators.

Kellie Morgan, Director of Early Learning and Junior Years, Melbourne Girls Grammar, Australia

Any teacher reading this book will feel inspired and empowered to get going with the Learning Power Approach straight away, because it all seems so doable.

Shirley Clarke, formative assessment expert, UK

Full of practical examples and ideas to help teachers and children delve deeper into what Guy Claxton and Becky Carlzon call “results plus”.

Tom Wallace, Specialist Leader of Education in Formative Assessment, Ignite TSA, and co-founder of Balance Assessment, UK

I am excited by the prospect of sharing *Powering Up Children* with teachers around the world – it is just the guidebook to accompany any teacher as they venture out on a journey of change.

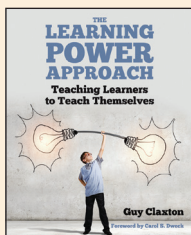
Kath Murdoch, education consultant, Australia

Full of exciting possibilities for those teachers and leaders looking to move beyond the recent focus on passing statutory tests and towards a way of teaching that gives children so much more.

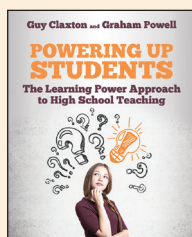
Aidan Severs, Deputy Head Teacher, Dixons Allerton Academy Primary, UK

A unique collaboration between Professor Guy Claxton and expert classroom practitioner Becky Carlzon that puts learning power theory into practice – and the result is a triumph!

Rae Snape, Head Teacher, The Spinney Primary School, National Leader of Education, The Kite Teaching School Alliance, UK



**The Learning Power Approach**  
Teaching Learners to Teach Themselves  
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**Powering Up Students**  
The Learning Power Approach to High School Teaching  
ISBN: 978-178583338-0

