LEARNING WITHOUT FEAR

A Practical Toolkit for Developing Growth Mindset in the Early Years and Primary Classroom

Julia Stead and Ruchi Sabharwal

FREE DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES

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PRAISE FOR *LEARNING WITHOUT FEAR*

In *Learning without Fear*, Julia and Ruchi tackle some of the myths relating to growth mindset and show how there is much more to this complex field than positive thinking and increased effort alone.

Beautifully illustrated, this terrific book covers the field of growth mindset in a way that is both accessible and thought-provoking – providing subtle insights into the difference between failing and failure, and how to support children to feel comfortable with being uncomfortable, for example. Furthermore, it shares wonderful resources, stories and case studies to help teachers make authentic growth mindset possible for every child in their classroom.

Learning without Fear will be incredibly useful for primary school teachers. An absolute gem.

Mary Myatt, education adviser and author of *The Curriculum: Gallimaufry to Coherence*

Forget growth mindset mantras and posters – instead read this more nuanced, comprehensive exploration of a range of strategies designed to achieve success in early years and primary settings.

Learning without Fear accessibly and practically describes the critical elements of learning without fear, and also delves into pupil self-regulation and the pitfalls of praising the child rather than the process. It is filled with anecdotes and 'mini stories' – case studies of children's typical negative school experiences or thoughts, skilfully turned into success stories – that all come to life in the book's colourful, welcoming pages, which also feature plenty of research evidence and the authors' personal classroom experiences.

This delightful publication then culminates in a bank of powerful and easy-to-follow lesson ideas, which – together with the rest of the book's content – will help educators develop in their learners a growth mindset that will benefit them both in school and beyond.

Shirley Clarke, international formative assessment expert

Learning without Fear is a fantastic introduction to growth mindset in the classroom which skilfully debunks some of its common myths. Accessibly written and based on sound research, the book begins with a discussion on how to assess your own mindset and invites you to consider its impact on your practice. Julia and Ruchi then move on to offer practical ways to introduce the concept of growth mindset to children across the primary school age range, explore its importance as an ethos rather than as a bolt-on lesson, and provide strategies to embed growth mindset throughout the curriculum.

This book will be a valuable addition to the library of both experienced teachers and those new to the profession.

Angela Goodman, Head of School, Waterloo Primary School and part of the #PrimaryRocks team

By distilling a wealth of research on growth mindset and metacognition, *Learning without Fear* provides the classroom teacher with a go-to compendium of ideas and strategies to fully embed a culture of growth in the classroom.

This book has the potential to change every primary school classroom in the land, and should be a key text for any primary teacher training course.

Colin Grimes, teacher, Rothbury First School

A must-read for anybody working with children, *Learning without Fear* offers a fresh approach to looking at growth mindset and provides a whole host of excellent ideas, resources and practical examples. Can teachers make a change? With this book, yes they can!

Graham André, teacher, Lanesend Primary School, speaker, #PrimaryRocks organiser and eduTwitter influencer

No teacher need be concerned or fearful about developing a growth-mindset philosophy in early years and the primary classroom. *Learning without Fear* has it all here for them.

Nina Jackson, author, award-winning speaker and education consultant, Teach Learn Create Ltd

Julia and Ruchi have produced an instantly accessible, practical guide which explains some of the key concepts central to growth mindset and metacognition in such a way that will help everyone who works with children. The book's mini stories are an excellent medium to get learners to think about different scenarios, and the references to research are useful for anyone who wants to explore the literature around growth mindset in greater depth.

Learning without Fear is a really valuable resource which will spark debate and discussion among staff teams and help teachers to reflect on the language they use and the behaviours they model in school.

Ruth Swailes, school improvement adviser and education consultant

If you're interested in optimising the conditions for learning in your classroom, this practical and well-informed guide is a great place to start.

Jonathan Lear, Deputy Head Teacher, St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, speaker and author of *The Monkey-Proof Box*

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ANXIETY!
If I get this wrong will they still think I'm good?

INTRODUCTION

This is a book that has grown out of our experiences in the classroom, our further reading and our professional dialogue, so it seems logical to start by introducing ourselves. We're Julia Stead and Ruchi Sabharwal, and between us we have over 20 years' experience in the primary classroom, right through from Reception to Year 6. We share a passion for teaching and learning and, when we began discussing our pedagogy and practice – and realised the effect we were having on our learners – concluded that it was worth sharing our ideas. So we started writing this book. Here we each draw on examples from our own classrooms and experience, which are woven alongside insights from our wider reading and brought to life with Ruchi's colourful illustrations, which are available to download to use in the classroom.

One day, we were sat discussing the atmosphere in our classrooms. Ruchi reflected, 'So often in my classroom learning feels stunted because the children sat in front of me are scared. Scared to ask, to try, to question and to challenge. Scared of getting it wrong, of being slow, of looking stupid, of letting their teacher down and of being exposed as anything other than clever, right or "good".'

We agreed that every single pupil we've ever taught has experienced moments in which they were inhibited by fear, and some never quite got over it. But surely this wasn't good enough! We knew that these children hadn't always felt like this. As babies and toddlers, they were inquisitive explorers of the world around them, bold in their risk-taking and courageous when it came to pushing through failures and trying again. So what happened? At what point did the intrinsic curiosity of very young children become stifled? Was it in the classroom? Through exposure to competition? When did our pupils become self-conscious about their *ability*?

It was rather serendipitous that Ruchi stumbled across growth mindset in the work of Carol Dweck when she was sent on a course about teaching success.[1] She is so grateful to the perceptive head teacher who sent her on it, because that day changed her life, and she thinks the head knew that it would. It might sound dramatic but believe her when she says that sitting with a group of like-minded colleagues who challenged and

1 Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (London: Random House, 2006).

debated their own approaches to teaching and learning, and understood the impact this could have, gave her career a huge injection of agency.

Anyway, after discovering growth mindset, Ruchi started to think about her own fixed mindset and how this had inhibited her growth. Throughout her experiences in school, for whatever reason, she had convinced herself that she was not a mathematician and that she couldn't do certain things. So, of course, she never even tried. She would rather avoid something altogether instead of risking messing it up and, worse still, risking others finding out that she wasn't as good as they thought. What she realised through reading Dweck's work was that she was limiting her options because of her fear. This was a real light-bulb moment and she quickly realised how powerful it could've been if her own growth mindset had been nurtured at an early age. If she wanted to be a mathematician, there was no reason for her not to try and work at it. As it turns out, she absolutely loves teaching maths now and it's because she has worked hard, tried new approaches, developed new ways of teaching and learnt with her pupils. Before this, if you caught her on a maths course or in a meeting, she would've sat at the back – cocooned in her own fear of failing and avoiding questions at all costs. In fact, she probably wouldn't have even attempted to interact for fear of her colleagues seeing her flop and then immediately asking her to kindly leave the profession and close the door on her way out. If teachers feel that way, imagine how the pupils feel when they are quizzed on their seven times table and are expected to give an answer within three seconds! She revealed this fear to Julia, who, of course, had experienced the same feeling.

For adults, this feeling is often referred to as 'imposter syndrome', the psychological belief that despite proven competence and success, you are inadequate and that any achievements you have had have been down to sheer luck.[2] This leads to the fear that one day your luck will run out and you will be uncovered as a fraud. In schools, the threat of exposure is hard to avoid because teachers have nowhere to hide; our successes and failures are transparent to all and we are highly accountable. It is so important for teachers to embrace the mindset principles we are trying to encourage our pupils to adopt.

So, one course and countless books later, not only did the weight of our professional influence and moral responsibility truly hit us, but the fundamental belief that the link between mindset and success fed into all aspects of learning landed full-force too. We

2 Angela Watson, 7 Ways Teachers Can Push Past Imposter Syndrome, *The Cornerstone for Teachers* [blog] (12 November 2017). Available at: https://thecornerstoneforteachers.com/truth-for-teachers-podcast/imposter-syndrome/.

knew we had to develop ways of weaving this into every strand of classroom life, and we wanted to make sure that there was impact in our endeavour. This meant rethinking how we taught, understanding when to sit back and thinking carefully about our questions. Underpinning this was the sky-high expectations we held of *all* our pupils. So much so that they started to hold them of themselves. What we learnt during the two years that we dedicated to refining this approach with two classes of Year 3 pupils was that although children can be extremely resilient, this is too easily challenged; it takes very little to switch a child off from learning. We understood how quickly a learner can label themselves, feeling incapable or that they are not worthy or good enough. This can happen in a split second, in the middle of an English lesson on a Wednesday morning, when everything had been going fine and you least expected it. But the moment a child feels stupid is the moment they can become disaffected. It can be a fight to bring them back if you don't notice and act quickly.

On the other hand, we also learnt – and wanted to share with others, hence the motivation for writing this book – that through flipping your thinking, by bringing everything you do back to learning, by modelling success and failure, and by letting go and giving your pupils opportunities to explore, you can achieve some truly amazing things together. Through careful planning, differentiation and assessment you have the absolute power to transform learning behaviours. It is not always easy and we face challenges that can get in the way sometimes, but it is very possible and the strategies for doing so are in this book.

The words, 'Have a growth mindset!' were rarely used in our classrooms. Instead, what we developed was a little learning community, in which children genuinely felt pride when they tried, regardless of the outcome. This was the first stepping stone to making our pupils braver. When they felt brave, they wanted to be challenged, they wanted to be independent and they wanted to know how to get better. The biggest achievement with our classes was in nurturing positive relationships, and in how well all the children worked with each other. There was no fear of competition: over time, through our classroom communities, we learnt each other's strengths and used collaboration as a conduit to improvement. The more we worked together and allowed space for everyone's ideas, the more confidence emanated from even those pupils who had never experienced this feeling before. Over time, through the methods outlined in this book, pupils who previously felt too anxious to share their answers felt safe enough to participate, and everyone wanted to listen. We are so proud of these pupils and, although we've been teaching for many years between us, we feel that we learnt an awful lot from them too.

Although growth mindset has been talked about in education for long enough now that most teachers and schools see the benefit in adopting the principles, what we really want you to take away from this book is that relationships really do lie at the heart of everything we do in the classroom. Forget posters about how great mistakes are, and superficial encouragement about perseverance. Changing a *mindset* goes so much deeper than taking some ideas from Twitter or Pinterest. Here you will find a practical model that you can use to start embedding some of the qualities associated with a growth mindset. But hopefully this is just the starting point for you and, together with your class, you will discover your own nuggets of greatness and success that will form the basis of your very own learning community. We urge you to continue the legacy and share any successes, no matter how small, with your colleagues because you might just light the spark of an ember that was already glowing and – without even realising it – inspire someone else to take a risk.

Chapter 3

TEACHING SUCCESS

Time for another visualisation. Imagine that you are about to climb a small peak somewhere in the UK. You may have already done this, in which case draw on that experience. Ruchi hasn't climbed a mountain before (this is part of a fixed mindset about hiking – she's working on it!) but she imagines that the feelings before and during are similar to those we might have when faced with other challenging life experiences – such as going for a promotion, dealing with a change in personal circumstances, starting a new job and not fully knowing the expectations yet, and so on.

You are climbing the hillside at a steady speed. The air is crisp, and you are enjoying the opportunity to take it at your own pace. After a couple of hours of steady climbing, the path narrows to traverse a very narrow crest, only a metre wide in some places. You are suddenly very aware of how high up you are and you start to feel the tiniest wave of anxiety. Beads of sweat build on your forehead as you realise that the only way forward is following the exposed path ahead. The wind whips around you and that anxiety wave is slowly starting to ripple. Rationally, you know that it is safe, and that thousands of people have done it before you; this shouldn't be a problem. But still, you can't deny the fear as you're faced with the increasingly difficult task ahead of you. You know you only have two options: you can either admit defeat and go back down the way you came, unsuccessful and unfulfilled, or you can face the feelings of dread, push yourself physically and mentally and carry on to successful completion.

Now we want you to think carefully about what specific behaviours or skills will help you to succeed in the face of difficulty. What will push you out of your comfort zone and over that mountain? Consider the kind of traits that can be applied to any setback or obstacle in order to overcome it.

We have delivered lots of training on growth mindset and we often ask the audience this question right at the beginning. No matter the group, when we go around the room and gather responses there are always the same set of answers, which we have laid out in the grid that follows.

determination	perseverance	confidence	resilience	teamwork	bravery
conviction	self-belief	tenacity	practice	boldness	self-regulation
fortitude	patience	mindfulness	ambition	optimism	drive
strength of will	instinct	courage	initiative	creative thinking	positivity

As adults, we often have to utilise these qualities at work and in our personal lives. Experience has taught us to use them almost instinctively in times of great need. What's even more interesting is that no one has ever offered up 'intelligence' as an attribute to draw on in the face of struggle. Being clever is not necessarily conducive to success. Which begs the question, if the skills listed here are those that we seem to universally accept as providing the key to success, why are we not explicitly teaching them in lessons?

Let's bring it back to your classroom. No matter what age group you teach, we want you to mentally fast forward to the end of the academic year. What kind of learners do you want to see? What are they going to be like after your specific input? Are they going to climb the mountain or turn back because of self-doubt and fear? As obvious as it may seem, *you* hold the power and influence to make the changes you want to see in the minds of the pupils you teach. It really is as simple as that. We know; it's a huge privilege, but what a responsibility! Professor John Hattie bravely admitted what the profession has secretly always known, that it's the teach*er* that makes the real difference in the classroom, not the teach*ing*. As he said in a speech at a researchEd conference in Melbourne, 'I could not care less about how you teach! I care about the impact of your teaching and about how you think about your teaching.'[1] What *you* believe and how you convey it will transfer directly to your pupils. In the classroom, you are the parent, guide and master and it really is no exaggeration when we say that everything you say and do has impact. To quote Spiderman's Uncle Ben, 'With great power comes great responsibility.'

1 John Hattie, 'I could not care less about how you teach!' Speech given at researchEd conference, Melbourne, 1 July 2017. Video available at: https://visible-learning.org/2017/08/john-hattie-how-you-teach-video/.

While you recover from the gravity of that, let us highlight the beliefs about learning that we should instil in our pupils. As well as the traits listed previously, these will form the foundations of their growth mindset:

Higher-order critical thinking	Autonomy	Valuing hard work
Conviction to manage tough decisions		Pace and patience
Bouncebackability	Effective self-reflection and assessment	Initiative and audacity
Openness to challenge	Readiness to collaborate	Self-belief
Effort	Willingness to seek help	Resilience to setbacks
Sound practical judgement	Boldness of enterprise	Determination and tenacity

There is a subtle but powerful variance between failing and failure. We need to help our pupils understand how failing is not a definition of their ability and does not determine their future outcomes. *Failing* is turning back down that mountain, maybe to try the climb again under different conditions, or with better resources. *Failure* is never climbing a mountain again and the difference, of course, is in how many of these traits have been internalised as part of your mindset.

Failing	**Being a failure**
An event	A mindset
Temporary	Permanent

Failing	Being a failure
Shows that you stretch the limits	Shows that you gave up
An opportunity to learn	The end of learning

Self-determinism is a theory that delves further into this area and although on the surface it might sound rather academic, it's actually a very sound and important idea for teaching mindset. We'd recommend reading further if you are interested in this area of research.[2] We could go on but, in the interest of time and word count, we shall summarise. Self-determinism assumes that humans are intrinsically predisposed to be curious about our environment; we are driven to learn and to develop knowledge, which pretty much summarises how very young children approach any task (early years colleagues will back us up here).

Unfortunately, within the constrictions of the curriculum – and the imposed assessment structure determining what children must learn by particular ages – this natural state is quashed by educators who impose external controls onto learning environments, which can undermine the sense of *relatedness* between teachers and pupils. All too often, these controls can stifle the natural processes involved in high-quality learning. Conversely, we've found that when we support learners' basic psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence, it helps to create pupils who are independent in their learning, and who take responsibility for what they are achieving. It's what we all aim for as teachers. This fits in neatly with what we've been talking about in terms of mindset; if we get these three factors right in our classrooms, we've essentially got the perfect recipe for nurturing intrinsically motivated learners. Easy, right?

2 For a good starting point, try Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation* (London: Penguin, 1996); and Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being, *American Psychologist*, 55(1) (2000): 68–78.

THE FEAR

We all experience the fear: at home, at work, in conversation with colleagues, around the table at dinner parties, in the classroom when a child asks us a question we just don't know the answer to but feel as though we *should* (particularly when another adult is watching – even worse when it's a spelling or calculation question). So where does this come from? At what point do we start to feel self-conscious, worried or *scared* when answering questions? Where does this fear of 'looking stupid' come from?

At a #LearningFirst conference at the University of Cumbria in November 2016, Ruchi heard a colleague speak about this feeling, and she articulated it very well. She was talking about questioning and she asked the audience of teachers to turn to one another and imagine that they had asked a fairly routine maths question. Next, she asked us to imagine that we had chosen a child to answer and that they had come out with the most random, bonkers response ever heard (we've all been there). We dutifully complied, and it resulted in 200 teachers showing each other faces that were a mixture of confused, irritated and disappointed (and in some cases a bit cross). Some seemed pitiful or patronising and some (unsuccessfully) tried to stifle a smile. Try it yourself in the mirror or with a colleague, you might be surprised at what you see.

Then she said the thing that hit Ruchi right in the ribs, so brace yourselves. The face that we could see looking back at us – the irritated, bemused one – is the face our pupils see when they say something that isn't right or that doesn't equate with what we were expecting. *That* is the face that makes children feel stupid. We can have the best intentions in the world, we can think we are giving the most inclusive, encouraging feedback, but, in the end, children are incredibly perceptive, particularly with non-verbal cues. They can see when they have let us down by being 'wrong' or because they haven't been able to guess what was in our heads. Some of our pupils might never recover from the one time it happened and that is what triggers the fear. That is precisely what we need to eradicate. We've got some work to do.

What we need in bucketfuls is courage. How are you going to make your pupils braver? How will you get them to the point where they are not afraid to be curious, to ask questions and to try things out? How can we make them feel safe? Ruchi's colleague at the conference suggested that questioning played a key role, with the aim of not having anything in your head that your pupils are trying to guess at – more on that

when we look at questioning in Chapter 6. However, we think our work starts earlier than that.

We need to grasp the idea that, in the classroom, we are all in it together and there is safety in numbers: what we refer to as *relatedness*. The fear is not a rational thought process, it is an unwanted feeling that creeps into our learner psyche and can sometimes feel crippling. Your pupils need to feel supported to learn by everyone in the space in order to counter it. The classroom needs to become a safe space – one where you will firmly close, lock and bolt the door behind you in order to keep the fear out.

Feeling safe to discuss, perform, question and share in the classroom is a rejection of the fear that prevents us from stepping out of our comfort zone and into the realm of challenge and learning.[3] A simple discussion is a great way to start building this idea straight away and can easily form the basis of a whole day of learning around bravery and courage (which we will explore as the lesson idea Safe Classroom, see pages 56–58).

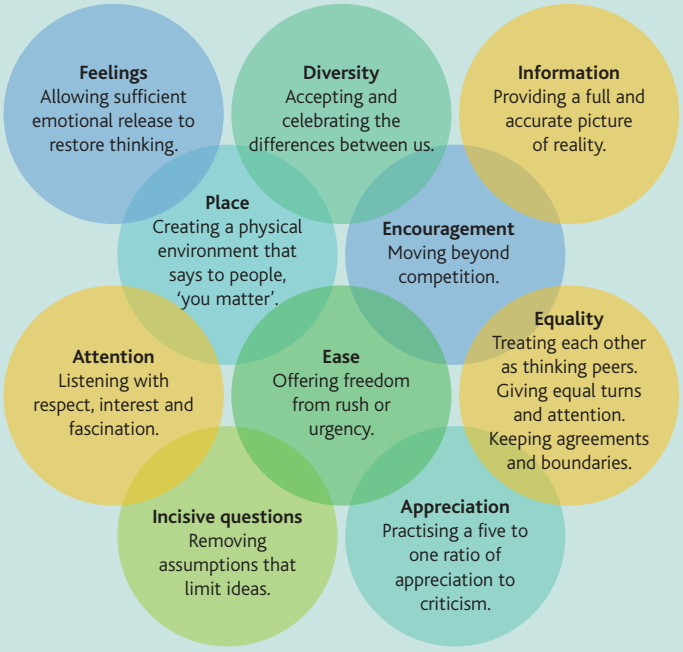
We often talk about the fear in maths because most children can relate to this feeling easily – it's typical to feel fixed in this subject. When we are scared about being wrong, irrational or self-hindering thoughts creep into our psyche and it renders us immobile and, in some cases, speechless.

3 This is based on Lev Vygotsky's work on the Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the difference between what a learner can do without help and what they can't do. See Lev Vygotsky, Interaction Between Learning and Development. In Mary Gauvain and Michael Cole (eds), *Readings on the Development of Children* (New York: Scientific American Books, 1978), pp. 34–40. Available at: https://www.faculty.mun.ca/cmattatall/Vygotsky_1978.pdf.

This is where the idea of the safe classroom comes into play. You need to explore these thoughts explicitly and talk about the feelings of nervousness and panic that arise when we are put on the spot. In a safe classroom, those feelings of fear don't exist because all ideas, answers, voices and opinions are heard and valued. Although we might disagree or think that an idea needs a bit of work, as a team, we talk about it openly, feel comfortable to challenge others without shaming them and understand that there is more than one way of looking at something. You will find that, over time, when we ask the pupils to explain why they agree or disagree and bounce it back to them, their respect for each other naturally grows. Your role is crucial to this process because you will need to model the language and behaviour involved every time you engage with the whole class. Consistently bring them back into the safe classroom through your modelling. Perhaps you could even create a safe display so that you can point the children towards it every time you sense hesitation in sharing ideas.

The key is to align everyone in the class to this concept; it's safe for everyone, including the adults. The pupils need to believe that the classroom is their space to ask questions, explore, invent, investigate, challenge and cooperate. When we take the idea of competition out of the equation, children (and adults) stop measuring their successes against others' and begin to understand the value of difference and individuality.

In *Time to Think* Nancy Kline outlines ten key components of a thinking environment, which we think underpin everything we value when it comes to creating a classroom of relatedness.[4] By this we mean a classroom in which pupils feel supported and connected to their teacher and to each other, particularly when facing challenge or difficulty. Studies into relatedness show that when learning communities are united by positive feelings of connection, empathy and support, this improves outcomes.[5]



4 Nancy Kline, *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind* (London: Octopus Books, 1999), p. 35.

5 For example, Richard M. Ryan and Cynthia L. Powelson, Autonomy and Relatedness as Fundamental to Motivation and Education, *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 60(1) (1991): 49–66; and Amori Yee Mikami, Erik A. Ruzek, Christopher A. Hafen, Anne Gregory and Joseph P. Allen, Perceptions of Relatedness with Classroom Peers Promote Adolescents' Behavioral Engagement and Achievement in Secondary School, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 46(11) (2017): 2341–2354.

By adopting just a few of these principles into the routines and language of your classroom you will start to notice a shift in the way your pupils interact with each other. The key is to provide the opportunities for these principles to play out easily.

FROM STUCK ISLAND TO GOT-IT CITY VIA CHALLENGE OCEAN

Okay, you've got your pupils talking and listening, and hopefully their confidence is starting to increase and they are relating to each other, so what's next? Well, it's time to make the learning journey and the struggle that comes with it explicit; they need some experiences and feelings to relate to. Time for a little story now – get your goggles on, we're diving into another analogy.

Imagine you are sitting on a beach, the sand is soft and golden, the air is warm but comfortable and the speckled sunshine is beating down gloriously on your back. You can hear the gentle lapping of the ocean waves as you settle down for a lazy mid-afternoon nap. Just as you are about to drift off you catch yourself thinking, 'This is paradise. I could stay here forever.'

But we all know what happens when you have too much of a good thing. What starts out wonderfully can quickly turn sour, and it's no different here on Stuck Island. You see, this is the place that feels comfortable at first – you know everything about the island, there's nothing new or difficult to worry about. There are no obstacles and you know exactly what to expect. The trouble is, very quickly, you start to realise that Stuck Island is kind of boring. There's nothing to do – except all the activities you've already done repeatedly – the sun is far too strong and everyone else on the island is leaving to make their way towards something new. When you look out at the horizon you can see the bright lights of Got-It City – a vibrant and exciting place full of possibility, wonder and endless opportunities. Slowly but surely, you accept that, as easy as it is to stay on the island, you need to leave. The warm fuzziness you once felt is starting to burn. 'I'm going for it,' you say to yourself. 'I'm going to get myself to Got-It City.'

If only it were that simple. You see, there is something vast and scary in-between where you are and where you want to go. Something that scares you so much, you start to convince yourself that Stuck Island isn't so bad after all. Sure, it's the same thing day in, day out, you've learnt to make every type of sandcastle imaginable, and you're lonely and mind-numbingly fed up, but the thought of leaving fills you with a feeling that is far worse. The fear has taken over, for in front of you lies Challenge Ocean, a dangerous and daunting stretch of water, full of potential dangers and difficulties.

'I'm not a confident swimmer, there's no way I can do it,' you say to yourself. You start to reel off a list of objections and worries:

It'll take too long.

It's too much effort.

I'm not good enough.

The current is too strong.

I don't have enough energy.

I don't know the way.

It's too far away.

There are sharks in there.

What if I drown?

What if I get lost?

What if I can't stay afloat?

I'm scared.

I'm fine exactly where I am.

No, you conclude, it's best to stay where you are, safe among what you know and without obvious difficulties. How you feel on Stuck Island is exactly how it feels when you realise it's time to try something different and more demanding. You know you should, and you do want to. But what's familiar is also very comfortable, and crossing over into unknown waters is an open invitation for the fear to creep in. This is an analogy we have often used with pupils: the concept of Stuck Island is an accessible symbol of the fear stifling our learning.

Our classes have really run with this metaphor and find that they can relate to the idea of being stuck in quicksand and feeling unable to keep going. Pupils have likened this to learning moments in which they have not been able to move forward with a tricky problem, so have either given up or gone backwards and attempted tasks which they knew they could already do. 'It's not really learning if you can already do it,' one pupil offered wisely. The analogy also works to unpick why it might be worse to stay on the island rather than take the plunge and dive into the water. In class we have talked about how the island will eventually take hold of you and make you feel as though you can't leave: there are crabs pinching at your toes as you edge closer to Challenge Ocean and quicksand that drags you down and stops you reaching your full potential. Feeling as though you can't do something really does hurt! It's painful to realise that you are not able to participate in something that seems to come easily to your peers. In a safe classroom it's important to explore and openly discuss these feelings of inferiority.

The more these feelings are normalised, the more your pupils will learn to ignore and overcome them.

On the other side of Challenge Ocean is the buzz of Got-It City: the place where everyone can thrive and where the fear disappears. The city is the opposite of Stuck Island. Everything is new, exciting and open to possibility. When pupils arrive here, they can feel proud that they have overcome their challenges, completed a difficult task, solved a problem or finally grasped a concept that has been puzzling them for a while. The feelings of accomplishment you get from reaching it are to be celebrated and, crucially, children should be encouraged to talk about how they got there. It's important for them to accept that the waters of Challenge Ocean are not smooth and that if they were, perhaps it wasn't really a challenge after all.

You might have encountered the learning zone model before.[6] The concept suggests that, in learning situations, the moment we step out of what is comfortable and into unknown territory – terrain which is scary and demanding – is when learning happens. It's one of the most exciting places to be and, as teachers, we must provide as many opportunities as possible for pupils to experience the learning zone. In our model, Challenge Ocean is the learning zone and Got-It City is the breakthrough zone.

Challenge Ocean

Remember when we were on that mountain earlier and had to face the fear that made us want to turn back? Remember those feelings of doubt and discomfort that you have to push through in order to reach a goal? This is all that Challenge Ocean represents. Trying to swim in it is the fear personified and all those niggling doubts can be hard to ignore with the vast expanse of the ocean in front of you. In a safe classroom, pupils can liken difficult questions or tasks to swimming in Challenge Ocean. It's going to take effort and time and, more importantly, you're probably going to need some tools to help you. This is where the handy survival kit comes into play (see page 48). Our pupils really enjoy using this kit as a reference point for how to get themselves unstuck.

Each tool in the kit has been included to reinforce the traits we discussed earlier in this chapter: resourcefulness, collaboration, self-regulation, creativity, patience and a willingness to seek help, and also to encourage pupils to use the scaffolds we provide – for example, success criteria. Interestingly, our pupils love the idea of using the snorkel, because sometimes we just need to take a moment to breathe! It's okay if that times table doesn't come to us straight away; if we allow ourselves time to think, to take a breath and to remember not to let the fear take over, the answer soon comes. We have also used props to reinforce these ideas, sometimes bringing the items into class or even spending time making our own. Children love putting on the goggles when checking their work or pretending to light the flare when they want some teacher feedback.

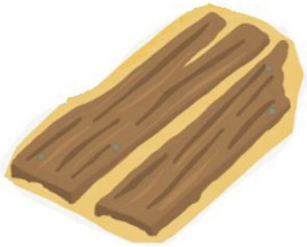
6 A good summary can be found at: http://www.thempra.org.uk/social-pedagogy/key-concepts-in-social-pedagogy/the-learning-zone-model/. The original work by Tom Senninger (*Abenteuer leiten, in Abenteuern learnen* (Münster: Ökotopia Verlag, 2000)) is, unfortunately, not available in English.

RUBBER RING

Feeling stuck? Find something in the classroom to help you.

Lifeguard

Ask a friend for some tips or share ideas to help you move on.



DRIFTWOOD

Get busy and creative! Try something different to work your way through the challenge.

Compass

Check the class toolkit to make sure you are on the right track.

F l a r e

Is this your best effort? Ask an adult for some feedback, support or a new challenge.

GOGGLES

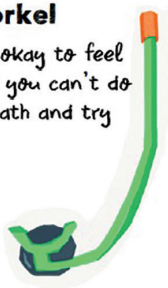
Go back, retrace your steps, find and correct any mistakes.

Lifejacket

Give yourself some thinking time. Does this remind you of anything you've done before?

Snorkel

Breathe! It's okay to feel worried that you can't do it. Take a breath and try again.



The survival kit has been designed to remind pupils to take ownership in the face of struggle and to use metacognitive devices to reinforce their self-regulation within a learning task. Too often we have sat in lessons in which pupils sit with their hands up, waiting for an adult to tell them what to do or to hand them a resource. Sometimes those with fixed mindsets don't even ask because of the fear, and this just isn't good enough. We are simply not equipping our pupils with the independence they require in order to succeed beyond primary school. As Yates states:

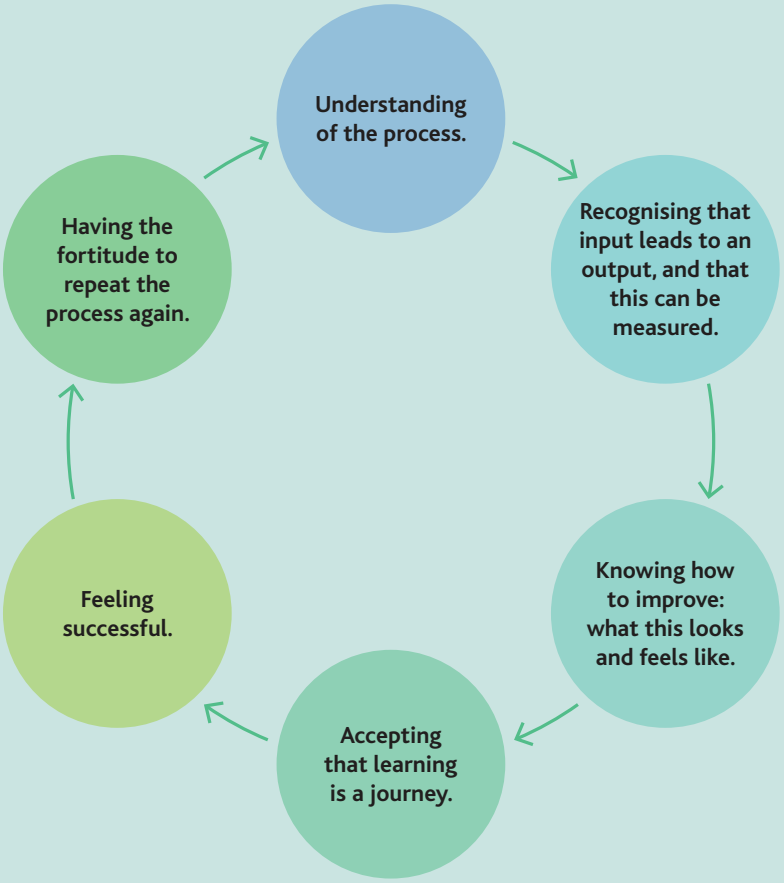
> Students with learned helplessness see success as determined by factors such as luck which are outside of their control (Seligman, 1993). Furthermore, they generally believe they will never be successful at school for a variety of reasons including their perceived lack of ability (Dweck & Repucci, 1973) and the difficulty of the tasks.[7]

Remember the three basic needs that self-determinism informs us about: relatedness, autonomy and competence? We need to begin with the culture of relatedness in the classroom, then provide the right environment in which to explore autonomy and freedom and, finally, offer enough guidance and input to develop the pupils' competency in any task. The survival kit is a way to make this visible and user-friendly for your pupils and can help to create a common language of learning in your classroom. We'd recommend having the survival kit displayed prominently, and making reference to the tools regularly. It's a great idea to ask pupils which bits of the kit they think they might need before they start a task and then to reflect on what they did use at the end. Guide them to reflect on whether and how the tools were useful and whether they would recommend them to a partner. Every child has the potential to be a lifeguard in any skill or subject area – to help others if they are struggling. This reinforces the belief that we can learn from each other, no matter how fixed our ideas about our own 'abilities' are. If a pupil has swam the length of Challenge Ocean and made it to Got-It City, they can be celebrated as a lifeguard in whatever skill they were working on, helping them to further master their skillset and giving them the confidence to try things they may have previously avoided.

7 Shirley Yates, Teacher Identification of Student Learned Helplessness in Mathematics, *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 21(3) (2009): 86–106 at 87.

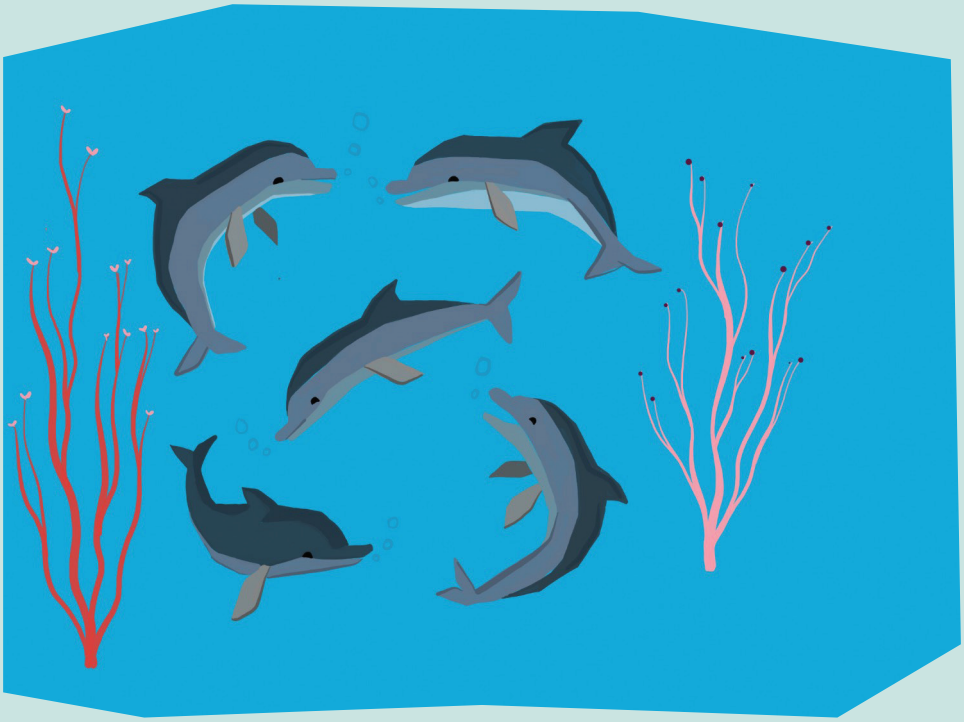
Professor Barry Hymer has co-authored some useful books on mindset and has summarised what it might look like in learning tasks.[8] This links in wonderfully with the idea of learner self-regulation and metacognition that we will look at in Chapter 5. In short, the cycle of metacognitive learning and mindset revolves around an awareness of what we do and don't know, and our understanding that improving what we know involves an active process of recognising, regulating and manipulating our cognitive processes.

8 Pete Boyd, Barry Hymer and Karen Lockney, *Learning Teaching: Becoming an Inspirational Teacher* (Northwich: Critical Publishing, 2015); and Barry Hymer and Mike Gershon, *Growth Mindset Pocketbook* (Alresford: Teachers' Pocketbooks, 2014).



Once your pupils are on board with the idea of Challenge Ocean you can start to explore what might happen when you go for a swim. Before the ideas are embedded, children focus on the setbacks they may face – encountering sharks, for instance. What's wonderful about the concept of the ocean is that you can start having meaningful conversations about surface and deep learning.

When our understanding is at surface level – meaning that we haven't explored the task, skill or problem in any great detail – we may think we have understood the subject matter really well. However, there may be more below that surface. The same can be true when we face a problem. On the surface it can appear unsolvable, but if we scratch the surface and use our tools to help us go deeper, we find that things aren't as scary as we might have thought. Jump into the difficulty feet first and you might find that what looked like sharks are actually friendly dolphins, and no one wants to miss out on swimming with dolphins.



As soon as we dip our toes into a challenge, what seemed scary might not be after all. Once we overcome obstacles on our learning journey and give ourselves time to reflect on our success, we often realise that the fear is what skews our perception. Depth of understanding comes when we overcome the fear, and it opens up a whole world of wonder. Wouldn't it be incredible to have a class full of children who were curious and excited about diving deep into their learning? In Chapter 10 we outline a series of lesson ideas which detail how to extend and explore the Stuck Island analogy with the children.

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN *YOUR* CLASSROOM?

John Hattie's synthesis of meta-analyses – the culmination of 15 years of research – concluded that explicit teaching about metacognition and mindset can have the biggest impact on learning when it is taught through the principle of self-determinism.[9] When we have those three core ideas – relatedness, autonomy and competence – at the heart of our teaching, we provide the right environment for success.

When we talk about learning environments, we are not just referring to physical features like layout or displays. It is the all-important culture of the classroom that really matters: the shared values, priorities, expectations, language, habits and routines. However,

9 John Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009).

working walls and displays do play an important role in the function of your classroom and we shouldn't underestimate these as a powerful tool for cultivating change. Even if your school culture is not in line with your own ideas of what it could or should be, believe us when we say that great things can come from small changes. This might be the hardest job of all in terms of mindset change, but you need to believe that you can be the change you want to see. Don't wait for senior management to green-flag your ideas; be brave and try them out for yourself.

In order to change the culture of a setting, you need to scale back and start with the *climate* to facilitate a shift in thinking, language, interactions, relationships, actions and, ultimately, mindset. In teaching, we are regularly presented with opportunities to invite change in our classrooms. Each half term provides us with, essentially, a blank canvas, as we continually seek to improve our practice and refine our approaches. Strategies that didn't work last time can be scrapped in favour of shiny new ideas and initiatives. We are incredibly lucky in our profession; we can't think of another job in which you can refresh and reinvent your working space so easily and frequently. We urge you to grab these incredible opportunities throughout your teaching career, to read about and research strategies that might work for you and to have the courage to implement them in your classroom.

LESSON IDEAS

If you'd like to start putting these principles into practice, here is a lesson idea, which is a taster of what you'll find in Chapter 10 (the icon key is on page 180). It aims to start building the children's acceptance of feeling uncomfortable – to show them that they can feel safe in answering questions and approaching new tasks.

Safe Classroom

Intention(s)

To scaffold the pupils' thinking and encourage them to share their ideas freely. In this task, the teacher will ask questions, listen to all groups and pick out key themes in order to guide the learning. To help pupils to understand the feelings of discomfort we experience when fear stifles our curiosity. To introduce the idea of a safe classroom, where all ideas, thoughts and answers are valued.

Resources

A picture of a safe on the interactive whiteboard or placed on tables.

A flipchart.

Activity

As a quick warm-up, show the children a picture of a safe and ask them to individually jot down all the things they know it could be used for – this could be on a mini-whiteboard or in their books. Share some suggestions and take notes.

Next, ask the children to pair up and think about what makes them feel safe. Ask them to discuss this then share ideas as a class. Depending on the age of the children, you could ask them how the classroom is a safe place. Generally, we have found that most children tend to go for the obvious ideas: kind adults, locked doors, school gates (we even had someone suggest CCTV one year), but the key is to guide them to think beyond the tangible components of 'safety' and towards those abstract fuzzy feelings of comfort and a sense of well-being.

Next, show the pupils a series of images chosen to evoke specific feelings of comfort or discomfort. Ask them to write down one word associated with each image. Then ask them what they fear the most and record the answers as they are shared. Ask a handful of pupils what they do to try to overcome their fear and who helps them to achieve this.

In groups, ask pupils to discuss what they fear the most when they are in class. They need to come up with one main idea to share.

A range of pictures to induce feelings of comfort/discomfort, including a difficult maths problem. Examples could include: a spider, a family, a roller coaster, a cute puppy, an assault course, a happy classroom, etc. A device you can use to play a YouTube clip.	Using the pupils' answers to steer the learning, go back to the maths calculation image and pick this one apart. Without any specific answers in mind, ask the following: • What do you see? • How is this connected to what we have been talking about? • How does the picture make you feel? • Imagine if I asked you to give me the answer, how would you feel then? • What's the worst thing that could happen if you are wrong? • What might I do or say? • What might the other children do or say? Pupils generally assume that the worst thing that could happen is that everyone else will laugh. It's worth building on this point to talk about whether this has actually happened to anyone and whether it is likely to. Build a scale of likeliness, with positive outcomes at the top and negative ones at the bottom. Add this to the class working wall. Ask pupils to contribute ideas for a class manifesto on keeping the classroom safe from the fear. Compile it together and display it at the front of the room. If you need a little inspiration, there is a great video which you could watch to generate a conversation about facing our learning fears and celebrating bravery.[10] Decide how this will be positively

10 Soul Pancake, 'Kid President Presents the Scariest Thing in the World' [video] (27 October 2016). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9SwbLN-OvY&index=3&list=PLzvRx_johoA-YabI6FWcU-jL6nKA1Um-t.

	reinforced in the classroom – with a thumbs up, a nomination for best fear-facer at the end of the day, etc. Ask the pupils to draw a visual representation of the fear. They can screw it up into a ball and then throw it away (but you could unfurl the drawings and use them as part of a safe classroom display).

HAVING A GROWTH MINDSET CAN REALLY EMPOWER YOUNG LEARNERS TO TAKE RISKS TO EXTEND AND DEEPEN THEIR LEARNING.

THERE IS, HOWEVER, MORE TO IT THAN SIMPLY ADDING 'YET' TO 'I CAN'T DO THIS'.

In *Learning without Fear* Julia and Ruchi tackle this misconception head-on, combining bite-sized theory with the practical tools and techniques that will enable teachers to map out their pupils' growth mindset journey from the early years up to their departure for the challenges of secondary school.

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This delightful publication shares a bank of powerful and easy-to-follow lesson ideas which, together with the rest of the book's content, will help educators develop in their learners a growth mindset that will benefit them both in school and beyond.

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Julia Stead is a teacher and key stage leader with over a decade of experience in the classroom, having taught from Reception right through to Year 5. Julia has written for various educational publishers on topics such as the recent changes in primary education, how specialised toolkits can be designed for whole-school impact and how to create whole-school CPD packages. She has also presented at national CPD events.

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