

# 17

## GUY CLAXTON

### LEARNING POWER

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#### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Having read this chapter you should be able to:

- appreciate Claxton's notions of learning to learn
- identify and understand his ideas on epistemological apprenticeship, building learning power and the learning power approach
- apply the principles of learning power in your practice
- critically appraise his theories.

#### KEY WORDS

Building Learning Power; The Learning Power Approach; epistemic apprenticeship; lifelong learning; dispositions; soft creativity; Results Plus

## INTRODUCTION

Guy Claxton is a major contemporary thinker in education who argues that the traditional concept of education, which is still the focus of government policy for schools, is unfit for preparing students for the challenges and complexities of the twenty-first century. Claxton's theories have had a practical impact in many schools which have engaged with his **Building Learning Power** (BLP) programme, a programme which will be explored in detail later in this chapter. As a starting point, Claxton makes a case for paying less attention to the curriculum content and the emphasis on summative assessment and more to the building of students' confidence and character. Building confidence and character, he reasons, is crucial to developing students' 'ability to learn: they need, for example, to be curious, independent and reflective ... but to foster them [teachers] need to change pupils' attitudes and values' (Williams, 2004: 32). Over the past few years Claxton has developed the **Learning Power Approach** (LPA), a set of principles which has emerged from BLP. The idea of the LPA is to endeavour to shift pedagogical practice which helps students feel safe in trying new things and not be afraid of making mistakes, but also to be able to learn, think and deal with complexity. In doing so the LPA both extends and complements the idea of BLP.

There are two central aspects of Claxton's ideas. One is the need for educational change and the other is the positive notion that most students have the capacity to become better learners. Firstly, the world is a changing environment where students will have to cope with uncertainties, the complexities of developing technology and complicated infrastructures. For Claxton, education must also change to meet these challenges, but, he cautions:

... this will not happen if they remain founded on a narrow conceptualisation of learning; one which focuses on content over process, comprehension over competence, 'ability' over engagement, teaching over self-discovery. (2002c: 121)

Secondly, he states that cognitive science suggests that most students have the faculty to become better learners if the conditions for learning are appropriately supportive and encouraging. He believes science now offers a broader means of perceiving what learning is all about. This perception 'includes feeling and imagination, intuition and experience, external tools and the cultural milieu, as well as the effort to understand' (Claxton, 2002c: 121). If this fresher notion of learning and teaching is adopted, instead of the more traditional approaches, then students will be better prepared to confront the challenges they face throughout their lives. Being aware of the influence of culture is paramount in this new fresher notion of learning and teaching, as 'it impacts on pupils' interpretation of task performance and their views of themselves as learners' (Pollard, 2005: 158).

Interestingly, Claxton does not shy away from the effort students need to exercise in building a capacity to learn, and is quite forthright in questioning levels of student persistence:

Learning is finding out something that you did not know and struggling with it. It's almost as if, if [today's students] do not know something immediately they feel as though they are failing. (2012: 7)

What hampers such lack of persistence and the realisation that learning is a struggle could be the students' possible deficiency in suitable habits, skills and attitudes, which Claxton states are needed for what he termed 'learning power'. If they acquire this learning power and if the teacher creates and structures appropriate lessons, they can work at noticeably greater levels of learning and achievement (Griffith and Burns, 2013).

This notion of learning power is the driving force behind Claxton's BLP, a practical school and classroom learning and teaching improvement programme. BLP is an evidence-based programme which followed on from the findings of his (2001) book *Wise Up: The challenge of lifelong learning*, in which he researched the different world-wide methodologies of applying ways of 'learning to learn' in classrooms. BLP has evolved from the motivation of teachers to improve the quality of what Claxton termed the '**epistemic apprenticeship**' that students were offered in classrooms (Claxton, 2012). Before this chapter explores the facets of epistemic apprenticeship and the theory and application of BLP, it is necessary to consider his background to gain a deeper understanding of the foundations of his theoretical perspectives.

## GUY CLAXTON, THE PERSON

Guy Claxton is a prolific researcher and writer, and an eminent and renowned thinker regarding learning. He is a cognitive scientist and has degrees from Cambridge (a double first in Natural Science) and Oxford universities (a PhD in Cognitive Psychology) and is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society. He has held many notable positions in his field, which include an Academician of the Academy of the Social Sciences, Assistant Director for Learning at the Specialist Schools and Academy Trust, Co-Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning (CRL) at the University of Winchester, and Director of Development of the research initiative on the Culture and Learning Organisation (CLIO) at the University of Bristol. His research interests include learning to learn, dispositional teaching, unconscious mental processes, emotions, neuroscience and learning. He is currently a Visiting Professor at King's College, London. He is also actively, and collaboratively, involved in furthering the concept of LPA in early years settings, schools, universities and organisations.

He has written over thirty important and thought-provoking books and numerous papers, which have practical application and challenge the more traditional educational viewpoints of education and learning. His books include *Becoming a Teacher: A positive approach to change and stress* (1989), *Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind: Why intelligence increases when you think less* (1998), *Wise Up: The challenge of lifelong learning* (2001), *Building Learning Power* (2002a), *What's the Point of School? Rediscovering the heart of education* (2008), and with Bill Lucas, *Educating Ruby* (2015). More recently he has been writing a series of four books relating to the LPA, the second, third and fourth books were written in collaboration with others: *The Learning Power Approach* (2018); with Becky Carlzon, *Powering Up Children: The Learning Power Approach to primary teaching* (2019); with Graham Powell, *Powering Up Students: The Learning Power Approach to high school teaching* (2019); and with Jann Robinson, Rachel Macfarlane, Graham Powell, Gemma Goldenberg and Robert Cleary, *Powering Up Your School: The Learning Power Approach to school leadership* (2020). In addition, a text which probably encapsulates his thinking and offers practical solutions is the British Psychological Society's 32nd Vernon-Wall Lecture, *Schools as an epistemic apprenticeship: The case of building learning power* (2012).

Many of Claxton's ideas have been developed from his collaborative studies as part of the Centre for Real-World Learning at Winchester, where he formally finished his university career, and also his work with numerous schools and teachers. He has additionally worked with a small company, TLO (The Learning Organisation) Ltd, based in Bristol. Both of these connections have enabled him to seek ways of applying his theories in very practical terms, mainly in the form of the BLP programme, and latterly the LPA.

## CLAXTON'S THEORIES

Claxton's theories are derived from his concern that current schooling does not prepare students for a life of learning in an increasingly complex and challenging world. Indeed, he and Lucas pose a thought-provoking question about the function of schools: 'If school is meant to offer young people a powerful preparation for a successful life (and not just for university), why isn't it more *like* real life?' (2015: 48, emphasis in original). This argument for a real-life related curriculum was also a key feature of his book *What's the Point of School?* (2008). The term '**lifelong learning**' was first coined to mean that education was an 'essential part of life and an ongoing pursuit' (Wallace, 2008: 165). Schools, Claxton argues, despite the rhetoric of lifelong learning, are more concerned with examination results and league tables, which hamper the development of students' ability to learn for themselves and to enjoy learning. Furthermore, he feels that otherwise successful students may 'become brittle and insecure when confronted with real problems they can't immediately solve' (Claxton, 2008: 20). Even if they do become 'successful learners' this probably means no more

than achieving in terms of examination results rather than having the competence to learn in the real world away from school (Claxton, 2007). Claxton's theories come from his cognitive science background and a deep-seated interest in learning. These include: aspects of the brain and notions of intelligence; the importance of apprenticeship; culture; encouraging **dispositions** and creativity for learning; and the foundations of learning power behind his BLP programme, and the LPA.

Neuroscience has demonstrated that learning to learn is achievable and it is also possible for students to cast off old habits and develop more productive ways of learning. Unlike most other animals, we are born into the world in a very undeveloped and vulnerable state, which means that our process of maturing is over a longer term and is a more complicated process. However, this slow maturation process 'allows children to tune themselves much more precisely into the particular world in which they live. This tuning in is what we call learning' (Claxton, 2008: 94). During this learning process there are a number of things that can go awry or not as predicted and further tuning is needed. The brain learns through continually checking how accurately its predictions have worked out, and adjusts by developing new attitudes and habits of thinking to resolve complex problems which occur in life.

These relatively new understandings of the workings of the brain, derived from research over the past twenty to thirty years, have led us into thinking about intelligence in a more flexible and developmental manner. Previously, intelligence was perceived to be a fixed phenomenon where 'people's "ability" was a stable feature of their minds that did not change and "being dim" stayed with you in the same way that your eye colour or blood group stayed with you' (2008: 59) – a view of educational thinking that Claxton argues still exists today. Intelligence, according to him, is not a single fixed commodity but a combination of habits of thinking which can be refined to deal with the challenges of real-life learning.

An important part of this notion is emotional intelligence, which begins at an early age. Young children, who are uncertain how to react to people or experiences not previously encountered, respond by reciprocating the behaviour of those they know and trust, such as family members and carers. The actions of these significant others, whether deemed to be positive or negative, can have a profound effect on the emotional intelligence and development of children. If children have positive and reasoned experiences which are modelled by these significant others they are more likely to have the emotional intelligence to enable them to work under pressure. They are also better equipped to relate to others in thoughtful and meaningful ways. In so doing, young children undergo an apprenticeship of their emotions (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2005).

Apprenticeship is a theme that recurs in much of Claxton's work. He offers the viewpoint that, over the period of their schooling, students will have undergone a lengthy and somewhat intensive apprenticeship in what they learn and how to think. It is the varying outcomes of the learning offered by schools which he explores and criticises in the search for a more effective model of apprenticeship where students can become better equipped for lifelong learning. This model he terms an "epistemic

apprenticeship” – “epistemic” in that it is to do, centrally, with the activities of thinking, learning and knowing’ (Claxton, 2012: 3). Currently, he argues, schools concentrate on two dimensions – that of what is to be taught (the content) and that of how this is assessed. An epistemic apprenticeship consists of a third dimension, which involves ‘the skills and attitudes towards learning students are cultivating by the way they are taught and addressed’ (2012: 4). These skills and attitudes comprise what he calls ‘dispositions’, such as creativity, perseverance, resilience, empathy and imagination – epistemic qualities which are crucial to living a rewarding life in an ever-changing world (Claxton, 2012).

Unlike gaining a skill, such as structuring a sentence or solving mathematical equations, students who develop dispositions such as those mentioned are enabled to respond in difficult circumstances and in times of conflict. The starting point in developing such dispositions is in early childhood and is closely aligned with the learning culture that individual children have experienced. This early stage is where an encouraging and supportive culture leads to children gaining self-belief, being brave enough to take risks and make mistakes and develop their learner identity. This identity is passed on through the culture of the setting children inhabit. This early starting point is a crucial stage in developing dispositions:

The habits and rituals of culture enable certain kinds of learning and disable others. ... Experience in childhood, at home and at school, is particularly important because these early belief systems, whether functional or dysfunctional, can be carried through into people’s lives as adults. (2002c: 122)

Creativity is one of the learning dispositions that Claxton argues is significant. However, there are a number of conventional meanings for the term ‘creativity’, all of which are quite complex, involving innovation and uniqueness – so expecting students to achieve creativity at this level of originality would therefore be problematic. For example, Shaheen (2012) states that creativity can fall into the following groups:

- a. production of something original;
- b. production of something original and of value;
- c. production of something new, of value and imaginative;
- d. production of something original, of value and which is accepted by the group.

However, Claxton offers another definition which he calls ‘**soft creativity**’ – a more accessible form of creativity but which nevertheless allows the learner to give ‘a satisfying scratch to the creative itch’ (Claxton, 2006: 353). Soft creativity gives learners the opportunity to explore and nurture facets of creativity over a period of time, which can be achieved by involving them in interesting problem-solving projects and activities (2006). Such activities, which develop dispositions, are the mainstay of his BLP programme which endeavours to encourage students to be “ready”, “willing” and “able” to engage profitably with learning’ (Claxton and Carr, 2010: 87).

Learning power is about developing the whole student. It is more than just learning skills, it is about enjoying the learning experience, about having a learner identity and seeking out opportunities for learning. Building learning power involves developing four aspects of student learning: 'the four Rs', which are helping students to become more resilient, resourceful, reflective and reciprocal. These four aspects, and what they involve, are further explained in Table 17.1.

The 'four Rs of BLP' will be further explored in the application section of this chapter.

The LPA, which has emerged from, and extended, the BLP programme, has a similar but probably more of an ambitious and practical goal, which is:

To develop all students as confident and capable learners – ready, willing, and able to choose, design, research, pursue, troubleshoot, and evaluate learning for themselves, alone and with others, in school and out, for grades and for life. (Claxton et al., 2020: 43)

Similar to the BLP programme, the LPA is firmly embedded in cognitive science with all the elements involved explored above, but it adds, even further, to the blend of aspects such as 'feelings, expectations, self-regulation strategies, attitudes ... [and] ... values, and dispositions' (2020: 49). The practical aspirations of the LPA are clearly set

**Table 17.1 The four Rs of BLP**

The four Rs	What is involved
<i>Resilience</i> – being ready, willing and able to lock on to learning	Absorption – flow; the pleasure of being rapt in learning Managing distractions – recognising and reducing interruptions Noticing – really sensing what's out there Perseverance – stickability, tolerating the feelings of learning
<i>Resourcefulness</i> – being ready, willing and able to learn in different ways	Questioning – getting below the surface; playing with situations Making links – seeking coherence, relevance and meaning Imagining – using the mind's eye as a learning theatre Reasoning – thinking rigorously and methodically Capitalising – making good use of resources
<i>Reflectiveness</i> – being ready, willing and able to become more strategic	Planning – working learning out in advance Revising – monitoring and adapting along the way Distilling – drawing out the lessons from experience Meta-learning – understanding learning, and yourself as a learner
<i>Reciprocity</i> – being ready, willing and able to learn alone and with others	Interdependence – balancing self-reliance and sociability Collaboration – the skills of learning with others Empathy and listening – getting inside others' minds Imitation – picking up others' habits and values

(Adapted from Claxton, 2002a)

out in the introduction to *Powering Up Students: The Learning Power Approach to high school teaching*: ‘to grow robust, inquisitive, imaginative, and collaborative learners – lesson by lesson, week by week, year by year’ (Claxton and Powell, 2019: 2). We will be looking at the elements of the LPA, and what it can offer classroom practitioners in the application section.

Within the LPA, Claxton’s refined goals are to foster:

... a culture in which a clear and collective understanding of the valued, sought-after outcomes of education – of character strengths developed *as well as* academic successes achieved, what we call *results plus* – drive everything in the school ... – most important of all [is] – the pedagogical style of every member of staff. (Claxton et al., 2020: 2)

Claxton explains that ‘the LPA charts a middle way between the extremes of “traditional” and “progressive” teaching’ (2020: 50). The LPA, then, retains the core elements of gaining knowledge and understanding espoused by the traditionalists which are important for students to gain examination success. It also promotes the development of attitudes necessary for students to cope with difficulty and uncertainty, which is favoured by the progressives (2020). Further to this, in his 2020 *The Learning Power Approach INTED Keynote Speech*, he advances the two important characteristics which were essential to achieve his and his colleagues’

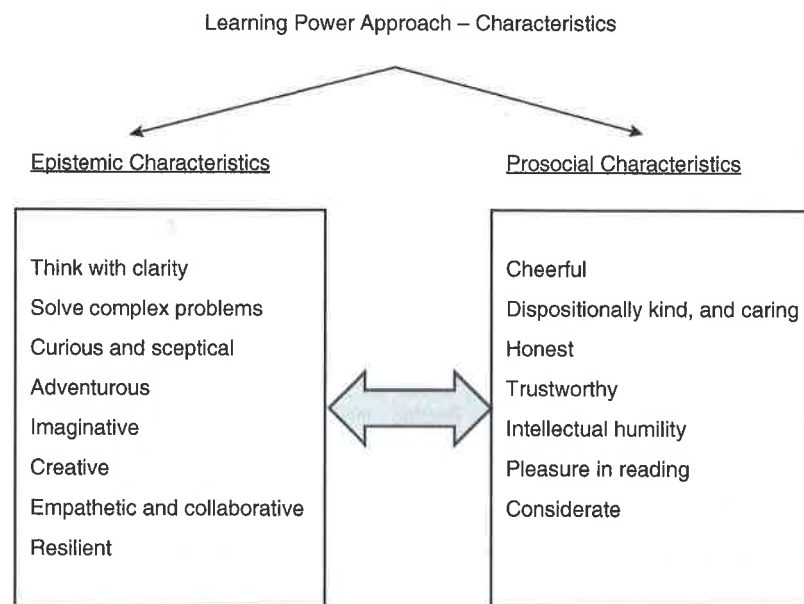


Figure 17.1 The two characteristics of ‘Results Plus’



idea of **Results Plus**: epistemic characteristics (those which are directly related to learning), and prosocial characteristics (those which are also needed for attaining his *results plus* aim). Both sets of characteristics can be employed in practice in the form of the 'learning mode' which endeavours to make learning safe, and the 'performance mode' which is about preparing learners for exams and involves challenging activities (Claxton, 2020). Some of the qualities required for each of these two characteristics are listed in Figure 17.1.

## LINKS WITH OTHER THEORISTS

Many of Claxton's notions offer attractive solutions to developing learning and, as we shall discover, have practical implications for the classroom. Also, many of his ideas can be associated with other educational theorists. These come under the following headings: social and cultural constructivism, socially situated learning and ways of locating intelligence. Dewey's emphasis on the importance of reflection and the use of active learning methods which relate to real life, as well as his opposition to the traditional school subject-focused curriculum, are akin to Claxton's ideas. There are also close similarities with Vygotsky's emphasis on the significance of 'thinking-in-action' as being central to lifelong learning, as well as the notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). However, for Claxton, the ZPD is arguably more than just a conceptual framework; it should be used to build meaningful, supportive and encouraging relationships between students and teachers to form a 'creative collaboration' (Mahn and John-Steiner, 2002). Additionally, Claxton's approach implies an active coaching and prompting model of 'scaffolding' – a concept created at first by Vygotsky but given a more practical application by Bruner.

The theme of apprenticeship, which is very evident in Claxton's work, has a close association with situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and with communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Claxton's epistemic apprenticeship draws from communities of practice:

... in which an interwoven set of attitudes and skills are passed on from 'old timers' to 'newcomers' over time, through a whole host of methods and media. These may include modelling, casual feedback and correction, and the telling of pointed jokes and stories, as well as direct instruction and the design of explicit activities. (2012: 8)

Claxton's notion of epistemic apprenticeship is also aligned with Barak Rosenshine's idea of cognitive apprenticeship where students are helped by their teachers through modelling and support to become independent learners. The value of students being infused with, and learning from, the culture of the epistemic apprenticeship is parallel with Bourdieu's cultural capital and social reproduction theories where culture has an impact on the learning potential for life.

Claxton's thinking behind dispositions for learning is similar to that of two other educational theorists with alternative views on intelligence. Firstly, there is Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences – a model 'which regards intelligence as multi-perspectival, rather than logical–deductive' (Bianchi, 2013: 201). Comparable to Claxton's less fixed idea of intelligence, Gardner's model includes visual, spatial, musical, kinaesthetic, interpersonal and spiritual intelligences, although it also retains the more traditional mathematical and linguistic intelligences. Secondly, perhaps even more closely linked with Claxton's dispositions for learning is Daniel Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence, although Claxton was somewhat critical of the overly simplistic nature of Goleman's work (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2005). According to Goleman, what is important in developing emotional intelligence is the capacity to control emotional impulses and use reasoning to overcome stressful situations and resolve problems. Acquiring emotional intelligence enables students to cope with the complexities and challenges of real-life learning. Goleman, similar to Claxton, thought educational achievement is 'as much to do with socio-emotional and self-regulatory capacities as academic skills and knowledge' (cited in Rose et al., 2013: 180).

Claxton's BLP – which endorsed the four Rs of resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity in developing learning – is closely linked to Albert Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. For Bandura self-efficacy is 'children's belief in their abilities to do well and, through their capacity to exercise control over their own actions, achieve success' (MacBlain, 2014: 172). In fact, Claxton also used the phrase self-efficacy for a similar reason as Bandura to demonstrate that 'some beliefs determine how much we generally see the world as potentially comprehensible and controllable' (Claxton, 2002c: 122). Finally, there are strong associations between Claxton's ideas and those of Carol Dweck, who advocates the notion of resilience as being vital for successful learning. Dweck, like Claxton, contests that intelligence is not a fixed entity. Regarding the LPA, Claxton lists a number of like-minded contemporary education thinkers and their programmes which have similar ideas. Among these are: Ron Ritchhart and his thoughts on 'cultures of thinking' and 'intellectual character'; Michael Fullan and associates, and *New Pedagogies for Deep Learning*; Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong's *Tools of the Mind* approach to early childhood education; and Susan Hart, Alison Peacock and associates, and their *Learning without Limits* approach (Claxton et al., 2020).

## CRITIQUING CLAXTON

It may appear quite a hard task to be critical of Claxton's ideas, because they seem sensible and rational, and perhaps more importantly because they offer, especially BLP, a very applicable and inclusive concept for the classroom. Yet it is the very

straightforwardness of his concepts which merits some critical review. In *Building Learning Power* (2002a), and the LPA series of books, he is heavily reliant on lists and guidelines which could be construed as a prescriptive and overly simplistic model to use in developing learning. However, in the case of the LPA, Claxton et al. argue that their ideas are not to be seen and used as a recipe. Neither are they 'to be bought lock, stock, and barrel and implemented according to the instructions on the box. It is a *philosophy*: a set of values about education as a preparation for the tests of life' (Claxton et al., 2020: 11). Also, Pollard gives warning about the use of words such as 'intelligence' and 'ability' as being 'imprecise, insecure and unreliable – but ... often put to rhetorical use' (Pollard, 2005: 158). Furthermore, although it is acknowledged that BLP and other similar models such as 'Philosophy 4 Children' are successful in what they do and are widely used programmes in schools, Robins cautions that 'there is a need to ensure that these do not become ends in themselves but a means of producing learning tools' (Robins, 2012: 133).

Claxton himself acknowledges the problems his work creates, especially around the matters of monitoring and evaluating in what are subjective topics such as culture, creativity and intelligence. Although he has tried to formulate ways to measure these subjective topics, he recognises the problems that arise in attempting to show how students increase their learning power and how teachers change their habits when engaging in epistemic apprenticeships. However, in relation to evaluation, Claxton also clearly affirms that the BLP programme is not about the improvement of test scores. Rather, the aim of BLP is:

... to improve the transferable learning dispositions of students – to develop their broad epistemic mentality and identity – *without jeopardising their performance on more conventional measures of school success*. (Claxton, 2012: 16)

While learning power is a popular programme it is still a relatively new concept, and, although Claxton has been involved and has collaborated with others in numerous action research projects, it is suggested that perhaps further empirical research is needed. For example, Bartlett and Burton caution readers about Claxton's use of terminology:

... exercising their 'learning muscles' and to become 'resourceful, resilient, reflective learners', using these terms as organising vehicles for his arguments. This approach can lead to the publishing of polemic rather than detailed research accounts and can divert students of education from wrestling with the central research proposition. (2016: 334)

Nevertheless, these comments do not in any way mask the acclaim that Guy Claxton's work deserves. He has created truly applicable and inclusive processes which develop students' learning power and create learning cultures in schools and other learning settings.

## APPLYING CLAXTON IN THE CLASSROOM

This section of the chapter will cover the learning power ideas for practice, firstly by considering aspects of the BLP programme and then the emerging and developed thoughts promoted in the LPA; both relate to his overall notion of learning power. It should be noted at this point that the range of strategies for teaching and supporting learning power suggested by Claxton and his colleagues is vast and beyond the scope of this section. We have, therefore, endeavoured, from our perception, to cover those which we consider you will find useful and helpful for your practice. There are a couple of lists here (lists are quite common in Claxton's work) that we suggest you consider as an evolving set of ideas for learning power which have developed from BLP to the LPA. Claxton is very clear in explaining the application of his ideas for classroom practice and in developing epistemic apprenticeships in learning settings. He also firmly reinforces the need for an interactive and collaborative learning and teaching practice: 'we might remind ourselves that qualities such as resilience, imagination or empathy cannot be developed merely by students being taught *about* them' (Claxton, 2012: 7). Much of the practical advice stresses that the habits and attitudes required for developing learning power need to be nurtured through an encouraging and supportive culture. Before we explore and offer practical examples of applying Claxton's work, it is appropriate to briefly explore how learning power can be developed. This will come about not through the complete redesign of educational programmes or indeed by implementing radically new ways of teaching, but what is needed, Claxton argues, is:

... an attention to the implicit values and assumptions of the culture, and to making sure that its objects, its tasks, its non-verbal signals and so on are consonant with the dispositions that the culture wishes to develop. (2002b: 32)

There are a number of practical ideas for classroom practice included in *Building Learning Power* (2002a), as well as associated resources. As such, he focuses on how teachers can develop 'the four Rs' of BLP – resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity – in their students. Teachers encourage learning power through what they themselves value, how they talk with their students about learning and attainment and how they themselves model learning. This, Claxton argues, is achieved by teachers explaining, commenting, orchestrating and modelling from the perspective of the particular subject. These four facets are major factors in developing learning power. Some elements of these will be explored further, but a synopsis of them, with some practical ideas, is given in Table 17.2.

These facets offer succinct, yet, in their own way, comprehensive guidelines for teachers. While they should be used by teachers to develop learning power, Claxton reinforces that they are not to be employed at the expense of gaining subject-specific knowledge and the completion of tasks. This, he states, requires teachers using what

**Table 17.2** How teachers can develop student learning power

Facets to develop learning power	What is involved
<i>Explaining</i> – telling students directly and explicitly about learning power	Informing – making clear the overall purpose to the classroom Reminding – offering ongoing reminders and prompts about learning power Discussing – inviting students' own ideas and opinions about learning Training – giving direct information and practice in learning: tips and techniques
<i>Commenting</i> – conveying messages about learning power through informal talk, and formal and informal evaluation	Nudging – drawing individual students' attention towards their own learning Replying – responding to students' comments and questions in ways that encourage learning to learn Evaluating – commenting on difficulties and achievements in learning-positive ways Tracking – recording the development of students' learning power
<i>Orchestrating</i> – selecting activities and arranging the environment	Selecting – choosing activities that develop the four Rs Framing – clarifying the learning intentions behind specific activities Target setting – helping students to set and monitor their own learning power targets Arranging – making use of displays and physical arrangements to encourage independence
<i>Modelling</i> – showing what it means to be an effective learner	Reacting – responding to unforeseen events, questions, etc., in ways that model good learning Learning aloud – externalising the thinking, feeling and decision making of a learner-in-action Demonstrating – having learning projects that are visible in the classroom Sharing – talking about their own learning careers and histories

(Adapted from Claxton, 2002a)

he terms 'split-screen thinking', wherein they need to retain 'a dual focus on the content of the lesson and the learning dispositions that are currently being expanded' (Claxton, 2007: 127). Furthermore, he warns that the opposites of the four Rs should not be undervalued. For example, although single-minded perseverance could be seen as a positive learning disposition, 'judicious giving up' is also a quality, as 'an effective learner knows when it is smart to abandon a project and move on, just as much as when and how to persist' (2007: 130).

Many students 'often underachieve not because they don't know what to do, but because they don't do what they know' (2002a: 103). He suggests that teachers encourage students to think about and comprehend the process of learning – this being the first stage in learning to learn. This is a long process and is further developed by teachers continually prompting and reminding and 'scaffolding' learning, which in the first stages should be done often and overtly. As the process develops,

the prompts should 'fade' and become less frequent so that students develop the practice of doing it on their own: 'They are developing the voice of the guiding, prompting coach inside their own head, so they cease to need external direction' (2002a: 103).

Claxton suggests three ways in which soft creativity can be developed. Firstly, students should not discard any rough notes or 'working outs' they have made. These can be included in a separate section of their exercise books and used to talk about their early thoughts and plans with others. Secondly, students should be persuaded to keep a 'commonplace book' in which they keep records of their thoughts during learning, a log of what has been discussed with teachers and fellow students, drawings and quotes. Thirdly, teachers should create displays in corridors and classrooms that not only depict finished work but also develop plans and drafts the students have made to show the creative process that is involved. This, he suggests, would give authenticity and significance to the creative process (2006: 353).

Schools and teachers need to change themselves to embrace and sustain the culture of epistemic apprenticeship. The type of teaching required for forming new learning habits is a lengthy process and one which differs from the type of teaching used to pass on information to reproduce facts for examinations; it requires teachers to think and act differently. This involves thinking about creating a learning-friendly and supportive classroom environment which gives students the self-belief to take risks and experiment, knowing that true real-life learning involves uncertainty, confusion and challenge. It also requires teachers to notice and nurture the learning habits of their students and give encouragement when needed. This could include changing the way they create activities and structure lessons. This willingness by teachers to embrace a change of culture involves the same difficult process of habit change as their students experience, and as such, teachers also need 'the same kinds of understanding, patience, determination and support' (2012: 15). However, on a more positive note, Claxton also offers some comfort for those teachers who perhaps feel they need to be an 'all-knowing' oracle for students to have respect for them. During his work in schools he found that students 'like their teachers to be fallible and inquisitive and not Know Alls' (2007: 128–9).

What being a powerful learner means to teachers and students is listed in eight broad 'qualities or dispositions' which Claxton calls 'The Magnificent Eight'. Powerful learners are curious; have courage; are good at exploring and investigation; are good experimenters; have imagination; are creative; are sociable; and are reflective (2008: 122). These Magnificent Eight qualities or dispositions have been developed even further by Claxton et al. (2020) in the form of elements created for the LPA. These include another eight points which present classroom practitioners with ways they can think about learning and teaching. These elements are the 'habits of mind' that learners need to develop during their school career, and are listed, slightly abridged, in Table 17.3.

The ideas raised in this section will help develop the characteristics and academic success which are the goal of Results Plus.

**Table 17.3 Elements of the LPA for developing habits of mind**

<b>Elements of the LPA for developing habits of mind</b>	<b>What is involved</b>
<i>Curiosity</i>	Having an inquisitive attitude to life (exploring, experimenting and tinkering)
<i>Attention</i>	Locking your mind onto learning (noticing, concentrating, contemplating, immersing)
<i>Determination</i>	Sticking with challenges that matter to you (persevering, recovering, practising)
<i>Imagination</i>	Creatively exploring possibilities (connecting, playing with ideas)
<i>Thinking</i>	Working things out with clarity and accuracy (analysing, deducing, critiquing, systems thinking)
<i>Socialising</i>	Benefiting from and contributing to the social world of learning (collaborating, accepting, imitating, emphasising, leading)
<i>Reflection</i>	Standing back and taking stock of learning (evaluating, self-evaluating, tinkering, witnessing)
<i>Organisation</i>	Managing and controlling your own learning (learning designing, planning, resourcing, adapting)

(Adapted from Claxton et al., 2020)

### OVERVIEW OF APPLICATION: IDEAS FOR LEARNING POWER IN THE CLASSROOM

Claxton et al. (2020) give a clear and comprehensive set of overall guidelines - what he calls design principles - which indicate some practical ideas that have the most influence on developing learning power in the classroom:

- Create a feeling of safety.
- Distinguish between learning mode and performance mode.
- Organise compelling things to learn.
- Make ample time for collaboration and conversation.
- Create challenge.
- Make difficulty adjustable.
- Talk about and demonstrate the innards of learning.
- Make use of protocols, templates and routines.
- Use the environment.
- Develop craftship.
- Allow increasing amounts of independence.
- Give students more responsibility.
- Focus on improvement, not achievement.
- Lead by example.

(Claxton et al., 2020: 58)

## SUMMARY

Guy Claxton's ideas on learning power continue to make a crucial contribution to helping students have the self-belief to learn in a changing world by encouraging their acquisition of the values, attitudes and habits they need to be successful lifelong learners. His theories have clear practical applications that teachers can transfer to schools and classrooms. Claxton's argument is that not enough effort and time are currently given to developing how students learn to learn. His ideas for improving students' learning power are set out in *Building Learning Power* (2002a), which is an informative and practical text and the basis for his BLP programme, which is used in numerous schools. The BLP programme has been extended further still with his work, mostly with colleagues, with the LPA. There have been a series of four very informative and influential books published on LPA between 2018 and 2020. The LPA, like BLP, has proved to be very popular with schools and other educational settings. Embedded in the concepts underpinning BLP and the LPA, Claxton's main themes and interests, which have become the foundations for his many writings, are the concepts of intelligence, the importance of culture in learning and the building of epistemic apprenticeships, dispositions for learning and soft creativity. All of these themes have a very functional application for educational practice.

There are similarities between Claxton's ideas and those of others. For example, there are close links with the social constructivists Vygotsky and Bruner (ZPD and scaffolding), which are evident in Claxton's practical classroom practice in the BLP programme of explaining, commenting, orchestrating and modelling. There are also possibly even closer links with the socially situated thinkers Lave and Wenger and the significance placed on the concept of apprenticeships and the value of culture and learning from others. Furthermore, Claxton's ideas on apprenticeships are aligned with Rosenshine's concept of cognitive apprenticeship. There are connections, even though critical at times, with Gardner's multiple intelligences and Goleman's emotional intelligence. Furthermore, there are similarities to Albert Bandura's notion of self-efficacy, and Carol Dweck's theory which argues that intelligence is not a fixed entity. There are also a number of like-minded contemporary educational thinkers who have similar ideas to Claxton's learning power phenomenon. Critiquing Claxton's works can be challenging as they appear sensible, inclusive, practical and positive in their nature, but perhaps a main criticism is the problem of evaluating and moderating the effectiveness of some of the more subjective areas, such as creativity and concepts of intelligence. Regardless of this, there is no doubt that Guy Claxton's ideas are popular in classrooms. He has certainly been prolific in his writing, which has given clear advice and guidance to classroom practitioners and school leaders alike. His argument for encouraging personal learning power to prepare students for life-long learning is a positive notion and a refreshing change from the traditional focus on curriculum content and assessment.



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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### **Building Learning Power**

A practical and useful school and classroom learning and teaching improvement programme, which comprises developing 'the four Rs' of student learning to become more resilient, resourceful, reflective and reciprocal.

### **Dispositions**

The skills and attitudes needed by students towards meaningful learning, which include creativity, perseverance, resilience, empathy and imagination, all of which are key to living a worthwhile life in uncertain and difficult times. These dispositions need to start in early childhood within a supportive culture which leads to children not being afraid of making mistakes, developing their own identities, and being confident in their own self-belief.

### **Epistemic apprenticeship**

A concept of learning where students become better equipped for lifelong learning and where activities of thinking, learning and knowing are key. In contrast, schools currently concentrate on just two aspects: what is being taught and how it will be assessed. The third aspect of epistemic apprenticeship is needed in order to develop the skills and attitudes – what Claxton terms dispositions (see above) – required for meaningful longstanding learning.

### **Learning Power Approach**

This notion has emerged from, and extends, the concept of Building Learning Power. The approach is a suite of design principles calling for a shift in pedagogical practice which seeks to develop two overarching characteristics in learners: firstly, prosocial characteristics (the social character), and secondly, the epistemic character (the character to learn, think and deal with difficulty and complexity). Overall, the LPA comprises of two modes: The 'learning mode', which endeavours to make learning safe, and the 'performance mode', which is about preparing learners for exams and involves challenging activities. See also Results Plus below.

### **Lifelong learning**

A concept that education is an enduring, encompassing and unending process which enables people to thrive in life as a whole. Therefore, it is much more than the idea that learning finishes when students complete their school, college and university education.

### Results Plus

Results Plus is an important aspect of the LPA: it aims to combine the development of the characteristics essential for learning, as well as academic success.

### Soft creativity

An idea of a more reachable form of creativity which gives learners an opportunity to sample being creative. The goal in the long term is that they develop their creative attributes through being involved in projects and problem-solving activities. These activities are fundamental in cultivating dispositions (see above).

## FURTHER READING

Claxton, G. (2021) *The Future of Teaching: And the myths that hold it back*. Abingdon: Routledge.

A quest for a new model of learning and teaching which rejects the notion of 'traditional' or 'progressive' education.

Claxton, G. and Lucas, B. (2004) *Being Creative: Essential steps to revitalize your work and life*. London: BBC Books.

This is an informative, practical self-help guide to unlocking the reader's creativity. Not specifically related to education.

Gilbert, I. (2002) *Essential Motivation in the Classroom*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Although not directly linked to Claxton's BLP, this concise and very practical book seeks to help teachers motivate their pupils and change the culture of their classrooms, which is very much in line with Claxton's ideas.

Hattie, J. (2012) *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Following on from Hattie's research-based (2008) *Visible Learning*, this text is aligned with Claxton's notions of school improvement.

Lucas, B., Claxton, G. and Spencer, E. (2012) *Progression in creativity: Developing new forms of assessment*. Background paper for the OECD conference: 'Educating for Innovative Societies'. Available from: <http://oecd.org/edu/cei/50153675.pdf> [accessed 9 March 2018].

This paper attempts to address the vexed question of assessing creativity.

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