

# The Conversation

A place for sharing and discussing ideas about education



## Welcome to the conversation

At **The Conversation** we believe that giving educators the space and time to talk about teaching and learning is essential.

Conversations can generate ideas, inform pedagogies and inspire reform. A conversation implies a measure of equality and that listening and sharing without limit, without judgement, without inhibition can lead to incredible things. Conversations allow us to explore ideas, to ask questions of ourselves, each other and the systems we work in. They allow us to create, analyse and evaluate ideas. They allow us to engage intellectually with the latest research and make links between theories and praxes. Conversations can lift us, excite us and challenge us. So join in the conversation!

1

### WEBSITE

Come and join in the online conversation. Read more articles and listen to conversations.

2

### QUESTION

Questions can kick start conversations. They ask us to think, respond and converse.

3

### CONVERSATION

If you would like to join in with our physical conversations email [jrodgers@mountsbay.org](mailto:jrodgers@mountsbay.org)



Each issue we will pose a new question

This time we ask **"What is the purpose of education?"**

### Our responses

John Rodgers thinks that **neuroplasticity** is the answer and Amy Green believes we must help our students become **future literate**



How would you answer?

We would love to hear from you. Send us a response (approx 500 words)

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## JOIN IN THE CONVERSATION

The conversation is all about bringing people together and talking. Asking a question is a good way to begin a conversation. This semester we ask **"What is the most important idea in education?"**. Clearly there are many possible ideas and views one could answer with or argue about, but that's the point, it gets the conversation going.

We would love to hear your ideas. If you would like to submit a written response (of around 500 words) please email us at [jroddgers@mountsbay.org](mailto:jroddgers@mountsbay.org)

Conversations need not happen face to face but it sometimes is just really nice to sit round a table and talk. If you would like to join in with one of our conversations in person the please let us know. Email [jroddgers@mountsbay.org](mailto:jroddgers@mountsbay.org) for more details.

Do you agree with the ideas discussed by our contributors? Maybe you completely disagree. Either way we want you to talk about it! Let us know your thoughts, discuss them with your colleagues, debate them with your friends. Have a conversation.

So come on, dive in and join the conversation!



# Neuroplasticity

John Rodgers

The most important idea in education is neuroplasticity. This is the understanding that the experiences we have and the learning we undertake changes the layout and organisation of the brain. Our brain's structure and capacity are not fixed. We can become smarter and better at anything we set our minds to.

And it seems that setting your mind to it is almost all you have to do. A recent experiment showed the same expansion of the motor cortex region in two groups of people; one group who practiced the piano for 2 hours each day for one week and the other who simply imagined practicing the piano whilst holding their hands still. Neurologists conclude that mental training has the power to change the physical structure of the brain.

It is well known that London cabbies have enlarged hippocampi due to their "knowledge" of detailed street maps. Professional musicians have on average 130% more grey matter in the auditory cortex. With every other factor controlled for, bilinguals develop Alzheimers 4.5 years later than monolinguals.

**"Everything having to do with education must be re-examined in the light of neuroplasticity."**

Now even cosmologists admit that the brain is the most complex structure in the known universe. Each of our brains contain nearly 100 billion neurones, each with a capacity to directly connect with 100,000 others, leading to 100 trillion neurone connections and more possible pathways across the neural network than there are atoms in the entire cosmos. Clearly there is much we have yet to learn about the brain, its structure and the emergence of intelligence and consciousness.

However we have recently learned that the brain is more plastic than we ever believed before. It is no longer an organ that deteriorates inexorably with age, not making any new neurones past adolescence. It has now become a mouldable, sculpt-able changeling. The creation of new brain cells (neurogenesis) continues throughout our life. And better yet, can be guided and shaped by specific learning experiences and persistent practice.



Norman Doige said "Everything having to do with education must be re-examined in the light of neuroplasticity." This is the real truth at the heart of the growth mindset revolution. ANY student can achieve ANY level in ANY subject. This is now demonstrably true thanks to the work of neurologists.

No-one is born a concert pianist or a theoretical physicist. Those that achieve much have practiced much, persisted much, learnt much. They have changed the physical structure of their brains with hard work, grit and resilience much like a body builder will change the physical structure of their muscles.

As educators, we must recognise the inherent challenge in the revelation of neuroplasticity. Science is telling us that no student can be left behind, that all students can learn and develop the skills of our subjects. It is telling us that given the right learning experiences, with the right amount and type of practice and with the right amount of determination and patience any student could be a concert pianist or a cabbie or a cosmologist.

Let's become brain builders.

## Future literacy

Amy Green



It seems like an obvious statement that our job as educators is to prepare young people for the future. However, it seems that there are still systems in some schools, and even nationally, that seem to be looking backwards, rather than forwards. The fact we still have grammar schools in our country, alongside the structure of our examination systems, as well as the pressure put on teachers to give extensive written feedback and box tick, could be seen as completely back to front.

So, where should our focus be?

In his essay 'The Scrap Heap Challenge' (Education Forwards, 2017) Mark Stevenson says, *'There is a staggering lack of future literacy in many of our educational institutions. There is little understanding of the real questions the future is asking us- those our children will be called upon to answer.'*

We cannot know exactly what we need to prepare the future generation for, but there are many facts about our economy, political landscape and our planet overall that we seem to be ignoring. I believe that as educators, we need to be creative and resourceful to challenge priorities we are being told we should have. Who says that the core subjects are the most important? Is it still relevant? Why do we test our students so much? I am not saying these things are wrong, but I am saying we need to question them when clearly our overall system is flawed.



I believe that if you are currently working in education, there should be the acceptance that sometimes risks need to be taken to achieve better outcomes. Change is often seen as a negative thing in the context of a school. A change of policy, system or curriculum is what many teachers find to be a distressing concept, but change is the one thing we need in education to keep our practice relevant and meaningful to our learners.

***“There is little understanding of the real questions the future is asking us”***

In 2006, within his TED talk, Ken Robinson raised the question ‘Do schools kill creativity?’ He went on to say that *“creativity is as important as literacy and we should afford it the same status”*.

I would build on that statement to now say that creativity and **future** literacy are two of the most important things in education at this time. Creativity in education does not mean that the creative arts subjects are more important. It is about asking questions and challenging what has become ‘the way it’s done’ in an informed, methodical but innovative way. Innovation is offering a new idea, and to innovate is to be creative. To be creative, you have to take risks. Some things work, other things don’t- but it is important to try.

I feel lucky to work in a school that is most definitely looking to the future in a proactive way.

## Labels

Simon Jack

I believe that one of the biggest factors that limit student achievement in school is the mantle of the genius or more able. In mathematics and art, in particular, these identities are particularly prevalent. I can think of examples when students, teachers and parents identify an individual as a mathematician or an artist and equally the opposite of those two identities. These labels cause a range of problems for learners, some of which I will discuss in further detail later however, in particular they immediately take the responsibility of underperformance away from the individual and allows them to blame fate.



Recently both Carol Dweck and Jo Boaler have addressed these titles head on. In Carol Dweck's book *Mindsets* she shows the example of students who perceived themselves as not being artists who were asked to draw a self-portrait before enrolling on a week long intensive drawing course. At the end of the course they again drew a self-portrait and unsurprisingly, all things considered, their drawings were of a standard that an 'artist' would be happy with.

Jo Boaler would go further and say that the mantle of mathematician is not only unhelpful for those who find maths difficult but also for those given the mantle. It was found that many students who had been identified as gifted in mathematics at the end of Year 6 where only average at age 16 whilst other students had flourished who had not been given the mantle. Many students interviewed saw that being given the title meant that new learning came easily and they would rarely make mistakes. Once mistakes were made and the going got tough they would have a loss of confidence and increased self-doubt and this would then lead to further struggles. The mantle of being a mathematician weighs very heavily and when the going gets tough it can be very damaging for the students' self-worth.

**“The only difference between the two groups was that in the teachers' written feedback they had included the line ‘I believe in you’.”**



This was also the same experience as identified by Stanford University who followed 1470 students who were selected for a lifetime study based on the outcomes from an ability test. They all had IQs over 140. Whilst many of these students went on to be lawyers and doctors none went on to be the big thinkers of their age. However, interestingly two students who were considered not clever enough to be selected originally went on to win Nobel prizes. This does beg the question of what prior data we are using with our students and what might be the unintended consequences of that.

In our schools we should be teaching our students that learning is a journey and that it should be difficult. If they fall behind we should be catching them up. If they are getting ahead are we challenging them to think deeply enough or is their understanding superficial? In my opinion we should be regularly looking to present the concepts and ideas in a variety of ways so that the students need to be flexible and imaginative and see it from multiple perspectives. We should ensure

that the students are asked to present their learning and understanding in a variety of ways including words and visual representations as this uses different parts of the brain.

Boaler states all students should experience making mistakes and being stuck frequently in lessons. To this end I ask you how often do we use unworkable situations? In life we are often confronted with problems that can't be solved completely satisfactorily if at all. However, in school students are rarely confronted by these scenarios. Through giving examples that can't be solved we ask students to be creative to try new alternative strategies to try and find a satisfactory outcome. We also give them the opportunity to demonstrate their deep understanding of the concept as they will need to be able to argue why there is no satisfactory solution.

I will conclude with one simple change that all teachers can make that is proven to have a positive impact on students progress. In a study cited by Jo Boaler one group experienced better outcomes than a control group. The only difference between the two groups was that in the teachers written feedback they had included the line "I believe in you".

## Personalised Delivery

Nick Strong

There are numerous pedagogical methods, ideas and processes throughout all educational systems in the world which could be classed as important ideas. Many leaders within these world leading education systems, for example those in Singapore or South Korea would argue that the methods and ideas which their systems are built on, (highly streamed, academic and test based) provide targeted pathways for individuals to achieve the highest level, are the most important. Equally systems, such as those in Scandinavia which are more socialist based and focus on nurture and support for all, allowing students to flourish as individuals first, would also argue that their idea of education is the most important. Each system will have its own merits and arguably provide a purposeful education for the young people it serves.

**“The concept of instilling a wanting or thirst to become better, improve, develop or just know more, is the most important ‘idea’ of education.”**

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However, it is my belief that the idea of education is far more than a system or a process. The most important idea in education is not the sharing of facts, figures or information, but is the sharing and development of a mindset with which students want to do and learn more. The concept of instilling a “wanting” or “thirst” to become better, improve, develop or just know more, is the most important ‘idea’ of Education. It is this act, which will inspire, motivate and encourage individuals and is what most practices in education are based upon. Some examples of these are tests to motivate and encourage students to gain high scores, or inspirational resources and activities to

grab students' attention and make lasting memories. However, what works for one person may not work for another.

What is fundamental to a successful education and productive learning is that it is personalised to the individual, each and every person is different, a simple fact which should not be overlooked. Therefore, the idea that differentiating the ways in which a teacher motivates and inspires others is the underpinning and most important idea within education. Teachers and educators play many different roles within their daily life and being able to adapt in a variety of ways to positively and purposefully interact with their students are the basis for all further pedagogical strategies to be successfully applied. Lesson activities such as group challenges, independent research, teacher explanations are all methods to impart information but they need to be delivered in an environment where the teacher has created a mindset where the students want to know more. This can be in a variety of ways and does not need to be overcomplicated. Personality, humour, rapport, care and time all contribute to successful learning.



**"What is fundamental to a successful education and productive learning is that it is personalised to the individual"**

In conclusion the most important idea in education is the importance of how to personalise delivery in order to engage a student's interest in a topic, lesson or activity and not merely the processes, such as tests, questions and tasks that may be used along the journey.

## A Good Teacher

Ian Cross

The answer to the question 'What is the most important idea in education?' depends on the philosophy and values of those answering it. For example, an Epicurean might suggest that the most important idea is that students are taught to attain happiness through peaceful living, self sufficiency and close friendships, whilst an ardent Nationalist might suggest that it is to engender a coherent group identity on the basis of their own paradigm for nationality. To ask 'what is the most important idea in education?' is therefore to ask what does one personally and subjectively value most and thus perhaps reveals more about the person answering than the answer reveals any empirical truths. Nevertheless, education when placed in the context of human evolution must be



about the transmission of language and ideas so that our species can sustain itself and thrive. The success of sapiens in general has much to do with our capacity to adapt quickly to change through the application of our minds rather than through our biology.

## **“Poor is the pupil that does not surpass his master” Leonardo Da Vinci**

If the sustainability of our species is the most salient consideration, then for the unimpeded continuity of education itself the most important idea must be to make teachers out of students. As Leonardo Da Vinci famously wrote in his Prolegomena and General Introduction to the Book on Painting: “Tristo é lo discepolo che non avanza il suo maestro” - Poor is the pupil that does not surpass his master. The question must therefore follow - what does it mean to be a good teacher? If we turn to the empirical researchers for answers then a good teacher is one who is meta-cognisant, has expert knowledge, shows caring and develops strong relationships, communicates well, is imaginative and innovative. A good teacher is one who understands and encourages multiple perspectives, is prepared and organised, understands what objectives to set and how they can be assessed. A good teacher has high expectations and so constantly sets appropriate challenges, sees errors and pitfalls and scaffolds kind, timely and specific individualised feedback to aid progress. A good teacher works hard but has a balanced life, sleeps well and can handle stress. A good teacher shows grit, shares passions, enjoys challenge and discerns the best ways to proceed irrespective of convention. A good teacher connects new knowledge to prior knowledge from across the curriculum, has a good sense of humour and loves learning. A good teacher teaches their students to be a good teacher.



## **Emotional Intelligence**

Neil Williams

Emotional Intelligence (EQ or EI) is a term created by two researchers - Peter Salavoy and John Mayer - and popularized by Dan Goleman in his 1996 book of the same name. We define EI as the ability to: Recognize, understand and manage our own emotions; Recognize, understand and influence the emotions of others.

As classroom practitioners, we are more than communicators of information - we need to be sympathetic, empathetic, sensitive human beings. The 'soft skill' of using emotional intelligence is central to success in a modern-day classroom.

When working with teenagers, the following maxim is probably true: "People don't care what you know, until they know that you care." But do students perceive that we care? Do we show it enough?

Key areas for demonstrating emotional intelligence:

**MANAGING SELF** - before we can manage others effectively, we must consider our own emotional state. In teaching, the challenge of managing our own emotions is often put to the test. In busier times, general politeness and manners can be lost - when dealing with students and staff alike. This should be reflected on and evaluated. Students may pick up tension and frustration in our body language and tone of voice, therefore creating an uneasy atmosphere in our lessons. Q. What are we doing to manage our emotions in busy times of the year? Can we do more to enable us to approach the working day positively?

**BUILDING RAPPORT** - in modern education, this is essential. The aim is simple: to get students working for you, not simply 'cracking the whip!' Small, discreet discussions with students can go a long way: How was your weekend? Did things go well in your athletics last week? Have you seen the latest Marvel film? Building connections with students and showing them that we are human beings can be highly motivational for them.

**READING EMOTIONAL CLIMATES** - on starting a lesson, we know that the 'climate' in the room can vary. Same class; different day - contrasting experience! So, we pick up the mood of the students and respond. For experienced teachers (with emotional intelligence), this becomes instinctive. Factors: the weather? Pastoral dynamics? The preceding lesson? A fight during breaktime? A fair in town? Relational breakup? The list goes on..... The way that we respond to these factors can make, or break, a lesson!



**AVOIDING ESCALATIONS IN CONFLICT** - this can be one of the most difficult dynamics. We can feel tired, for example, and a student begins to irritate us and may become challenging in their behaviour. Emotional intelligence and sensitivity can diffuse a situation before it escalates. At times, we must remind ourselves: we are the adult! In contrast, there are times when a teacher vents frustration and leaves a student feeling like they have been humiliated and with no way forward - they can feel trapped. This can be hugely damaging on their educational journey. Once a student has been 'lost' and has 'closed down' to the teacher, diplomacy is needed. How should a teacher navigate the path to restoration?

**DIFFUSING ANXIETIES** - this is particularly applicable during exam season for Year 11. As teachers, we should be aware of students' differing approaches to the challenges they face at this time - for

some students, pushing them too hard can be counter-productive; they know the importance of the exams and simply telling them this repeatedly can be damaging to their emotional state – affirmation and encouragement are greater motivational forces. Many students also fear delivering presentations to their peers. Whilst this is an important life-skill, we need to be sensitive to students' anxieties. Is there another way to complete the task effectively? Maybe with a small group of close friends?

There are many more situations where emotional intelligence can pay dividends. In short, strong relationships with students and sensitivity to their emotional state can prove to be key factors in their engagement with a subject and, ultimately, their achievements.

## Evidence Based Teaching

Roland Stuart

The most important idea in education is that teaching and learning is a science. Different pedagogical approaches and praxes have been proven to be more or less effective than each other by researchers employing the scientific method. It is imperative therefore that teachers and educational professionals avail themselves of research findings rather than waste time on fads and initiatives that have no evidence base. In fact I would be so bold as to suggest that any person working in education that is not aware of, and employing evidence based teaching methods is at best wasting their time and at worst professionally negligent.



Teachers and school leaders must be readers. They must at the very least read to become aware of the highlights of new educational research. There are of course large numbers of books, publications and websites where one can find out about evidence based teaching. If you haven't already, check out the websites listed at the bottom of this article to get started in EBT (evidence based teaching).

Teachers can also experiment themselves. John Hattie urges teachers to "know thy impact", a call for them to put the scientific method into practice in their classrooms. For each new idea a teacher tries out in his or her lesson they must ask "what was the impact of this idea?" And even more importantly "how do I know?"

Schools can also make use of the latest neuroscientific research. Due to tremendous improvements in imaging techniques our understanding of the brain and its working is increasing exponentially. Institutional willingness to receive new scientific understanding and implement its findings is always slow. It is my belief that any school willing and able to be courageous in decisions based on developments in our understanding of the brain can get well ahead of the

curve. Brave schools could be pioneers into a new future for education that fully embraces neuroscience and embeds its findings for the benefit of students.

**“Any person working in education that is not aware of and employing evidence based teaching methods is wasting their time”**

One example of this would be staggered start times for the school day. Research has shown that the changes in the teenage brain result in a shift of its circadian rhythm. In essence the brain and hormonal changes occurring during adolescence mean teenagers genuinely stay up and wake up later than younger children and adults. There is an actual shift in their body clock. This means that for these students beginning the school day at 8:30am physically feels like a very early morning start (imagine starting work at 5am!). Combining this with their difficulty in getting to sleep at a reasonably early evening time (imagine going to bed to sleep at 7pm) and we often have students whose length and quality of sleep is well below that which is necessary for healthy learning. Knowing this, why do schools not start their day at 11 o'clock?

This is but one example of many suggestions neuroscience can offer schools willing to take difficult and radical decisions to create evidence based teaching and learning institutions which prioritise pedagogies and policies that would truly benefit the learning progress of students.

## FURTHER READING

### Some useful websites for Evidence Based Teaching

<https://angeladuckworth.com/research/> <http://ebtn.org.uk/> <http://www.learningscientists.org/>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/> <https://visible-learning.org/john-hattie/>

<http://www.evidencebasedteaching.org.au/evidence-based-teaching-strategies/>

[http://www.heppell.net/old\\_default.html](http://www.heppell.net/old_default.html) <https://the-ieee.org.uk/>

<http://www.bestevidence.org/index.cfm>

Needless to say this is not an exhaustive list. If you know of any websites that are about Evidence Based Teaching then please let us know.

There are of course many books that present EBT.

Email [jrodgers@mountsbay.org](mailto:jrodgers@mountsbay.org) for some suggestions.



## Growth Mindset

Amy Veall

I feel strongly that students should leave education as well-rounded individuals who are prepared for life. Therefore, to me, I believe the most important idea in education is creating a student that has high aspirations and is resilient. High aspirations refers to a student having a high desire, longing or aim to reach their goals and objectives. It is also essential that the students' aspirations are not capped by themselves, parents/carers or even teachers. In addition, it is vital student's do not believe they are unable to achieve a goal or objective. It is paramount that they believe they are able to achieve their full potential, and reach their personal goals and objectives. However, it is not only that students have these high aspirations but it is also the matter that they are equipped with the 'how' to achieve these aspirations and as teachers it is part of our job to ensure they are given the opportunities to explore and work towards achieving the 'how'.

The other key idea that I believe is important within education is creating students that are resilient, and this links to the idea of students having a growth mindset, and ultimately this will have an impact upon students' aspirations. Growth Mindset was introduced by Carol Dweck and there are 4 key factors that affect a person's mindset.

1. Their beliefs about themselves
2. Their goals
3. Their feelings about their social connectedness
4. Their self-regulatory skills

By students having a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset they believe that their intelligence can change, develop and is not a fixed matter. Students can become reluctant when they face failure. It is essential that they see a **fail** as a **First Attempt In Learning**, that they take on board what they have learnt from the experience and are resilient to try again. Therefore, they are applying a growth mindset to the situation as opposed to a fixed mindset.

I believe that the ideas of both high aspirations and Growth Mindsets clearly link together, and by students having a growth mindset in their day to day learning, this will help lead them into having high aspirations. However, what is essential as a school is that we create a culture where these are the norm and both the students and teachers have high expectations.





## Ideas

Anon

To answer the question “what is the most important idea in education?” I first considered what is the purpose of education? The gathering of knowledge? The development of skills? Developing of awareness? Safeguarding of young people? All of these? As my career in education has progressed, so has my understanding of the many less publicised facets to the profession. Yes, the imparting of knowledge is a cornerstone but in the wider role of teaching, it forms a significant yet smaller part than one might expect.

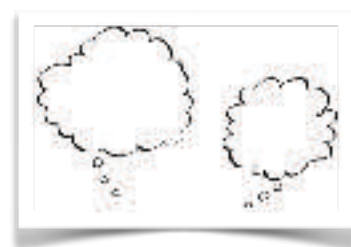
When given questions like this I often consider an assembly given many years ago at the height of David Beckham’s career when the speaker questioned the assumption that David was ‘not very intelligent’ largely due to the widely publicised, fairly simplistic use of language and monotone speech. This notion was challenged when it was pointed out that many of his talents, his coordination, leadership, business acumen, spatial awareness, artistic flare, interpersonal skills (to name but a few), were actually quite exceptional. So should his ‘intelligence’ measured through literacy and oracy?

### “David Beckham is not defined by his mathematical prowess”

It was and maybe still is, but hopefully to a lesser extent. I am much more aware now of the need for education to be less single dimensional and to build on the inherent skills and talents of individuals as well as providing the key life skills. David Beckham will not be defined by his mathematical prowess, as will very few of us!

So what drives us to move forward, to develop?...surely it is fundamentally our interest and curiosity? Is it not through an enthusiasm to go deeper into our interests that we push ourselves most to learn? That may manifest itself as a thirst to simply know more facts, or as a challenge to learn or further develop a skill, either arriving at a rudimentary level or becoming a leading expert. David Beckham was curious about how far he could take his talents. He was also lucky to have had the support and opportunities to develop his interests and for him this learning would have gone hand in hand with many other skills. What drives our curiosity? ‘I wonder...?’.....‘what if....?’ ....‘could I?’..... are these not connotations of ideas?

So have I arrived at my answer? Good education provides the stage and support to explore and structure our thinking. From this platform we can be creative and develop our ideas , so maybe the most important idea in education are the ideas themselves. My verdict: Ideas are the most important part of education!



## Good Teachers

Aimee (student)

In education, teachers are the most fundamental thing. Teachers teach students everything they need to know to be able to pass their GCSEs which is very crucial for their future. Students often look up to their teachers as mentors with much knowledge and experience. Teachers nurture students, becoming their role models. They help children to read, write, draw, persevere and communicate, giving us the skills and wisdom we all need to help us succeed in life. Teachers are the people who educate the youth of society who then become the leaders of the next generation of people.

Teaching is about the relationship built between the teacher and student. Children tend to work harder for a teacher they respect - those are the teachers who are enthusiastic and want to find out more about the student, getting to know them more, building up the relationship. Teachers watch pupils grow up into achieving students, seeing them be successful in their dreams and ambitions.



A great teacher makes learning fun and engaging by planning exciting lessons as it's very important to a student's academic success. A teacher who makes their classroom an exciting, warm environment for learning will hold the students' interest and they will learn best when challenged and intrigued. Inspiring students is essential to ensuring they are successful to fulfil their potential.

Teachers can be trusted to help pupils to lead them to important life decisions and give out advice. Those who are motivated by their teachers can proceed to achieve amazing things in life. This can be from helping a student throughout the school year, to help guiding them towards their future career. They can help students pursue higher education, explore opportunities and compete in different events.

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**“A great teacher makes learning fun and engaging by planning exciting lessons”**

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In my opinion, I believe teachers are under appreciated. I think they should be awarded more for their work, without them many people would be uneducated. They sacrifice their free time so they can plan lessons, mark books, or mark test papers to help get students the results they need. I feel

people take teachers for granted, when they should be grateful that not only we have teachers but that we live in such a place where we can get education for free. Schools and teachers are key in life, their role in society is significant and valuable and so they should be recognised more often.

## Collaboration

### Ella (student)

As a student, I strongly believe that collaboration is key when engaging in learning. Today, we observe people working together when peers actively encourage one another to be involved. Value is seen in working together to achieve a specific goal and equal cooperation provides every team member with equal opportunities. It allows people to be aware of the importance of their own contributions and when in a small group, each student is gifted the opportunity to express an individual idea. Being able to do so, and being heard can give the feeling of importance and worth. Personally, when I work with others, learning becomes much more fun and I am more eager to learn new things.



Having a common goal that is shared between students gives people a meaningful reason to collaborate, along with receiving many benefits. It is important to learn from peers as pupils have different skills, passions and knowledge. Participating in a team and when a question is raised, people learn from one another while also understanding ideas from various perspectives.

**“Collaboration helps students from different backgrounds share valuable ideas”**

Personally, I have gained self-confidence when working in a team by receiving a network of support during my learning. Collaborative learning can ensure that shy students are able to express themselves and as a whole, this method is ideal for my peers that have difficulties in social settings. In order to achieve a goal, people need to work together which also builds trust greatly; a major factor within education. Most importantly, an effective collaborative approach does not lose sight of each individual. You can realise how unique someone is by listening carefully to other's opinions. There is no such thing as an 'average person' and working together pays to this as it offers personal strengths and skills to be shared while recognising the merit in everyone.

Moreover, collaboration makes students from different backgrounds share valuable ideas. They would come together in a setting that may not be possible if it were not for education and pupils can make individual progress in line with other people. Students can learn to better understand differences, recognise them within themselves and use new ideas to their advantage. Collaboration can improve learning and I believe that it is much more beneficial than working as an individual in terms of progressing forward. It embeds knowledge more powerfully through listening and sharing as a student is more likely to remember something learnt by a peer rather than information that is being broadcast at the front of the classroom. The discussion of new ideas makes learning far more memorable.

It may seem bold but collaborative practice is essential as it can be a skill that is taken into future education. Overall, collaboration is defined as the action of working with someone to produce something. Work effectively in a team and it is possible to produce great things. "There's no I in team!"

## Stretch and Challenge

### Reuben (student)

A common misconception with students of higher ability is that they are independent. I feel that people believe they are able to challenge themselves and enhance their own learning beyond what is being taught in class. However, I know from personal experience that this is not the case. I fully understand that this is not the 'most' important idea in education; all ideas can be seen as equally important, but I do believe that this is an area in need of addressing.

Before I talk about challenging students, I'd first like to ask, what is higher ability? In my eyes, higher ability can be seen as a variety of things but it can simply be a student who is better than average in a given subject. Higher ability doesn't apply to just Maths or English, it can be Art, Languages, Drama or any subject. But higher ability doesn't mean you have completed the work required. There is no set line for the amount of knowledge you can have in school. You should keep on learning, and expanding your understanding in said subject.

Being higher ability is not a restriction, it is an opportunity to let your mind be free and reach the next level in your subject.



And that is the problem in schools. Understandably, once a student reaches a certain level in a subject, the school would be content with that and focus on keeping them in that level, and devote time to lower ability students. I am certainly not against the improvement of lower ability students, but I do see this as unfair. Too many times in lessons, I would be doing the same work as the rest of the class and the majority of the time, it would not be challenging for me, or not challenging enough. If you are a teacher that does challenge students to stretch their brains, then this article is not aimed you; I am just talking from personal experience.

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But why should schools challenge higher ability students? Because it's what schools are meant to do. School isn't a place where you get a grade and move on. It is a place of learning and where learning has no limit. It is where you find a talent in a subject that may determine your future job. So schools should allow students to be challenged in that subject and be prepared for a future of learning and exploring that subject. Being challenged also makes school more enjoyable for students. There is nothing more rewarding than working hard, than expanding your brain in a subject that you enjoy, and are talented in. For these reasons, that is why I think it is important that schools challenge higher ability students as it not only improves the students themselves, but also the type of learning environment provided within schools.

## Challenge

### Mia (student)

Education is made up of many different fundamental factors, all of which inspire and educate young people in order to ensure work for younger generations, in the fast growing career system. In my opinion I think that the most fundamental ideas in education are challenge and interest.

Challenge is the idea that a subject needs a high amount of mental or physical effort in order to understand and complete successfully. Challenge pushes people to excel in what they know and understand therefore meaning that a persons knowledge and ideas are extended due to the challenge they are presented with.





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**“I find this very satisfying, knowing that I have understood and overcome something that I struggled with, using my previous learning to recognise how to figure it out”**

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Because you are given this stretch and challenge it means that you have to really use your skill, insight and judgement to enhance your understanding of the subject or concept. As a student if I am studying a topic that am already confident with or fully understand then I will eventually become bored and lose interest in it. However if I am given a challenge, I will have to try a lot harder and put more work effort into it. I find that if I am stuck on something, and put my head down and really work for it, I will eventually understand it. Once I have understood it I can then link it to my prior knowledge and personally, I find this very satisfying, knowing that I have understood and overcome something that I struggled with but used my previous skill to recognise how to figure out the challenge. Without challenge we cannot succeed.

Alongside challenge I believe that interest is a key part of learning. Interest is being enthusiastic and curious about an idea. If you don't enjoy what you are studying you will not try to learn and understand it. For example if you find something interesting and captivating, you are more likely to continue studying and researching it in greater depth. But if you find something boring and tiresome you are immediately going to give up. Meaning if you find something interesting you are more likely to further your knowledge in it and enjoy and understand education.

## Independent Learning

Emily (student)

Personally, I believe the most important thing about education is independent learning, which I feel is a skill needed for adulthood in all aspects of life. This is because it helps us build individual opinions and views on debatable topics which broadens our understanding and knowledge of certain situations.

For me, I like having the responsibility of setting myself personal targets and goals and selecting the best strategies and methods in order for me to do so. I think it helps me understand my needs and abilities as a learner and having time to individually reflect on my knowledge and processes is something I find very helpful and reassuring. It allows me to monitor my weaknesses and build on ways I can individually improve my learning capabilities. I find being a more independent learner allows me to focus on my own performance in educational circumstances, rather than comparing my own results to others and not achieving my personal goals to the best of my ability.

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**“I think independent learning gives students a better insight into the working world”**

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As well as evaluating my learning, I think independent learning gives students a better insight into the working world, where we have to record our own information, research and discover things for ourselves. Finding information out for ourselves and discussing and sharing our independent views, I find increases my confidence and motivation as a learner; it supplies me with a greater awareness of my limitations in certain topic areas and my ability to manage them and learn from others.

In addition, I find I learn more from discovering my peer's independent learning strategies as they often supply me with new ideas for my own. When working in groups, I often find a natural leader becomes the person who places everyone's focus in one area which they may find interest in, using learning methods, which may be best for themselves but not necessarily everyone else. As we all find ourselves to be different kinds of learners, for example: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic etc, different strategies work better for different people. I find becoming a more independent learner avoids these situations and paves the way for a learner to take responsibility for the use of their own methods and actions on their learning. In my opinion, the most striking component of personalised learning is how we define the roles involved in the content delivery and recording information which is important when developing knowledge of facts.

In conclusion, I believe encouraging more independent learning in schools will set a strong foundation for students preparing for their adult experiences and will supply them with similar methods which are considered and used in many areas of the working world. I definitely think it will be effective and will give students more confidence as a learner which will only benefit their learning capabilities.

## THE CONVERSATION

The aim of this magazine is to stimulate conversation. Whether you agree or not with the ideas of our contributors please discuss them with colleagues. Be challenged, be inspired, **have a conversation**.

