

Focusing on the 'how' of learning

In education, we often focus on the 'what' of learning. This is partly because it is highly visible. The 'what' of learning is books, essays, exam grades. The 'how' of learning is often invisible. It includes things like attitudes, motivations and memory techniques. In Learning to Learn, we focus children's minds on the 'how' of learning. In this way, we can make the processes of learning visible, tangible – and therefore learnable.

Four levels of questions

The easiest way to focus on the 'how' of learning is through questioning. We can do this on four levels: thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and learning itself. Here are some examples of questions you might want to ask. However, this list is not exhaustive – if you find any questions that really unlock your child's ability to think and talk about their learning, please let us know!

Thoughts

- What beliefs do you have about yourself and your abilities? Do you ever hear yourself thinking things like the following?
 - 'I can't do X.'
 - 'I am usually quite good at X, but I find I really struggle with Y.'
 - 'I am useless at X.'
 - 'I don't know how to do X yet – what do I need in order to move forward?'
 - 'I can do anything if I set my mind to it.'
- What do you think when you are set a task that you find too easy?
- What do you think when you are set a task that you find too difficult?
- What do you think when you are set a task that is 'just right' in terms of difficulty?
- How do you know when a task is 'just right' in terms of difficulty?
- What tools or strategies might help you organise your thinking when you are working on a complex or challenging task? Do you use any of these?
- Would you say you have a good memory, or a poor memory? Why?
- When someone feels their thoughts racing, what can they do to slow down or control their thinking? Do you use any of these strategies?

Emotions

- What does it feel like when you achieve something that you initially found difficult, challenging or confusing?
- What does it feel like when you find it difficult to learn something, despite trying really hard?
- What does it feel like to lose control of your behaviour?
- Would you say you are an emotional person? What does this mean?
- Are people able to control their emotions, or do they just happen to us?
- Are people able to control how they respond to their emotions? Can you think of any examples?
- How do you know when you can trust someone?

Behaviours

- Would you say you are an impulsive person, or are good at controlling how you behave? Why do you think this?
 - Can you think of an example of when you have been impulsive?
 - Can you think of an example of when you have been able to control your behaviour?
- To what extent are people able to control their behaviour, would you say?
- Do you think you have 'free will'? What does this mean to you?
- How good are you at managing distractions in the classroom?
- Outside school, do you set goals and work towards them, or do you tend to drift from one thing to the next?
- Have you ever felt like your behaviour has been 'out of control'? What happened? Is there anything you could have done to prevent this from happening?

Learning

- What have you learned today / this week / this term?
- What were you doing when you learned X?
 - Was it when you asked someone a question and they answered it?
 - Did you ask a question and the answer 'came to you' as you were asking it?
 - Was it through listening to the teacher or a classmate?
 - Were you thinking about something else and suddenly something 'clicked'?
 - Did you look it up in a book, or online?
 - What does it feel like when you know you have learned something difficult?
 - Through which sense or senses did you receive the information? Did you read it? Overhear it? Was it by 'thinking out loud'?
- How long did it take you to learn X?
- How can you tell whether you can trust a source of information we find online?
- Did it take more or less time than you anticipated?
- What do good short, medium and long-term goals look like? Why do you think this?
- What do bad short, medium and long-term goals look like? Why do you think this?
- Is it possible for anyone to get better at learning?
- What are the characteristics of an effective learner?
 - How would you describe their personality?
 - What strategies do they use? What beliefs do they have?
- Some students always seem to learn what they need to learn from every lesson. What are they doing in their heads, or in their books, when they are learning so effectively? Maybe we should ask them...?
- How might you learn more effectively in *[insert subject]* in the future?
- When you learned X, was there a period of confusion or discomfort beforehand? What did that feel like?
- Is it possible to feel comfortable with feeling uncomfortable? What does this mean?