



Hampshire
County Council

Virtual School

Motivation and locus of control: supportive strategies and interventions

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PEP toolkit: motivation and locus of control

Introduction

Research suggests that some children and young people may be demotivated in their learning and have an external locus of control, which suggests they feel powerless to change their learning outcomes.

External locus of control: many children and young people who have experienced inconsistent attachments/trauma are demotivated in their learning. This is related to their lived experiences of being let down by adults or negative experiences of school/learning, so they have almost given up, often feeling powerless to change anything in their lives. As a result, their **motivation for learning is impacted** and can demonstrate difficulties in the following areas:

- recognising they are underachieving
- making efforts to improve
- working towards tangible rewards
- responding to positive reinforcement
- accepting constructive feedback (feedback is personalised; they cannot separate the 'self' from the 'task')
- maintaining confidence when learning new skills
- attending school for exams
- readily answering questions in class discussions
- relating success in schoolwork to personal effort (they may say the task was just easy)
- enjoying classroom responsibilities
- enjoying the process of learning, not just the outcome
- enjoying choices in learning (they just want to get the task finished)
- believing they can succeed (they have experienced many blueprints of failure or perceived failure)
- persevering with challenging tasks

Effort is often key when discussing pupils' needs, as it is internal and within our control. However, not all children have internal locus control, and they need a high level of support to believe that they can affect change and that effort will be effective. There tend to be two stages in order to help pupils do this. Firstly, the pupil is given sufficient support to be able to achieve more successfully. The second stage is to teach them to attribute this newfound success in the effort, skills and strategies they have been applying.

Dweck (1975) conducted an experiment with two groups of children.

The first group received support to improve their success in a subject. The second group also received support to be more successful, but they were then taught to attribute their improvement to the effort, skills and strategies they had used. The results showed that only the children who were taught to attribute success (or failure) to the effort they had applied persisted when faced with difficult tasks. Therefore, it is important to help children become more successful learners, but it is equally important to teach them why they are more successful (HEPS, 2007, Motivation and Pupil Attributions).

The importance of resilience

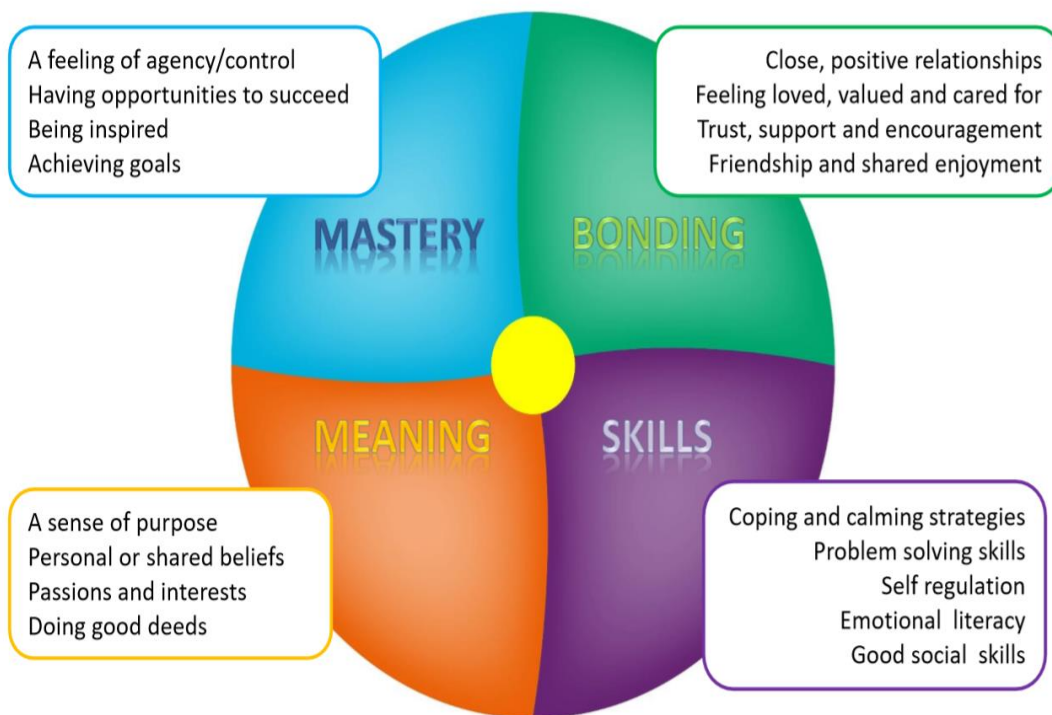
Box 1 - External Locus of Control Resilience Building

Resilience refers to the strengths, skills, and resources we all have to manage and overcome challenges and difficulties. It is about doing well or having a good outcome when times have been tough. It involves our skills, strengths, qualities and the relationships, support, and opportunities we have around us. It is central to our emotional and physical wellbeing (Masten, 2016).

Based on the research reviewed by Ann Masten (2016) and inspired by Henderson and Milstein (2003), Hart, Blincow and Thomas (2007) and Jeni Hooper (2012), adapted by Cath Lowther (2016/17) © HIEP. This has been reproduced with the kind permission of HIEP.

The following are important:

- **skills:** how can we support coping skills through problem-solving and teaching emotional understanding and management?
- **mastery:** where do they have a sense of control/agency? Where can they experience some success?
- **meaning:** when can they engage in activities that give them meaning and purpose within their day?



Remember the basics...

sleep

food

housing

exercise

feel safe

Strategies to develop resilience, motivation and locus of control

Attribution feedback

The following was produced by HIEP and reproduced with their kind permission.

Providing pupils with **attribution feedback** requires practice. However, it can be given both for success and failure on a task. Examples of the different types of attribution feedback are:

- **effort:** “Great, you have got it right now because of the extra work you did”
- **skills:** “You have cracked it, now you really understand how to divide fractions”
- **strategies:** “You got it right because you applied the steps in the right order, then checked your work”

Help pupils **reframe ability** as something that can be **developed** through **learning, practice** and **feedback** (“I cannot do this yet”).

Provide **worked examples** of how **abilities** can be **improved** (provide **staged examples**).

Provide **models** of **constructive attributions** that relate to **effort, skills** and **strategies** (“I got these spellings right because I used a look-cover-write-check routine and spent time practising them”).

Have **peers** explain the **skills** and **strategies** they use in **solving tasks** – this should include **coping strategies**.

BOX 2 – Take the Magic Out of Success

Describe the importance of attributing outcomes to controllable factors – emphasise effort as a strategy that can be improved. Clarify what effort means. It is more than just the time spent on a task; it requires active engagement. Examples include using memory strategies, comprehension strategies, practice, over-learning and seeking appropriate assistance. Help pupils reframe ability as something that can be developed through learning, practice and feedback.

Personal resiliency building activity

Undertake the resiliency-building activity by Sheila Burton using the concept of 'hidden treasures'



- **How have I done as well as I have done?**
- **What are the two or three biggest challenges, including crisis or trauma/ learning challenges, that I have overcome in my life?**
- **What did I use to overcome them?**
- **What do I use daily to effectively cope with my life's typical stresses?**

Strategy to introduce new tasks to children

Task: describe the task.

Process: describe the steps in the process of completing the task.

Self: praise traits of the child. Separate the process of learning from the self.

Self-regulation: use the questioning in the section on meta-cognition to help the child regulate their fear.

Do not mix praise with feedback or allow feedback to draw attention to the self. Make it specific to the task.

Start by praising the child's positive qualities and traits.

Make pupils aware that learning new things can initially be confusing. It is a common experience for everyone. Show them that the skills can be learnt and knowledge acquired in incremental steps.

Pupil responsibility: if work results are good, get pupils to say what they did that contributed to that success. If the performance was poor, discuss what they might have done differently. Be sure that the attributions relate to specific performance criteria and not in comparison to others.

Productive effort: help pupils differentiate between productive and non-productive effort. When a pupil performs poorly and claims they worked hard, challenge them to explain what they mean by worked hard and offer improvements.

Make this a class plenary

'When Making Mistakes Make You Quake' by Claire Freeland and 'help your dragon learn from mistakes: teach your dragon it's ok to make mistakes' a children's story to teach kids about perfectionism and how to accept failures by Steve Herman **are wonderful resources, as is the following link:**

[Top Growth Mindset Resources for Parents and Educators | Big Life Journal](#)

Peer support

Ask peers to explain the skills and strategies they use in solving tasks. This should include coping strategies and what to do about managing the emotional feelings when you feel you cannot do a task. In this way, any example can be a useful illustration. Develop a videotape of pupils discussing the difficulties they experienced in a subject, the causes of the difficulty and how they managed to overcome this and improve their performance using these techniques.

Ask pupils to practise giving each other positive attribution feedback: “That's great, and you used the doubling rule appropriately to change **stop** to **stopped**.”

Ask pupils to undertake independent practice of **linking what they do with the underpinning effort, skills and strategies** they are using.

Make pupils aware that learning new things can initially be confusing. It is a common experience for everyone. Show them that the skills can be learnt and knowledge acquired in incremental steps.

The key is to make learning visible to the pupil

Ten tips for helping pupils learn more effectively:

1. Start a lesson by getting each pupil to list five things they have done well in the last week.
2. Get your pupils to imagine that they have finished their learning. What will it look like, sound like and feel like? Get them to picture themselves having successfully completed it. Visualising success is a proven way of helping you to be more positive.
3. Get each pupil to set a modest goal for their learning in your lesson.

4. Check that you have really got the big picture of what you are about to teach. Maybe you cannot see the wood for the trees! Your mind is constantly trying to make connections, so giving the big picture in advance gives the pupil time to make sense of things and gather all they know about a particular subject. See how many ways you can connect what you want to teach with what you know about your pupils' interests.
5. Before you start a learning activity, cover a blank piece of paper with notes on what you already know about the subject.
6. Make a list of good questions about any learning topic in which you are interested.
7. Get the class to make up a simple rhyme to help them remember something they find difficult.
8. Get pupils to describe out loud what they are doing when undertaking a task.
9. Encourage pupils to share their mistakes and analyse where they went wrong. Reward them for doing this.
10. Stop using marks or grades when marking your pupils' work and give specific written or verbal feedback instead.

Taken from 'Teaching Pupils How to Learn' and 'Teaching Expertise', Bill Lucas (2005), available at <http://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/teaching-pupils-learn-700>

Asking rich questions

Asking rich questions: the ASK model of learning helps to structure your rich questioning. Display an **ASK poster** on your wall to remind you and your students what learning is all about.

Attitudes

Questions linked to students' attitudes will explore the learning dispositions that motivate and sustain good thinking. Examples include:

- persistence
- determination
- curiosity
- open-mindedness
- flexibility
- showing empathy
- taking responsible risks
- striving for accuracy
- finding humour
- courage
- friendliness
- honesty
- patience
- reflection
- posing problems
- questioning
- applying past knowledge to new situations.

Examples of **A**-rich questions:

- how did your feelings change in the process of tackling the task?
- what personal qualities enabled you to think well as a group?
- why do you value that?
- imagine you had faced that problem on your own – what would have been your attitude then?

- which disposition were you most tested on?
- how did you overcome the problem?

Asking rich questions: skills

Questions linked to students' **skills** can explore their thinking skills as well as their subject-specific skills.

Examples of **S**-rich questions:

- How did you go about doing the activity/solving the problem?
- How did you know you were thinking well?
- What strategy did you use?
- Did you change your strategy or ideas as you worked?
- What skills were you using/learning?
- What type of thinking were you doing?
- Can you give an example of this?
- What helped you most to learn these skills?
- Where else could you use these skills?

Asking rich questions: knowledge

Questions linked to students' **knowledge** can simply reinforce the subject specific knowledge they've gained in the lesson – or they can help towards the transfer of a developing thinking skill to its application in other contexts, such as knowing how to think well when the occasion arises.

Examples of **K**-rich questions:

- what knowledge did you draw on to be able to do this task?
- have you done anything before in other subjects that helped you? How will it help you at home?
- what is the value of knowing that?

Box 3 has some more ideas on developing a growth mindset

Box 3 – Growth Mindset Strategies

Try to draw the pupil into the process:

What do I need to do next?
What do we do now? Any ideas?
Why do you say that?
Show me how to do the next bit or do the next bit for me.

Prompt the pupil to share their thinking (this will also give you insight into any misconceptions and enable you to address them):

What are you thinking now?
Talk me through what you are doing.
Talk me through the options.
Tell me why you did that.

What to say when a pupil is stuck: it is important not to smooth over these Moments; try to get to the bottom of it as this will avoid future frustrations. It is not always helpful to ask if they are stuck or fake a query. Instead, ask the following:

You've hesitated, why's that?
Why do you think it's not working?
This is the bit that's not quite right, can you think of another way?
Let's go back to this bit where things were going well, talk me through this.

Praise as often as you can; this will support the shift in learning, as pupils cannot get enough praise. Do not give false or general praise. Identify specific things that are done well, and praise these, even if there are outstanding weaknesses that you want to address:

I like the way you did ...
I can really see an improvement in ...
The best thing about it is ...
I noticed that you used the method we tried last time.