



**Liberty Academy Trust**  
**Teaching and Learning Policy**

<b>Date</b>	September 2023
<b>Written By</b>	Chief Executive Officer Director of Education
<b>Review Date</b>	July 2024 for September 2024

## Contents

Liberty Academy Trust Purpose, Vision and Values .....	3
Aims of the Liberty Educational Offer .....	4
How We Learn.....	5
Perception .....	5
Memory .....	6
Attention.....	7
Sensory Breaks.....	8
Pedagogy into Practice – Expectations for Teachers.....	10
The Structured Learning Environment.....	11
Pedagogical Approaches .....	12
Dialogic Teaching and Oracy Skills.....	15
What do we mean by Dialogic Teaching? .....	15
The Importance of Oracy Skills .....	15
The Power of Mindset.....	18
How to Develop a Growth Mindset in the Classroom.....	21
Expectations of Academies .....	22
School Leaders.....	22
Teachers .....	22
Non-Teaching Classroom Colleagues.....	22
Appendices .....	23
Appendix 1: Recommended Lesson Plan .....	23
Appendix 2: Autism Friendly Pedagogical Expectations.....	24
Appendix 3: Teaching Charter .....	25
References.....	26

## **Liberty Academy Trust Purpose, Vision and Values**

Underwritten through the Articles of Association, our core purpose is to “*advance education for the public benefit*” and we do this through our vision and values statement aim **to create a better education for autistic children and young people through our core values of: courage; determination; and teamwork.** These values are applicable to staff and pupils alike.

At a pupil level, the values illustrate the high expectations we have:

### **Courage**

We are willing to try new things and work to the best of our ability – even when things are difficult.

**#ChallengeWelcome**

### **Determination**

We never give up and are always ready.

**#NeverGiveUp**

### **Teamwork**

We work with others to share ideas, offer support and provide solutions to problems.

**#BetterTogether**

Our strategic foundations underpin everything we do; they drive improvement towards excellence and inform performance management and target setting:

- Leading through accountability and moral responsibility;
- Driving excellence in education for autistic children and young people; and
- Supporting resilience and well-being.

## Aims of the Liberty Educational Offer

The aims of the Liberty educational offer are to:

- Develop successful learners, who enjoy learning and who progress and achieve well, from their starting points;
- Develop independent individuals, who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives; and
- Develop active citizens who make a positive contribution to society, based on their capabilities.

In achieving these aims, we rely on the professional judgement of teachers to accurately assess the prior learning of pupils, understand the learning potential of individuals, and teach within the zone of proximal development<sup>1</sup> to capitalise on the learning time available.

Renowned Russian Psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, coined the term *zone of proximal / proximate development* (ZPD) as he sought to develop a science of teaching that was more informed. (Barrs (2017), p.346 in Barrs (2022), p.143)

What the Zone of Proximal Development represents is that midway between what the child can already do and what s/he will be able to do in the future.

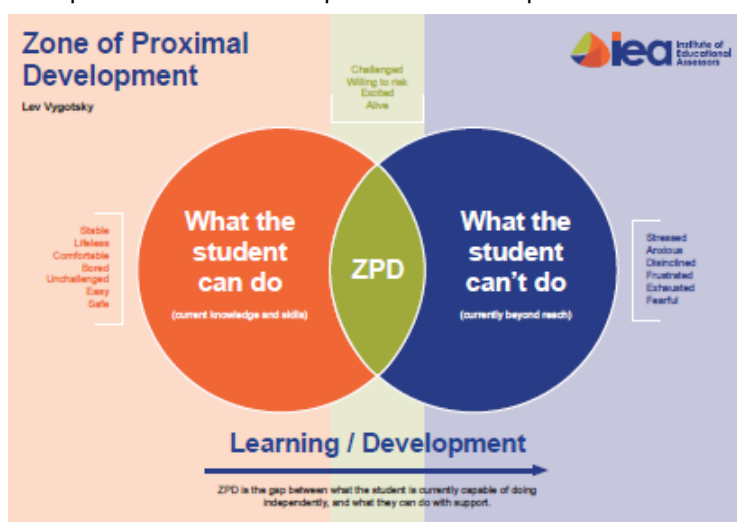


Image: Structural-Learning.com

As the midway position reflects what the child can do with the help of adults, s/he is not disillusioned by what they *can't* do – but excited at the prospect of moving towards independence, once the adult support is removed.

In this way, knowledge of each pupil's zone of proximal development today will help us as teachers define and plan for the achievements of tomorrow. Vygotsky was a passionate advocate for pupils with additional needs and was critical of schooling which sought to remove access to the curriculum or develop abstract thinking on the misguided belief that abstract thinking is beyond SEND.

We know, through research and practice, that the most effective way to improve standards and raise attainment, is to improve teaching and learning; this policy therefore supports the development of teaching and learning across the Trust, through an understanding of how children learn, and a summary of effective pedagogical approaches designed to support accelerated learning for autistic pupils.

<sup>1</sup> Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky)

## How We Learn

As a teacher it is important that we understand how we learn, as this will help us understand how best to structure our lessons so that all pupils can thrive. In 2017, the President of MIT declared: “if we don’t know how we learn, how on earth do we know how to teach?!” (in Dehaene, 2020)

The goal we have as educators is to impart knowledge, so that our pupils may learn to grow to be successful members of society. In recent years, much work has been done to bring research and practice together, with cognitive psychology and neuroscience at the forefront of the debate.

In simple terms, neuroscience tells us how the brain functions, whereas cognitive psychology tells us how the mind works, and it is for this reason that this policy draws on this area.

Memory and understanding are crucial to learning and so cognitive psychology is currently a better knowledge base for teachers to extrapolate findings that are applicable to the classroom (Weinstein and Sumeracki, 2019, p. 15) and thus improve practice.

It is interesting to note that as soon as we encounter a piece of information, we immediately start to forget it. (Ibid, p. 31) So, if we are to ensure pupils successfully engage with learning and are able to achieve well, in preparation for their next stage in life, then it is upon us as teachers to address this and find ways to help learning ‘stick’.

## Perception

Perception determines how we understand the world (Ibid, p. 43) involving all five senses and whilst our senses provide signals to our brain, which produces the sensation, it is our perception which interprets the signals.

In simple terms sensation is objective, whereas perception is subjective. (Ibid, p. 43)

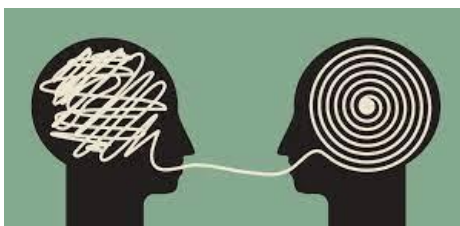


Image: CurzonPR

### Why is this important for us as teachers?

Pupils will arrive at our lessons with preconceived ideas, reactions, and attitudes; these perceptions will influence their engagement with the content – and this will differ from person to person.

Cognitive psychologists talk about perception occurring as a result of either ‘bottom up’ or ‘top down’ processing. ‘Bottom up’ processing happens through the senses as a direct result of a stimulus, such that we are drawn to a bright light or we respond to a loud and sudden noise with a jump. New-born babies engage mostly in ‘bottom up’ processing. (Ibid, p. 45)

‘Top down’ processing happens when we draw on our prior knowledge in order to make sense and interpret the stimulus. As an example, we make sense of the loud and sudden noise that made us jump as the doorbell and we are thus intrigued to find out who is at the door.

So, the perception and interpretation our pupils make of the lesson will depend on their prior knowledge and experience. The success they achieve, will also be determined by our understanding of their prior knowledge and experience.

## Memory

We need memory in everyday life; every activity requires us to use our memory. However, no sooner than we learn something new, then we start to forget it.

You may have heard the term 'working memory'. This functions as part of our attention span and describes our ability to hold information for a short time, process it and then commit it to our long-term memory, where we can retrieve it in the future.

Our short-term (working) memory lasts no longer than a minute (often between 15-30 seconds) and enables us to process information as we receive it; however, there is a limit to this, and researchers believe the most our short-term memory can hold is 4 items at any one-time (Burnett, 2016, p. 36), other researchers state short-term memory can sometimes go up to 7 items.



Image: Adobe Stock

As an unscientific test, we can perhaps consider how many digits of a phone number we have never seen before we can remember, and it is likely we will be able to recall between 4 and 7 digits.

For pupils with SEND, particularly those who are neurodivergent, this natural limit we all have can create frustration, which when combined with any difficulties they have in relation to their SEND needs can negatively impact on their attention – and perseverance.

However, our ability to *expand* these 4 or 7 items can be maximised by 'chunking', where we group things together into sentences or groups or patterns to create larger 'items', such as through mnemonics, as an example.

Anything that we hold beyond our short-term memory comes from our long-term memory and includes doing things without thinking. There are a number of ways we can embed information in our long-term memory; this requires the following process for it to be secure: encoding > consolidation > storage > and retrieval.

**Encoding** is the process by which information moves from short-term to long-term memory. When we make connections in learning, our brain is able to create patterns; some patterns are based on what we already know, and some are completely new. This process of linking and connecting patterns is called **consolidation** and strengthens our knowledge and memories.

These networks of knowledge which are linked by connections and patterns are called **schema**.

Once we consolidate this knowledge it becomes a long-term memory which can be **stored** and retrieved. What is exciting; however, is the fact that every time we **retrieve** such knowledge it is reconsolidated, and new memories are made, with new networks, links or schema created.

For our pupils then, it is important that our teaching encourages the development of connections so that knowledge committed to long-term memory supports meaningful connections and thus enhances the learning experience.

For pupils with SEND, including those who are autistic, the development of links in learning are essential to deepen their knowledge and understanding, so that they can draw upon these meaningful experiences, not just through formal learning, but throughout their lives.

## Attention

Researchers struggle to define what attention is. As a complex concept, the most accepted definition is that it is the ability to focus on specific stimuli (Weinstein and Sumeracki, 2019, p. 51) and is therefore important for our pupils, as a lack of focus will hinder learning.



Image: <https://elearningindustry.com/>

The American psychologist, Michael Posner, identifies three major attention systems:

- ALERTING – which indicates when to attend
- ORIENTING – which signals what to attend to
- EXECUTIVE ATTENTION – which decides how to process what we are attending to. (Posner in Dehaene, 2020)

The problem with attention though is that it is a limited capacity resource (Moray, 1967, in Weinstein and Sumeracki, 2019, p. 51); what this means is that we apportion our attention to the tasks we are engaging with – and we choose what to ignore.

This can pose a greater challenge for teachers of autistic pupils whose attention may be directed to specific interests or recent experiences, which have the potential to distract them from the content of the current lesson.

If the task is easy then we will have more attention available for other tasks, but if the task is hard then it will take up much of our attention, leaving little for anything else. In the classroom, therefore, we need our learners to be captivated by the content; perhaps we start with a visual stimulus, or we choose books that really draw the reader in, or we identify films and drama that immerses us in real-life experiences.

However, the distribution of our attention is also understood to be our **Cognitive Load** and when our attention is overwhelmed, we experience cognitive overload. (Sweller and Chandler, 1994, in Weinstein and Sumeracki, 2019, p. 52)



**Cognitive Load Theory** is of interest to us as teachers as it explains that since we can only process a limited amount of information at any one time, it is very important to avoid overloading our attention with unnecessary material.

For pupils with SEND, including those who are autistic, cognitive load is a key factor when designing activities aimed at deepening knowledge and understanding of subject matter, as for some pupils, their cognitive processing ability may be significantly hindered.

This, therefore, has implications for how we design presentations, write textbooks, and create multi-media materials. (Mayer and Moreno, 2003, in Weinstein and Sumeracki, 2019, p. 52)



Image: Adobe Stock

According to Hattie (2014, pp. 120), cognitive load for an individual pupil can be linked to any one of the following:

- Low levels of prior knowledge;
- Inappropriate coping strategies;
- Unrealistic expectations (e.g. overconfidence or goals set too high);
- Poor instruction;
- Inadequate teaching;
- Failure to engage with the learning materials;
- Unfavourable learning conditions (sensory overload, presence of distractions, poor environment etc);
- Fear of assessment.

These factors are just as relevant to autistic pupils and need to be considered when planning *how* to deliver the curriculum. Please refer to the *Curriculum Policy* for guidance on curriculum planning.

## Sensory Breaks

Given all that we know about perception, memory, and attention, it is important that the classroom offers an optimal environment in which to enhance learning and that as teachers we are aware of the signs our pupils give us to signal cognitive overload and failing attention.

Sensory breaks can be helpful for pupils in aiding regulation, helping focus attention and assisting in re-engagement with learning. If given, these breaks need to be structured, predictable, and manageable – and lasting no longer than 5 minutes. It should be noted that without boundaries and structure, pupils are likely to become more unsettled and less regulated.



Image: Designmantic.com

It is not appropriate; therefore, for sensory breaks (sometimes unhelpfully called *movement breaks*) to become a fixed feature of the lesson as this can be used as a 'bargaining tool' by pupils and staff alike. It is all too easy to state: "*Finish off that paragraph and then you can have a movement break*", but this reinforces to pupils that there is nothing to be gained from learning and instead creates an unspoken



rule that engaging in the bare minimum is both acceptable and leads to significant time away from learning.

In addition, it is not anticipated that whole classes will need sensory breaks at the same time; they should be used with discretion and understanding of individual needs. The function of a sensory break may also be different; some pupils will need a break to avoid being over stimulated, whilst some will need a sensory break to maintain focus.

If we rightly acknowledge that there are times when sensory / cognitive overload overwhelms our pupils, then we must ensure the *correct* sensory break is applied and that it is proactive not reactive.

What Energy States are Pupils In?	Signs to Look Out For	Types of Sensory Break Recommended
High energy	Moving in their seats; fidgety; loud; noisy; restless; over active; off task; disruptive; hyperactive	Calming activities / organising activities / helping to move a box of resources / mindfulness minute for all / 'Where's Wally' or similar activity
Just the right energy for learning	Relaxed and alert; able to focus; sitting upright; paying attention; listening; looking at teacher / board	Spoken activity / change of focus to maintain interest
Low energy	Sluggish; sleepy; zoning out; slouched posture; quiet; hard to get engaged	Alerting activities / distributing resources / music break with headphones / quick maths on a calculator
A class with a mix of energies	All of the above	Aim to start with an alerting activity and end with a calming activity so that all are brought back together

Source: NCSE (2020)

In ensuring a sensory break is controlled, a smooth transition back to learning can be supported using a countdown clock / timer and a verbal reminder that the learning activity will resume in 30 seconds / 1 minute.

*Where individual pupils require a specific sensory diet, as per their EHCP, please seek guidance from the SENCO / Occupational Therapist, as appropriate.*

# Pedagogy into Practice – Expectations for Teachers

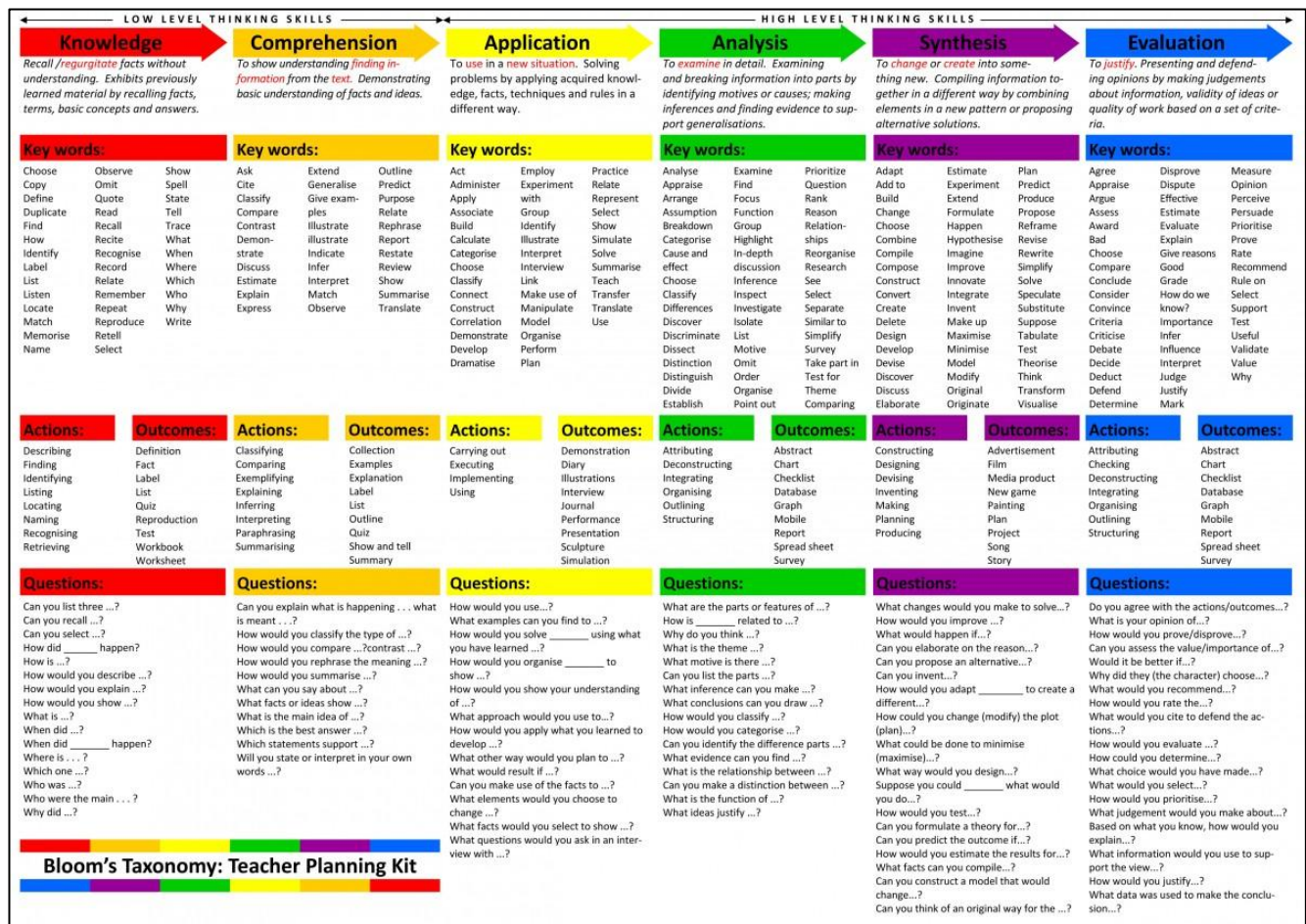
“Good teaching makes a difference. Excellent teaching can transform lives.”  
 (Cambridge Primary Review, 2010, p.279)

## Supporting Lesson Planning

Before we identify the appropriate pedagogical strategies to use in our lessons, we firstly need to identify what the purpose is and what skill(s) we intend to develop.

In 1956, American Educational Psychologist, Benjamin Bloom collaborated with a group of educationalists and educational psychologists to develop a framework for the categorisation of learning goals.

What was produced is now known as *Bloom's Taxonomy* and is illustrated below for reference. Bloom et al identified a hierarchy of thinking skills which develop from low to high; knowledge > comprehension > application > analysis > synthesis > evaluation.



This handy illustration of the taxonomy has been developed and is available for download from the [Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine](http://www.cebm.ac.uk). It is helpful for teachers and non-teaching classroom staff as it offers suggestions of key words that can be used to formulate learning objectives and also offers suggested actions and outcomes to support the identification of key activities, as well as a list of question stems relevant for each thinking skill.

## **The Structured Learning Environment**

We are all 'creatures of habit' and all pupils, including those who are autistic, will benefit from consistent routines, as this provides the security of familiarity and therefore reduce feelings of anxiety.

All teachers and non-teaching colleagues are expected to adhere to the SPELL framework, which reflects the minimum expectations of practice:

- **S**tructure and clarity;
- **P**ositive approaches and high expectations;
- **E**mpathy and understanding of the individual;
- **L**ow arousal environments; and
- **L**inks to support networks and signposting.

*Adapted from Beadle-Brown and Mills, 2018*

The SPELL framework reflects a person-centred approach designed to support high engagement in learning and underpins our approach to the Liberty educational offer which aims to achieve: enjoyment; success; independence; and the promotion of future active citizenship.

We understand that engagement in learning can be more challenging for autistic learners and so we take time to consider the best pedagogical approaches that will help all learners achieve success from starting points and which develops their love of learning through life.


As highlighted earlier, attention and memory can be different in autistic individuals; some autistic learners may have an amazing ability to recall specific details over long periods of time, however, working memory, or the ability to process several pieces of information at the same time, is often impaired. (Mesibov, 2016, p. 7)

It is therefore important that our teaching practice enhances the learning opportunities for all pupils.

## Pedagogical Approaches

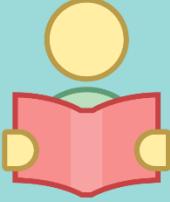
There has been significant international research into pedagogy and practice in recent years, resulting in a clear structure, which ensures learning is accessible for all; for Mesibov (2016), this is also referred to as *Structured Teaching*.

The Principles of Instruction (2010) also provide us with a pedagogical structure from which we can accelerate learning in the classroom.



**Barak Rosenshine**  
(1930 - 2017)  
American psychologist and educationalist

**Key Works:**  
Evaluation of Classroom Instruction (1970)  
Teaching Behaviours and Student Achievement (1971)  
Principles of Instruction (2010)  
Principles of Instruction - Research-Based Strategies that all Teachers Should Know (2012)



### The Principles of Instruction (2010)

"Master teachers are those whose classrooms made the highest gains"

- #10 Engage Pupils in Weekly and Monthly Review**  
Pupils need to be involved in extensive practice to develop well-connected, automatic knowledge, which is committed to long-term memory. Frequent review, discussion, and application activities supports this.
- #9 Monitor Pupils when they begin Independent Practice**  
Pupils need extensive, successful, independent practice in order for skills and knowledge to become automatic. Overlearning is needed in order to become fluent and automatic in a skill, without taking up memory.
- #8 Provide Scaffolds for Difficult Tasks**  
Scaffolds should be provided as a temporary support to help learn difficult tasks and then gradually removed as competence increases. Providing scaffolds is a form of guided practice.
- #7 Obtain a High Success Rate in Guided Work & Individual Practice**  
The optimal success rate for fostering pupil achievement is reported to be 80%; this shows they are learning new material and being challenged. Mastery learning is key to this.
- #6 Check the Responses of all Pupils**  
Checking for pupils understanding at each point can help learn new material with fewer errors. Asking questions to summarise learning or asking pupils to repeat directions or procedures augments connections.
- #5 Guide Pupils as they Begin to Practice**  
It is not enough simply to present pupils with new material, because it will be forgotten without practice. Pupils need to spend additional time rephrasing, elaborating, and summarising new material to embed.
- #4 Provide Models of Worked-Out Problems**  
Pupils need cognitive support to help them solve problems. Teaching modelling and thinking aloud while demonstrating how to solve problems are effective forms of cognitive support.
- #3 Ask a Large Number of Questions and Check Responses of All**  
Pupils need to practice new material; teacher questioning and pupil discussion are a way of providing this necessary practice. Questions allow a teacher to determine how well material has been learned.
- #2 Present New Material in Small Steps with Pupil Practice after Each**  
Our working memory is limited and can only handle a few bits of information at once. Therefore it is important not to overwhelm pupils by presenting too much information at once.
- #1 Begin a Lesson with a Short Review of Previous Learning**  
Reviewing the learning helps us strengthen the connections between the materials we have learned. Reviews support the recall of words, concepts and procedures in an automated manner for the future.

Dehaene (2020) posits that “pedagogy is an exclusive privilege of our species: no other animal actively teaches its offspring by setting aside specific time to monitor their progress, difficulties, and errors”. As a result, it is important that our pedagogical approach makes good use of the time set aside, so that all pupils are able to make great progress and achieve success.

The following strategies are expected to be featured in lessons across all Liberty schools and **appendix 1**, illustrates how these could be applied in a recommended lesson plan guide.

## **Pre-Teaching**

This is where teachers and non-teaching colleagues introduce pupils to new vocabulary and ideas, based on what they already know and can do, in order to prepare them for the new learning. The impact of this is that it ignites thinking and supports the development of language acquisition and recall.

## **Chunking Content**

Breaking larger pieces of learning into smaller more manageable 'chunks' allows all learners to access new content, with sufficient time to process it. These 'chunks' of knowledge grow over time, as pupils learn more to know more, supported by skilled teachers who are focused on mastery of learning, rather than speeding through a scheme of work.

## **Concrete Examples**

For many learners, including those with additional needs, understanding abstract concepts and ideas is incredibly difficult, therefore making a link between new ideas and 'real life examples' or visual examples helps to make the learning stick.

## **Modelling**

As with babies taking their first steps, learners moving towards independence need the guidance of the teacher to be shown the way. Before expecting pupils to apply their learning independently, it is helpful for teachers to show 'what a good one looks like'. Modelling can be done individually, in small groups or across a class, using the model: 'I do' (teacher explanation); 'We do' (class attempt); 'You do' (independent application).

## **Scaffolding**

As learners move towards independence, they may still require prompts and guides to support them. This can take the form of visual cues or sentence starters, as examples. The purpose of a scaffold is to support the learner as their learning grows, until the point where they can function well without it. A useful analogy is to think of the building of a house or block of flats, which requires the scaffold to support the structure as it grows – once the foundations are secure and the frame is in place, the scaffold can be removed and the building can function as intended, whilst the internal decoration and detail is developed.

## **Retrieval Practice**

When we engage in retrieval practice we are recalling and remembering information, in order to gauge how much we know. Quiz shows on television are a form of retrieval practice and popular culture sees them as an entertaining way to



test knowledge and brain power. In the classroom, retrieval practice can be supported through the use of flash cards; multiple-choice questions; and audience response systems (clickers).

## Over-Learning

Over-learning can also be seen as a feature of retrieval practice, as it involves the regular review and recall of learning over extended periods of time; however, it can also be a key feature of any plenary. The impact of this strategy is that it helps to secure knowledge and understanding into long-term memory, developing mastery and confidence.

## Dual Coding

As teachers of autistic pupils, dual coding is a standard pedagogical approach which combines words and images to present new learning in a way that is accessible and better understood; this is particularly important in managing short-term memory, attention and cognitive load.

Examples of dual coding applications include infographics, diagrams, graphic organisers, and sketch notes.

## Explicit Teaching of New Vocabulary

It is essential that time is taken to ensure the explicit teaching of new vocabulary and key words, even if they have been covered in previous schemes of work. All pupils benefit from a portion of the lesson dedicated to explicit vocabulary instruction and this includes academic vocabulary. When teaching new vocabulary, pupils should: read the word, explore its origins, understand it, see it in different contexts, and use it.

## Oracy and Social Communication

In addition, and because many autistic pupils struggle to converse in social settings, oracy and opportunities for talk are a key feature of every lesson, offering a safe space to practice those social conventions many take for granted. This can be supported through effective questioning (what > where > why > how questions) and through discursive talk and dialogic teaching.

*Adapted from Crossley and Hewitt (2021) p. 49-50*

“It is through pedagogy that (learning) aims become reality.” (Alexander, 2022, p.74)



## **Dialogic Teaching and Oracy Skills**

### **What do we mean by Dialogic Teaching?**

Dialogic teaching harnesses the power of talk to engage pupil interests, stimulate thinking, advance understanding, expand ideas and build arguments (Alexander, 2022, p. 1) so that pupils are supported to communicate both inside and outside the lesson. It aims to use dialogue through which pupils learn to reason, discuss, argue and explain so that higher order thinking is developed, as well as their articulacy.

Dialogic teaching requires explicit instruction in using talk to deepen knowledge and understanding and therefore supports cumulative curriculum development over time. Dialogic teaching is grounded in a positive classroom culture, where talk is allowed to flourish through reciprocal behaviours. Once these ground rules are established, the use of talk has been shown to develop purposeful, positive interactions that allow for the cumulation of knowledge acquisition.

One example of dialogic teaching is Socratic Talk, in which teachers and pupils pose questions and seek to explore the answers through a process of debate and cooperative argumentative dialogue. In a Socratic Circle (where pupils sit in a circle to provide a structural shift in the classroom environment and thus promote wider dialogue), it is possible for some pupils to engage in debate whilst others observe and then all come together to reflect on what they have learned as a collective. In this way, pupils are able to increase their engagement as their confidence grows.

The benefit of Socratic talk is that it requires the establishment of ground rules, which demands respectful dialogue and debate and subsequently encourages the involvement of all learners to collectively make meaning and as a result stimulate metacognition.

### **The Importance of Oracy Skills**

As we have already seen, Vygotsky advocated for an inclusive educational offer; however, he also proposed that language learning and experience are linked to cognitive development, hypothesising that involvement in spoken dialogues supports children's understanding of the world around them.

Oracy or spoken language skills is a term first introduced in the 1960s; Mercer and Dawes (2018, p. 3) assert that there are two key reasons why we need to focus on oracy education. These are:

- The impact they have on children's cognitive development and learning in school; and
- The impact they have on children's preparation for participation in the wider world.

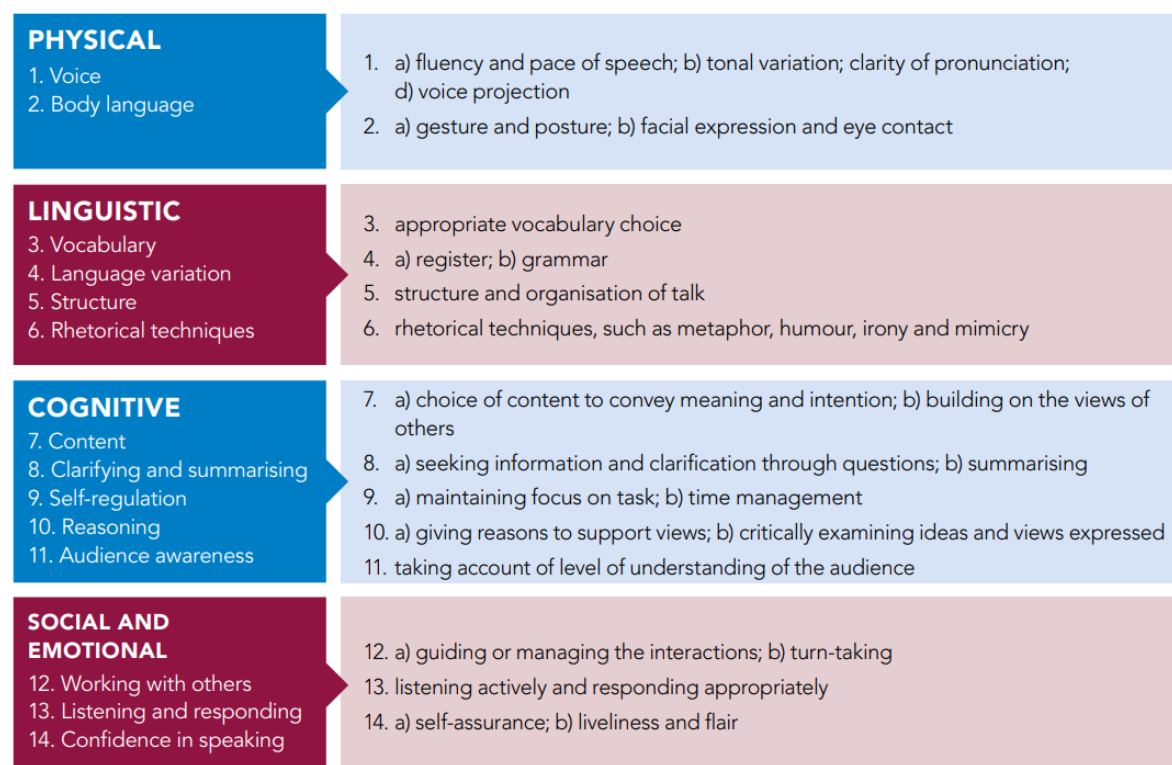


Oracy skills include the range of skills involved in all types of speech situations such as: collaborative problem solving, guiding or teaching another person, listening sensitively to another's experience, interviewing (and being interviewed), as well as public-speaking, debating and dramatic role playing. (Mercer and Dawes, 2018, p. 16)

Research suggests that oracy skills *need* to be taught, particularly for learners with additional needs as they are unable to 'tune in' as well as their more able peers. For cognitively-able autistic pupils, as their difficulty in social communication, and their knowledge and understanding of social conventions can present challenges and/or misunderstandings, it is crucial that these skills are taught so that they are able to engage more deeply with learning and so that they are equipped to manage social situations now and in the future.

Mercer and Dawes (2018) propose four main categories of oracy skills: physical; linguistic; cognitive; and social and emotional, and which are illustrated below for clarity and ease of reference.

### Oracy skills



*Source: Cambridge Oracy Skills Framework (2018)*

These oracy skills complement dialogic teaching in that there is an expectation for the explicit teaching of how we use talk to expand thinking, deepen understanding, and communicate ideas. The oracy skills identified above on the left, and accompanying elaborates on the right, provide a clear scaffold that teachers can use to enhance the development of these skills in the classroom.

For our autistic pupils, communication skills need to be explicitly taught and regularly practised so that over time those skills, which neurotypical individuals take for granted, can be cultivated providing a scaffold for life.

National Speech and Language providers, Lingo, have worked with Liberty Academy Trust to develop the Communication Curriculum, which offers a structured programme of study designed to support all pupils to communicate to the very best of their ability.

Teachers and paraprofessionals are trained, so that oracy strategies can complement formal delivery. Training focuses on:

- Understanding of Language
- Vocabulary
- Language Use
- Verbal Reasoning
- Collaborative Working
- Comprehension Monitoring and Metacognitive Skills.

To support the delivery of the Communication Curriculum, the Trust subscribes to [First News](#), the UK's only newspaper for young people, and this provides the stimulus for discussion and debate.



*The Liberty Curriculum Policy provides more detail on the Communication Curriculum.*

## The Importance of Metacognition

The translation of meta-cognition is meta (beyond) and cognition (thinking), so the term literally means *thinking about thinking*.

The importance of metacognition in the classroom is to provide learners the opportunity to plan, track, and evaluate their own learning and learning behaviours; this is done through the skilful support of the class teacher who will offer explicit strategies.

All subjects / lessons should have metacognitive strategies embedded so that it becomes a natural part of learning for all pupils, examples include:

- Teacher modelling problems / activities / practicals / paragraphs etc and talking through the process as they do it
- Scaffolding, which requires some knowledge and some support to help learners recall skills used in the past
- Using the Bloom's Taxonomy hierarchy of skills as a pupil reflection tool so that they can consider the depth of their learning
- Using mind maps at the start of a topic to activate prior learning and recall what is already known
- Using 'cold' and 'hot' tasks as both a teacher and pupil assessment tool, where the 'cold' task is completed at the start of a topic or module and the 'hot' task at the end, so both teacher and pupil can see the progress made
- Providing direct instruction, which leads to increasing independence, using the model I Do > We Do > You Do.

However, metacognitive skills can also be developed through the application of the pedagogical approaches on pages 12-13 and in the implementation of the *Principles of Instruction* on page 12 of this policy.

What we want pupils to achieve, is an understanding of how best to learn through the retention and application of knowledge and we want them to understand their strengths and areas for development – and how to get better or more skilled in these areas.

We need engaged, resilient learners if we are to help them reach the levels of achievement and success they are capable of.

## The Power of Mindset

Advances in neuroscience have shown us that the brain has capacity for lifelong learning and development, such that with use it can grow. However, research undertaken by Carol Dweck finds that we fit into one of two *mindsets*, and this is an interesting theory to explore, as it may resonate with teachers of autistic pupils, in particular.

Dweck asserts that the first mindset believes that intelligence is fixed – you're either born clever or you're not – you're either a natural artist / musician / mathematician etc or you're not. Individuals with this **fixed mindset** will look at the score they get in a test rather than the comments to improve and they are focused on looking clever and proving their intelligence. They see failure as a threat.

The second mindset; however, believes that intelligence can be developed – your initial qualities are simply a starting point for development – and with application and experience you can reach your potential. Individuals with this **growth mindset** enjoy learning for learning's sake and are excited at how they can improve their skills. They see failure as an important part of improvement and understand that with hard work they will be successful.

In addition, Dweck's research suggests that those with a growth mindset are able to develop better coping mechanisms, higher self-regulation, resilience, and positive social behaviour – all qualities we want to see and hone in our autistic pupils.



Image: WordPress.com

So, why could this be relevant for us as teachers? Well, Dweck asserts that the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life (2006, p. 6) and so it could be helpful to understand this and be able to identify it in ourselves and our pupils if we are to get the best out of our approaches to teaching and learning.

If we reflect on this in the classroom, **pupils with a fixed mindset** often exert little effort in class in order to protect their ego; it is far easier to say *I don't care* or *I didn't try* than to admit you don't know – particularly in front of your peers. The pupils with a fixed mindset therefore often just stop trying. These pupils talk in binary terms of clever or thick – there is no in-between.

Sometimes, this belief has been reinforced by family or school – either through comments identifying brilliance or surprise in the pupil's achievements. For example: *You are always so brilliant!* Or *I am surprised you didn't get that one.*

As **teachers** we are also likely to apply mindsets to our pupils. For example, if we believe that prior attainment is the *sole* determinant of a pupil's ability to succeed then we are applying a fixed mindset; Dweck's research found that fixed mindsets have a negative impact on future attainment and achievement.

However, if we see prior attainment as the *starting point for development*, which we will support and steer, then we are applying a growth mindset.

Our use of **language and praise** can reinforce mindsets. Using praise to acknowledge the brilliance of a *pupil* reinforces a fixed mindset, whilst using praise to acknowledge the brilliance of *the effort made* reinforces a growth mindset.

Teachers with a fixed mindset create an atmosphere of judging; they know which pupils to give up on before they've even met them (Dweck, 2006, p. 195). However, *great teachers believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning.* (Dweck, 2006, p. 194)

## How to Develop a Growth Mindset in the Classroom

If we agree that a growth mindset can have a positive impact on pupil progress, there are only simple tweaks that are needed to our own practice to ensure this is evident in our classrooms:

- **Praise Wisely** for their focus / perseverance / hard work / strategies, in order to develop resilience;
- **Do Not Praise Intelligence or Talent** as this can make pupils vulnerable;
- **Encourage Effort and Difficulty** explaining that the brain can only get stronger and smarter if it experiences a struggle;
- **Talk about the Power of 'Yet'** – when pupils can't do something, it is because they can't do it yet – and this enhances equality in the classroom;
- **Take Away the Fear of Being Wrong** – explain that our brains continue to grow, even when we get things wrong;
- **Model a Resilient Attitude** – express how you are overcoming challenges in the classroom (think broken projector / file not opening etc);
- **Share Motivational Stories of Famous Individuals with a Growth Mindset** so that pupils can see that fame and fortune is not simple or easy;
- **Admit when you make a Mistake** – pupils need to see that you practise what you preach.

Say This	Not That
<i>Praise the effort a pupil exhibits during a task</i>	<i>Avoid statements that suggest a pupil is 'smart' (or not)</i>
I like the way you tried lots of different ways to solve that maths question, until you finally got it.	Wow! You did great on that maths question – you're so clever!
That was such a long, hard piece of writing, wasn't it? But you stuck at it and that's great!	See, I told you that would be quick and easy – you're just so clever!
<i>For the pupil who finishes quickly:</i> All right, that must have been a bit too easy for you. Let's find something a bit more challenging, that will really test your learning power!	<i>For the pupil who finishes quickly:</i> Wow that was quick! Well done – you can relax now!
<i>For the pupil who works hard but really struggles:</i> I am so proud of the effort you are putting in. Let's go through a bit together and make sure you understand everything.	<i>For the pupil who works hard but really struggles:</i> You can't be good at everything – don't worry about it.



## Expectations of Academies

### School Leaders

All school leaders, in developing whole-school approaches to teaching and learning, are expected to drive the autism friendly pedagogical approaches illustrated in this policy and summarised in **appendix 2**.



Image: Adobe Stock

All school leaders are to ensure staff training and development includes a focus on teaching and learning, which covers the content of this policy and which ensures an understanding of how children learn.

### Teachers

We know that high-quality teaching is the best indicator of success for all learners – but particularly for learners with SEND. As a result, all teachers are expected to commit to the Teaching Charter, as exemplified in **appendix 3**, which highlights our commitment to this and illustrates our minimum expectations. It is a recommendation for all teachers to work with their class to agree the minimum expectations they have for learning and to co-produce a class *Learning Charter* which is understood and followed by all.

In addition, teachers are recommended to consider the exemplar lesson structure as illustrated in **appendix 1**; particularly where teachers are new to the profession or new to the Trust.

### Non-Teaching Classroom Colleagues

To ensure universal high expectations, all non-teaching colleagues who provide classroom support, or who deliver targeted interventions, are expected to read and understand this policy and support its successful delivery in the classroom. All non-teaching classroom colleagues are expected to commit to the Teaching Charter, as exemplified in **appendix 3**, so that they can effectively support teachers.





## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Recommended Lesson Plan



## Recommended Lesson Plan Guide

### TIME:

5-10 mins

10-15 mins

5-10 mins

10-15 mins

10-15 mins

5-10 mins

### FOCUS:

#### Recap of previous learning

This could be a multiple choice quiz of 3 questions.

#### Introduction of new learning and explanation of learning aims

To use concrete or real-life examples and an infographic to make clear new learning. Includes questioning to stimulate thinking and oracy. (What do you think about.... )

#### Modelling of Expectations

This requires the teacher demonstrate 'what a good one looks like' - either practical or written demonstration and allows pupils to test their understanding through use of questioning. (What do you notice about... / Can you see what...)

#### Scaffolding towards independence

This requires pupils to apply their understanding of the learning.

#### Recap of new learning

Offers an opportunity to address any misunderstanding or misconceptions as well as formative / summative assessment.

#### Link to the next lesson or future learning

Offers an opportunity to reinforce learning, as well as high expectations of learning power.

### KEY FEATURE:

Retrieval Practice

Concrete Examples and Dual Coding

Modelling

Scaffolding

Over-Learning and Repetition

Pre-Learning

**The whole lesson is a 'chunk' of the topic, which cumulatively builds over time.**

## Appendix 2: Autism Friendly Pedagogical Expectations



## AUTISM FRIENDLY PEDAGOGICAL EXPECTATIONS



Examples of pedagogical approaches that enhance the learning experience of autistic pupils in the classroom.

## Appendix 3: Teaching Charter



# Teaching Charter

Our teachers will:



Be knowledgeable about the subjects they are teaching

1



Be organised, have tidy classrooms, and start lessons on time

2



Ensure clear structure to lessons and ensure you understand what you will learn in the lesson

3



Use effective teaching strategies and resources that support you to understand, communicate, learn, and remember

4



Give you time to process information and instructions, be flexible and give extra support when needed

5



Provide opportunities for independent and group work

6



Address behaviour so learning is not disrupted

7



Plan lessons that develop a growth mindset, provide challenge and have high ambitions for what you can achieve

8



Listen to your views about your own learning and give you feedback on how well you are doing

9



Care about your wellbeing and your mental health

10



Teachers please refer to Liberty Teaching and Learning Policy

## References

- Alexander, Robin (2022) *Education in Spite of Policy* (Routledge)
- Barrs, Myra (2022) *Vygotsky The Teacher: A Companion to his Psychology for Teachers and other Practitioners* (Routledge)
- Beadle-Brown, Julie and Mills, Richard (2018) *Understanding and Responding to Autism: The SPELL Framework* (Pavilion Publishing)
- Burnett, Dean (2016) *The Idiot Brain* (Guardian Books)
- Crossley, Nicola and Hewitt, Des (2021) *Inclusion: A Principled Guide for School Leaders* (Routledge)
- Dehaene, Stanislas (2020) *How We Learn: The New Science of Education and the Brain* (Penguin Books)
- Demonstration Project on In-School and Early Years Therapy Support (2019) *Movement break ideas for post-primary schools* (Government of Ireland)
- Dweck, Carol (2006) *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Ballantine Books)
- Hattie, John and Yates, Gregory (2014) *Visible Learning and the Science of How we Learn* (Routledge)
- Mercer, N. & Dawes, L. (2018) The development of Oracy skills in school-aged learners. Part of the Cambridge Papers in ELT series. [pdf] (Cambridge University Press) Available at: [https://languageresearch.cambridge.org/images/CambridgePapersInELT\\_Oracy\\_2018\\_ONLINE.pdf](https://languageresearch.cambridge.org/images/CambridgePapersInELT_Oracy_2018_ONLINE.pdf) [Accessed 12 September 2022]
- Mesibov, Gary and Howley, Marie with Naftel, Signe (2016) *Accessing the Curriculum for Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Routledge)
- NCSE (2020) *Movement Breaks in the Classroom: A Resource for Post-Primary Schools* Available at: <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NCSE-Movement-Breaks-in-the-Classroom-Booklet.pdf> [Accessed 18 September 2022]
- Rosenshine, Barack (2012) *Principles of Instruction: Research-Based Strategies that all Teachers Should Know* (American Education)
- Weinstein, Yana and Sumeracki, Megan, with Caviglioli, Oliver (2019) *Understanding How we Learn: A Visual Guide* (Routledge)