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## Metacognition & Learning Strengths

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Some of the young people I see in my therapy room have such a negative view of their capacity to learn & succeed that they feel disheartened & lack self-confidence. For some, it feels that they have given up on themselves before they have really had a chance to explore life. This is a tragedy.

Research on self-efficacy originated by psychologist Albert Bandura shows that our assessment of our ability to do something (called self-efficacy) directly predicts our success in that area. Self-efficacy doesn't just improve results in school, it is a major factor in success in all aspects of life.

Henry Ford summarized this succinctly with, ***'Whether you think you can or you think can't, you're right.'***

Children who struggle to learn new concepts often decide that learning is all too hard & 'not for them'. Even our most gifted young people may feel accomplished in one area but harshly denigrate their performance in others.

Too many of our young people conclude that success in school involves pleasing teachers, doing the right thing, being quiet & most of all, **not** making mistakes. We risk creating fearful kids who switch off from learning or alternatively, become compliant people who speak up only when forced to & don't venture new ideas in case they are met with disapproval. This is hardly a recipe for success.

### **Metacognition creates success.**

Inscribed on the Temple of Apollo in Delphi is the maxim γνῶθι σαυτόν or ***'Know Thyself'***. Metacognition involves knowing how our brain learns best & being able to think about how you think. Knowing this helps us to leverage our own strengths. This sets everyone up for success in life. This self-awareness directly links to self-efficacy.

The Education Endowment Foundation report (2018) stated that metacognition was one of the most effective ways of supporting learner progress.

Once we understand how we learn, everything changes—from the questions we ask to the way you absorb, process, & retrieve information.

Success in life is largely a matter of knowing what we are good at & have to offer & finding places or people who value what we have to offer.

Metacognition also improves wellbeing & mental health. For example, if I know that I am a person who is prone to over-thinking issues, I can recognise this tendency when I do it & start to account for it when I feel stressed by saying to myself, *" Ah there I go again over-thinking things. Try to keep it simple'.*

## **Handing Our Kids A Road Map to Success**

One of the great gifts parents & teachers give young people is highlighting their own personal roadmap for success. Increasing their self-awareness & self-efficacy.

Our brains are always developing & growing. Brains are alive & become increasingly intricate & connected as we challenge ourselves with new ideas & situations. As we grapple with life, we all get smarter. Understanding **how** we are smart & how to use knowledge to get even smarter accelerates our success.

### **What smart people do**

When we look at what successful people do a clear pattern emerges. They don't try to be good at everything. They spend time working out what they are good at & then expand & apply that. This relies on, you guessed it, metacognition.

High achieving students are more likely understand how they think & use this knowledge to create success.

### **How we can help young people to do what smart people do**

The issue is that we don't know, what we don't know (until we know it). Helping our young people discover what they are good at & how to use it, is about knowing & applying learning strengths. This is **not** the knowledge that most of them know.

Young people are usually much smarter than they think they are. Ask them to complete (with you if you wish) an analysis of learning strengths at [www.mylearningstrengths.com](http://www.mylearningstrengths.com)

Start with what to strong rather than what is 'wrong'. Use these results to plan a strategy for building upon learning strengths over the next term.

Use this to acknowledge their smarts when you can. For example, '*Robin, I know you have*

*learning strengths in spatial reasoning, what are your thoughts about..?'*

Ideally repeat the learning strength assessment every 6 months. Consider obtaining the full report.

### **If we don't start somewhere, we don't start at all.**

Our awareness of how we think, and our learning strengths often begins when someone else points out our own capacities to us. This is where parents and teachers can powerfully kickstart success for young people.

Part of beginning is knowing where to begin. If we start where we are already strong we are most likely to have some early success and gain in confidence. This in turn builds our capacities and our self-efficacy.

### **Most of us are not good at everything but we are good at some things.**

Finding out our learning strength points us towards what we can leverage towards success. It will often also indicate our default mode- the way we most often & most easily think.

### **How Parents Can Help**

Parents can help by completing the analysis of their young person's learning strengths at [www.mylearningstrengths.com](http://www.mylearningstrengths.com) ( either with them or on their behalf) & using the results to connect existing strengths with other areas of learning & potential future career areas.

### **Spatial Reasoning**

People with learning strengths in spatial reasoning often find it easiest to solve problems, connect ideas & recall information using pictures & symbols.

## **Perceptual- Motor Skills**

People with learning strengths in perceptual-motor skills use their senses & their bodies to learn. Skilled dancers, gymnasts, athletes, artists, & musicians often have learning strengths in this area.

### **Concentration and memory**

People with learning strengths in concentration & memory are often successful students. Their focus & memorization of information is an advantage but can limit the depth of their thinking.

Sometimes a learning strength in concentration & memory can be confused with laser-like focus or speed of recall. This might be a good skill for game shows but doesn't always predict success in life. Some of these students are slow & methodical in their processing of information. This means in the rapid-fire life of school they can be seen as ponderous & cautious. Timed assessments can be disastrous to their academic self-efficacy. Their more analytical & meticulous processing allows them to give deeper & considered responses.

### **Planning and sequencing**

People with learning strengths in planning can order information into learnable chunks. Their memory is often like a chain of ideas that are linked in order.

Their memory is usually quite good- retrieve one idea & a series of others tumble out. However, they may follow the same patterns over & over again & may need help to consider alternatives.

### **Thinking and logic**

Analytical thinking, weighing up options & the advantages & disadvantages of a particular strategy are powerful ways of thinking when you have this learning strength.

## **People smarts.**

People with learning smarts as well as usually having high levels of emotional intelligence, also are greatly interested in others, what they think & what they do.

### **Language and Word smarts**

This learning strength involves the ability to reason, solve problems & recall information using verbal methods such as printed & spoken words.

### **Number smarts**

People with a learning strength in number smarts are often clear & logical thinkers who can sequence tasks well. This strongly overlaps with spatial reasoning.

For some we need to help them to shift from the abstract to the practical. Seeing the applications of numbers to real world problems is a good starting point.

### **How can figure things out when we are stuck**

When we find something difficult to understand (& we all do at times) we need to think again. This means being aware that our usual way of thinking about an idea or issue may not be the best way.

Many students when they get stuck, stop, & await further instructions. This does not set them up for success in life. Instead of stopping, ask yourself-

How am I thinking about this?

Are there different ways I could think about this?

What would happen if I created:

- a map (spatial reasoning)
- a movement ( perceptual- motor)

- mnemonic (concentration & memory)
  - a trail or outline of main steps (planning)
  - a detailed argument ( thinking & logic)
  - a link with someone I know (people smarts)
  - a story (language & words)
  - a formula or algorithm (number smarts)?
- Sometimes it pays off to shift our methods of outlining & thinking about issues.

Learning to shift from thinking in words (*language & word smarts*) or schedules & timelines (*planning & sequencing*) to thinking in numbers (*number smarts*) will often result in insights & perspectives we weren't initially aware of.

### **None of Us Is as Smart as All of Us**

Metacognition allows us to know the ways in which we think.

Knowing that other people have different learning strengths & therefore can make different contributions increases the flexibility of problem solving.

*I am grateful to Liz Keable and recommend her posts on metacognition on Linked-In to you for further inspirational reading.*

### **More information**

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### **Andrew's website**

[www.mylearningstrengths.com](http://www.mylearningstrengths.com) has helped over 45,000 young people in the past year discover their learning strengths.

### **Linked in**

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/andrew-fuller-2238a325/>

### **On face book:**

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Learning Strengths

### **Books for Parents**

*Unlocking Your Child's Genius*

*Tricky Behaviours*

*The A to Z of Feelings* (Bad Apple Press)

### **Book for Teachers**

*Neurodevelopmental Differentiation- Optimising Brain Systems To Maximise Learning* (Hawker-Brownlow).

