

Reflection

The aspect of Intellectual Character that school will focus more closely on during this half term is 'reflection'

Reflection is the inclination to review, to ponder, and to consider methods and approaches that have been tried; to analyse both successes and failures with a view to growing one's potential.

'You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards' – Steve Jobs

Reflecting on work enhances its meaning. Reflecting on experiences encourages insight and complex learning. We foster our own growth when we control our learning, so some reflection is best done alone. Reflection is also enhanced, however, when we ponder our learning with others.

Reflection and 'Growth Mindset'

I hope that all of our ongoing work regarding Intellectual Character is convincing parents and pupils that a view of a world where success is about demonstrating that you are smart or talented is becoming increasingly outdated. The 'Fixed Mindset' approach of avoiding effort and failure to hide personal limitations is flawed, as is the view that a person's potential is determined from birth and fundamentally an innate characteristic.

In the world of 'Growth Mindset', potential is deemed as a plastic trait that can be moulded and extended. A person's true potential is largely unknown and achievement can be enhanced with application, training and passion. In this world, failure is a useful hint for improvement and effort is what makes you smarter or more talented.

Crucial to this approach is the reflection on failure (as well as success) to understand what can be done better ... and then to try again (...and again).

Reflection and 'Mental Toughness'

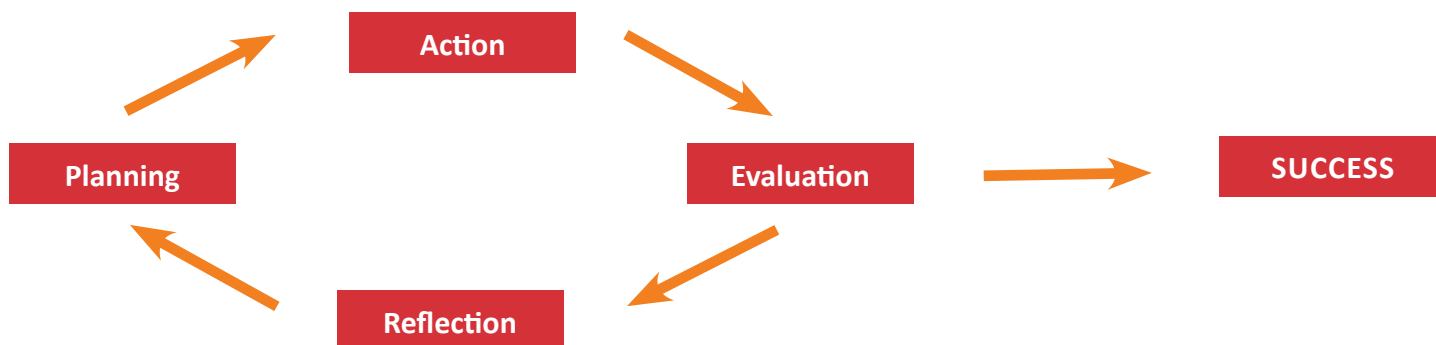
King Henry VIII School actively promotes the idea of a partnership between the pupil, school and parents in achieving the best development for young people. Being reflective within this framework is important. The 'Fixed Mindset' approach would dictate pupils to take credit for their successes (and of course, they should), but also to place the reason for any failures elsewhere, such as teaching, lack of parental support, poorly worded questions, etc. This approach doesn't necessarily look for areas of improvement when things aren't positive and can dismiss opportunities for improvement. Some psychologists suggest that the 'mentally tough' will more readily accept that they are largely responsible for both successes and failures. They are willing to accept that life can present setbacks that need to be overcome. Mentally tough people may still feel let down by others but they will have the ambition and self belief that it's down to them to succeed.

Reflection



A Model to Promote Reflection

There are many simple models that include reflection as an integral part to an iterative progression to improvement and a very simple one is shown below.



Many well meaning and motivated adolescents tend to be good at taking 'Action' as they can be keen to test their skills. Adolescents are also good at 'Evaluation', particularly when they have a predetermined and clear set of goals or targets against which they can be measured. Adolescents are less good at 'Planning' as they can lack the patience needed before simply 'getting on with it'. Of course, there will be regret (often too late) when the lack of planning creates more time consuming difficulties further down to the path to success.

Adolescents often need support with the 'Reflection' aspect of this cycle. Unfortunately, modern society has increased its promotion and reliance on instant gratification. Young people are used to getting everything much more quickly than previous generations. If they want knowledge they access the internet rather than having to catch the bus to the library to look in an encyclopaedia. If they want a music track from the charts, they download it immediately rather than having to wait until they can go to the high street on Saturday to buy a vinyl record from Woolworths. And if adolescents don't gain immediate success in other areas of their life, such as understanding a challenging academic topic, they can simply 'give up' immediately. Reflection takes patience and focus when pupils may be eager to dismiss poor results and 'move on'. Time taken on reflection is well spent, creating a deeper understanding that will improve results.

Three Simple Questions to ask after a task is complete

1. What went well?
2. What didn't go so well?
3. What will you do differently the next time to improve the outcome?

Much encouragement will be needed to understand a lack of success through reflection and prompt a young person to 'have another go'.

'Learning without reflection is a waste. Reflection without learning is dangerous' - Confucius

