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Learning Differences Programme

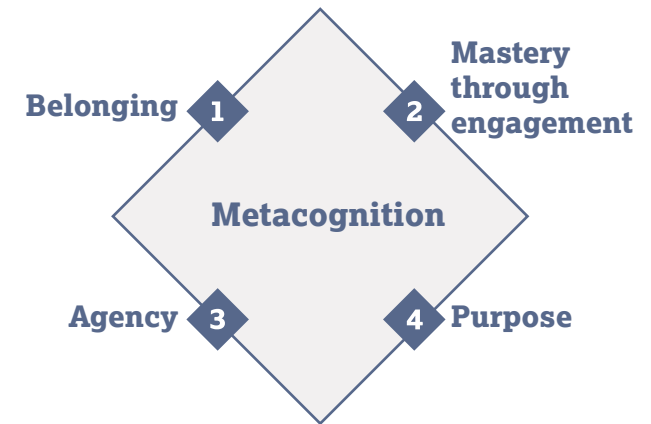
# **Rethinking the Way Learning Happens**

# Introduction

The Oak Foundation's Learning Differences Programme (LDP) believes every student should benefit from engaging and rigorous educational opportunities, and we support solutions focused specifically on students with learning differences, particularly those who experience additional adversity due to racism and poverty.

Advances in cognitive science and neuroscience have provided more understanding than ever about human development, from the science of reading to the link between academic mastery and social and emotional growth. Yet, changes in school organisation and instructional practice are slow to respond to this new information.

Based on interviews with students, families, teachers, and leaders, the LDP identified four attributes we believe are critical to realising our vision of building a world in which schools unlock the creativity and power of students with learning differences – along with every young person – and equip them to shape more just and equitable communities.



1. A sense of **belonging** through strong relationships that promote acceptance, connection, support and empathy in the learning environment;
2. **Mastery through engagement** with rigorous content, demonstration of its understanding, and critical reflection on new material;
3. **Agency** through the capacity and habit to form and act on intentions; and
4. **Purpose** through understanding of personal values and the relationship to learning and long-term goals.

At the same time, the LDP recognises that **metacognition** – the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking and consciously manipulate the cognitive process – undergirds all learning, including that of the four attributes. Together, belonging, mastery through engagement, agency, purpose and metacognition enable students to evaluate their needs as learners and to achieve their personal and academic goals.

Detailed definitions for each attribute follow on the next page. To build out the definitions, our research partners at Public Impact analyzed how the four attributes are reflected in or align with competencies included in the [Harvard Taxonomy Project](#), which maps hundreds of competencies across 40 of the most widely used non-academic, social-emotional frameworks. Whereas the competencies describe specific mindsets, habits, and skills, the attributes are broader, encompassing groups of related, but different competencies. These definitions reflect the LDP’s own interpretations and understanding of the attributes rather than scientific research findings.

We believe that practitioners need to offer students with learning differences responsive and unique learning experiences to fully develop these attributes and their related competencies. To learn about the evidentiary basis for the attributes and implementation strategies, as well as to access a range of other resources, please explore the [Resource Library](#) we developed with Public Impact. In addition, we developed an [Assessment Library](#) to identify metrics and assessments for monitoring student development of the attributes.



### Questions? / Get in touch

If you have questions about this resource guide, please contact our colleague Julie Hill at [julie.hill@oakfnd.org](mailto:julie.hill@oakfnd.org)

# Defining the attributes

