

# A review of *Share It!*

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## **Introduction**

*Share it!* is an American-English seven-level primary course for learning English. MacMillan Education have developed *Share it!* using principles aimed at giving students more confidence in class as well as fostering a Growth Mindset. By providing a set of tools and materials that create opportunities for sharing experiences and exchanging information in a positive, supportive classroom environment, they have set out to help young learners develop the language and skills needed to grow into confident English speakers.

This review looks at how the course aims to achieve these goals, and how well the course materials and structure are underpinned by research principles from cognitive and educational psychology. It will cover the following areas:

1. Developing a Growth Mindset
2. Increasing Confidence
3. Enhancing Motivation and Resilience
4. Long Term Memory
5. Encouraging Teacher Best Practice

## **What is a Growth Mindset?**

Growth Mindset is a psychological learning theory originally developed by Dr Carol Dweck. It revolves around the belief that you can improve intelligence, ability and performance. The opposite of a Growth Mindset is having a Fixed Mindset, which refers to the belief that a person's talents are stable. Central to the Growth Mindset Theory is the premise that mindset is malleable, thus, people can develop a Growth Mindset.

Having a Growth Mindset is important, as research has consistently shown that those who adopt and develop this way of thinking: seek out better feedback (Mueller & Dweck, 1998), cope with transitions better (Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck, 2007), cope with stress better (Yeager, Trzesniewski & Dweck, 2012), have higher levels of self-esteem and crucially, are better learners (Robins & Pals, 2002).

## **Developing a Growth Mindset**

### **Reinforcing Positive Improvement**

One of the hallmarks of students with a Growth Mindset is that they measure their success against their own progress, as opposed to comparing themselves to others. This is also known as having a Mastery Orientation. The opposite of this is an Ego-Oriented, which focuses on outperforming others. Students with a Mastery Orientation have been found to have better emotional stability, enhanced confidence and achieve better grades (Wolters, Yu & Pintrich, 1996).

A powerful way that *Share It!* taps into this research is through the regular use of 'I Can Routines', where students end every lesson stating what they have learnt and what they can now do (i.e. "I can use the language in Unit 2" or "I can talk about ways to help my memory"). By self-referencing their achievements (mastery-orientation) through the use individual and/or pair trackers, students are more likely to be focused on improving their individual learning instead of comparing themselves to their peers (ego-orientation) thus encouraging a Growth Mindset.

## **Encouraging a Positive Relationship with Feedback**

A wealth of psychological research has highlighted that providing high quality feedback is one of the most important things a teacher can do to help aid student learning (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Likewise, a prominent feature of having a Growth Mindset is the desire to seek out high quality feedback (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

Throughout each of the *Share It!* lessons and units, students are regularly encouraged to explore and engage with feedback. For example, in one of the writing lessons in unit 5 after completing a task, students are instructed to complete the following sentence, “One question I have is...”. This provides a clear prompt for them to seek out feedback. Asking for feedback in this way will allow students to accelerate their progress and take responsibility for their learning.

## **Independent Learning and Self-Reflection**

Self-reflection is one of the main foundations for developing independent learners with a Growth Mindset. By being able to reflect on how they learn, students are more likely to think more efficiently and effectively in the future. Research suggests that this is a skill that many students typically struggle with and one that needs clear structure and guidance (Wilson & Ross, 2019).

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that having students ask themselves self-reflective questions enhances their independent learning and grades (Chen, Chavez, Ong & Gunderson, 2017). This is because asking oneself questions prompts the brain to go searching for an answer (Senay, Albarracín & Noguchi, 2010).

*Share It!* utilises this strategy regularly, for example in Lesson 7 Unit 5, activities are scheduled where students ask questions such as “Is this my best work?”, “How can I make this better or more interesting?” and “Did I work well with my partner/group?”. They are given the autonomy to answer the questions themselves, but crucially, the structure of a self-reflective de-brief is provided to them.

## **Increasing Confidence**

### **Developing Confidence Through Building up Success Gradually**

Creating a structure where students build up a backlog of previous successful experiences increases the likelihood that students will want to learn more in the future. Research into primary-aged students has found that previous achievements are often the catalyst for developing confidence and motivation when approaching new tasks (Guay, Marsh & Boivin, 2019). This prompts a positive cycle where enhanced self-belief further drives future success.

One of the underlying themes within *Share It!* is that students build on their previous successes. This is evident both within a lesson as well as between each unit. For example, the activities within a lesson get progressively harder thus helping students to continuously make progress. An example of this is the PPP approach used (Presentation-Practice-Production) which sees the students learn new material, apply it and then create something new with it. In some of these activities, teachers are encouraged to allow students to take as long as they need to complete the activity successfully. This ensures that everyone feels a sense of achievement.

### **Developing Confidence Through Vicarious Experiences**

Vicarious Experiences are situations where students feel more motivated to undertake a task, if they see classmates performing that same task successfully. This is an effective technique as observing others succeeding can show students what is possible for them and can motivate them to improve on their own

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work. This is one of the key features of Self-Efficacy (Bandura, 2019), which has been found to significantly predict how well students do in their studies (Sharma and Nasa, 2014).

*Share It!* regularly prompts students to share their work with each other as well as further encouraging students to praise, motivate and critique each other's work. Two separate examples of this are used in the 'Share Your World' activities and the students' 'Share Book'. In the 'Share Your World' activities students are encouraged to show their newly produced work to each other and in their 'Share Book' students are guided to regularly discuss and motivate each other during the completion of their work.

### **Boosting Self-Esteem**

Sharing with the class and observing other students model correct answers allows students to develop their feelings of confidence, composure and control. Recent research has labelled these three attributes as key features of Academic Buoyancy, which has similar features to student resilience and Growth Mindset (Martin, Colmar, Davey & Marsh, 2010). It is suggested that these characteristics help students overcome daily challenges at school and persevere with new content for longer. *Share It!* regularly dedicates time for both Group Share and Class Share activities, which enables students to communicate, discuss and show their work to other students.

*Share It!* consistently emphasises the three values of respect, kindness and responsibility. This is evident at the start of every unit which have a 'Welcome Unit' that looks at and models these values prior to students completing a promise to follow the classroom rules and values. Likewise, in Levels 1-4 every unit has a story which emphasises one of these values. Knowing that they are going to learn in a positive and supportive environment will enhance student self-esteem and reduce fear of failure as they will feel more confident whilst learning.

### **Reducing Fear of Failure During Class Discussions**

*Share It!* often uses a strategy called 'Pair-Share'. This is where students are encouraged to share with their partner what they think about a task, what they have learnt, or share their answers to questions. In *Share It!*, students are encouraged to do this more regularly than often occurs in a traditional classroom. This technique has been shown to enhance student engagement (Kothiyal, Majumdar, Murthy & Iyer, 2013) and develop their critical thinking (Kaddoura, 2013). By making students feel more engaged in their tasks, their confidence increases which helps to minimise the fear of failure.

A strong fear of failure can be a significant barrier for students. Research has demonstrated that the fear of failure can lead to students experiencing shame and embarrassment, readjusting how they see themselves, experiencing uncertainty, upsetting others and losing interest (Conroy, Willow & Metzler, 2002). Having the students first share their work with their peers ('Pair-Share activities'), then within a group ('Group-Share activities') before sharing in front of the rest of their class ('Class-activities') helps reduce their fear of failure and gives them the confidence to go on to share their work with the rest of their classmates, as the number of students they share with has been increased gradually. Another example of this is through the collaborative projects, which occur in every 7<sup>th</sup> lesson. These foster a positive attitude towards sharing ideas with the rest of their peers and encourages positive co-operation and partnership.

## **Enhancing Motivation and Resilience**

### **Developing Resilient Learners**

*Share it!* embeds social-emotional learning tips throughout the course to ensure that students have challenging goals and to help create a culture of ongoing feedback and support. A recent overview by leading

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resilience researchers highlights that a resilient environment should be high in both challenge and support (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016). Each unit of work gets progressively more difficult (i.e. ensuring high levels of challenge relative to the students' current level of knowledge) whilst also encouraging teachers to maintain high levels of support. This is done through the regular use of praise, encouragement and checking for understanding.

### Enhancing Pride and a Love of Learning

Research from cognitive psychology has found that the relationship between positive emotions and grades is reciprocal. This means that students who get good grades tend to enjoy their work, but crucially that those who enjoy learning get higher grades (Pekrun, Lichtenfeld, Marsh, Murayama, & Goetz, 2017). *Share It!* utilises this concept by creating a range of positive emotions (i.e. joy, pride, happiness) through the use of rhyming, singing and chanting exercises to teach vocabulary during Class Share and Group Share activities.

With an ongoing emphasis on both fun tasks and games throughout the course, a fun learning environment is created for the students. Examples of this include the numerous games which are included in the 'Games Bank' in the Teacher Edition that reinforce prior learning. In addition, every grammar presentation is accompanied by a fun grammar animation video which makes learning grammar dynamic and enjoyable.

## Long Term Memory

### Prompting Students to Think Deeply

A regular feature of *Share It!* is that there is time for students to think about what they are going to do next or what the answer to a question might be. This is highlighted, for example, in the 'Share The World' lesson plan in level 5. Allowing for ample time to think of an answer has two distinct benefits. Firstly, as they are not rushing to give a quick answer, it reduces the pressure on them to look smart, as some students mistakenly attribute speed with intelligence. As a consequence of allowing ample thinking time, students can focus more on getting the right answer instead of providing an incorrect answer quickly. This is important as recent evidence suggests that students who feel the pressure to maintain their smart reputations are more likely to develop poor learning habits (Zhao, Heyman, Chen, & Lee, 2017).

Secondly, if students are not rushing to give an answer, it allows more time for them to retrieve the information in their mind. This act in itself has been found to cement information into their long-term memory as they are thinking deeper about the content (Moreira, Pinto, Starling, & Jaeger, 2019). This means the content of the *Share It!* lessons is more likely to be learnt and remembered.

### Enhancing Learning Through Retrieval Practice and The Production Effect

A common feature of the *Share It!* lessons is exam practice and regular fun quizzes that teachers are given to do with students in a diverting and stress-free environment. As well as featuring regularly within lessons, these tests also feature at the end of each unit, end of term, mid-year and at the end of the year. These quizzes and exam practice lessons are what researchers refer to as 'Retrieval Practice', which is the term given to the strategy of having to generate an answer to a question. Retrieval Practice has been shown to be one of the most effective learning strategies for students (Adesope, Trevisan, & Sundararajan, 2017).

*Share It!* also regularly prompts students to create their own new material based on previously learnt knowledge in their Share Books. In doing so, *Share It!* harnesses a powerful psychological effect called the Production Effect. The Production Effect describes how creating something new from the material you've been studying helps increase the chances of ingraining it into long-term memory (Macleod & Bodner, 2017). This is utilised within *Share It!* through the use of class plays and productions at the end of every unit.

## **Teacher Best Practice**

### **The Power of Teacher Praise**

Another ongoing theme throughout *Share It!* is that teachers are encouraged to praise students when they have learnt something new and/or made progress. Evidence from educational psychology has found that positive statements made by teachers have a direct positive influence on how primary-aged students speak to themselves (Burnett, 1999). This means that teacher praise can be a valuable strategy in helping boost student motivation, confidence and a Growth Mindset.

### **Facilitating Teacher Growth Mindset**

A teacher's Growth Mindset has a significant impact on their students' attitude towards their learning capabilities. For example, one study found that teachers with a Growth Mindset were more likely to have higher expectations for their students, which in turn led to students becoming more motivated and having higher expectations for themselves (Rattan, Good, & Dweck, 2012).

The Teacher Edition of *Share It!* includes a 'Teacher Reflection Log' section that teachers can use to reflect on what worked well and what they would do differently next time. Teachers are also encouraged to share their feedback with their colleagues and are prompted to create a 'shared ideas bank'. These elements will all facilitate a teacher's Growth Mindset by ensuring they are developing and growing as practitioners.

## **Final Remarks**

The *Share It!* programme is underpinned by, and effectively utilises research from cognitive and educational psychology to help students develop a Growth Mindset and improve their confidence whilst learning English as a foreign language. Central to this are the activities and tasks that develop their skills and encourage students to track their own progress.

Additional noteworthy elements include the engaging activities that foster a love of learning within students, and the strong emphasis on sharing work, experiences and feedback. These are vital components that help students and teachers develop their Growth Mindsets and confidence. The use of proven memory techniques such as Retrieval Practice and the Production Effect will ensure that their learning is embedded in students' long-term memory. Putting social-emotional learning at the heart of *Share It!* helps improve student resilience and self-management. Notably, this is done through emphasising the value of kindness, respect and responsibility.

By encouraging students to seek out feedback and reflect on their learning, *Share It!* helps foster independent learning. Likewise, with a number of effective strategies for teachers, such as collaboration and self-reflection, *Share It!* has the added benefit of helping teachers develop their own confidence and Growth Mindset.

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