



Linking Learning to Lives

If you have students in your classroom that are hard to reach, difficult to engage or disruptive due to boredom or lack of perceived interest in the subject it can help to build relevance for them towards their own experiences and how your subject fits into their current lives and future aspirations.

It is even more powerful to use opportunities for getting outside of the classroom and using the local area to reinforce the content you are teaching, creating strong memories of the specific topic.

Creating relevance by using **personal experience, knowledge and interests** is a very powerful tool to enable better engagement, increased understanding and retained learning. Using memory and visualisation and linking the students learning to experiences they have had or locations they know can support retention of information and increase recall ability.

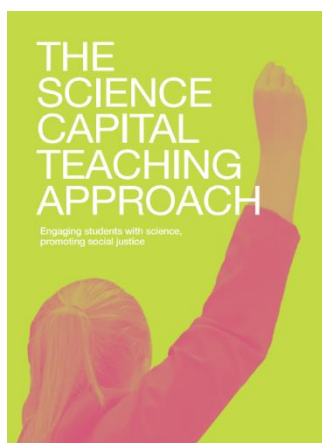
One approach which has been developed by researchers at Kings College London to increase student engagement in science and is called the [Science Capital Teaching Approach](#), and the theory is equally applicable to all subjects. Contextual learning as an ongoing process and when weaved throughout the school year and across all subjects will change your students from passive learners to engaged and active workers.

Creating that link to a student's life ensures that the subject content is personally relevant to their everyday lives and helps them see that their attitudes, interests and experiences are relevant to the learning. This in turn helps them realise that they have resources, skills and experiences which are valued in the classroom and can bolster engagement.

The key elements of the creating capital way of teaching are to first build the **foundations** by understanding your students, giving you a basis for **personalising and localising** your lesson content to the students' lives. This will then allow you to **elicit responses**, with targeted questioning, value those responses, by positive acknowledgement of the contribution and link these responses back to their lives by drawing on the knowledge you have gained about them. Which in turn allows a growth in understanding of the relevance of a subject by a student and enables them to identify with the subject, and how it can affect, improve and support their current and future lives.

The final aspect is to **build on the capital**, so all the experiences they have in their lives, by giving them the opportunity to experience a wide range of different approaches to learning.

Giving students the opportunity to recognise a relevance and in turn generate an interest in a subject will build their curiosity muscle and help develop resilience in all aspects of their lives.



To build the foundation knowledge base you can use the questionnaire, which is available via the SCTA handbook, aimed at students to gather useful information, or you can create your own. You could also use a quick-fire questions and answer session at the beginning of your lessons to help you build a picture of your students, background, experiences and interests.



This approach can be achieved by making **small tweaks to existing practice** and building on them over time. For example, you can take one lesson for next week and look at ways you can change the content to incorporate local information, landmarks, talking points or just a shop that students regularly go to. To find out this information you could walk the route students regularly take home, see what they see daily, when coming and going to and from school. Take some pictures of the area, The nearest newsagents, the local chippy, local industry, statues or anything which they would recognise and can be used to link the content of the lesson back to their lives.

Task:

Look at opportunities to tweak a lesson plan in which you can incorporate some local landmarks or detail. Feedback to the department on the student engagement and reaction.

Examples:

A teacher who was teaching 'electricity in the home' went outside the school and took photos of the **sub stations** in around the town and used these to increase engagement and really make the lesson content as close to home as possible. Another teacher used a photo of the **local fish and chips shop** where the students went at lunchtime to get a bag of chips and used it to give hook for a **maths question around speed and time**. This was particularly powerful as the students all then became really engaged and wanted to know how fast they would have to go to get there and back in the timeframe of the questions. It personalised and localised the maths problem and increased engagement from the whole class.

Top take aways:

- 1 • Find out about your students
- 2 • Small changes over time
- 3 • Link little and often
- 4 • Build on your success

Over time increase the relevance by including real world examples and building student confidence in applying problem solving and imagination to their learning.

[Keeping Learning Real, Relevant, and Relatable | Edutopia](#)

[The Science Capital Teaching Approach | IOE - Faculty of Education and Society - UCL – University College London](#)

[Why we should always link learning to the real world | Tes Magazine](#)

[Seven ways to improve pupil engagement \(sec-ed.co.uk\)](#)