

# Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority...

Frank Coffield





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Frank Coffield

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## About the author

Frank Coffield is Emeritus Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, and Visiting Professor at the University of Sunderland. He retired at the end of 2007 after 42 years in education, having worked in the universities of Keele, Durham and Newcastle in England; and at a comprehensive school, an Approved School and Jordanhill College of Education in Scotland.

He has written books on, for example, juvenile delinquency, the so-called cycle of disadvantage, youth unemployment, vandalism and graffiti, young people and drugs, youth enterprise, a critical review of learning styles and the impact of policy on post-compulsory education.

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## **Dedication**

This pamphlet is dedicated to those tutors in post-compulsory education who through knowledge, skill and commitment re-engage young people and adults in learning; and to those taxi-drivers who ask penetrating questions.

## Foreword

In an age of government priorities and targets, teaching and learning remain close to the hearts of many post-16 education professionals. This report will strike a chord with the many people working in the sector who are driven by the desire to help learners achieve their individual goals and make a tangible difference to the future of those they teach. It also has the capacity to engage policy makers, helping them reflect on the transforming power of teaching and learning in our growing and complex post-16 education sector.

We are delighted to publish this landmark report, as part of a series of Learning and Skills Network projects that focus on teaching and learning. The series started with an interactive conference on the topic. We challenged college principals and senior managers to reflect on practices in their own institutions, asking 'If you focus on teaching and learning at your college, will the rest of the business fall into place?'. The reaction to the event was overwhelmingly enthusiastic, with many people commenting that they would take some of the ideas and techniques from the day back to their own institutions.

Our next step was to commission this report by leading educationalist, Professor Frank Coffield. His impassioned call for teaching and learning to be restored as the undoubted focus for post-16 education and training at the 2006 Association of Colleges conference was the original inspiration for this series. In this report he has been given a free hand to present his views and explore the capacity of a revitalised focus on teaching and learning to spark the creation of a world-class learning and skills system.

We have provided the space for the debate; Professor Coffield has certainly risen to the challenge, creating an independent and inspiring piece of work. In his own uniquely challenging way, he argues that teaching and learning should regain their rightful place as the main focus of the post-compulsory education sector. As Frank Coffield admits, some of the arguments presented in the report swim against the current tide of educational policy, but surely that's how change for the better can begin.

This report is passionate and often directly challenges the status quo. But it is clearly a valuable contribution to the debate on improvement in the post-16 education sector.

### John Stone

Chief Executive,  
Learning and Skills Network

## **Acknowledgements**

This pamphlet was conceived in cyberspace, in an exchange of emails between Frank Villeneuve-Smith of the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) and myself. I want to thank Frank publicly for believing in this project from day one and for supporting it ever since. If its conception was maculate, then this pamphlet's gestation was enriched by the constructive criticism of the following voluntary midwives: Emma and Tom Coffield, Sheila Edward, Anne McBratney and Iain Rodger. The newborn has also been helped on her way by the perceptive comments of Geof Alred, Stephen Ball, Heather Booth-Martin, Clare Coffield, Sue Crowley, Tony Edwards, Phil Hodgkinson, Robert Powell, Paul Richardson, Lorna Unwin and Kevin Watson. Each faltering step has also been discussed with one other person – my wife, Mary, alegría de mi vida.

**Frank Coffield**

May 2008



## Preface

Last December, I left the Institute of Education on a Friday evening to walk to King's Cross Station to get the train back home to Durham. I was carrying a briefcase and trundling a suitcase. I hadn't got 200 yards when a cloudburst began to drench me. Repressing my ingrained Scottish caution about unnecessary expense, I jumped into a taxi, which five minutes later got caught up in grid-locked traffic on Marylebone Road. Minutes began to slip away and I began to worry about missing my train, for which I had a non-negotiable ticket. The taxi-driver, a bright Arsenal supporter (if that's not a contradiction in terms), engaged me in conversation:

*Do you mind me asking you what you do?*

*I'm an educational researcher.*

*How long have you been doing that then?*

*For over 30 years now.*

*And what have you found out?*

I found myself reduced to whispering, 'Look, I'm getting worried about missing my train. I'll get out and walk from here.'

As I made my way through the downpour, I kicked myself: one-nil to the Arsenal again. I should have at least countered with a remark of Robert Frost who claimed that: 'The human brain is a wonderful organ. Mine, for example, starts work as soon as I open my eyes in the morning and doesn't stop until I get into the office.' But that would have been a flippant and unworthy answer to an incisive question. This pamphlet is a more considered response. I would settle for an honourable one-all draw.

# Introduction

Just for once let us take the government's rhetoric seriously and imagine a learning and skills sector (LSS), where teaching and learning have become the number one priority. We are all familiar with current practice: ritual genuflection is made to the central importance of learning, but the sermon swiftly becomes a litany of what the government considers to be the really key elements of transformation – priorities, targets, inspection grades and funding – and the topics of teaching and learning disappear from sight, as if they had no momentum or dynamic of their own. If they are mentioned further, teaching and learning are treated as unproblematic, technical matters that require little discussion. The unspoken assumption is that we can all recognise and disseminate 'best practice' without any difficulty.

For once, let us reverse this process and take the following proposition seriously, namely that **the** way to creating a world-class LSS is to improve the teaching and learning taking place within it. This pamphlet will explore this proposition, and will tease out the most likely consequences of making teaching and learning the first priority of the post-compulsory sector. In doing so, I am aware that I am swimming against the prevailing tide but, as Malcolm Muggeridge once remarked, only dead fish swim with the stream.

The current orthodoxy would also have us believe that the private firm offers the most appropriate model for public-sector organisations, and that to succeed educational institutions should be run like businesses. But exactly what characteristics of business are we to emulate? The financial incompetence of the former directors of Northern Rock? The alleged bribery of Saudi princes by BAE? Or the obscene rewards for the chief executive of Barclays Bank who was paid in February 2008 a bonus of £14.8 million on top of a basic salary of £250,000, although the bank's share price fell from 730p to 450p in March (Treanor 2008)? In direct opposition I will argue that post-16 institutions are more likely to succeed, both educationally and financially, if they operate first and foremost as centres of excellence in education and only secondly as businesses. In essence, education is not a market and it suffers if it is treated as such. It is a process, a transaction between the generations, whereby tutors introduce one body of students after another into what it means to become a hairdresser or an electrical engineer, a nursery nurse or a painter and decorator ... or, more generally, a lifelong learner.

To my mind the most likely consequences of a switch in priorities are that we would maximise not only the professionalism of tutors (Chapter 3) and the agency of learners (Chapter 4), but also the relationship between tutors and learners, which is the cornerstone of success (Chapter 5). This means improving the cultures of learning in every centre of post-16 learning, in the LSS and in the educational system as a whole (Chapter 2). The complexity of 'transforming' large, social institutions and the LSS itself is spelled out in Chapter 6, as are the problems of prioritising teaching and learning in a seriously overburdened and turbulent sector.

But before discussing these possible outcomes, I want to begin by posing some fundamental questions in Chapter 1. For example, for how long can we continue to extol the wonders of learning, if we do not even have a definition of the term that most of us can sign up to? Similarly, do we not need a theory (or theories) of learning to guide our practice? The one sure way of bringing a conversation with educational professionals to a dead stop is to ask them: 'What's your theory of learning and how does it help you improve your practice?'

Moreover, if teaching and learning were to be recognised as the main means of improving further, adult and vocational education, we would also need an agreed, democratic model of change which explains how the 'transformation' is to be brought about. That topic, however, is beyond the remit of this short pamphlet and so will only be dealt with briefly in Chapter 7.

The target audiences for this pamphlet are two-fold. First, it has been written not for my academic colleagues but for senior management teams (SMTs), part of whose remit is to plan courses for initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD), and who have the responsibility of producing written policies for teaching and learning. The need for such a pamphlet is supported by the conclusion reached by Ofsted, after assessing the ITT of further education teachers:

*Senior college managers give insufficient attention to the quality of the initial training at the institutions they manage. They rarely make the connection that improving the quality of ITT will improve the overall standards of teaching and learning.*

Ofsted 2006: 4

Second, it is aimed at tutors who either run such courses or who attend them, and at the staff in the new Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETTs). The arguments should also be of interest to students with whom, I think, they should be shared openly, but students are not the prime focus of attention, although I devote one short chapter to means of improving their learning (Chapter 4).

My intention is to write in clear, jargon-free English, and in everyday language. I want to speak directly to all staff working in the very varied sections that make up the LSS, but I shall focus on further education (FE) colleges, as they account for the lion's share of the budget. Examples will, however, also be drawn from both work-based learning (WBL) and adult and community learning (ACL). The topics to be discussed are of a serious nature, but weighty matters are sometimes best handled with a light, but not flippant, touch.

I also want to offer a rationale for the choice of topics and research studies that form the backbone of what follows. First, I have selected research, which I consider to be valid in its methodology, relevant in its subject matter and tested in its application to practice. Second, where possible, I have chosen ideas and activities that I have incorporated into my own thinking and practice. Third, these recommendations appear to work also for my students and for those conference delegates whom I have discussed them with over the years. But in the final analysis the suggestions in subsequent chapters are a personal selection because, in a pamphlet of this size, it is impossible to be comprehensive. I too have had to prioritise, be highly selective and brief, at the risk of omitting much of value and of over-simplifying the arguments of those researchers whose work I have drawn upon.

So the following chapters are an attempt to bring a brief synthesis of what I consider to be the most appropriate, the most up-to-date and the best-conducted research in this country and abroad to the attention of those within the LSS whose responsibility it is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Where there are weaknesses in the research, these are pointed out. I also intend to challenge directly some aspects of current practice and to offer other options that I consider more effective.<sup>1</sup> So instead of an uncontroversial canter through the research literature and its relevance for the post-compulsory sector, I have deliberately decided to provoke argument and perhaps even opposition in the hope of engaging readers in the main issues.<sup>2</sup> My overarching aim is to work within my understanding of teaching and learning and so produce a challenging text which is practically useful to staff in the LSS, but which is at the same time securely grounded in the most appropriate theoretical and empirical research.

I have also included four **Activities** in boxes for readers to carry out or not, as they see fit. The intention here is to involve readers actively in the debates; I would very much welcome readers' responses to these activities in order to assess the range of answers, the degree of agreement and disagreement with my own views and to find out what of importance I have omitted.

This pamphlet, then, is a parting gift to the teaching profession that has given me so much.

### Notes

1. There is value, I think, in education of deliberately using creative friction as a means of moving the argument (and the learner) on. In the terms Piaget used, I want to introduce an element of disequilibrium in the 'continual search for a better equilibrium' (1982: 840).
2. I learned this from Karl Popper who, in his autobiography, wrote of 'my custom, whenever I am invited to speak in some place, of trying to develop some consequences of my views which I expect to be unacceptable to the particular audience. For I believe that there is only one excuse for a lecture: to challenge. It is the only way in which speech can be better than print'. (1976: 124)



# 1 Back to basics

## 1 Filling the gap

Many of us remember wistfully how our hopes were raised 10 years ago by the publication of the newly elected Labour government's Green Paper on lifelong learning. It presented a vision of learning that:

*is about more than employment. The development of a culture of learning will help to build a united society, assist in the creation of personal independence and encourage our creativity and innovation.*

DfEE 1998:10

That inspiring vision animates me to this day, but in the meantime policy has narrowed to the mantra of 'economically viable skills', as proposed by the Leitch review of skills (2006:1). Perhaps rather naively, I interpreted the quotation above to include the enhancement of the independence, creativity and innovation of the staff in post-compulsory education.

There was, however, one significant silence in the Green Paper, a silence that has been repeated in all the Green and White Papers and Acts of Parliament that have poured over us since then: it is impossible to find in any of these official texts a definition, never mind a discussion, of the central concept of learning. As I wrote at the time:

*In all the plans to put learners first, to invest in learning, to widen participation, to set targets, to develop skills, to open up access, to raise standards, and to develop a national framework of qualifications, there is no mention of a theory (or theories) of learning to drive the whole project. It is as though there existed in the UK such widespread understanding of, and agreement about, the processes of learning and teaching that comment was thought superfluous.*

Coffield 1998: 4

Politicians and senior policy officials could perhaps reasonably respond that the provision of definitions and theories of learning is not their business but ours. I want in this chapter to rectify these deficiencies and in general to clear the ground before attempting to suggest how cultures of learning within the sector could be improved. In more detail I will offer:

- some definitions of learning including my own preferred definition
- an explanation of why I insist on talking and writing about teaching and learning rather than concentrating only on learning
- a brief summary and comparison of the two main metaphors of learning and 10 general principles for effective teaching and learning.

## 2 Definitions of learning

### Activity one

Before reading any further, I would like to suggest that colleagues stop for a moment and, without consulting any texts or websites, jot down a definition of learning they like or one they use in their work. Please spend no more than 5–10 minutes on this first activity.

Learning is

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In the absence of an explicit definition of learning in official texts I suggest that the implicit definition amounts to nothing more or less than the transmission and assimilation of knowledge and skills, as when a student is taught and learns that ‘hablaba’ in Spanish means ‘I was speaking’. I will quote a few well-known definitions of learning to show how inadequate and instrumental the implicit definition is.

For John Dewey, learning, or as he preferred to call it ‘the educative process’ amounts to the ‘severe discipline’ of subjecting our experience ‘to the tests of intelligent development and direction’, so that we keep growing intellectually and morally’ (1938: 114). So much for the naive notion, heard at conferences up and down the land, that learning is, or always should be, fun.<sup>1</sup>

Sixty years later, Etienne Wenger argued that what differentiates learning from mere doing is that ‘learning – whatever form it takes – changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, to negotiate meaning’ (1998: 226).

Knud Illeris has helpfully teased out three different meanings of the term ‘learning’ in everyday speech. Learning can refer to:

- the outcomes of learning, ie what has been learned
- the mental processes used by individuals while learning
- the interactions between individuals and their environment.

This helps to explain some of the confusions and uncertainties which often surround the term and which Illeris wishes to dispense with by defining learning as ‘any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing’ (2007: 3).

Illeris's definition is clear, but it is too biological and not sufficiently sociological for my liking, as it appears to omit the possibility of changes in attitudes or values not just by individuals but also by institutions, systems or society being considered examples of learning. So I prefer the definition that a group of colleagues and I produced when we were working on a research programme into the Learning Society (see Coffield 2000 a & b):

*Learning refers only to significant changes in capability, understanding, knowledge, practices, attitudes or values by individuals, groups, organisations or society. Two qualifications. It excludes the acquisition of factual information when it does not contribute to such changes; it also excludes immoral learning as when prisoners learn from other inmates in custody how to extend their repertoire of criminal activities.*

My concern here is not that all staff adopt my preferred definition, but that they have an explicit definition of their own which reflects their beliefs and practices and which they can defend, if challenged.

### **3 Teaching and learning: bringing tutors back in from the cold**

I have, however, considerable reservations about an exclusive concentration on learning. For over 20 years, the fashion in the educational world has been to 'downplay' the significance of teaching (and so, by implication, teachers) and to praise learning. The nadir of this approach was reached when Margaret Hodge, who at the time was chair of the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, argued that

*we should be thinking of employing fewer teachers, not more ... Over the next few years information technology will revolutionise our schools ... and the use of interactive software could replace more formal lessons*

(1998: 10)

As BF Skinner remarked in the 1960s: 'Any teacher who can be replaced by a computer, should be.' This cannot be the explanation for the huge expansion in the number of computers in education, can it? As an exercise, may I suggest that a senior manager in each post-16 institution be asked to compare the annual cost of ICT (hardware, staff, etc) with the annual budget for staff training; and to calculate what percentage of the salaries budget is being spent on those staff who do the teaching. What is the rest being spent on? Brand managers? Public relations officers? Second personal assistant to the deputy head of faculty?



For me, teaching and learning are not two distinct activities, but intertwined elements of a single, reciprocal process, or, if you like, the two sides of one coin; perhaps they could be described as a double-sided, interactive process which transforms both tutor and learner. It is mainly due to the work of Vygotsky and his successors that we have come to celebrate the essential role of those tutors who enable learners 'to operate just beyond their established capabilities and to consolidate this experience as new ability and understanding' (Mercer 2000: 141). Intriguingly, the Institute for Learning (IfL) has been established as the professional body for practitioners in the FE system. So why is it not called the Institute for Teaching and Learning (IfTL)? Or, better still, the Institute for Tutors (IfT), to act as the strong, confident voice of the profession. How can 200,000 professionals become so invisible when they are so indispensable? So from now on, I shall refer to teaching and learning or T & L for short, as one concept and as one singular noun. In time T & L may prove as inseparable and stimulating to tutors as G & T.<sup>2</sup>

## 4 Two main metaphors of learning

From all the many theories, models and metaphors of learning in existence,<sup>3</sup> I have chosen to focus in this short pamphlet on the two approaches that dominate current practice and research: the metaphors of acquisition and participation. Our choice of metaphor is likely to have serious repercussions because, as Anna Sfard argued, 'Different metaphors may lead to different ways of thinking and to different activities. We may say, therefore, that we live by the metaphors we use' (1998: 5). I shall explain both metaphors briefly.

The acquisition metaphor is familiar to anyone who has studied or taught in the formal education system, where learning is seen as gaining possession of knowledge, skills and qualifications, just as people acquire cars, watches and houses. It is also the unacknowledged metaphor behind government policies in education and the basis on which schools and colleges are judged by Ofsted. Some of the key words in this approach are: delivery, transmission, internalisation, achievement, accumulation and transfer. The acquisition metaphor also tends to assume that learning is individual; that it is the direct result of teaching which is seen as a simple, technical process; and that 'good practice is infinitely transferable' (James and Biesta 2007: 104).

In contrast, the participation metaphor locates learning not in the heads of individuals, but in the simultaneous social processes of: learning to belong to different 'communities of practice' (a term which I will explain in a moment); learning to recognise changes in our identity because learning changes who we are; learning to create meaning out of our experiences; and learning what it means to know in practice. This fresh look at learning shifts the focus from the individual to learning as participation in 'communities of practice', which are 'groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise' (Wenger and Snyder 2000: 139). I am, for example, simultaneously a member of the following 'communities of practice': Newcastle United season ticket holder (for my sins, of which there must be many), the British Educational Research Association, a local health club, a book club, a village community association, the University and College Union, the Parish Council, etc.

The key words in this approach are: community, identity, meaning, practice, dialogue, co-operation and belonging. Learning is viewed as a process of participation in a variety of social worlds, and the learner is seen as someone being:

*transformed into a practitioner, a newcomer becoming an old-timer, whose changing knowledge, skills and discourse are part of a developing identity – in short, a member of a community of practice.*

Lave and Wenger 1991: 122

To quote Anna Sfard again, the participation metaphor has the ‘potential to lead to a new, more democratic practice of learning and teaching’ (1998: 9) and that has become a large part of its attraction for many educationists. Her comment prompts the question of why there is so little discussion in the sector of how to make post-16 institutions more democratic for both staff and learners. Those who work in, or graduate from educational organisations, need regular practice of active citizenship, but they are not likely to receive it if they are treated as ‘customers’ seeking ‘value for money’ from a ‘business’.

Box 2:1, which has been adapted from Sfard’s article, compares the two metaphors across a number of dimensions such as their different conceptions of knowledge, of students and of learning. Both metaphors now co-exist uncomfortably in our society, offer different perspectives and are complementary in the sense that the strengths of one compensate for the weaknesses of the other and vice versa. Indeed, the acquisition metaphor is so deeply embedded in our individualistic, acquisitive culture, and in the statutory models of inspection to which institutions must pay regard, that it is difficult to see how to lessen its grip on our collective imagination.

Basil Bernstein emphasised the harmful effects of treating knowledge as a commodity:

*The principles of the market and its managers are more and more the managers of the policy and practices of education ... there is a new concept of knowledge and of its relation to those who create it and use it... Knowledge should flow like money to wherever it can create advantage and profit. Indeed knowledge is not like money, it **is** money. Knowledge is divorced from persons, their commitments, their personal dedications... Knowledge, after nearly a thousand years, is divorced from inwardness and literally dehumanised. Once knowledge is separated from inwardness, from commitments, from personal dedication, from the deep structure of the self, then people may be moved about, substituted for each other and excluded from the market.*

1996: 87 original emphasis

As I have written previously: ‘Socrates taught me that knowledge would set me free; Peter Mandelson tells me that its modern function is to make employers rich.’ (Coffield 1999: 490)

**Box 2.1**

<b>Two metaphors compared</b>		
	<b>Acquisition</b>	<b>Participation</b>
<b>Goal</b>	Individual enrichment	Community building
<b>Learning</b>	Acquiring facts and skills	Becoming a participant
<b>Student</b>	Recipient, customer	Apprentice, peripheral participant
<b>Teacher</b>	Deliverer, provider	Expert, dialogue partner
<b>Knowledge</b>	Possession, commodity	Aspect of practice
<b>Knowing</b>	Having, possessing	Belonging, participating

Source: adapted from Sfard (1998)

The advocates of the participation metaphor have much to say about learners as apprentices, and about 'cognitive apprenticeship'. This suggests that it could become a useful model, particularly for vocational education, which they view as the process of progressive participation in a particular 'community of practice' in order to become, for example, a beautician or a chef. David Hargreaves captured the social and psychological significance of this approach for each new generation of apprentices and it is a statement which, I think, should be brought to their notice:

*To learn a job through apprenticeship is not just to learn a skill or to earn a living: it is to join a community, to acquire a culture, to demonstrate a competence and to forge an identity. It is, in short, to achieve significance, dignity and self-esteem as a person.*

(1997: 5)

Contrast this with the official view of lifelong learning, which is more about 'employability', about **not** forming a settled identity because the demands of the labour market will change.

Interestingly, the research carried out in this country by Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin to test the potential of the participation metaphor for understanding apprenticeship has identified three main shortcomings: it downplays the role of formal learning in the development of apprentices in, say, FE colleges; it does not deal adequately with power relationships in the workplace; and nowadays young people take to their workplaces skills and knowledge, for example in ICT, which they pass on to their older colleagues; and so they are switching between the role of novice and expert rather than moving steadily from the role of newcomer to that of 'master' (see Fuller and Unwin 2004b). I suspect that young people have always brought new knowledge and skills into the relationship.

Looking back on my own career with the help of the two metaphors, I realise that I have taken on two additional identities on top of that of teacher; the first time teacher educator, and the second time educational researcher. I had to pick up not only new knowledge and skills (the acquisition metaphor) but, more importantly, new ways of behaving and talking. I associated myself with experienced and successful researchers, modelled myself on these ‘old hands’, and I learned how to act, talk and write like them (the participation metaphor).

In a similar fashion, as Lave and Wenger (1991) argue, people learn how to become non-drinking alcoholics by attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), where through group work they begin to see themselves differently – as alcoholics who can never afford to take an alcoholic drink again. Writing as a drinking non-alcoholic, I am impressed by the way AA members change their behaviour by re-constructing their identity, by providing new life stories of themselves as alcoholics. In like manner, painters and decorators who join the staff of FE colleges have to start the long, slow and often painful process of becoming teachers; and ex-joiners and busy housewives in ACL centres turn themselves into basic skills teachers. The two metaphors of acquisition and participation may help them understand and come to terms with what is happening to them. But we are not talking here about ‘sudden transformations’ or ‘step-changes’ but slow, hard-won evolutionary change. Similarly, the task of driving up success rates in gaining qualifications from, say, 69% to 96% cannot be achieved in one or even two years. Ministers and senior civil servants, who have never worked in post-compulsory education, need to moderate the pace of change to what is humanly possible.

## 5 Ten principles

If the core processes of T & L were to be given priority within the LSS, some general principles would be useful to underpin such an endeavour. Luckily, there is no need to develop these from scratch, but they can be adapted, with changes where appropriate, from the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and which has become the largest ever initiative in educational research in the UK. The 10 evidence-informed principles of T & L, presented in Box 2.2, are the result of analysing key findings from 20 projects in primary and secondary schools, but we need to consider whether they are also applicable to the post-16 sector.

Each of these principles deserves to be explained in a little more detail and what follows is heavily dependent on the commentary produced by the TLRP Team (James and Pollard 2006). The first is concerned with the development of all learners as active citizens, which means, for instance, expanding our conception of worthwhile learning outcomes beyond the attainment of academic qualifications. In doing so, we would be catching up with our learners who already value other outcomes such as the new friends met at college, the rise in self-confidence and the informal learning done in and outside the college.

## Box 2.2

### Ten principles of effective teaching and learning

1. Equips learners for life in its broadest sense.
2. Engages with valued forms of knowledge.
3. Recognises the importance of prior experience and learning.
4. Requires the tutor to 'scaffold' learning.
5. Uses assessment as a means of advancing learning.
6. Promotes the active engagement of the learner.
7. Fosters both individual and social processes and outcomes.
8. Recognises the significance of informal learning.
9. Depends on and encourages tutors continuing to learn.
10. Demands consistent policy frameworks with support for teaching and learning as their primary focus.

Source: adapted from James and Pollard (2006)

The second principle argues for tutors to possess a good understanding both of the subjects they teach and of the best ways to teach those subjects so that learners are engaged 'with the big ideas, key processes, modes of discourse, and narratives' of those subjects (2006: 8). But we need to ask: **whose** valued forms of knowledge? The government's? The tutor's? The student's? Experts in the field?

Effective tutors are aware that they need to take account of what learners (and especially adult learners) know already, but the third principle also requires them to respond to the personal and cultural experiences of the different groups in their classrooms.

By 'scaffolding' learning, the fourth principle means that tutors 'should provide activities and structures of intellectual, social and emotional support to help learners to move forward in their learning so that, when these supports are removed, the learning is secure' (ibid: 9). A useful analogy is providing a child with stabilisers while she is learning to ride a bike. In other words, all learners need to be given the means of going beyond the understanding and skills of their tutors.

The fifth principle argues that assessment should advance learning as well as determine that it has taken place, a topic to which I shall return in Chapter 5.

The active engagement of learners in the sixth principle calls for them to acquire a broad repertoire of learning strategies and to become agents in their own learning, about which I shall say more in Chapter 4. Sue Crowley pushes this argument further: 'If we accept the importance of prior learning and experience, then the trajectory of learning must be shaped by both the teacher and the learner; the teacher can be a source of ideas to consider, but the informed decision must be owned by the learner. Such interactions amount to more than just "active engagement"' (personal communication).

This takes us on neatly to consulting learners about their learning, which is part of the seventh principle and which considers giving them a 'voice' as a right. Again, this will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

The eighth principle argues that informal learning in the home, during leisure pursuits or in the workplace is perhaps more significant than formal learning in educational institutions.

Tutors, according to the ninth principle, need to learn continuously 'in order to develop their knowledge and skill, and adapt and develop their roles, especially through classroom enquiry' (ibid: 10). This will be explored in Chapter 3.

The final principle argues that 'institutional and system-level policies need to recognise the fundamental importance of teaching and learning and be designed to create effective learning environments for all learners' (ibid). There are, however, serious constraints on tutors working in the LSS and these are the subject of Chapter 6.

The 10 principles need to be discussed and agreed with students and, because they are so very general, they also need to be worked out in detail so that they fit the radically different sites of T & L up and down the country. (See Activity 2, page 14.) They provide only a framework and the main job remains to be done, namely of finding techniques to turn these principles into practices which suit you and your students. They also need to be adapted to the different subject areas taught in the LSS, because the pedagogy needed to teach engineering is obviously different from that needed to teach child care. If not, we shall end up with rather mechanically-minded nurses and child-centred engineers.

Taken together, do these principles constitute a 'culture of learning' or is something more meant by that phrase? That is the topic of the next chapter. In the meantime I give the last word to William Blake:<sup>4</sup>

*He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars:  
general Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, and flatterer, for  
Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organised Particulars.*

Quoted in Hobson 1985: 161 as in original

## Activity 2

Please take 5–10 minutes to consider the relevance of these 10 principles for your professional work. Are they appropriate? Do some need to be reworded for the LSS? Do you want to suggest other principles? Or could they be taken over as they stand?

Q1 In what ways are these principles relevant to your work?

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Q2 Do they need to be reworded for your sector?

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Q3 What is missing? What other principles do you want to suggest?

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Q4 How could these principles be turned into practice in your place of work?

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## Notes

1. Why is there so little written or spoken about the role of humour, and different types of humour, in education? For what it's worth, I find self-deprecating humour both appealing and disarming. Humour can, however, also be used as an anaesthetic to avoid confronting painful truths as in Peter Nichols' play *A day in the death of Joe Egg*, where the father of a mentally handicapped child pinpoints the limitation of the sick joke: 'It kills the pain but leaves the situation just as it was' (Nichols 1967: 23). For me, humour (or rather stories which conform to the 'universals of narrative' (Bruner 1996: 133) is one way of getting to the heart of a problem quickly, while grabbing the attention of the audience. As with the story in the Preface, I'm still reeling from the effects of an incisive but perfectly valid question, three months after it was posed.
2. Paul Richardson tells me that in Welsh the word '*dysgu*' means both to teach and to learn. Similarly Harry Daniels writes that the Russian word *obuchenie* is best translated as teaching–learning as 'it refers to all the actions of the teacher in engendering cognitive development and growth' in learners (2001: 10). He also quotes Sutton on the fascinatingly different approach taken in Russia: 'On balance, Soviet developmental psychology is a psychology of teaching and teaching difficulties, as much as ours is one of learning and learning difficulties' (ibid). We need to move away from either seeing learning problems as locked into individual students or blaming particular teachers to investigating how they can come together to solve the difficulties confronting them both.
3. I refer readers who want a more extensive treatment of these topics to the following: a) Illeris (2007) who has attempted to produce a comprehensive, overarching theory of learning from the major approaches such as those of Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky and many others b) Evans *et al.* (2006) in a book on how to improve workplace learning discuss the limitations of both the acquisition and participation metaphors and offer others for consideration c) the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) has developed a powerful resource of research briefings, articles, books and teaching material on a wide range of topics in T & L from 'learning to learn' to 'improving literacies in FE'. I urge colleagues to sample the outputs of this research programme ([www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org)), from which reports can be downloaded free of charge.
4. My thanks to Geof Alred for bringing this quote to my attention and for pointing out that Blake was the first 'situated learner'.



## 2 Improving our cultures of teaching and learning

In December 2006, Lord Leitch produced the final report on his review of skills in the UK and his recommendations have since become the linchpin of government plans for the sector. So his views on the ‘five key factors that underpin a culture of learning’ (2006: 105) need to be considered seriously. Unfortunately, his report proceeds to list only four factors, which suggests that the national deficit in numeracy skills is more pervasive and reaches higher echelons in society than previously thought. His four recommendations are:

- raising awareness and aspiration through a sustained national campaign, which can currently be seen on TV with the slogan of **‘Our future. It’s in our hands’**
- making informed choices with the help of a new national careers service
- increasing the choice of individuals by giving them purchasing power through Learner Accounts
- ensuring individuals can afford to learn by targeting help to those wanting to improve their basic skills and Level 2 skills.

These suggestions are unobjectionable and deserving of support, but I question the propriety of raising the awareness and aspiration of learners who then cannot find jobs worthy of a human being. Here we have yet another highly influential report to government which shows not the slightest interest in the topics of ‘learning’ or ‘culture’, nor any knowledge of the extensive research that has been conducted into how they can be combined in ‘cultures of learning’.

Luckily, help is at hand and to be found in the research of the largest independent study of T & L in further education in England, called *Transforming learning cultures in further education* (TLC) (see James and Biesta 2007). The approach adopted by this research team, as is typical of research in all disciplines, employs not jargon, but technical terms which I will use sparingly here. It consists of two powerful, interlocking ideas – a theory of learning cultures and a cultural theory of learning. I shall not pretend that these are easy ideas either to explain in a few words or to understand at first hearing, but they are important; and their neglect may help to explain why we continue to find it so difficult to create the ‘individual learning revolution’, which the government called for 10 years ago (DfEE 1998: 17). I refer those who wish a deeper understanding of these notions to the many publications of the research team (eg James and Biesta 2007; Hodkinson *et al.* 2007; Gleeson *et al.* 2005). What I present here amounts to the barest outline of their thinking.



By the term 'learning cultures', the researchers mean the **social practices** through which tutors and students learn and not the contexts or environments in which they learn, although people's working conditions are obviously important too. Individuals are part of learning cultures and so exert their influence upon them; and vice-versa, so learning cultures are part of individuals and influence them in turn. Learning cultures permit, promote, inhibit or rule out certain kinds of learning. So the key issue is 'how different learning cultures enable or disable different learning possibilities, for the people that come into contact with them' (James and Biesta 2007: 28). Or, in my words, what practices should we as tutors be holding on to and which ones should we be abandoning? Our learners could help us identify our bad practices, but how does any post-compulsory institution break away on its own from the competitive market in learning and skills?

The next question to address is: how do individuals learn through their participation in such learning cultures? The researchers use their second big idea, 'a cultural theory of learning', to explain the dynamic and reciprocal interplay between individuals and learning cultures. As they argue, 'the impact of an individual on learning culture depends upon a combination of their position within that culture, their dispositions towards that culture, and the various types of capital (social, cultural and economic) that they possess' (ibid: 34). In this approach, learning is understood as something that is done; learning is practical and embodied, that is, it involves our emotions and our bodies as well as our brains. Moreover, learning is (in the main) done with others which means that it is 'a thoroughly social process' (ibid). Learning is also the process through which the learner's dispositions (eg attitudes to academic study) are confirmed, developed, challenged or changed.

One of the values of this socio-cultural approach to learning is that it presents an holistic view of learning rather than the narrow, official view which is pre-occupied with qualifications. It also integrates psychological and sociological views of learning and attempts to give equal weight to both. Moreover, it addresses some of the serious omissions in the participatory metaphor of learning, for instance, 'a tendency to downplay issues of inequality and power relations within and beyond' classrooms in FE (Hodkinson *et al.* 2007: 416). This line of thinking also poses challenging questions to tutors and managers: for example, whose interests are being served by this particular practice? The interests of the learners? Of the staff? Of the institution? Of the government? Or some combination thereof?

Finally, this cultural approach, because it stresses the complexity of all learning and the differing social, ethnic and gender positions of learners and tutors, argues that there can be no such thing as 'best practice' which can be universally applied in all classrooms and in all contexts. (See Coffield and Edward, forthcoming, for a critical discussion of 'good', 'best', 'excellent' and 'perfect' practice.) Moreover, if we want to improve T & L, the researchers argue that we must change our present cultures of learning and that calls for 'contextualised judgements [of particular learning sites] rather than for general recipes' (James and Biesta 2007: 37).

The research team offers a detailed set of 'Principles of procedure for improving learning in FE', and the reader can find these on pages 151–9 of James and Biesta (2007). I shall draw on these principles in later chapters, but here I wish instead to give a few examples of the kind of practical changes needed to improve T & L cultures in post-compulsory education. The cultural approach forces us to think about the inter-connections between classrooms, staffrooms, institutions, the FE sector, the education system, and the world of work. In this chapter I shall deal only with the higher levels of the post-16 sector.

In terms of T & L the cultural approach does not limit itself to a number of specific targets such as the retention and attainment of students. Rather, the general aim is for learners, tutors, managers, institutions, the sector and the education system itself to **get better at T & L**; and that means that at each of these levels there is a need for expertise in T & L.

Let me give an example of where such expertise is needed. The first ever White Paper on further education in 2006 devoted one chapter to the elimination of failure. Under a boastful sub-heading 'We will eliminate failure', the White Paper announced the introduction of '...a robust intervention strategy to address inadequate, barely satisfactory and coasting (satisfactory but not improving) colleges and provision' (DfES 2006a: 56). Let us leave aside for a moment the hectoring and punitive tone rather than the offer of support for those in difficulties, and the redefinition of 'satisfactory' as 'unsatisfactory'. Instead, I want to raise the psychologically important notion of learning from failure and the impossibility of its elimination. My remarks should not be taken as in any way an endorsement of poor performance. Rather, one of Piaget's earliest breakthroughs was his realisation that the mistakes and misunderstandings of children provided him with an insight into their type of thinking; paying close attention to misunderstandings is an intrinsic part of T & L.

A rational response to the clear threat, or as Ministers would phrase it, 'the robust intervention strategy', posed by the White Paper would be for senior managers and tutors to play safe and abandon any risky, new approaches in T & L in case they failed. But at the very same time the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury was propagating a totally different message to the public services: 'Don't wait forever for an "evidence base". Change sometimes doesn't happen because people assume innovation might be blocked by central government, but that won't be the case' (Burnham 2008: 30). So, if we put together the two messages from the White Paper and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the exhortation from government appears to be: 'You must innovate, even if you have no evidence to support your innovation; but if you fail, we shall close you down or place you in special measures'. This is a perfect recipe for stagnation, for freezing practices in T & L as they currently are. Mixed messages spread confusion, lower morale and encourage cynicism, eg do these guys ever talk to each other? Could we also ask for more humility from government? Surely the minimisation of failure rather than its elimination would be a more realistic, attainable and psychologically sound objective?

Let us move to the level of institutional support for T & L, which will not be prioritised without the public support of principals and SMTs. Lip-service to the central importance of T & L is not sufficient nor are written policies for T & L, of which I have read a few.<sup>1</sup> It is up to SMTs to provide the necessary structures, resources, dedicated time and opportunities for all staff and learners to become better at learning. Reed & Lodge also argue that SMTs need to create 'a safety zone within which risk can be encouraged and supported' (2006: 8).

If SMTs want, however, to exemplify in their own behaviour how important they believe T & L to be, then they themselves should teach (See Activity 3). Nothing is more likely to convince staff and learners of the centrality of T & L than seeing principals and deputy principals struggling, as we all do, with the demanding job of re-engaging in learning young people and adults with a history of educational failure. You can only live off anecdotes of past pedagogical triumphs for so long – teaching and vocational experience needs to be constantly updated. Obviously, finance directors and other such members of SMTs would be exempt from this principled stand, which argues that those with the responsibility for T & L should both teach and be seen to be learning and sharing that learning in the coaching of colleagues. Principals and SMTs are educational leaders first and foremost and only secondarily are they business managers. Moreover, the institutions they lead are called Colleges of Further **Education**, and not Colleges of Further Skills, nor Colleges of Qualifications, nor Colleges of Skills for Employability. Could principals also please refrain from talking about 'my college'? It is not their college, it is our college.

Furthermore, if T & L is to be publicly studied and celebrated, then there will have to be serious, new investment in the libraries of FE colleges and ACL centres. At present, they barely cope with the needs of learners, but they are quite inadequate to support the professional development of staff. If you doubt me, go to your nearest FE college and ask to be shown the section on research into T & L or into the pedagogy of teaching different subjects. Then compare the equivalent section at your local university.

### Activity 3

What are the pros and cons of the recommendation that all principals should teach? Can a principal, for example, 'teach' by coaching his or her tutors to teach in ways he or she thinks appropriate? Is it more important, for example, for a principal to patrol the external boundaries of the institution and to spend the time that could be spent on teaching on building partnerships? Please spend 5–10 minutes writing down what you consider to be the most significant advantages and disadvantages of this proposal.

#### Pros and cons of principals teaching

Pros	Cons
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Conclusion: On balance I think that ...

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Please see Appendix 1 where some ideas are presented for your consideration

I am here drawing the same conclusion as the one made much more persuasively and on the basis of evidence by Seymour Sarason, after his study of the reasons for *The predictable failure of educational reform in the USA* (1990). Tutors, concluded Sarason, cannot create and sustain the conditions needed for students to become lifelong learners if those conditions do not exist for the tutors *themselves*; and presently they do not in post-compulsory education. Similarly, he argues that, if tutors do not exhibit critical thinking in their own professional lives, why should we expect it in their students?

Post-16 institutions need to set up, perhaps in local or regional federations or networks, **centres of research into T & L**. One national research centre for T & L will not be up to the job, because, if we have internalised the cultural approach discussed earlier, the demands of T & L, being situated in very different contexts, will vary markedly from region to region, from subject to subject, from group to group and from learner to learner. Time and again throughout this report, I draw on research carried out in primary or secondary schools or in higher education because the equivalent research does not exist in post-compulsory education and training. In this, as in so much else, post-16 learning is ‘the disadvantaged middle child ... between schools and HE’ (Foster 2005: 7). It is a national scandal that the needs of millions of learners and their tutors within this sector have been so badly under-funded and under-researched for so long.

In sum, improving our cultures of learning calls for **expansive** rather than **restrictive** learning environments at all levels of the system. By the term ‘**expansive**’, Fuller and Unwin (2003, 2004a) mean workplaces which, for example: offer a breadth of learning opportunities; planned time off-the-job for reflection and for courses on T & L; support for *all* employees as learners; and the alignment of the T & L goals of the institution with those of individuals. Indeed, is it likely that any of the plans mentioned above could be realised without introducing sabbaticals for staff in post-16 learning? Is their work not every bit as important and demanding as those working in higher education? The theme of maximising the professionalism of tutors is taken up in the next chapter.

### Notes

1. Some of these policies make *ex cathedra* statements without evidence or reference to any supporting literature (eg ‘We believe that excellent teachers...’); others discuss a variety of aspects of learning but ignore teaching (eg ‘our principle of putting the learner and not the provider at the centre of everything we do’); and still others have a separate policy for assessment in addition to their policy on teaching and learning, thus failing to recognise the inextricable links between these three processes.

### 3 Maximising the professionalism of tutors

Some years ago, without a moment's training or preparation, I was put in charge of a department with about 60 academics and 20 administrative and support staff. Shortly afterwards, we were visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), who provided detailed evidence for what I already knew, namely, that about 10% of staff were seriously out of date and were not interested in being brought up to date; they wanted a dignified exit and that, over time, was afforded them. I used the handle of the HMI report to kickstart the process of renewal. I also quickly calculated that, being restricted to two new appointments per year, it would take three years to replace those who had in effect retired, but were still being paid as full-time members of staff. It would also take 15 years before half the staff were new in post and a generation before complete replacement was achieved. Investment in new appointments of the highest quality had to be one, but only one, of the main ways of introducing much-needed change. Nevertheless, I always tried to remember that newcomers can make a different type of contribution, if they are invited to comment on the implicit rules of the organisation before they have learned to accept the taken-for-granted assumptions of the 'old-timers' about how the place 'works'.

All this happened more than 20 years ago and in higher education. Since then, as we all know, there has been a significant expansion in the number of temporary, part-time contracts in higher, and even more in further, education, as SMTs have sought to cope with the sudden expansions and contractions in funding. For instance, over the 10-year period from 1995/6 to 2004/05 the ratio of full-time to part-time (full-time equivalent, FTE) staff in FE colleges declined from 75.3%:24.6% to 71%:29% (DfES 2006b: 12). These percentages disguise, however, the sheer number of people involved as opposed to full time equivalents: in 2004/05 106,000 full-time and 140,000 part-time staff, the latter figure being more than the current size of the British Army.

The general principle remains, however, that if, as the Prime Minister claims that 'The culture of second best is not acceptable to me. It is a culture of excellence that we want to achieve' (Brown 2007), then SMTs must have the resources to appoint the very best candidates, especially to the declining number of full-time posts. Such a recommendation has obvious funding implications, but if T & L has become the first priority...

As readers are well aware, government has introduced wide-ranging reforms in what it calls 'workforce development' or 'capacity building'. I prefer the term maximising the professionalism of tutors, which I take from the TLC research project (James and Biesta 2007: 153). I also want to add to their detailed recommendations a proposal that emerged from a research project into the impact of policy on T & L in post-compulsory education, which I and a team of colleagues carried out from 2004–07 (see Coffield *et al.* 2008). Our study of the LSS as a **system** revealed the absence of one crucial element in the feedback to policy-makers and Ministers: there are at present no formal mechanisms whereby those who enact policy in the 'front line' can report back on the strengths and weaknesses of initiatives. Staff need to be involved as full, equal partners in the development, enactment, evaluation and redesign of policy, because tutors and managers are the people who turn paper policies into courses, curricula and purposeful activities in classrooms. We proposed the establishment of fora:

*where participants from all the many levels in the sector (national, regional, sub-regional and local) come together on a regular basis to iron out policy tensions, misunderstandings or over-interpretations, in order to reduce the distance between policy and practice.*

(Coffield *et al.* 2008: 186)

Elsewhere (see Coffield *et al.* 2007), I have written a detailed critique of the government's plans for 'workforce development' in the sector, which I shall not repeat here, except to plead for a different model of leadership. The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit claimed: 'There is evidence of a strong correlation between effective leadership and organisational performance' (PMSU 2006: 82) and cited research studies in support of its claim. The original studies, however, told a more complex and nuanced story; for instance, that different leadership styles are required at different periods in the evolution of an institution; and they concluded that improvement was more likely to result from a move away from inspirational, heroic heads or principals towards more democratic and 'distributed' forms of leadership, which devolve power to colleagues and learners by, for instance, involving them in the formation and evaluation of policies for T & L (see Muijs *et al.* 2004). Leadership needs to be 'distributed' widely among colleagues because a principal is unlikely to be an expert on all the issues he or she will have to make decisions about. In short, good T & L (based on mutual trust, open dialogue and constructive criticism) should not only be the institution's core purpose but its guiding organisational principle.

The rest of this chapter will present briefly in bullet form a series of positive suggestions, but I want to make three preliminary remarks beforehand. First, there exists common ground among all the main players in the system that the beneficiaries of the significantly increased investment in the sector, of the splendid new buildings and of the welcome recognition of the importance of initial and continuing professional development should be **the learners** and not the tutors. Post-compulsory education is not a job creation scheme for incompetent staff, who should be firmly but sensitively removed. The much greater problem is unimaginative and uninspiring teaching; and I suggest we talk of 'poor teaching' rather than of 'poor teachers' on the principle that we castigate the sin but cherish the sinner.



We can all improve, but 'perfect practice', as espoused in the literature of one FE college I shall not name, should not be the goal. As Oscar taught us, perfection 'would leave no room for developments' (Wilde 1966: 8) and, if we ever achieved it, how would we spend the time? Contemplating our perfection? The vast majority of tutors are willing to learn and improve their teaching, but wonder where the time is to come from, if nothing is done about increasing workloads and endless, repetitive administration. Some institutions employ the simple expedient of keeping all Wednesday afternoons free of teaching to provide at least some space for staff training.

Second, the new regulatory requirements (eg 30 hours CPD, qualifications for principals and aspiring principals), are a major advance for tutors whose professional development has been neglected for far too long. So there is no suggestion in what follows that nothing is happening and that no improvements are currently being made. If what follows is treated as no more than a checklist to ensure that nothing important is being overlooked, then it will have served its purpose.

Third, I am arguing for the professional development of tutors as the main lever for improving T & L because of 'a growing research base on the influences on student learning, which shows that teacher quality trumps virtually all other influences on student achievement' (Thompson and Wiliam 2007: 2).

That being so, the following recommendations should help to improve the quality of T & L in the sector.

- After appointment, all staff (including part-time and agency staff, and those on short-term contracts) should be properly inducted and set on a career ladder, if they are to be retained and developed. Career structures do not, however, exist for tutors in adult and community learning in the same way as they do for staff in further education.
- ITT and CPD are not two separate activities but need to be formally linked so that the latter builds explicitly on the former.
- In the teaching profession as a whole CPD has been slowly evolving away from teachers attending external courses towards school-based and school-led professional development, with an emphasis on peer coaching, mentoring and whole-school policies on T & L, which can be accredited. Now that substantial resources are at last available for CPD in post-16 learning, the same patterns may emerge. There remains, however, a place for off-the-job reflection and the re-charging of batteries, when, for example tutors enrol for a higher degree in education to extend their knowledge base on T & L. SMTs may still wish to be persuaded how such off-the-job courses can have a 'ripple effect' on their institution, perhaps by asking the beneficiaries to write reports or hold seminars on their new knowledge, skills and understanding.
- The organisation of CPD is also important. A *smorgasbord* approach where individuals chose from a long list of options whatever suits them is unlikely to have much effect on the work of teams; and teams need time after the training session to assimilate what new ideas and practices they have been exposed to in order to work out their joint response. Moreover, if the principal agrees that T & L is the number one priority, then perhaps he or she should attend CPD sessions as a lifelong learner.



- CPD is a responsibility for all professionals but it is also a right. If 'personalised' learning is the new government aim for all students, then it should apply equally to staff, who have their own learning needs, gaps and aspirations. CPD rightly needs to include how an institution will respond to the latest government initiatives, but space must also be left for tutors to, say, develop new materials or intensify their joint working with colleagues or to devote to whatever they feel they need to make them or keep them lifelong learners. May I suggest that 15 of the 30 hours of CPD are devoted to institutional topics and 15 hours for the personal development of tutors? Let's call it a *Charter of Opportunity* (see Winterton *et al.* 2000); and let us at the same time recognise that equivalent staff in Wales will be entitled to 'not less than 10 days per year' for CPD (Webb 2007: 119).
- T & L – at least of the formal variety described by the acquisition metaphor – does not take place in FE colleges:

*It takes place in classrooms, as a result of the daily, minute-to-minute interactions that take place between teachers and students and the subjects they study. So ... if we are going to improve learning, we have to intervene directly in this 'black box' of daily classroom instruction.*

Thompson and Wiliam 2007: 1

The above quotation<sup>1</sup> comes from a research report that discusses one intervention into that 'black box' – an approach to formative assessment in the USA and the UK, called *Keeping learning on track*. This is not the place to describe the content, process and theory<sup>2</sup> that make up this promising intervention, apart from saying that it develops expertise in tutors through **teacher learning communities**, which are supported by a growing research base, references to which can be found in Thompson and Wiliam (2007). The post-compulsory sector can learn from the extensive empirical research that has been carried out in schools on building and sustaining such communities, although if we take the theory of 'situated learning' seriously, the approach will have to be tested in the very different contexts of the LSS (eg classrooms, workshops, dance studios and simulated work environments). It has been shown that teachers need regular time during the standard working week in order to discuss T & L. They need both knowledge of the research base and continuing 'structured opportunities for new learning, practice, reflection and adjustment' (Thompson and Wiliam 2007: 23). Finding dedicated time for tutors to devote to learning communities means, however, that something more must be done about the heavy demands on staff by bureaucracy, by the paperwork required by Awarding Bodies and by inspectors, all of which divert energy and time away from T & L.

These constraints will be discussed in the sixth chapter, but meanwhile it is acknowledged that some staff will find that these proposals challenge their attitudes, values and practices and some may offer resistance. Sue Crowley rightly suggests that it may be helpful for SMTs to explore the reasons behind such resistance: 'There may be a range of different and legitimate motives that, if explored together, could be a learning journey for all parties' (personal communication).

In sum, change has to occur not just in the beliefs and assumptions of both tutors and managers, but in their **practices**, which means slowly developing expertise through systematic reflection with colleagues, a process which needs time, resources and support. No wonder so little real change takes place.

Finally, the most recent Ofsted report on the initial training of FE teachers raises a number of concerns, two of which I shall highlight here. First, the inspectors recommend that trainees be given ‘significant guidance on behaviour management ... so that they feel confident to manage challenging behaviour in their lessons’ (2008: 6). Many of these learners bring not just educational but familial, financial and health problems into colleges and this places very high burdens on teaching and support staff. As Gallacher *et al.* (2007) found in community-based learning in Scotland, these extra burdens need to be acknowledged in additional training, support and resources for such staff.

The second concern, however, raises an even more intractable and long-standing problem. In the words of the inspectorate, ‘Senior managers in further education colleges should ... prioritise the development of trainers’ subject-specialist skills and knowledge across all aspects of the training’ (ibid). This raises the vital topic of what vocational knowledge and what vocational pedagogy trainees and their tutors need to possess. Michael Young raises these questions in his important new book, engagingly entitled *Bringing knowledge back in*. Briefly, he argues that trainees need three types of knowledge: specialist disciplinary knowledge (of engineering, say, or travel and tourism); context-specific knowledge (learned at work); and trans-sectoral knowledge (general education rather than ‘core skills’). He goes on to discuss what model of professional education is most appropriate for their lecturers (see particularly Chapter 12). Because of the present policy preoccupation with structures and skills, we as a nation have avoided these topics for too long, but no curriculum of vocational education, as opposed to vocational training, can be constructed without detailed and convincing answers to the problems Michael Young has raised.

### Notes

1. The intention to use direct intervention is at odds with the collaborative, collegial spirit of the rest of the report. Would ‘make a contribution to’ or ‘engage in dialogue with’ be preferable and less de-skilling?
2. Let me whet the reader’s appetite by listing the five main strategies employed by teachers in this approach: clarifying their learning intentions and sharing the criteria of success with learners; engineering effective classroom discussions, questions and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning; providing feedback that moves learners forward; activating students as the owners of their own learning; and activating students as teaching resources for one another. The final two criteria take us neatly on to the theme of the next chapter.



## 4 Maximising the agency of learners<sup>1</sup>

*If you want respect, show us respect first.*

FE learner, LSN Conference, Lord's Cricket Ground, 12 February 2008

If we are ever to create a culture of lifelong learning in this country so that learners move 'seamlessly' (the standard official adverb) from one phase of education to another (school to further education, for example), then what dispositions towards learning is it reasonable to expect all school leavers to possess? I like David Hargreaves' answer to that challenging question. According to him, all young people should:

- *view themselves as someone able to learn successfully*
- *understand learning and themselves as a learner*
- *leave school with a positive attitude to continued learning.*

Hargreaves 2004: 82

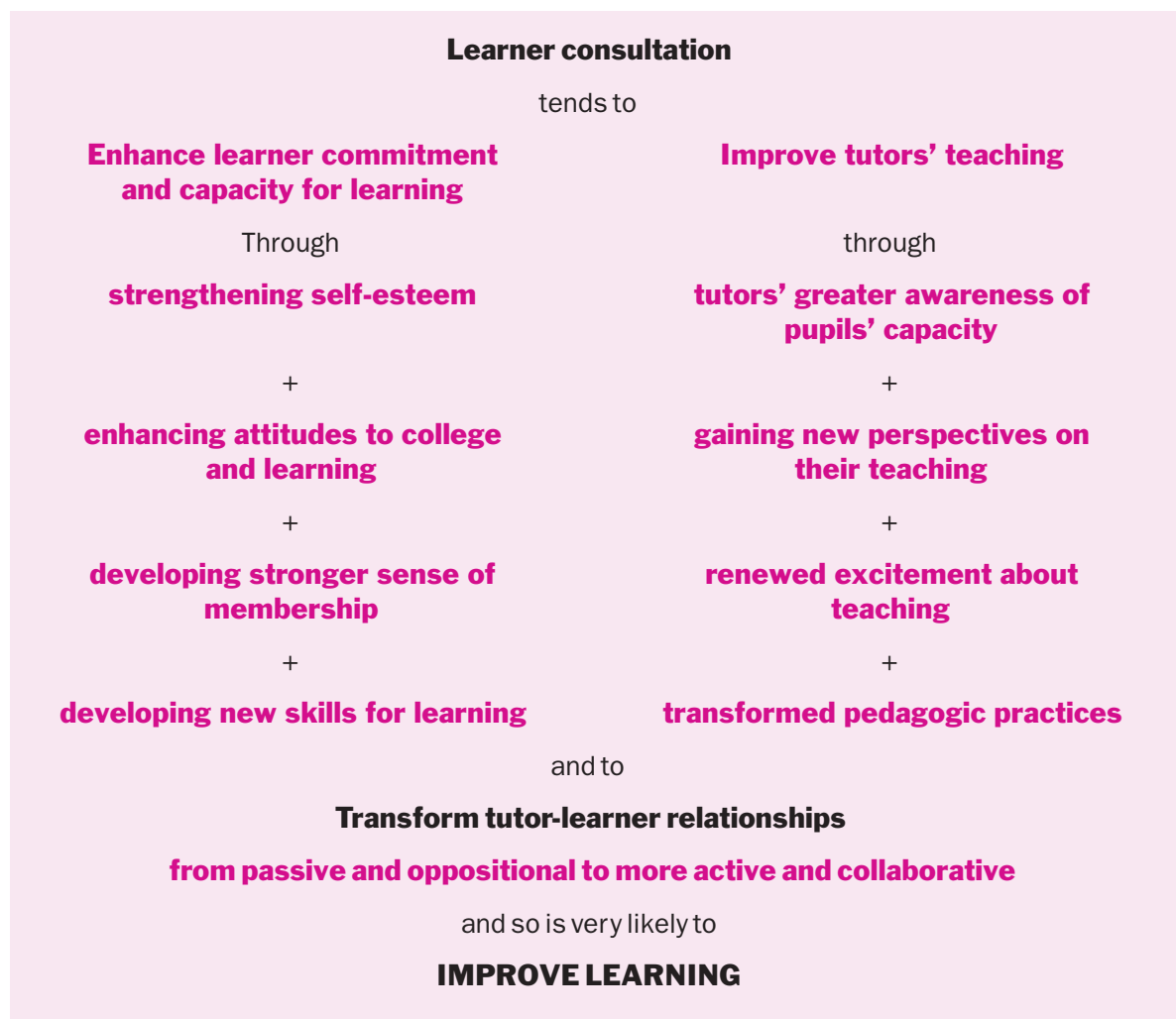
I want to add a fourth outcome, namely 'critical intelligence' or, to express the idea more directly, the ability to detect bullshit and the moral courage to expose it publicly.<sup>2</sup> Those tutors, however, who teach either 16/17 year olds on Level 1 courses or adults on basic skills courses, are often confronted by disaffected and disengaged learners, whose self-confidence and self-respect have been damaged by their earlier experiences of failure at school. I am reminded of Florence Nightingale's dictum, which she wanted inscribed in stone above the entrance to every hospital: 'The first requisite of a hospital is that it does the sick no harm'. Perhaps the maxim for secondary schools should be: 'Do the minimum harm'; and less harm would be done if the four outcomes listed above replaced five good GCSEs as the criteria by which secondary schools are currently judged.

Post-compulsory education is expected to pick up the deep-seated problems created by those schools that have ignored youngsters unlikely to gain five good GCSEs; these are structural problems caused in large part by the target and performance culture imposed by government on schools. And yet the great, unsung achievement of the post-compulsory sector is to re-engage in learning so many of these young people and adults whom no one else is keen to teach. Such teaching is, however, highly intensive and demanding; it also requires high levels of support staff and so needs to be much more favourably resourced than it is at present.

Like the previous chapter, this one will now make a number of constructive suggestions which, as before, can be treated as a checklist by staff:

- *consulting learners*: Again post-16 learning could usefully learn from the growth of the ‘pupil voice movement’ in schools, which has been well researched by Ruddock and McIntyre, who claim that ‘pupil consultation can have a very powerful beneficial impact on life and learning in classrooms’ (2007: 150). Box 4.1 summarises these benefits.

#### Box 4.1



Source: adapted from Ruddock and McIntyre (2007: 152)

This summarises these benefits to both learners and teachers, with the authors being careful to point out that they do not yet have evidence that they lead to improved attainments. You can find evidence, however, that ‘a focus on learning can enhance performance, whereas a focus on performance can depress performance’ in both Chris Watkins’ early (2001:7) and later work (2005).

I would also be in favour of establishing in colleges not just learning communities for teachers, but T & L communities made up of learners, tutors, managers and senior managers, ie representatives of all the levels within the institution.

- *end the academic/pastoral split*: In our research into the impact of policy on T & L in the LSS, we encountered two different approaches, where student learning and welfare were seen as either inter-related or as separate topics and so dealt with by either the same tutor or by two quite different departments and tutors. If we have accepted, however, the cultural theory of learning which recognises the constant interplay of cognition and emotion, of formal and informal learning, of students' lives inside and outside the college, then our practice needs to deal with the learner in his or her full humanity. Splitting the academic concerns of learners from their welfare is artificial, unhelpful and ill-founded, although all tutors need to be trained in when to refer learners to more specialist colleagues such as counsellors, mentors or experts in dyslexia. As Illeris argues:

*An adequate learning theory must ... transcend the classical division [between the cognitive and the emotional] and concern itself with the human being as a whole, both the rational and subject matter content and the incentive and emotional sides and, not least, the interaction between them.*

2007: 76

- *ensure that all students receive the rights to enhancement, inclusion and participation*: Basil Bernstein argued strongly that in an effective democracy all learners have three inter-related pedagogic rights. The first is the *individual* right to enhancement, by which he meant 'the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities' (1996: 6). Do we require our learners to think for themselves or just to report other people's thinking? Do we teach them how to find and pose problems as well as solve them? Are they regurgitating 'unwanted answers to unasked questions' just to pass exams (Popper, 1976: 40)? The second is the *social* right to be included 'socially, intellectually, culturally and personally' (ibid: 7), which also means the right to be separate. The third is the *political* right to participate not only in discussions but in 'procedures whereby order is constructed, maintained and changed' (ibid). The sting comes in the tail. Bernstein expected staff to examine their practice to 'see whether all students receive and enjoy such rights or whether there is an unequal distribution of these rights' (ibid). For example, do Level 1 and Level 2 students receive the same kind of demanding programmes, the same teaching hours and resources, as Level 3 students? If not, why not? There is nothing so practical as a good theoretical question to expose unjustifiable inequalities or poor performance by institutions.
- *welcome the introduction of the National Apprenticeship Service and Foundation Learning Tier (FLT)*: the second of which has been designed for young people aged 14+ and adults below Level 2, the level which government considers to be the basic platform of 'employability'. As a research team studying the impact of policy on T & L on post-16 learning, we expressed two concerns:

*First, the FLT needs to be resourced and staffed at the same standard as Level 3 provision, to prevent it becoming stigmatised as a disadvantaged service for disadvantaged people. Second, it needs to become an integral part of an inclusive set of learning opportunities open to all learners and not a separate, compensatory programme.*

Coffield *et al.* 2008: 180

Why is it that those who find learning easy and who come from supportive homes have much more spent on them than those who find learning difficult and who come from some of the most disadvantaged homes in the country? Equity demands that we begin to reverse this policy of double disadvantage. We could begin by, for instance, lowering class size for all Level 1 and Level 2 work. We could also push for entitlements or learning rights for all those in the FLT; rights, for example, to a broad curriculum and to progression based on credits to help these learners get to where they want to go rather than to where the government thinks they should go. (See Stott and Lillis, 2008, for further details on this important proposal.)

- *move beyond the current pre-occupation with learner retention and attainment to include learner progression:* For example, for those learners who find the move from Level 1 to Level 2, or from Level 2 to Level 3 too demanding, it may be helpful to build some 'half-way houses' or 'staging posts' to enable more students to consolidate their learning before moving forward again.
- *involve learners in peer tutoring/group work:* One of the dangers of the intensification of tutors' workloads is that they revert to whole-class teaching interspersed with some work with individuals, thus neglecting the potential of group work or 'co-learning'. One of the projects in the TLRP has shown convincingly that in primary and secondary schools group work improves not only pupils' social development and their relationships with teachers, but also their academic progress, 'provided teachers take time to train [them] in the skills of group working' (Blatchford *et al.* 2005: 3). The project also produced handbooks of advice and activities for teachers to support them in introducing and sustaining whole-school approaches to group work (see [www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org) for more details). It will also serve to introduce colleagues to the knowledge base on peer tutoring which, for instance, has demonstrated that learners 'whose partner exhibited higher-level reasoning were far more likely to benefit from collaboration than those whose partner did not...' (Daniels 2001: 115). Certainly, I quickly learned to improve my squash by playing with someone better than myself, who could show me how to incorporate his superior but attainable skills into my game. On reflection, I also learn from working out why I disagree with boring old prattlers of all ages and both sexes, whose Powerpoint presentations are full of colour, little content and no challenge.

Already in this chapter I have begun to explore ways of changing and improving the relationship between tutors and learners, which is the theme of the next chapter.

### Notes

1. Again, this term is borrowed from the work of James and Biesta (2007).
2. The philosopher, Harry Frankfurt (2005), in an elegant essay on bullshit argues that it is always bullshit before the 'but'; as in such sentences as 'My first love is teaching, but I don't do any because I'm snowed under with paperwork/I've just married a fit young wife/my ox has fallen in a pit'.

## 5 Enhancing the relationship between tutors and learners: virtuous spirals

*A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;  
There shallow drafts intoxicate the brain  
And drinking largely sobers us again*

Alexander Pope *An essay on criticism* (1711: 1.215)

*If only...*

In this chapter I explore the relationship between tutors and learners under six headings: learning styles; the impact of policy on T & L; which intervention to choose; providing feedback; a dialogue of minds; and tutors' models of learners' minds.

### 1 Learning styles

In 2003–04 I, together with three colleagues, was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Development Agency to write a systematic and critical review of learning styles (see Coffield *et al* 2004 a and b; 2005). One of the main outcomes for me was the growing realisation that, although all but one of the learning style instruments were unreliable and invalid and had a negligible impact on the teaching of staff and the learning of students, there were still some practical lessons to be drawn. For example, the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire was not developed as a psychological test, but as a stimulus to encourage business managers to examine their own learning and that of their staff in order to enhance it. So it could perhaps be used as a means of starting a dialogue about our strengths and weaknesses as learners.

What I also learned from this research, however, was that it was not sufficient to pay attention to individual differences in learners; we must take account of the whole teaching–learning environment. In short, we need to move from a rather narrow focus on the learning styles of individuals to a broader concern for improving social conditions for good T & L. (See Box 5.1 for a critical discussion of VAKT.) Perhaps learning styles could be the starting point for a dialogue with students about how they learn and fail to learn, as long as the knowledgeable tutor quickly moves the discussion away from a narrow preoccupation with learning styles to conceptions of learning, learning strategies and the purposes of learning. In my own experience, such discussions at their best develop the momentum of an upward spiral, where we begin by discussing individual learning preferences; in the current policy climate, this quickly leads on to a questioning of the



need for so much assessment. The tutor is here given the opportunity to explain the connections between assessment and learning. Within a short time, tutor and learners are discussing not whether they are 'globalists' or 'analysts', but what knowledge, skills and capabilities are needed to be considered an educated person in the 21st century.

### Box 5.1

#### VAKT: A classic example of non-learning

Over the last 10 years, schools, sixth form and FE colleges have fallen prey to a non-scientific movement (I almost wrote 'disease') which goes by the acronym of VAKT, and which claims without any convincing evidence that learners can be divided by their learning preferences into four groups: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic or tactile learners. This movement allows its disciples the pretence of student-centred teaching, and it neatly transfers the responsibility of students' failure to learn to tutors, eg 'You didn't match your teaching style to their learning styles.'

The most worrying aspect of this movement is that it appears impervious to evidence-based criticism. Our detailed and systematic review found that '... there is no evidence that the model is either a desirable basis for learning or the best use of investment, teacher time, initial teacher education and professional development' (Coffield *et al.* 2004a: 35). Put simply, it doesn't work.

Yet the VAKT approach persists. For example, *From theory to practice: using differentiation to raise levels of attainment* by Cheryl Jones (2006), part of LSN's 14–19 Vocational Learning Support Programme – so no straw man and part of the officially-funded advice to the sector – still blithely maintains in the face of the evidence we presented that 'this does not mean that it is no longer relevant to consider learning styles' (Jones 2006: 7).

How more explicit could we have been? Let me try harder this time. There is **no** scientific justification for teaching or learning strategies based on VAKT and tutors should **stop** using learning style instruments based on them. There is **no** theory of VAKT from which to draw **any** implications for practice. It should be a dead parrot. It should have ceased to function.

Even the most detailed suggestions for practice drawn from VAKT are based on over-simplifications of a misunderstood and discredited theory. Learning styles, like fish oils or brain gym, are part of what HL Mencken in an inspired phrase called the 'pseudo-psychological rumble-bumble' that infests education (1926: 177). It's time to move on. Why do we expect to capture the full complex humanity of learners by dividing them into four categories which are so simple as to be patronising, if not downright insulting?

I have, however, found it difficult to engage learners in a discussion of their own and other people's learning and some questions have proved far more productive than others. Part of the difficulty is that we do not have a shared, technical vocabulary with which to discuss T & L; the learning styles movement has muddled the waters by producing endless dichotomies such as 'pragmatists' v 'theorists', 'field independent' v 'field dependent' learners, and 'left' v 'right brainers'. Most of these terms have no scientific justification whatsoever; nevertheless too many tutors succumb to the intuitive appeal of these pseudo-scientific concepts.<sup>1</sup>

There exists, however, some well-grounded research in this area and I recommend Noel Entwistle's use of 'deep', 'surface' and 'strategic'<sup>2</sup> approaches to learning, terms which provide us with an appropriate lexicon. Note that I have not referred to 'deep', 'surface' or 'strategic' *learners*, an approach that runs the risk of labelling students in inappropriate and limiting ways.

#### Activity 4

Please spend 5–10 minutes considering what questions to ask your students about their own learning and learning in general. Please produce a list of 1–10 such questions.

Q1

Q2

Q3

Q4

Q5

Q6

Q7

Q8

Q9

Q10

See Appendix 1 where I offer as suggestions the questions that I've found work best for me with the particular students I've tried them out with.

## 2 Impact of policy on T & L

Another main influence on my thinking has been the TLRP project, which we have just completed,<sup>3</sup> into the impact of policy ‘levers’, such as targets, funding, planning, inspection and government initiatives, on T & L in the LSS. Here I want to highlight our central conclusion, namely, that in FE, ACL and WBL *the cornerstone of success was the strength of the tutor–learner relationship*. We concluded as follows:

*despite their generally negative prior learning experiences, the learners we met were extremely positive about their current learning ... they found a relaxed and safe atmosphere, a culture of mutual respect, more one-to-one attention and (for the younger learners in particular) a relationship in which the students were treated as adults.*

Coffield *et al.* 2008: 166

So far, so good. Here, however, I want to push the argument further by asking: how are we to enhance these relationships between tutors and learners, which are already very positive? I want to suggest three ideas and to emphasise that I am trying to move beyond focusing on either the tutor or the learners, and instead putting in pride of place improving the interactions between them. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the three notions I shall explore are: providing feedback; education as dialogue; and tutors’ views of how students learn.

## 3 Which intervention?<sup>4</sup>

One preliminary consideration:

*Before making any change in practice, professionals are duty-bound to consider two possibilities: first, that the proposed change may make matters worse; and second, that some alternative change may be more beneficial than their preferred option.*

Coffield *et al.* 2004a: 135

One way forward is to consult the conclusions of a meta-analysis<sup>5</sup> of a large variety of educational interventions, which John Hattie carried out, and which offers estimates of the magnitude of the impact of any particular intervention on the attainment of learners. In the trade, these are called *effect sizes* or the gain in average scores, which are generally considered large and worth pursuing when they are more than 0.8.

**Box 5.2****Effect sizes of different types of intervention**

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Effect Size</b>
Reinforcement	1.13
Students' prior cognitive ability	1.04
Instructional quality	1.00
Instructional quantity	0.84
Direct instruction	0.82
Students' disposition to learn	0.61
Class environment	0.56
Peer tutoring	0.50
Parental involvement	0.46
Affective attributes of students	0.24
Individualisation	0.14
Behavioural objectives	0.12
Team teaching	0.06

Source: adapted from Hattie (1999)

Box 5.2 presents the effect sizes for different types of intervention that I have extracted from Hattie (1999). It can be readily seen from the table that only five types of intervention – reinforcement, students' prior cognitive ability, instructional quality and quantity, and direct instruction – have effect sizes of more than 0.8; in passing, note that individualisation, behavioural objectives and team teaching have been found to have trivial effects, ie effect sizes less than 0.2.

Tutors can do little about students' prior cognitive ability, but principals and SMTs can influence 'instructional quality' by appointing the best staff possible and investing heavily in them. 'Instructional quantity' refers to the research finding that, if you want as a tutor to teach students, say, about the cognitive development of pre-school children, then you and they have to spend large slabs of time on that task, time which should not be taken up by completing administrative forms for Education Maintenance Allowances or awarding bodies. Part of the problem with Hattie's approach, however, is that he provides no explanation of his categories or whether they retain a consistent meaning across different cultures. So I suspect that 'direct instruction' means didactic teaching as in lectures. That leaves us with 'reinforcement', which is better explained as providing repeated 'dollops of feedback' (Hattie 1999: 9). Let me offer my own 'take' on this approach, which also goes under the name of *assessment for learning* (see Black and Wiliam 1998).

## 4 Feedback

In my experience as tutor and learner, feedback needs to be timely, constructive, sufficient and sensitive. If you get an assignment back so late after the date of submission that you have lost all interest in it, then the tutor's comments, however apposite, are likely to have little effect. Similarly, the tutor's comments must be sufficiently detailed and supportive to engage your attention. Comments also need to be focused on moving your learning forward by providing information, encouragement and diagnosis of what has been well or badly done and how both could be improved. Unthinking praise is of little help. For example, at the beginning of my career, I used to write 'This is a first-class piece of work' or 'Splendid performance' and little more at the end of essays written by my brightest students. I was taken aside by an 'old-timer' (participation metaphor) who pointed out that all learners need to be stretched and that the very best students are very likely to respond positively to suggestions of where their thinking could be improved or their reading extended. More recently, at the LSN conference on 12 February 2008, I learned from Robert Powell to add a target to my written comments and to invite my students to spend the first 10 minutes of their next assignment in addressing that target. (See Powell 2006, for further good ideas.)

So learners in their turn act on the feedback tutors provide; and then tutors need to act on the responses the learners make to the initial feedback and so on upwards. Again, I use the metaphor of the *virtuous spiral* to capture the notion of steady improvement in the quality of the professional relationship between tutor and learners, as both respond to the positive suggestions and reactions of the other in order to make a success of the joint task of T & L. If rich feedback is to be given to all learners, then tutors need the **time** to read and reflect on their assignments, **time** to write encouraging and stretching comments, and **time** to discuss these face-to-face with students.

To change the metaphor, fans of *Strictly come dancing* have seen how an experienced and empathetic professional can, through hard work, mutual respect and the modelling of techniques, conjure highly polished performances of a professional standard from committed but untrained beginners. If Anton and Camilla can do it, then so can we, but even Camilla would have her work cut out if she was landed with me as her dancing partner.

## 5 A dialogue of minds

*Classroom interaction has a now famous asymmetry: students are in the majority, but teachers do most of the talking; much is made of learning, through discovery and enquiry, but actually it is teachers who ask most of the questions. At its worst, classroom talk does the opposite of what one might reasonably expect it to do: it disempowers the student.*

Alexander 2006a: 12

Robin Alexander draws on a wealth of research and practice (eg Edwards and Westgate, 1994) to argue for 'education as dialogue', where dialogue is more purposeful, elaborated and principled than 'communication skills'. By dialogue, he means 'a meeting of minds and ideas as well as of voices; and it is therefore mediated through text, internet and computer screen as well as through face-to-face interaction' (2006a: 15).

I have space here to explain briefly the five criteria that guide and test dialogue, but not the breadth and subtlety of Alexander's analysis. According to him, interaction is likely to be dialogic if it is:

- collective: tutors and students learn together in groups or classes
- reciprocal: tutors show that they have listened to what the learners said and vice-versa
- supportive: tutors and students help each other to learn and avoid point-scoring or the 'stunning bitchiness' that Jerome Bruner complained of in Oxford (1980: 139)
- cumulative: tutors and students build on their own past learning and on each others' ideas
- purposeful: dialogue is not mere conversation but has specific educational goals in mind. (See Alexander 2006 a and b for a fuller explanation.)

How could such a pedagogy be used in post-16 learning? Well, if Ofsted reports are complaining that some learners in your college or adult learning centre are too passive in class or have become 'mark hungry' rather than intellectually curious, or are simply reporting in their assignments other people's thinking without offering any ideas of their own, then may I suggest that you and they have need of dialogic T & L, which challenges the thinking of such learners to move them up to a higher level. Similarly, if you have colleagues who claim to use student-centred methods, but peer observation reveals that they teach in conventional teacher-centred ways; if, when confronted with the latest government directive or criticism, 'they revert to drill, to lecture, or to discussions that are essentially lectures in disguise' (Grubb 1999: 57), then your colleagues have need of dialogic T & L.

Dialogue can have the further use of promoting professional learning among colleagues. Dialogue with learners is likely to lead on to discussion among tutors about particular students, but also about different approaches to teaching, say, Business Studies to a class of Level 2 students who consist mainly of asylum-seekers with a poor command of English. In this way, tutors are encouraged to form 'learning communities' or 'quality circles' to discuss and plan the next stages of their work together. As Alexander argues, such developments presuppose that the participants have a firm notion of what T & L is and how it can be improved in individuals, groups, institutions and in the sector as a whole. Dialogue, therefore, of the kind proposed here should reverberate through every level of a democratic system from classroom to the Secretary of State's office.

## 6 Tutors' models of learners' minds

Behind all your interactions with learners lies a set of usually unspoken assumptions about how you think students learn, how their minds work and how T & L is best managed. Your teaching methods will reflect these assumptions hence Jerome Bruner's concern to get 'teachers (and students) to think *explicitly* about their folk psychological assumptions, in order to bring them out of the shadows of tacit knowledge' (1996: 47, original emphasis). In short, tutors need some insight into their own implicit theories that shape how they teach and how their students learn.

A distinction, however, should be drawn between the ways in which tutors want to teach and the ways in which they feel *constrained* to teach because of what is euphemistically referred to as 'challenging behaviour' of some learners. Some tutors retreat to didactic teaching, to lecturing, to leaving students on their own to work on assignments, or to dreaming up 'busy work' (eg cutting out pretty pictures from magazines and pasting them in folders), **not** because they want to teach in such a fashion but because they have to establish and maintain order, without which no T & L is possible.

Such considerations should be added to Bruner's argument that tutors have four dominant models of learners' minds:

- *learners as imitators*. From time immemorial young people have learned to swim, ride bikes and tell jokes by a combination of imitation, practice and explanation, and by modelling their behaviour on the skilled performances of swimmers, cyclists and joke-tellers. They acquire 'know-how' (the acquisition metaphor) in much the same ways that apprentices learn competences from an expert (the participation metaphor).

The demanding task for the tutor is constantly to put herself into the shoes of a beginner who finds difficult what she has understood for so many years that she has forgotten that she, too, once found it difficult. Hence some of the most unhelpful words to be heard in classrooms are 'It's dead easy', as when an IT specialist executes a skilled and much practised sequence of 12 moves in 1.2 seconds and then turns to you, smiles and says triumphantly: 'Now, you do it. It's a piece of cake.'<sup>6</sup>

- *learners as recipients*. People also learn facts, principles and rules of action by being told them. The assumption here is that learners' minds are blank slates or empty pitchers waiting to be filled. If the learner fails to acquire such propositional knowledge, 'her shortcomings can be explained by her lack of "mental abilities" or her low IQ and the educational establishment goes scot-free' (Bruner 1996: 56).

This approach has had a bad press for some years but I would like to reserve some space for didactic T & L and for the acquisition metaphor of learning. For instance, if you wish to give your students an overview of an area, by showing them how the work of leading thinkers or practitioners can be fitted together to form an understanding of a discipline, and by pointing out the main strengths and weaknesses of the key texts or approaches, then a didactic tour *d'horizon* may be an appropriate starting point.



- *learners as collaborative thinkers*. Here, learners construct their own model of the world in order to help them make sense of their experiences; and tutors foster their understanding through collaboration, challenge and dialogue ie the participation metaphor. The learner is here viewed as 'capable of thinking about her own thinking, and of correcting her ideas and notions through reflection – by "going meta", as it is sometimes called' (ibid: 57). 'Going meta', or using metacognition, is a high falutin' way of saying that all learners should know how to: set themselves explicit, challenging goals; identify appropriate strategies to reach those goals; monitor their progress towards them; and restart the whole process by choosing a new set of sensible goals. Seven year olds can, and have been, taught to 'go meta'.
- *learners as knowledgeable* Learners need to know that all knowledge is provisional, that in the words of AN Whitehead 'it does not keep any better than fish' (1962: v); that it has a history; and that they have a right to knowledge. They also need to have some understanding of what is worthwhile knowledge, how different kinds of knowledge are constructed, how they can make connections between them, and how new knowledge is created.<sup>7</sup> Moreover they need to be able to distinguish between personal knowledge and the body of objective knowledge which has been accumulated over time by their culture. In this way, tutors and learners can enter into dialogue with famous minds from the past and present (see Young 2008).

Four general points. First, Bruner argues that these four partial perspectives should 'be fused into some congruent unity, recognised as parts of a common continent' (1996: 65). So tutors need to incorporate all four perspectives into their repertoire of teaching methods. Second, if they are not careful, the choice tutors make of teaching methods may come to be seen by their learners as the only way of teaching or learning: 'For a choice of pedagogy inevitably communicates a conception of the learning process and the learner. Pedagogy is never innocent. It is a medium that carries its own message' (ibid: 63). Third, one particular sentence of Bernstein's has always stayed with me: 'If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher' (1971:199). I have always taken that to mean we need to know our students' background, their music, their enthusiasms and prior learning experiences, if we wish to enthuse them with what enthuses us. Four, those who advocate the participation metaphor argue that the 'problems of schooling are not, at their most fundamental level, pedagogical' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 100). Like Plato before them, they are concerned about who is to fill what roles in society and about the political, cultural and financial constraints placed on social mobility; these themes will be taken up in the next chapter.

Let me sum up the strategies I have proposed to enhance the relationship between tutors and learners. Effective learning relationships, I contend, are based on: a climate of mutual trust and respect which allows for rich, warm and personal exchanges; a language which both parties can use to deepen their understanding of T & L; feedback which publicly affirms the positive regard in which every learner is held and which also challenges every student to move his or her learning forward; dialogue which 'scaffolds' the understanding of learners, enabling them to go beyond their tutors and the information given; dialogue among tutors about T & L which leads to



T & L communities; and the incorporation by tutors and learners of a broad range of perspectives on how people learn. Effective T & L also understands the power of metaphor and this chapter can be summarised as the creation and maintenance of virtuous spirals of T & L. If you are a new member of staff, please have a look at Box 5.3.

Finally, is it possible for a post-16 institution to have put into practice all the suggestions made so far and yet most of the staff reject any suggestion that it should be called a 'learning organisation', however we define that term? Unfortunately, the answer appears to

### Box 5.3

#### For new staff

If you have recently started teaching in the post-compulsory sector, you might find all these suggestions either obvious and already part of your teaching repertoire; or, on the other hand, rather too numerous and perhaps even overwhelming. If you agree with the latter response, then may I suggest that you start with one or two ideas and assess their strengths and weaknesses as you incorporate them into your practice. Here are, for example, a number of suggestions from which to choose when establishing good, personal relationships with all your learners. Whose names do you learn first? Whose names do you have trouble remembering and why? What are their enthusiasms and interests? What good experiences have they had of learning? What kind of help do they want from you? What do you need to do now to improve your understanding of learning? What reflections have you about your first experiences of teaching? How do they compare with those of other newcomers? Please choose whatever questions you feel most comfortable with. Please also remember what I wish someone had said to me at the start of my teaching career: you're not there to become the learners' new friend; they already have friends. You are there as a professional to help all of them achieve their learning goals.

GOOD LUCK and GOOD LEARNING!

be 'yes', in part because the most innovative and motivating practices in some people's hands become routine and dull techniques of control rather than of empowerment. How, then, does one 'transform' an organisation that has all the outward appearances of excellence but little of its spirit, ie what David Sherlock calls 'the smug bastard syndrome' (2008: 7)? Can Ofsted spot the distinction between appearance and substance and, if so, how? If the inspectorate were to become again what they once were, namely, members of the same 'community of practice' as tutors in colleges, then perhaps we could detect earlier the shadow which sometimes falls between the dream and the reality, when for example, a gulf has opened up between the SMT and the rest of the staff. The best people, however, to answer these questions are those who work in institutions which are 'learning organisations' in name only.

## Notes

1. Every handbook on T & L contains a learning style questionnaire and so, not to be outdone, I have included my own in Appendix 2.
2. *Entwistle argues that if students have a sophisticated conception of learning and a rich understanding of the nature of knowledge and evidence, they adopt a deep approach in order to reach their own understanding of material and ideas. If, on the other hand, they see learning as memorising or acquiring facts, and their intention is merely to meet course requirements or to respond to external injunctions, they are likely to adopt a surface approach. A surface approach relies on identifying those elements within a task that are likely to be assessed and then memorising the details. However, students do not only adopt deep and surface approaches. The structure of a curriculum and the demands of summative assessment exert a strong influence on approaches to learning. Entwistle argues that summative assessment in higher education usually encourages a strategic approach where students combine deep and surface approaches in order to achieve the best possible marks. Students using this approach become adept at organising their study time and methods, attend carefully to cues given by teachers as to what type of work gains good grades or what questions will come up in examinations. If this argument is valid, it is likely that the increased use of explicit, detailed assessment criteria used in many courses will encourage this strategic approach.* (Coffield et al. 2004a: 94, original emphasis, commenting on Entwistle et al. 2001)
3. The book on our ESRC/TLRP project is called *Improving learning, skills and inclusion: the impact of policy on post-compulsory education* and was published by Routledge in April 2008.
4. The term 'intervention' here is used loosely to denote any initiative in education or influence on student learning, in the way that Hattie uses it.
5. 'Meta-analysis' is a research technique which synthesises all the research reports on a particular innovation, usually from different countries, into a single estimate of effect size. The term 'effect size' is explained in the text. Readers need to know that the work quoted here refers to research in secondary schools rather than in post-16 learning, that the original research reports were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s and that Hattie's categories need elucidation. Despite these reservations, the findings tell an interesting story, based as they are on '180,000 studies, representing 50+ million students, and covering almost all methods of innovation' (Hattie, 1999: 5).
6. The same principle applies when I'm in unfamiliar territory and ask for directions. I tend to be treated to a rapidly delivered spiel of complicated instructions which are topped off with the inaccurate prophecy: 'You can't miss it'. What they mean is they can't miss it because they know the place like the back of their hand. I miss it every time until I've got a mental map of the new route in my head. New learners (and conference delegates) arriving at a college for the first time tend to get the same treatment; why not provide them with maps with accompanying explanatory text?
7. Learners, I think, would appreciate the story of how Albert Einstein produced the strikingly original theory of relativity. He was a poor student at school, but at the age of 16 began to question the customary conception of time, when travelling on a train to school. It all began with a puzzle he set himself by asking this disturbing question: what would happen if I was riding not on this train but on a beam of light? It took him seven years to produce a convincing answer, but only five weeks to write his paper on relativity, while working full-time at the Patent Office. (See Wertheimer (1945) for the story of Einstein's thinking.)  
Similarly how did Charles Darwin think up 'the single best idea anyone has ever had' (Dennett, 1996: 21)? Daniel Dennett places Darwin's achievement ahead of Einstein's, Newton's and everyone else's: 'In a single stroke, the idea of evolution by natural selection unifies the realm of life, meaning, and purpose with the realm of space and time, cause and effect, mechanism and physical law. But it is not just a wonderful scientific idea. It's a dangerous idea' (ibid).  
The pertinent question raised by Emma Coffield, however, is: 'why then do we not all accomplish at such a high level?' (2006: 18). She goes on to quote Robert Weissberg to the effect that: 'one crucial factor is often ignored. Brilliance "is a skill that must be learned. All artists undergo extended periods of formal or informal training before they are capable of producing something others value ... to understand the process involved in artistic creation, it is imperative that we have some idea of the arduous training involved"' (ibid). So the fashionable notion that all children are creative and just need fish oils to become the new Mozart is so much twaddle. On the other hand, Richard Sennett controversially proposes that 'nearly anyone can become a good craftsman' (2008: 268)



## 6 Dealing with complexity in an overburdened and turbulent sector: the emperor has too many clothes

### Box 6.1

I was sitting in the back row of a class of electrical apprentices in a German vocational school on the outskirts of Duisburg, the German equivalent of Middlesbrough, only with jobs and highly paid jobs at that. About twenty 18/19 year olds were studying part of the core curriculum – German literature – and, on this particular Friday morning, they were taking turns to read out loud from Goethe's *Faust*, with the lads working out in advance who would have to speak the part of Gretchen and inciting their foredoomed classmate to assume a high-pitched voice. When the class finished, I turned to the lad sitting beside me and explained that I was a visitor from Britain, studying the German 'dual system' of vocational education. I then asked him what was the relevance to his future working life as an electrician of Goethe's *Faust*. He thought for a moment and then whispered back: 'Electricians have souls too, you know.'

### 1 LSC in wonderland

If a Persian or a Martian or, stranger still, a university lecturer, were to stumble unwittingly into the world of post-16 learning, what would she find?

- a land of plenteous but bewildering acronyms; the LSC includes a list of 74, all of which are needed to explain its policies (LSC 2007b: 97)
- a sector where the government had to establish a Bureaucracy Reduction Group to deal with the effects of its own hyperactivity in spawning so many new policies, initiatives, qualifications, institutions, partnerships, targets, priorities, ambitions and aspirations that those trying to enact their proposals became overwhelmed with the paperwork
- a permanent revolution in structures which change name and remit every time Ministers are reshuffled. Ministers have to make their mark in such a short time that little, if any, consideration is given to the staff working in these organisations, many of whom are made redundant at heavy cost to the taxpayer and at considerable emotional cost to them and their families.<sup>1</sup> So, for instance, what was once the Further Education Unit (FEU) was merged with the Staff College to become the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA); which in turn was turned into the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), which was then divided into the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN); the QIA was then amalgamated with the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL), to form a new group, unidentified at the time of writing in March 2008

- a world where the gap between the rhetoric of policy and the reality of practice has become a chasm. So, for example, the government is determined to create a 'demand-led system', where funding is supposed to follow the choices made by learners and employers, but the government has added two provisos. The learners must not demand too much (funding for ESOL courses was restricted in 2007 because too many immigrants and asylum seekers enrolled for them). Nor must they demand the 'wrong' type of course (skills for 'employability' take precedence over learning for personal development; and funding will only be forthcoming for those vocational qualifications approved by Sector Skills Councils). Moreover, FE colleges and private trainers have little control over the investment decisions that employers make about industrial policy, both of which are very influential in shaping the amount and kind of training that employers demand.

It is not necessary to exaggerate the requirements being made of the sector. I shall let the official texts speak for themselves and I shall restrict myself to three key documents, all produced in November 2007 to serve as an introduction to the fascinating, turbulent, yet desperately important world of the LSC. The three I have chosen are:

- The *LSC Grant Letter 2008–9* from John Denham and Ed Balls, the Secretaries of State respectively for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (DIUS/DCSF 2007)
- *Our statement of priorities: better skills, better jobs, better lives*, the LSC's priorities for 2008/09 to 2010/11 (LSC 2007a)
- *Learning and skills: policy summaries 2008/09* (LSC 2007b).

I have just finished reading all three, one after the other, and I found much to welcome, such as the £2.3 billion which the government will invest to ensure that colleges have world-class buildings; and the £577 million being spent every year on Education Maintenance Allowances, which encourage young people from low-income families to continue to participate in learning. Overall, however, my mind is reeling, because the government imposes on the sector not only priorities and targets (an LSC document of eight pages explains the difference between the two terms), but also 'cross-government delivery agreements' (LSC 2007a: 6) and 'agreed key indicators' (DIUS/DCSF 2007: 10), which appear to operate just like targets (eg 'An apprenticeship completion success rate target for 2008–9 of 65%', *ibid*). In addition, the government has ambitions and aspirations, which again look uncannily like targets to me (eg 'the UK ambition for 500,000 apprentices' LSC 2007a: 7). I know of no LSC document that explains all these separate categories of demand on 'providers' within the sector.

In all I counted:

- four government 'strategic priorities'
- three LSC 'overarching' priorities
- beneath the first overarching priority (Creating demand for skills) 25 targets or 'goals' for raising demand among young people; 12 for raising demand among adults; and 13 for raising demand among employers
- the second priority (Transforming FE) consists of 5 'key strands' of activity, which have been set 22 separate goals
- the third priority (Better skills, better jobs, better lives) has 14 goals, not one of which, as it turns out, is concerned with creating better jobs.

That makes in total seven priorities and 86 goals; I list all the goals very briefly in Boxes 6.2 to 6.6 and it tells its own story that it takes five boxes to do so. The LSC's statement of priorities and targets (which also includes goals, aims, ambitions and aspirations), runs to 56 pages and the separate summary of these policies takes up 97 pages. One of the five key strands for 'Transforming FE' is entitled 'Championing Simplification', which is broken down further into eight separate goals. The LSC does not do irony. On the other hand, it has met *all* the targets set for it by government, which is a huge, but largely unacknowledged, achievement.

Moreover, behind each of the 86 goals lies a detailed strategy. The Framework for Excellence in Box 6.5, for instance, consists of seven 'key performance indicators' and each of these is divided into several constituent measures, making up a minimum of 27 new indicators in all (LSC 2006: 16).

## Box 6.2

### **LSC Priority 1a: creating demand for skills among young people**

25 goals

- increase achievement of Levels 2 and 3 at 19
- 90% of 17 year olds to be participating in learning by 2013
- September guarantee of suitable courses for all 16 year olds
- reduce number of young people in NEET [not in education, employment of training]
- a work-based learning place for all young people who want it
- promote learning agreements
- greater flexibility of provision
- commission only high-quality provision
- 14–19 partnerships to reach out to most disadvantaged
- more personalised support
- expand apprenticeships
- enhance the range of vocational routes
- improve completion rates of apprentices
- a matching service to link employers and apprentices
- improve achievement in school sixth forms
- a national entitlement re curriculum for all 14–19 year olds
- new Diplomas from 2013
- Level 1 and pre-vocational offer in every area
- prospectuses for all 14–19 partnerships
- greater progression into FE and HE
- more people into higher levels of learning
- narrow achievement gaps across all pathways
- increased success for those with learning difficulties/disabilities
- financial support to overcome barriers
- work with Children's Workforce Strategy Action Plan

**Box 6.3****LSC Priority 1b: raising demand among adults**

12 goals

- develop skills accounts
- Develop Train to Gain (TtG)
- establish new adult careers service
- join up skills and employment services
- each area to have a core adult offer
- invest in FLT, Skills for Life and Level 2
- all courses to be personalised
- Adult Learning Grant to remove barriers
- more numeracy courses
- colleges and providers to generate income
- national skills campaign
- FE as key resource for local communities

**Box 6.4****LSC Priority 1c: raising demand among employers**

13 goals

- ESF [European Social Fund] funds to broaden the training offer
- literacy, numeracy and ESOL to be available within TtG
- employers to contribute to ESOL for Work
- more adult apprenticeships
- increase Level 3 offer to employers
- employers encouraged to recruit workless individuals
- more employers to sign skills pledge
- more leadership and management training
- FE to become first choice for employers
- employers to identify the qualifications they want
- build on TUC's peer support programme
- expand number of apprenticeships
- national marketing campaign

**Box 6.5****LSC Priority 2: transforming FE**

Four main strands

a. Aligning funding with priorities

4 goals

- clarifying fees policy across publicly funded provision
- colleges and providers to generate more income
- income targets to be agreed with colleges
- ESF funding to be integrated with LSC funding

b. Championing simplification

8 goals

- a fairer funding methodology
- improve treatment of 'customers'
- single brokerage service for employers
- New Standard for selecting providers
- Framework for Excellence to assess providers
- a single skills strategy in each region
- develop the Qualifications and Credit Framework
- remove unnecessary bureaucracy

c. Investing in capacity and infrastructure

5 goals

- invest £2.3 billion in college buildings
- invest in other facilities beyond colleges
- extend use of learning technologies
- drive the professional development of the system
- develop specialist vocational provision, eg skills academies

d. Intelligent commissioning

3 goals

- intervene where market is not responding
- three-year contracts to high-quality providers
- effective procurement with the third sector



## Box 6.6

### LSC Priority 3: better skills, better jobs, better lives

14 goals

- more opportunities for learners with difficulties/disabilities
- £210 million for Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL)
- maintain investment in ESOL
- invest in FLT
- respond to local skills and employment priorities
- tackle shortage of numeracy skills
- increase skills and qualifications of offenders
- all young people to take part in work experience
- integrate employment and skills services
- local employment partnerships to provide access to training
- integrate support for unemployed
- respond to crises, eg mass redundancy
- promote higher levels skills
- meet skills demand from London Olympic Games

In all three documents, which run to 167 pages altogether, there is one deafening silence: there is no discussion of T & L. Indeed, it barely rates a mention and the only full sentence I can find which deals with the topic reads: 'We will embed and extend the use of learning technologies across the whole sector' (LSC 2007a: 20). ICT tends to be the main form of investment in T & L that policy-makers support unequivocally; machines are, after all, cheaper than tutors, they can be worked day and night without protest from unions and, so far at least, they have not been known to answer back.

The sector is now busily responding to this avalanche of policies, with SMTs throughout the country being distracted **from** meeting the needs of learners, local communities and employers **to** meeting the needs of Ministers and policy-makers. Further evidence for this argument arrives almost daily. For example, in March 2008 the government announced the details of yet another 'radical transformation of our education and skills sector' in another White Paper, called *Raising expectations: enabling the system to deliver* (DCSF/DIUS 2008: 3). The LSC has apparently been so successful in meeting all the targets set by government that it is to be dissolved and replaced by a more complex system, with new agencies all with new powers and responsibilities, new entitlements and qualifications for learners, and a radically different organisational model of adult skills, based on two high-risk programmes (Train to Gain and Skills Accounts). The logic appears to be: 'the LSC is not broken so let's break it. The learning and skills sector is our toy so we can twist it into a new shape just as all Ministers have done before us'. It takes Ed Balls and John Denham,

the two Secretaries of State, 93 pages to explain their new structures but again not one of these 93 pages contains a discussion of T & L, which is the heart of the matter. This new White Paper proposes another raft of top-down policies and yet it claims to be devolving power; they should have called it *Raising expectations and lowering morale*.

Stephen Ball has been arguing for some time that policy is not a solution to our difficulties but the biggest single problem facing professionals. At first hearing I thought that Stephen's conclusion was a deliberate exaggeration for effect, but, as I have reflected on all the reforms imposed on the post-compulsory sector since 1992, I have come to accept it.

Each new Secretary of State introduced his or her own torrent of legislation and the most recent incumbents, Balls and Denham, are no different. Witness their statement in the press release announcing the dissolution of the LSC: 'We are committed to revolutionising the education system...' (DCSF/DIUS Press Release 17 March 2008: 1). Their Ministers of State also push initiatives attached to their names and careers, but, as Alan Tuckett has pointed out 'in the past 20 years there have been 15 junior ministers in post with responsibilities for adult learning, and 15 different civil servants overseeing the work' (2008: 8). This is no way to run a country. This is no way to transform a system. Ministers have understood the urgent need for change without appreciating the concomitant need for continuity, a topic to which I shall return in the final chapter. With a heavy heart, I conclude that the proposed new structures are more likely to result in yet another failure to create a vibrant and equitable post-compulsory system than to produce 'world-class skills'. The permanent revolution imposed on the public services by Ministers is a symptom of a deep malaise in our political system because governments with an overall majority are literally out of control.

One further point. These three official texts introduce a new category of learning, which now goes by the name of 'Adult Safeguarded Learning' (ASL). ASL is described as 'learning for personal fulfilment, civic participation and community development' (LSC 2007b: 21). It is excellent news that such vital purposes are to be safeguarded, except that, when I consulted the budget up to 2010/11, the allocation for ASL has been capped at £210 million for four years, which means in times of rising inflation, a cut in provision (DIUS/DCSF 2007: 11). Similarly, the planned volumes for ASL are projected to fall by 100,000 from 658,000 in 2006–07 to 585,000 in 2010–11 (LSC 2007a: 41). But LSS statistics show that over the last two years there has been a dramatic fall of 1,400,000 learners from publicly funded adult education and the infra-structure of adult education is being eroded (Flint and Hughes 2008: 3). So Adult Safeguarded Learning is a misnomer. It could more accurately be described as Adult Second-Class Learning (ASCL) or Adult Endangered Learning (AEL), because most of the LSC's budget in 2008–09 of £11,374,179,000 will be devoted to promoting 'economically valuable skills'. The percentage to be spent on promoting personal fulfilment, civic participation and community development amounts to 0.0018% of the total budget. The amount allocated for 'Neighbourhood learning in deprived communities' amounts to £20 million or 0.00017% of the total budget (LSC 2007a: 48). Administration costs in the DIUS alone will come to over £219 million in 2007–08 (DIUS/DCSF 2007: 12).

A better set of values and a much less inequitable ordering of priorities by Ministers are clearly called for. I am also concerned about the abuse of language whereby the euphemism 'safeguarded' is employed to disguise the real intentions of government.

### 3 Capturing the essence of the problem

To understand what is happening in the LSS calls for the imagination of Hans Christian Andersen or Lewis Carroll. We need a new folk tale to capture the essence of the problem, because Andersen's story about the emperor's new clothes does not apply. You may remember that two cheats claimed those clothes 'possessed the wonderful quality that they became invisible to anyone who was unfit for the office he held or was incorrigibly stupid' (Andersen 1984: 60). So, out of fear of appearing to be unfit for office or very stupid, first ministers and then the emperor himself pretended to see what did not exist. The LSS is in a different dilemma, because we need a story about an emperor who puts on a fresh suit of clothes every day without ever taking one off so that sooner rather than later he begins to struggle to walk or to breathe; then, as he dons more and more finery, he has to lie down permanently, but begins to experience such difficulties in thinking that he becomes unfit to rule. Policy Man has become Michelin Man.

### 4 Dealing with complexity

It is all very well for hyperactive politicians and policy-makers to devise strategy upon strategy in Wonderland; principals and SMTs must be able to enact them successfully in Sunderland and all points north, south, and west of it. And there's the rub. Coping with the level of complexity and the speed of perpetual reform is testing, sometimes to breaking point, senior staff who must quickly and repeatedly work out how to protect their institution, their staff, their local community and their learners from the latest round of government measures, while at the same time keeping faith with the public-sector values of social justice and social inclusion which brought them into the sector in the first place. Is it any wonder that it is becoming more and more difficult to get good candidates to apply for the post of college principal? One senior manager is quoted as follows:

*You need to be out in the community, seen to be active at all levels within the college, keep up to date with the constant changes from the politicians, deal with all the government bodies and manage the finances. It is an impossible job.*

Kingston 2008: 10

In other words, the list of 86 goals included earlier does not cover all the activities of the LSC nor all the responsibilities of a principal who must also deal with awarding bodies, inspectors, representatives of the local community and of their staff, etc, etc, etc.

Stephen Ball has summarised the combined effects on staff of the new styles of management, of the market, and of accountability, and I present a shortened form of his summary in Box 6.7. In my words, staff have to learn to cope with the hyperactivity of ideologically-driven politicians, which has resulted in both hyper-competition and hyper-accountability. Staff, however, exhibit a range of reactions to these pressures (which are also mediated differently from college to college), from tactical compliance to exiting the sector altogether, with a whole continuum of responses in between (see Coffield *et al.* 2008 for further details).<sup>2</sup>

### Box 6.7

#### Effects on staff

1. increased emotional pressures and stress
2. increased pace and intensification of work
3. decline in sociability at work
4. increase in paperwork, systems maintenance and report writing
5. increased surveillance of teachers' work and outputs
6. a developing gap between senior staff (concerned with budget, recruitment, public relations and impression management) and teaching staff (concerned with learners' needs, record-keeping, control and curriculum coverage)

Adapted from Ball 2008: 52

If this list of tasks was not sufficiently taxing, I then come along and ask principals to prioritise T & L and to find time to teach themselves. I can readily see how my suggestion is likely to be seen as the straw that breaks the diligent camel's back. My response is that, in the unforgiving and tumultuous climate that government creates, it may be helpful to go back to first principles: what is further education for? Who is it for? What is the purpose of the mountain of learning that is undertaken every year in the LSS? Are the millions of learners in the sector gaining qualifications to ensure that the UK has a more productive and competitive economy in order to succeed in the economic wars against Chinese and Indian workers? Surely, as Robin Alexander has argued, our outlook needs to be more **inter-national** than **contra-national**, 'acknowledging that global interdependence carries moral obligations from which no country is immune; and that education can serve to unite rather than divide' (2006: 6). That is one of the main themes of the final chapter.

#### Notes

1. A parliamentary question revealed that it cost £248,000 to change the title of the Department of Trade and Industry to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. This figure covered the cost of stationery, changes to the computer system and a new logo (*The Daily Telegraph*, 8 March, 2008: 8). The personal and familial costs of redundancies are, however, immeasurable.

2. Chris Watkins writes well about the fear which is now part and parcel of teachers' professional lives and which effectively silences the public voice of resistance: 'Open defiance is the least common form of resistance ... strategic defiance is more common, and reflects the Ethiopian proverb, "when the great lord passes by, the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts"' (2008: 8).

## 7 Final comments: the music in the word ‘education’

*The primary concern of the schools should not be with the living [students] will earn but with the life they will lead.*

Halsey *et al.* 1961: 30

I have chosen five themes to pull together all the different strands in the previous chapters: the wilful neglect of the word ‘education’ in favour of learning and skills; the need for a model of change to guide our actions; the need to align our values, priorities and funding; the purposes of all this learning; and, finally, the music in the word ‘education’. In a pamphlet of this size, I have also had to omit other themes such as personalisation and ICT: I leave the ‘cyperbole’ to others.

### 1 A society for the preservation of the word ‘education’

Our learners become (or already are) not just workers, but lovers, parents, consumers and citizens. We need to educate them for all these roles. We must, of course, prepare them to become committed and hard-working employees, but we must also prepare them to become active citizens, discriminating consumers and decent human beings. I want for every child what I want for our two children: a high-quality initial education, an appropriate vocational education and training, and a job worthy of a human being. For many young people, however, their 21 hours per week in college for one or two years may prove to be their only experience of education after they leave school at 16; so we must use that time wisely.

Above, I have deliberately used the word ‘education’ because I am becoming concerned that we shall need to form a society to fight for its preservation. The word ‘education’ has disappeared from the title of the two Ministries, DCSF and DIUS, neither of which contains a reference to FE colleges; and official texts now routinely refer to ‘adult skills’ rather than to ‘adult education’, and to ‘post-16 learning’ rather than to ‘post-compulsory education’. In the same vein, why have so many principals rushed to adopt the title of chief executive? Are they not proud of being the leading educationist of an educational institution? Similarly, the word ‘teaching’ has suffered an eclipse, while ‘learning’ and ‘skills’ ride high as the panacea for all our educational ills. And yet, when I ask learners of all ages what has been the greatest influence on their careers, they immediately discuss the beneficial effects of inspiring, committed, knowledgeable and sensitive teachers as well as the baleful effects of poor teachers.

Jerome Bruner reminds us that ‘we are the only species that *teaches* in any significant way’ (1996: xi, original emphasis) and that, in treating teachers as a necessary evil, ‘we have probably alienated our most important ally in renewal’ (ibid: 84).

For me, T & L is collaborative, reflective, purposeful, open-ended, lifelong and, above all, based on trusting relationships. Education, however, is a broader and more significant concept than T & L. Again, Bruner, for me, sums up the argument well:

*...education is not simply a technical business of well-managed information processing, nor even simply a matter of applying ‘learning theories’ to the classroom or using the results of subject-centred ‘achievement testing’. It is a complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and of fitting its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture.*

Ibid: 43

I would contend that in the LSS at present, we are fitting learners to the needs of the economy and providing them not with a high-quality education in accordance with their needs but with a distinctly inferior form of ‘trainability’ in accordance with their class.

## 2 A model of change

*What’s progress? Being a little quicker than the snail.*

Günter Grass, 1976: 9

In Chapter 1 I argued that we need not only a definition of learning but theories of learning, and I have sought to provide working versions or first drafts of these. But, if we are to improve upon the status quo, then we need another vital ingredient of success: a model of change; that is, explicit theories, principles and tried-and-tested practices, which will enable us to achieve radical and lasting change at the different levels of: the classroom, the institution and the system. Before coming to some constructive suggestions on this theme, I want to make three general points.

First, Seymour Sarason (1990) has argued that previous attempts at educational reform at a national level in the USA have failed and could have been predicted to do so. Why? Partly because complex social organisations like schools and colleges are adept at absorbing change in order to remain stable: ‘organisations respond to external forces by converting changes meant to be fundamental into minor or incremental changes, compatible with existing organisational structures’ (Waks 2007: 2). Moreover, we need to recognise that within organisations change and stability are not opposite, but interacting, forces: ‘stability ...depends essentially upon continual variation of processes to neutralise internal or external sources of variability. Thus organs change in order for the organism or organisation to remain stable. Stability requires change.’ (ibid: 6) And, just as importantly, change requires stability.



Second, governments 'speak the language of change, even of radical change, but change of their making, on their terms, without consultation' (Sarason 1990: 175). This was written about attempts at educational reform in the USA, but it rings very true for this country under both Conservative and Labour administrations. Governments talk about **radical** change, but they rarely address the **roots** of problems and indulge instead in endless structural re-organisations<sup>1</sup> because they find it too difficult to face the structural causes of deep-seated and long-lasting problems, eg the undistinguished history of many British firms that produce such low-value added goods or services that they see no point in training their own workers; or the 'scandalously low' proportion of our young people staying on in education and training post-16 (DfES 2006a: 4).

Third, is it possible to discern in government policy a coherent and well-tested model of change for the sector? The official approach is, in the present state of knowledge, a reasonable one and is probably best summed up by saying that all the known levers of change (eg targets, inspection, staff development) are being pressed simultaneously in the hope that some of them, acting independently or in some unknown combination, will work. We need, however, to do better than this scatter-gun approach which leaves us not knowing why some targets have been hit and others missed. We need a theory to guide and improve our practice.

My first positive suggestion concerns reform at the level of the system. One of the overall aims of the government is to 'transform' the LSS into a self-improving system, 'with the sector taking on much greater responsibility for and control of its own direction and effectiveness' (LSC 2007a: 18). How is this 'transformation' of the system to take place?

Cynthia Coburn's work is helpful in suggesting how we need to move beyond counting minimal improvements in test scores, or in the success-rates of institutions as measured by the retention and achievements of learners, or in the number of colleges adopting a particular reform. She proposed that there are four inter-related dimensions to scaling up reforms in order to create a 'self-improving' system; namely, depth, sustainability, spread and ownership:

- depth – 'change that goes beyond surface features ... to alter teachers' beliefs ... and underlying pedagogical principles' (2003: 4)
- sustainability – change which is continued over time, after the initial enthusiasm and resources have dissipated
- spread of reform principles from classrooms to the policies of colleges and to the system itself
- a shift in the ownership of reform so that it becomes an internal rather than an external reform, with authority for it held by local authorities, colleges and tutors, 'who have the capacity to sustain, spread and deepen reform principles themselves' (2003: 7).



Taken together, these four elements of scaling up call for nothing less than deep, cultural and sustained change on the part of government as well as of all other parties; and this will take years of hard, patient work. They also require far-sighted management and more equitable, collaborative partnerships between all the main players that can only be developed over the long term. The trajectory of change is also important – the aim is to scale **up**, ie upwards from classrooms and workplaces to institutions and networks of institutions. This cannot be achieved by a sudden ‘quantum leap’, a ‘step-change’ or ‘transformation’ or any of the other macho phrases used repeatedly by Ministers.

But how can we at a national level design an intervention that can be flexibly enacted in the thousands of classrooms up and down the country, while remaining faithful to the core principles (or theory) of that intervention? The LSS could usefully draw on the experience of one of the most promising interventions in secondary education, namely, the movement in favour of assessment **for** learning rather than assessment **of** learning, which takes the professional development of tutors as its central axis of efforts to build capacity. After years of careful experimentation in both the UK and the USA, Thompson and Wiliam came to the conclusion that interventions need to be both ‘tight’ and ‘loose’. As they explained:

*The ‘Tight but Loose’ formulation combines an obsessive adherence to central design principles (the ‘tight’ part) with accommodations to the needs, resources, constraints, and particularities that occur in any school or district (the ‘loose’ part) **but only where these do not conflict with the theory of action of the intervention.***

2007: 48, original emphasis

By the ‘theory of action of the intervention’ they mean its core principles. So the main message appears to be that power needs to be shared with practitioners to accommodate local conditions, but that such flexibility must be within the limits imposed by the core principles of the intervention. This change programme uses the creative tension between never telling tutors which techniques they should employ in their classrooms, while at the same time holding them accountable for the decisions they do make.

My third suggestion concerns a promising approach to the problem of transferring good practice. In a large research project carried out for the DfES, Michael Fielding, Michael Eraut and colleagues (2005) studied the factors facilitating or constraining ‘the transfer of good practice’ between secondary schools. The first conclusion from this extensive empirical study is that we need to drop the term ‘the transfer of good practice’, because it misleadingly omits the essential collaborative work that needs to be done jointly by the ‘originator’ and the ‘recipient’ of whatever they consider to be ‘good practice’. Indeed, the researchers advise a complete change of terminology in favour of **‘joint practice development’**, which is based on trusting relationships, a professional exchange of knowledge and skills between equals, and new forms of learning for both parties. These new working arrangements, if they are to prove fruitful, require ‘all schools [to] be encouraged to see themselves as both originators and receivers/ partners of practice’ and ‘considerable investment of time, resources and commitment’ (Fielding *et al.* 2005: 6 and 3). Could it be the considerable cost of this successful approach that has deterred officials from incorporating it into their plans for change in FE? Or does research carried out for one sector (secondary) not percolate through to another (FE)?

### 3 Aligning our values, priorities and funding

I am genuinely puzzled by one particular aspect of current government policy. The values of this government more closely approximate my own than the alternative, but in one case these values have not been translated into either priorities or funding. I refer to the anomaly whereby staff in FE colleges have for years been paid less for doing the same work than their counterparts in schools or sixth form colleges. It is not sufficient for the government to proclaim that 'comparable funding must be allocated for comparable activity' (DfES 2006a: 66), they need to act on their own principle. Nor is it good enough to promise to narrow the gap 'when resources allow' (DfES 2006a: 68), which is 'policyspeak' for 'it is not one of our priorities'. Fletcher and Owen (2005) calculated that it would cost £200 million to eliminate this differential and still the government drags its feet. If Ministers had learned the lesson from their first 10 years in office, namely that the staff in FE need to be treated as essential allies rather than as whingeing adversaries, then they would have eliminated the disparity.

I would like to be helpful by making a constructive proposal. If the two new Secretaries of State for the DCSF and the DIUS want a quick 'hit', with beneficial effects out of all proportion to the investment, then may I suggest that they take £200 million from the huge budget of £2.3 billion for building new FE colleges and use it to improve the motivation of the staff in the LSS by paying them **now** the same as their colleagues doing the same work in schools. Otherwise all their rhetoric about the 'workforce' (and that is the cold, managerial term preferred by the politicians and the policy-makers) being our most valuable resource will continue to sound false, if not hypocritical.

Even at the lowest level of political calculation and party advantage, why do Ministers, as practising politicians, not see the public relations coup of treating with fairness hundreds of thousands of professionals, who are also voters, rather than pouring money into glass and concrete. 'Equal pay before prestigious buildings' is a more engaging slogan than 'Buildings are more than 10 times as important as staff'. As the school-leaver remarked to his headteacher about the new buildings: 'It could all be marble, sir, but it would still be a bloody school.' (CACEE 1963: 2).

I have chosen to highlight above one example of a much larger and long-standing problem, namely, the comparatively poor treatment of post-compulsory education vis-à-vis either schools or universities. In our book on the impact of policy on the sector we list the main inequalities such as the 20% gap between funding for Level 1 students in FE and Level 3 students in sixth-form colleges (Coffield *et al.* 2008: 116). Here, I wish to point out another glaring difference. Where, for instance, are the equivalent bodies for FE or adult and community education of the following: the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, the Council for Industry and Higher Education, the Higher Education Careers Services Unit, the European University Association, Higher Education in the European Research Area, the Higher Education Policy Institute, Higher Education Reach Out to Business and the Community, the Higher Education Development Association, the Higher Education Statistics Agency, Institutional Management in Higher Education, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and the Society for Research into Higher Education.<sup>2</sup>

The equivalent range of organisations to service the LSS simply does not exist. When Sir Andrew Foster described FE as the 'disadvantaged middle child' between schools and HE (2005: 7), he underplayed its subordinate role. FE, and even more so, adult and community education are more akin to two long-neglected children, fostered by benevolent but authoritarian parents, who bring them up not to expect to be treated as well as their natural elder brother (HE) or younger sister (schools). If you consider that analogy overdone, then can you please explain why, given such long-standing historical inequalities, investment in FE colleges increased by 48% in real terms since 1997, but investment in schools by 65% (see Coffield, 2007: 6 for details)? When will this government act to minimise, eliminate and reverse these unjustifiable inequalities? When will its funding more fully exemplify the values it espouses? When will it invest **more** in those who take longer to learn and come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, eg Level 1 and Level 2 learners?

The proposals made throughout this pamphlet would, without doubt, be costly, but the pursuit of excellence, the objective chosen by government, and understood by me as the highest possible quality for the highest possible number, does not come cheap.

## 4 What is the purpose of all this learning?

*We are hunters and gatherers of values*

Seamus Heaney (2008: 8)

If the official projections are realised, in the year 2007/08 over 1,472,000 16–18 year olds will be studying in FE colleges, sixth forms or in apprenticeships; 2,341,000 adults will be taking Skills for Life, ESOL, Level 2 and Level 3 courses or classes for their personal fulfilment; and a further 745,000 people will be taking publicly funded courses of work-based learning. This makes a staggering total of 4,558,000 learners, all engaged in an enormous range of courses and qualifications.

You might expect the scale and the diversity of this huge enterprise to be matched by a correspondingly comprehensive account of the purposes of all this learning. Instead, those purposes tend to be listed briefly at the beginning of official texts, as though they were non-contentious and widely accepted. For instance, the Chairman and Chief Executive of the LSC in the Foreword to their organisation's statement of priorities mention six general objectives, which appear to have been chosen without consulting either staff or learners, in order to underpin the general aim of developing 'skills for social and economic prosperity':

- *creating a culture of demand for skills*
- *increased social inclusion: the role for skills*
- *focusing on priority groups*
- *developing a more commercial approach*
- *responding to a changing landscape*
- *putting skills at the top of the political agenda.*

LSC 2007a: 2-4

Three significant points emerge from their joint statement. First, the market-driven business model is treated as the one and only possible approach, which apparently brings only immediate and lasting benefits but no risks. No other option merits a mention, never mind a discussion; and yet the Webb review of FE in Wales has rejected the market model in favour of more collaboration through consortia (2007).

Second, 'skills for employability' have now been enthroned as the main focus and 'mission' of the sector and as the main means of meeting the ambitious targets set by Lord Leitch. Notice, the objective is not even 'skills for employment', but skills for that weasel word 'employability', which means learners joining the reserve army of labour, while constantly honing their skills in the hope of being called into work, when, where, and at what level of pay suits industry. If learners were to be consulted about what the LSC's priorities should be, they are more likely to stress, not 'employability' skills but jobs; and not what young people in the North East call 'shit' or 'dead end' jobs, but jobs for which they have been trained, jobs with further training and career prospects.<sup>3</sup> When you ask adults why they have returned to learning, their motivations are multiple and interlocking: women, for example, go back to college to regain their self-confidence after child-rearing; **and** to help their children with their homework; **and** to fill gaps in their own knowledge; **and** to stretch themselves intellectually; **and** to meet other women; **and** to get out of the house; **and** to improve their chances of getting a decent job. They do not return to improve Britain's international economic competitiveness (see Coffield *et al.* 2008).

Third, the first priority of 'skills for employability' is slowly being mediated and misinterpreted in some colleges as if it were the **only** priority, and as a result social inclusion is in danger of being pushed to the margins. There are, for instance, many people attending courses in FE colleges and adult and community centres who are unlikely ever to be able to, or to want to, acquire 'economically valuable skills', but whose learning needs deserve attention, respect and appropriate provision. Let me predict: the market-driven model, imposed from the centre, will in this particular case harm the most vulnerable in society and those least able to fight their corner publicly.

In short, what is happening in Stephen Ball's words is 'the subordination of education to economic imperatives ... the social and economic purposes of education have been collapsed into a single, overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness and an increasing neglect or sidelining (other than in rhetoric) of the social purposes of education' (2008: 9 and 11). Education is being reduced to the narrow pursuit of competitive advantage in international trade, an objective rightly close to the heart of any Chancellor of the Exchequer but not one likely to inspire staff or students.

We need a new set of priorities for the sector and I wish to suggest the following:

- to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capacities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment

- to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable knowledge-based economy [and society] at local, regional and national levels
- to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society
- to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application to the benefit of the economy and society.

Readers will recognise these four purposes as those proposed by Sir (now Lord) Ron Dearing and his Committee for higher education in the learning society, although I have taken the liberty of adding 'and society' to the second priority and switching the running order to make them more applicable to the LSS (the fourth purpose above appears as the second in the Committee's report, NCIHE, 1997: 72). To recognise the distinctive role of FE, I would suggest an additional purpose: 'to meet the learning needs of the local economy and community by providing appropriate courses for apprentices, second-chance learners and lifelong learners in order to counter disadvantage and inequality'. To those who protest that there should be clear differences in the purposes of the FE and HE systems, I would reply: which of the above aims should be omitted from the education and training of young people and adults in the LSS and why? Would shared purposes between HE and FE not be more in keeping with a tertiary system, as they have in California, where learners move along well-organised, well-financed and well-publicised routes from further to higher education and back again for high-level vocational education? We could, in other words, seize the historic opportunity, missed by Dearing, of replacing the divisive binary line between FE and HE with a tertiary system that celebrates diversity, inclusion and excellence.

I have been surprised by the rather muted response from FE and college principals to the narrow, utilitarian proposals of the Foster and the Leitch reports. Compare the lively and extended public debate and the spate of articles and books on the new set of purposes for HE set out in the Dearing Report. For the LSS to become self-improving and self-regulating, college principals and the chief executives of quangos like QIA and CEL will need not only to 'recognise the political context within which their work is encompassed, but they should more actively engage with it ... if they are incapable or fail to articulate what education is **for**, they fail to be leaders, and become no more than servants of the powerful' (Bottery 2004: 7 and 10, original emphasis).

## 5 The music in the word 'education'

I want to end on a personal, familial and social note. I come from an Irish Catholic family which emigrated to Scotland some time before the First World War in the search for work and in the hope of improving their lot and, more especially, that of their children. My father, James, was the first and only member of the family to go to university, Glasgow, in 1930, at a time when there were only places for around 14,000 new entrants or 2% of his generation. He always said he would never have got through school and university if it had not been for the peace, space and books provided by the local public library. I went up (that's how I thought of it intellectually and morally) to the same university in 1960, when 93,000 or 5% of my age group entered higher education. In 2000, our daughter Emma, after an excellent foundation course in a local FE college, joined our *alma mater* and in that year no less than 950,000 or 36.8% of her age cohort became university students. The increase from 2%, to 5%, to 36.8% represents nothing less than a transformation of British society.

Looking back over 100 years and three generations of my family, I can see three great social movements. First, every time the universities and FE colleges have prised open their doors a little, able students have come forward in sufficient numbers to fill with success the places made available. Second, the Scottish education system in 1918 passed enlightened and inclusive legislation, which financed most of the building costs of separate schools for immigrants of an alien (and to many an unwelcome) faith. Third, education has been for my family, and for hundreds of thousands like it, the route into the professions, and to an honoured, secure and well-paid place in society. Our generation must not forget, however, that we are the beneficiaries of the long and often painful journey made by our parents and grandparents, who needed structural and financial help, as well as education, in order for us to move up in society.

All this is cause for celebration, gratitude and reflection; and so I warmly welcome the most recent advances, brought about by the substantially increased investment in education since 1997, as a result of which millions more have achieved qualifications or received training, some for the very first time. These desirable improvements are, however, accompanied by gross, rising, new and unjustifiable inequalities; in each generation whole swathes of the community have been left behind and continue to be left behind in scabby estates which should outrage our collective conscience.

Moreover, something vital to the whole enterprise is being forgotten. I learned from my father, as he learned from his, to hear the music, the excitement and the hope in the word 'education'. I also learned that it is the job of teachers to help other people's children to hear and respond to that music. We do it because teaching is a noble profession, which dedicates itself to the lot of those who have not had our advantages. We do it because we believe in social justice and, like our parents and grandparents, we want a better world for ourselves, our children and all children. That is the meaning of our lives as teachers.

*Die Hoffnung flüstert sanft mir zu  
Wir werden frei, wir finden Ruh<sup>4</sup>*

**Notes**

1. In much the same way, many new principals feel it necessary to restructure shortly after taking over a college and some do not confine themselves to one restructuring, but introduce permanent revolution into their management style, thus aping one of the worst features of government practice.
2. Similarly, a full and separate supplement is devoted to HE (THES), but FE is dealt with by an additional section (FE Focus), tacked on to the back of the TES, whose principal audience is primary and secondary school teachers.
3. These priorities of learners would make more demanding criteria of success for the LSC and providers, eg what is the destinations of all those who start courses? How many complete their course successfully? How many get jobs? How many get jobs in the trade they were trained in? How many think after all their hard work to gain qualifications that they are stuck in 'dead-end' jobs?
4. 'Hope whispers gently to me  
We shall be free, we shall find rest'  
First prisoner, Act 1, *Fidelio*, Beethoven



## Appendix 1: activities

**Activity 1** can be found at the beginning of Chapter 1 and it asks the reader to provide a definition of learning. The second activity consists of four questions about 10 principles of effective T & L and can be found at the end of Chapter 2.

### Activity 3

In Chapter 2, I invited colleagues to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal that principals and other members of the SMT should themselves teach. Below, I set out my own balance sheet and the conclusion I reach.

Pros	Cons
Principals should exemplify in their own behaviour the pre-eminence of teaching.	The job has become impossible, with too many conflicting demands. This would break the camel's back.
Principals to be seen as lifelong learners, willing to share their learning in the coaching of colleagues and the teaching of students.	Principals may be out of touch with their specialism.
Learners see the staff with the most power devoting their time and energies to helping them succeed.	Developing partnerships with external agencies and mediating government policy are more important.
Principals remain in touch with the changing needs of frontline tutors and learners.	It would be difficult for them to keep certain periods on the timetable free for teaching every week.
Principals to be seen first and foremost as educational leaders, experts in T & L and with their own specialism.	It is not necessary to teach a class regularly to remain in touch with the needs of tutors and learners.

### My conclusion

The arguments against the proposal are challenges to initiative, delegation and planning rather than genuine obstacles; or they are rationalisations and evasions that need to be treated as such. The pros are so compelling that, in my view, they win the day; the symbolic significance of a principal involved in T & L like all other staff is not to be underestimated. Can we have a 'learning organisation', the leader of which exempts himself or herself from the main form of learning taking place in the organisation? This re-ordering of priorities would, however, have to be understood and agreed by governors, the LSC and government.



### Activity 4

In Chapter 5, colleagues were invited to list the questions they would ask their students about their learning. I included this exercise because I have found it difficult to engage some learners in such discussions because I suspect they are unused to reflecting on how they learn. The questions I have found most helpful in getting a good discussion going are:

1. What was your best experience of learning? What made it so good? What can we learn from that experience? (Similar questions about 'your worst experience')
2. What do you enjoy learning? What do you not enjoy learning?
3. What helps you to learn? What prevents you?
4. How do tutors help you learn? How could they be more helpful?
5. What kind of things do you learn from your friends? How important is this informal learning to you?
6. How do you assess how well you are learning?
7. What kind of feedback or comments on your assignments do you learn best from?
8. How could you improve your learning? Do you set yourself targets? How do you assess if you have hit the targets?
9. Do you challenge yourself to learn something you find difficult? Are you prepared to move out of your 'comfort zone'?
10. Are you willing to try different ways of learning?
11. What gaps in knowledge and skills do you think you have? What are your plans for filling them?
12. What do you want to learn now?

## Appendix 2 Coffield's learning or teaching styles questionnaire

### (CLOTS 2008)<sup>TM</sup>

Write your name, sex and maternal grandmother's favourite colour in the space I've forgotten to provide.

#### 1. I learn best by:

- |   |                          |   |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| a. internalising the wit and wisdom of Homer Simpson on TV                | <input type="checkbox"/> | V |
| b. listening to myself talk   | <input type="checkbox"/> | A |
| c. throwing the books at the wall   | <input type="checkbox"/> | K |
| d. rubbing the bumps on my forehead (sorry, pre-frontal cortex)           | <input type="checkbox"/> | T |
| e. following the clear, simple instructions of the IT staff               | <input type="checkbox"/> | O |
| f. listening to boring speakers and working out why I disagree with them. | <input type="checkbox"/> | ! |

#### 2. My brain hurts when:

- |  |                          |   |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| a. I see students being labelled 'pragmatists' or 'theorists' after a 10-minute questionnaire.                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | V |
| b. I listen to politicians making vacuous speeches on education based on only the evidence they like.                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | A |
| c. I forget to take a glass of Côte de Rhone with every glass of sparkling Buxton water.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | K |
| d. I compare the very tangible benefits for those attending a City Academy against the damage done to other local schools. | <input type="checkbox"/> | T |
| e. I try to make a connection between answering 10 daft questions and how I learn or teach.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | O |
| f. I'm completely VAKT.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | ! |

#### 3. I've worked out the incredibly sophisticated theory behind this questionnaire, so I'm tempted not exactly to cheat or lie but to apply a little spin. I am:

- |                      |                          |         |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| a. Tony Blair        | <input type="checkbox"/> | XPM     |
| b. Howard Gardner    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Prof    |
| c. Brain Jim         | <input type="checkbox"/> | CLPTRP  |
| d. Alistair Campbell | <input type="checkbox"/> | BGSTNRD |
| e. Ruth Kelly        | <input type="checkbox"/> | WHO?    |
| f. Chris Woodhead    | <input type="checkbox"/> | RTWLR   |

**4. I learn best with:**

- a. a fag in my mouth ☐
- b. a glass of 25 year old Macallan in my hand ☐
- c. a double espresso stiffened with a little pill ☐
- d. a wet towel round my head ☐
- e. without a theory or definition of learning; I just 'suck it and see' ☐
- f. all of the above, while listening actively to my partner ☐

**5. I learn best after:**

- a. hearing of my team's latest 1–0 annihilation of Man U ☐
- b. two weeks in the Bahamas ☐
- c. organising our early retirement ☐
- d. reading deeply about theories of learning ☐
- e. the spontaneous joy felt on hearing about the government's latest initiative this week ☐

**6. I'd describe my teaching style as:**

- a. modelled on Gradgrind ☐
- b. fuelled by Mogadon ☐
- c. better than those who can only inspect ☐
- d. good enough ☐
- e. student centred; I give the little buggers equal respect ☐

**7. The metaphor which best describes my teaching style is:**

- a. subject seller ☐
- b. young people's friend ☐
- c. government apparatchik ☐
- d. controller of the untamed ☐
- e. Socratic ☐

**8. As a tutor, I'm able to take only one of the following. I would choose:**

- a. a 10% pay cut ☐
- b. weekly meetings with the parents of all my students who present difficulties ☐

(No, you must tick one box)

**9. I differentiate my class into:**

- a. one group ☐
- b. two groups ☐
- c. three groups ☐
- d. four groups ☐
- e. what's differentiation? ☐

**10. Learning, like child rearing, is always fun. I've most fun when:**

- a. teaching Level 1, Basic Maths revision ☐ S-M
- b. watching my team lifting the Cup ☐ NCL (hope springs eternal)
- c. clubbing 'til 4 am ☐ HDNST
- d. I take my clothes off and ... ☐ NYM
- e. in staff meetings we revise our Mission Statement yet again ☐ BRWNSE

**Technical data****Reliability**☐ zero**Validity**☐ no tests carried out**Impact on practice**☐ nil

But please, don't let these findings deter you from using it.

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## Glossary

- ACL** Adult and Community Learning
- ASL** Adult Safeguarded Learning
- CEL** Centre for Excellence in Leadership
- CETTs** Centres of Excellence in Teacher Training
- CPD** Continuing Professional Development
- DCSF** Use the mnemonic 'Department for Cushions and Soft Furnishings' to remember Department for Children, Schools and Families
- DIUS** Think of 'Department for Ingenious, Unworkable Strategies' to remember Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
- EMA** Education Maintenance Allowance
- ESF** European Social Fund
- ESOL** English for Speakers of Other Languages
- ESRC** Economic and Social Research Council
- FEDA** Further Education Development Agency
- FEU** Further Education Unit
- FLT** Foundation Learning Tier
- G & T** If you need to be told what this stands for, you need to get out more.
- HMI** Her Majesty's Inspectorate
- ICT** Information and Communication Technologies
- IfL** Institute for Learning
- IoE** Institute of Education
- ITT** initial teacher training
- LSC** Learning and Skills Council
- LSDA** Learning and Skills Development Agency
- LSN** Learning and Skills Network
- LSS** learning and skills sector
- LLUK** Lifelong Learning UK
- NCIHE** National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education
- NEET** Not in education, employment or training
- PCET** Post-Compulsory Education and Training
- PMSU** Prime Minister's Strategy Unit
- QIA** Quality Improvement Agency
- QUANGO** Quasi Autonomous Non Governmental Organisation
- SMT** Senior Management Team
- T & L** Teaching and Learning

- TLC** Transforming Learning Cultures, a TLRP project
- TLRP** Teaching and Learning Research Programme
- TtG** Train to Gain
- TUC** Trades Union Congress
- WBL** work-based learning

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‘In an age of government priorities and targets, just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority...’ This is the topic that the Learning and Skills Network asked Professor Frank Coffield to explore as a part of our series of projects on teaching and learning. Professor Coffield has certainly risen to the challenge, creating an independent and inspiring piece of work. In his own uniquely challenging way, he argues that teaching and learning should regain its rightful place as the main focus of the post-compulsory education sector. This report will strike a chord with the many people working across education who are driven by the desire to help learners achieve their goals.

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