



**Teaching pupils how to learn:
national conference and launch of Learning
to Learn project research findings**

23rd May 2002

**New Connaught rooms
London**

Conference Report

Learning to Learn: conference report

23rd May 2002

Background and introduction

This report summarises the Learning to Learn conference which took place at New Connaught Rooms, London on 23rd May 2002. The conference was attended by 200 teachers and other practitioners and saw the launch of two publications from Phase 1 of the Campaign for Learning co-ordinated Learning to Learn in Schools action research project: the Research Report and *Teaching pupils how to learn: research, practice and INSET resources*.

Bill Lucas chaired the day and started by welcoming participants. He went on to tell the story of a time when he appeared against the historian David Starkie on Radio 4's Moral Maze. Starkie, a famously fierce intellectual combatant, was flummoxed when Bill managed to wrong-foot him by remembering the date that Alfred Binnet invented the concept of IQ, showing how frail the ice is that supports many supposedly 'intelligent' people.

Bill then asked participants to talk about their vision of the classroom of the future. He then raised a note of caution for those who were too visionary by announcing some of the results from the Campaign-commissioned MORI survey of over 2500 secondary pupils earlier this year.

Which three of the following do you do most often in class?

	2002	2000
Copy from the board or a book	67%	56%
Listen to the teacher talking for a long time	37%	37%
Have a class discussion	31%	37%
Spend time thinking quietly on my own	24%	22%
Work in small groups to solve a problem	22%	25%
Take notes while my teacher talks	20%	25%
Talk about my work with a teacher	16%	22%
Learn about things that relate to the real world	12%	11%
Work on a computer	10%	12%

Revolution or side-show?
Sir Christopher Ball

Sir Christopher began by painting a bleak picture of today's classrooms: last year's OECD PISA report showed a disappointing minority of 15 year-olds are disaffected given the UK's investment in education. Whereas 25 per cent in most countries say school is not a place they want to go, 25 per cent say so in the UK. In terms of performance, one in six leave school with poor basic skills.

Of course, many learners think they are too stupid to learn. Learning to Learn offers a possible solution to this but Sir Christopher put several caveats on this. Firstly, he said it cannot be a 'survival manual', since many people will

inevitably not find it that. Thus, for example, it must be about more than tricks of the trade such as mind-mapping. Secondly, he has issues with the title 'Teaching pupils how to learn', since we don't yet know how to do it, and since it must anyway be a discussion with learners, exploring their individual idiosyncrasies, rather than a teaching process.

Ultimately, Learning to Learn must be about the science of learning and Sir Christopher warned that classrooms as we know them may not survive this. He then set about defining what he sees as the important considerations in this.

- He gave two definitions for **talent**, the first that it has a glass ceiling, the second that it is an iceberg, with only about 1/5 above water and the rest submerged and hidden.
- An education system which starts by defining the curriculum, with the pedagogy following on, is wrong. The **how should govern the what**.
- He stated that if he is personally comfortable as a learner he will learn anything. For him successful learning rests on **five C's**:
 - choice
 - confidence
 - challenge
 - clarity
 - comfort
- We need a **new curriculum** for the 21st Century, rather than Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA), we need Attitudes first and foremost, followed by Skills and then Knowledge (an ASK curriculum).
- We need to move from the cumulative learning that we all know to **transformational learning**, like the moment when you first learn to ride a bike.
- Learners, like walls about to be decorated, need priming, so that they are **ready to learn**. Sir Christopher described a recent session using the Talent Key, which has been developed by the Talent Foundation to prime adults in the workplace, with seriously disaffected teenagers at a special school in Oaktree, Liverpool. The school is extremely excited about the positive results from the two day course.
- We are not yet ready to 'teach pupils how to learn' since first we must focus on **teacher development**. Just as we would be nervous of a doctor who wasn't continuously involved in professional development, so teachers should have access to continuous exploration of the science and art of learning.

So, Sir Christopher concluded that the conference was a chance to relaunch education. Learning to Learn, he said, is neither the sideshow or revolution of his title, but a chance for reconstruction.

Professor Guy Claxton

Guy began by stating his support for the Campaign's Learning to Learn project which has put into practice much of his thinking over the past 20 years. The *Teaching pupils how to learn* report sets out evidence that Learning to

Learn works and is practical, overcoming excuses he has encountered in the past for why people shouldn't adopt such approaches. Equally importantly, the approach has increasingly won teachers' hearts and minds, reminding them why they came into teaching. Guy referred to similar initiatives taking place around the world, for example in Russia, the US and Canada. Of course, that is not say Learning to Learn does not have its critics, such as Chris Woodhead who feels that it risks throwing out the content of education, but Guy felt this was an invalid criticism as Learning to Learn combines content and learnacy skills.

So, Guy asked, where do we go from here? He set out eight 'mores':

1. We still need **more momentum** in order to overcome excuses and what Sir Christopher described as the 'glass ceiling' view of the world. If children are finding learning difficult it is because they have not yet built up their learning muscles. If you consider yourself stupid, you become so, whereas if people see learning according to Sir Christopher's iceberg approach, they will relish opportunities for growth.
2. We need to generate a greater **sense of urgency**. It is not just that Learning to Learn can be done, it must be done. In today's complex world, young people must feel more confident than ever, yet at the moment even the school 'successes' reported feeling unconfident in a recent Industrial Society survey. Three articles in the most recent Observer newspaper highlighted the effects of this lack of confidence – disaffected boys, self-harming girls and young people feeling anonymous and rootless.
3. Echoing Sir Christopher's plea for an ASK curriculum, Guy stated that we need more emphasis on the **dispositions** required for learning and how these can be developed - for example 'stickability' (sticking with the learning even when it's hard), knowing how to ask good questions, playfulness and creativity. This requires more than just tips and techniques, teachers must model learning approaches such as mind-mapping, not just teach them as revision skills. This is the difference between knowing how to read and being a reader.
4. We need more **co-creation** of Learning to Learn. The most powerful learning is when teachers and learners learn together and ask 'how did do that?'. An example of this is the 'What do you do when you don't know what to do?' posters created by pupils and teachers in many classrooms around the country.
5. We need more **structuring of learning** in classrooms. For example, so that all Year 7 pupils are stretched and challenged. Young people also need to develop real relationships with adults who are not their parents, i.e. teachers. But too often we bore them. For example, one teacher found that her Year 7's felt that 85 per cent of what she did with them was too easy.
6. We need more emphasis on **transfer**, with learning relating to the real world outside, not just for the next SAT or GCSE exam.
7. We need more **coherence and depth in the theory**. At the moment it is a mish mash, with misplaced concepts such as 'we must drink more water or our brains will dry out' potentially ruining everything.

8. We need to move beyond Learning to Learn to think about **what young people deserve from education** in order to deal with life in the 21st Century. The risk is insecurity, not just about learning, but about belonging. Families shift and move around ever more rapidly, displacing young people from their peers and known context. Young people's friendship groups are shallow and shifting anyway, which is stressful in itself. Schools need therefore to offer some sense of belonging.

Lessons learned from the Learning to Learn project – or Reasons to be cheerful

Dr Jill Rodd, Research Leader, Learning to Learn project

Jill started by saying that the conference was a chance to celebrate the excellent work done by the 24 Learning to Learn action research schools in Phase 1 of the project from September 2000 to July 2001. 24 schools working with about 2000 pupils from age 3 to 18. The approach was school-based enquiry, meaning that the schools themselves set the agenda and were supported by advisory board mentors, regular INSET sessions and the research team, which included Jill, Professor Elizabeth Leo of De Montfort University and the Campaign for Learning project team.

Jill gave the project's definition of Learning to Learn, which is that it is a 'process of discovery about learning. It involves a set of principles and skills which, if understood and used, help learners learn more effectively and so become learners for life. At its heart is the belief that learning is learnable'. Jill believes that the project's findings begin to inform a science of learning and learnacy.

So what did the schools look at? Areas explored included: Learning styles, Multiple Intelligences, Learning environments and Learning to Learn induction courses. Evidence came from quantitative and qualitative data, including pupil, teacher and parent observations and SAT, CAT and GCSE scores. All this focussed on how pupils learn and the impact of this on standards and motivation and the development of independent learning. It also looked at the impact on teachers and the wider school culture.

Lessons on teaching

- **Teacher morale:** In many ways the strongest finding from the project was the impact of using Learning to Learn approaches on teacher satisfaction. Teachers involved in the project and their colleagues reported feeling 'revitalised' by focussing on their 'core purpose for coming to the classroom – learning'. As a result morale had gone up in the staffrooms involved.
- **Role of the headteacher:** where heads and senior staff had been involved in the project is had succeeded in achieving its aims.
- Teachers awareness of **different teaching and learning styles** impacts on pupil motivation and confidence, particularly where creativity is fostered and pupils' thoughts are respected.

- **Teacher autonomy:** Learning to Learn offers teachers opportunities for autonomy and creativity in what can otherwise be a constrained environment.
- **Delivery:** Learning to Learn supports the National Curriculum and can be embedded in different ways, for example through Science, Maths, Geography etc.
- Teachers as researchers are more **confident** and those that share good practice become more **effective**.

Lessons on learning

- **Learning is learnable:** even the youngest pupils benefit from knowing about their learning style etc.
- **Motivation:** pupils who understand Learning to Learn find learning more enjoyable.
- **Raised standards:** confident learners are more likely to realise their potential across the board.

Evidence from the project also covered:

- Ways in which the approach could be embedded into the culture of schools and staffrooms
- the role of Learning to Learn in raising family/community understanding and expectations.

18 of the schools have gone on to Phase 2 of the project which will report about the same time next year.

Plenary comment and discussion

The plenary session which followed included a panel made up of:

- Maggie Atkinson, Cheshire County Council
- Dr Lesley Saunders, General Teaching Council
- Jeremy Krause, DfES Key Stage 3 Strategy
- Tony Hinkley, Ellowes Hall School/Secondary Heads Association

Comments included:

- The fact that many schools are already doing excellent work in this field, which should be celebrated.
- The fact that the Government's Key Stage 3 strategy is already addressing many of these issues, reflecting much of the thinking that has informed the project.

Workshops

Learning to Learn and the Key Stage 3 Teaching and Learning in Foundation Subjects strategy

Jeremy Krause, Regional Director, Teaching and Learning in Foundation Subjects KS3 strategy, DfES

Jeremy started by talking about his own experience working in schools in Cheshire, where cross-hierarchy, cross-curricular groups of teachers had worked successfully together on developing approaches to teaching and learning. He sees this kind of approach as informing the new Key Stage 3 strategy, which includes coaching modules for teacher to teacher professional development in the TLF strand.

He demonstrated an example taken from the Teaching through Geography work of David Leat. This involved participants drawing while he read an extract from an Isabelle Allende story about Mexican illegal immigrants to America. He showed how many deep learning points about the structure of society and the economy could be drawn out from people's responses to this story. He then went to lead a fascinating discussion about how different people had found the activity, how Jeremy had presented it and the different learning styles and issues that this presented for teachers to consider.

He finished by raising a number of points and questions:

- Education is principally about concepts that learners are part of and can help construct together.
- Do we teach to all learning styles in our classes or just some in the expectation that others will be picked up elsewhere in the curriculum?
- Should we always seek to expand learners' repertoire of learning styles and approaches?
- The TLF outlines many learning strategies, but the big question is what will be the engaging content for pupils in the 21st Century?
- The role of the teacher is orchestration of the different learning styles in the classroom.

Learning to learn in primaries

Elaine Wilmot, Head teacher, West Grove Primary School, London

West Grove Primary School are trying to develop lifelong learners by equipping children with the skills needed for learning and the language to describe their learning preferences to others.

Elaine's workshop started with a short meditation to illustrate how important it is to be mentally ready for learning. She then spoke about learning from early childhood.

Elaine's school runs a full community programme to enable parents to become true partners in the educative process. They offer baby massage, music and art for babies and toddlers and a Toddler Group. The school runs sessions for parents on understanding early child development, provide opportunities for them to meet with 'experts' on sleep, diet, play, etc and hold a regular coffee morning / support group for parents who have children with special educational needs. This community aspect of the school is extremely

important in beginning the dialogue about individual learning needs.

West Grove Primary School plan their curriculum around what children already know and the questions that they would like answering. In this way, existing knowledge is built on and provides an opportunity for the child 'experts' to lead on a topic. The children plan their learning using mind maps and use their maps as a review tool at the end of topics. Individual learning styles are considered when planning activities to try to ensure a broad repertoire to enable all children to access the learning. Brain gym and pulse learning sessions are used to break down the learning into manageable chunks.

Physical needs of the learners are a prime consideration. Fruit and water is available all day in all of the classes for when children feel the need. The children on school council also asked that set playtimes be banned because they interfered with their learning. Classes now take a break when it is appropriate to them.

All adults who work in classes are seen as learning facilitators, including parents who come in to help. All adults, whether staff or voluntary helpers, receive the same training about learning to learn so that they can be effective in the classroom, and in the case of parents, outside the classroom too.

The school concentrates particularly on the process of learning rather than the content. A lot of time is spent discussing how children have learned to make the learning process explicit for them.

Learning to Learn in and out of the classroom

Maggie Farrar, Director, University of the First Age

Maggie first asked attendees to think about the things we did or learnt out of school and come up with three words that described this type of learning. Words included, excitement, enthusiastic leaders, purposeful, challenging, scary, voluntary, hands-on, immersed and voluntary.

She then talked about the work of the National University of the First Age which is committed to developing out of hours learning programmes for young people in partnership with the home, the school and the community. This focuses on the 85% of waking time that young people spend in the home and community and aims to capture these areas which are rich in possibility and potential but may not be realised to its fullest extent. Out of school learning is viewed by the UFA as a creative transformational space recognising the fact that teachers can't do it all on their own.

The core principles of UFA are:

- Students and staff entitlement to learning through two linked institutions – school and UFA
- Brain based accelerated learning approaches to learning

- Promotion of learning teams
- Linking the home, school and community curriculum
- Unshakeable belief in the potential of all to achieve access

Maggie then went on to talk about the opportunities for learning beyond school. These included

- creative spaces and places where habits could be broken
- new partnerships and learning teams
- testing out the learning to learn curriculum
- students as researchers
- linking areas of learning such as maths/art and science/drama.

The UFA offers teachers the opportunity to try out new approaches to learning and explore areas such as accelerated learning techniques. Teachers see UFA as an experimental arm or 'Research and Development department' of their school. Headteachers have commented that this 'legitimises experimentation and innovation' and leads to 'inclusive and extended classroom practice.' Young people also have the opportunity to act as learners and tutors at the same time, for example in multi-age learning teams, deepening their understanding of the teaching and learning process through direct experience. All this may break the habits and practices of teachers and pupils, facilitating learning experiences of both in school and beyond.

Learning to learn in secondaries: a whole school approach

Mark Lovatt, Head of Science, Cramlington Community High School, Northumberland

Mark described to an audience of around 40 senior teachers and educationalists the journey Cramlington School had taken to integrate Learning to Learn strategies throughout the school. It was emphasised that this was a journey that started in one discipline (Science) and had grown on the basis of the enthusiasm of the Headteacher and Heads of Department and the grass root successes that were being achieved engaging the curiosity of other teachers.

Mark explained that creating a learning environment took time and a culture of sharing ideas and supporting each other through change. It was not a 'bag of tricks' for one-off lessons. Teachers were expected to model learning behaviours and new teachers to the school were recruited on the basis that they shared and were prepared to adopt the philosophies and approach to learning that was being introduced.

A number of practical experiences were shared at the workshop and videoed examples of teaching highlighted the impact on both teachers and pupils of the approach to learning being taken. Mark was keen to testify to the success measured in both qualitative and quantitative terms of applying techniques such as Accelerated Learning, Multiple Intelligences and VAK teaching.

Evaluating Learning to Learn in secondaries

Dennis Medway, Deputy Head, Summerhill School, West Midlands

In his workshop, Dennis demonstrated the measureable improvement in student performance from the addition of kinsaesthetic learning activities. Using a very straightforward experiment which was conducted using year 7 students in English, Mathematics and Science, the workshop looked at how the experiment was planned, conducted and evaluated.

Within each subject an element of kinaesthetic learning was provided – in maths it was the making of a cuboid – a CD case, In English it was the physical construction of sentences in teams.

The experiment was to teach a topic and then test student understanding at the end of year exams. The experimental group performed significantly better in the tests than the control group.

The experiment was then put into a context of whole school development in

- a) involving students in their own learning
- b) modifying the learning environment
- c) carrying a whole school through changes in teaching and learning strategies to involve all learning styles, offer challenge and demonstrate that learning can be fun.