

Creating a Learning to Learn School

Annual Conference of Learning to Learn

Outcomes note

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New Connaught Rooms
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Report prepared by:

DEMOS
people changing politics

What do we mean by Learning to Learn?

Bill Lucas, Former Chief Executive, Campaign for Learning

'Learning to learn' is not a quick fix. We don't need 'learnacy' like we have literacy or numeracy strategies or 'yet another initiative' of any kind.

Learning to learn is:

- a set of deep learning strategies
- a model of how we learn
- a language to describe what is really important

We need a discourse about learning.

It is an approach to learning that is respectful of the learner.

In a recent large scale survey, 63% of students reported that they spent very high amounts of their time in school copying from the board and 37% said they spent very high amounts of time listening to a teacher talking.

At present in our education system, educators don't learn how the brain works.

Why is learning to learn so important?

- Results go up. Assessment for Learning has produced evidence.
- Preparation for life. Resourceful and resilient.
- Improves teacher retention – motivated, why teachers entered the profession.
- Fun

Learning Styles

Learning styles are based on theories of whether potential is fixed (ability) or expandable (capability).

Examples of learning styles:

- VAK = visual, audio, kinaesthetic – three modes, not styles, of learning.
- Personality tests, e.g IQ and Myers Briggs.
- Behaviour models of learning, e.g. activist, reflector, theorist, pragmatist.
- Multiple intelligences by Gardner, emotional Intelligence by Goleman

Many of the above are views of intelligence. They are all popular at the moment. Added to this list could be Sternberg's work on inkling and superintelligence, and on practical intelligence. The point is that each of the above make unreal distinctions in the ways that people learn. The power of many popular styles is that they allow the general public to let go of IQ and other personality tests which are deeply engrained in our culture.

Lucas says:

- The key questions are: 'are you using the data you get via tests of learning style?' and 'are you using them as alone or as one piece of information amongst many?'
- The real benefit comes from students themselves learning how they learn.
- It also means that teachers must know and be able to articulate what their own model of learning is.

- Focussing on learning styles means looking at student aptitude and student attitude. However, we need to add a third factor – teacher attitude.
- Lucas prefers Piaget's definition of intelligence: 'Intelligence is what you do when you don't know what to do'.

Strategies for learning

Hints and tips can be useful, e.g. Guy Claxton's 5Rs – readiness, resilience etc. The challenge is for people to use what they believe in 'in every aspect of their discourse'. Also, because we are in a complex, uncertain world, the ideas drawn upon need to be flexible and regularly updated.

For teachers, this means being in a 'curious' mood.

Environment for learning

We want to create a cultural and physical environment that is: high challenge, low threat; fit for purpose, etc.

Assessment for learning

Assessment for Learning developed by Black and Wiliam has now produced evaluations on a large-scale that indicate increases in achievement from 6 months of using the programme. One activity in Assessment for Learning is the holding up of traffic lights:

- Red- I haven't got a clue what the teachers/facilitator is talking about,
- Amber – I have a vague clue and if I can sit with someone who is green I'll quickly learn it for myself,
- Green – I've got it.

Another activity in Assessment for Learning is putting your hand up when you don't know. David Bell, Chief Inspector of Schools, has come out and said schools are over-tested. Public examinations, says Lucas, ought to be a celebration of achievement. Pupils should fail and enjoy it. Helping parents to see this is probably as important as helping students learn to learn and educating teachers.

Why learning to learn is important

Professor David Hopkins, Head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit, DfES

Introduction – on the policy agenda

David expressed his commitment to spreading learning to learn across schools and throughout the DfES. Judy Sebba has/is instrumental in this. There is a need to put, for example, thinking skills and assessment for learning much more strongly into policy.

Useful definitions

He called learning to learn 'deep learning strategies' where knowledge, instruction and learning are inextricably linked (cf Bruner) to create 'powerful learning experiences. In practice, it means teaching the teaching strategy to give a learning strategy to people.

The shift:

- There needs to be a shift from informed prescription to informed professionalism. Prescription from the centre will not do alone.
- What is needed is powerful learners who can take their place in the knowledge society.

- The government was committed to building programmes and now it needs to be concerned with building capacity.

Hopkins then talked about school improvement and the government agenda more widely. He seemed keen to take this opportunity to convey his commitment to and ideas for the education system. He talked about every new policy being underpinned by the core principles of learning and teaching, school improvement and system wide reform, and the need for practical ways to feed these in to the culture of schools. At the end, he stressed the need for moral purpose and social justice as underpinning policies, and the need to develop a language and discourse across the system.

Questions

Hopkins was asked how the idea of learning to learn can reach a wider number of schools – those who aren't yet 'converted'? He answered:

1. develop a language around learning to learn, teaching and learning. Part of the problem is that the UK is not sophisticated in this.
2. underperformance is due to a lack of teaching and learning culture, and leadership is therefore trying to focus their work and support on this.
3. networking and collaboration helps the spread.

Leading learning schools

Heather du Quesnay, Chief Executive, National College for School Leadership

Heather gave a short, sharp and passionate presentation on the NCSL's commitment to ideas around learning to learn. She emphasised the need for a more radical, dramatic next phase in school improvement, where the system becomes able to adapt to students' needs and dissatisfaction with the out-of-date 'factory' model of schooling is left behind.

Barriers to learning include competitive cultures, blunt accountability systems, isolation and time.

Re-structuring time for professional talk is important. Teachers 'need to carve out time to talk'. Some schools are moving to 4 ½ day teaching weeks, some 11 day fortnights. Each school needs to re-design itself so that this can happen.

School to school

Heather talked of a need to 'ensure that learning transmits itself from school to school to make the whole system a richer, more dynamic and learning-focused place'.

Learning is a social process – engage, connect, share. Need trust to do this.

Readiness - Readiness to learn is key. Readiness is a useful idea: it says things about your emotional state, your environment, whether you are feeling curious.

Role of the National College of School Leadership

The NCSL creates the 'rules of engagement' through which people can be brought together for professional dialogue and improvement. Its programmes aim to build a knowledge base.

Question

Heather was asked what the NCSL is doing about student leadership. She answered that there is a lot going on around the country, that she's meeting with Louise Raymond from BSIP after Easter to discuss this further, that the NCSL's core mission is about adult professional

development and so it has not focussed on this very much and that well-led schools will have a place for student leadership.

Appendix - Agenda

- 9.00 **Arrival and Registration**
- 10.00 **Chair's welcome**
Susie Parsons, Chief Executive, Campaign for Learning
- 10.05 **What do we mean by Learning to Learn?**
Dr Bill Lucas, Former Chief Executive, Campaign for Learning
- 10.45 **Why Learning to Learn is important**
Professor David Hopkins, Head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit, DfES
- 11.15 **What difference does Learning to Learn make? The research project findings**
Dr Jill Rodd, Learning to Learn Project Research Leader
- 11.45 **Workshops:**
- 1- **The Head's role in developing a Learning to Learn secondary school**
Sheila Ireland, Headteacher, Malet Lambert School, Hull
 - 2- **The Head's role in developing a Learning to Learn primary school**
Elaine Wilmot, Headteacher, West Grove Primary School, London; Dot Charlton, Headteacher, Hipsburn County First School, Northumberland
 - 3- **Developing lifelong learning dispositions**
Dennis Medway, Deputy Head, Summerhill School, West Midlands; Liz Ladd and Sarah Jackson, Class Teachers, Christ Church Primary School, Wiltshire
 - 4- **Learning to Learn in the primary classroom**
Jack Newton, Class Teacher, West Grove Primary School, London
 - 5- **Developing Learning to Learn into Key Stage 4**
Jackie Beere, AST, Champion School, Northampton; Rob Musker, Project Manager, Cornwallis School, Kent
 - 6- **Developing Learning to Learn in Key Stage 3**
Sue Jones, L2L Co-ordinator/Asst KS3 Manager, and Helen Beckett, English/MFL Teacher, Ellowes Hall School, West Midlands
 - 7- **Overcoming disaffection and underachievement through Learning to Learn**
John Welham, Learning Co-ordinator, Camborne School and Community College, Cornwall; Sara Davey, Deputy Head, Prince William School, Northamptonshire
 - 8- **Learning to Learn and teacher professional development**
Simon Cogan, Learning Co-ordinator, Ogmere School, Wales; Sue Egersdorff, Senior Primary Adviser, and John Hattersley, Educational Inclusion Development Co-ordinator, Cheshire LEA
- 12.45 **Lunch**
- 13.45 **Workshops repeated**
- 14.55 **Leading learning schools**
Heather du Quesnay, Chief Executive, National College for School Leadership
- 15.25 **Circle Time: developing the emotionally intelligent learner**
Jenny Mosley, Director, Jenny Mosley Consultancy
- 15.55 **Final comments and close**