Inside Evidence

Putting research into practice

LSIS
LEARNING AND SKILLS IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

Inside this issue

Practitioner research
How to irritate your learners

Research Conference
19 June 2012
#RESCONF

Research LSIS 2012
Research conference announced

Viewpoint
Vocational pedagogy – some thoughts from Geoff Stanton

Welcome

Welcome to the Spring 2012 edition of Inside Evidence in which we focus on two intimately linked issues: the role of professional development and the way in which research informs it.

As the improvement body for the further education and skills sector, understanding the most effective ways to support teachers in improving their practice is of fundamental importance to LSIS.

Very helpful then are the findings of the latest Institute for Learning (IfL) survey of CPD in colleges and training organisations, reviewed inside, considered alongside supporting analysis from Geoff Petty and John Hattie, all of which point to similar conclusions about the most effective forms of CPD.

The role of teacher as action researcher is backed up by the IfL report. And the wider evidence reviewed by Petty and Hattie points strongly away from top-down CPD delivery models and instead identifies empowering teachers to undertake self-directed and collaborative development opportunities, in which they also involve their learners, as the most effective ways of improving teaching and learning.

Investigations into how professionals change their practice in the light of evidence show that simple transmission of the research evidence to the practitioner is not usually very effective. In fact, interaction is needed between the practitioner and the evidence. The practical problem needs to be clearly identified, and then high quality evidence found and debated in relation to it. Changes in practice are then designed, building on the evidence but adapted to the context.

Several practical examples of this approach can be found inside, in the Innovation section.

And how practitioners are best supported to use evidence is one of the themes we will tackle in the LSIS research conference this year, details of which have just been announced **here**. Entitled **'Improving vocational learning through research informed practice'**, our two keynote speakers are experts in their respective fields. Professor Sandra Nutley is well known for her research into how evidence gets used by policy makers and public service practitioners and Professor Lorna Unwin is a specialist in vocational education. Further information about the conference can be found inside on **page 37**. I do hope to see you there.

Finally, I'm delighted to be able to announce in this edition that work is underway at LSIS to run a fourth year of Research Development Fellowships (RDFs) with the support of SUNCETT. Further details will be announced during the summer term; please keep checking our research news page **here** for further details.

IE is produced by an editorial team comprising Andrew Morris, Ian Nash and myself. Additional writing was contributed to this edition by Sue Jones. We would like to thank all those working in the sector who have submitted material for this edition.

We are always on the look-out for interesting projects to feature in future editions. If you have articles to send us, or any comments on IE please send them to me at **research@lsis.org.uk**

Sheila Kearney
Head of Research, LSIS

Highlights

Contents

Practitioner research
How to irritate your learners

Innovation
Students collaborating through technology

Research
What are teaching models in vocational education?

Research
Formative assessment – a springboard or a straitjacket?

Viewpoint
Apprenticeship rehabilitated in a post-modern world?

Research networking
The Learning and Skills Research Network

Practitioner research

How to irritate your learners

**"O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us."**

...appropriate lines by Robbie Burns to introduce a fascinating report by practitioner researchers in Scotland's FE Regional Research Network (FERRN). The study, Holding up the Mirror, contrasts learners' views about their teachers with teachers' views of learners. It asked learners what teacher behaviours they found most detrimental or helpful to the learning and teaching process and asked teachers the same in relation to learners.

A questionnaire was developed through a small-scale pilot study with a sample of 174 learners and 55 teachers from a range of

subject areas in six participating colleges. The questionnaires, based on behaviours identified as helping or impeding the learning process were subsequently administered in five colleges. A total of 547 learner and 106 staff questionnaires were returned and the data were analysed using SPSS software.

Findings
The complete findings for learners and staff, together with the blank questionnaires and qualitative responses are available in the report **here**.

Tables 1 and 2 give just the top ten results in each case.

Table 1. Learner perceptions of Teacher behaviours

	Irritating behaviours	Frequency
Top 10	Talks too much / for too long	169
	Assumes we already know things we don't know	143
	Treats learners differently (has favourites / picks on individuals)	130
	Is patronising or condescending	126
	Doesn't give clear information about course / unit requirements	109
	Doesn't explain topics clearly	101
	Repeats the same things over and over	101
	Learners indicated teachers had no irritating behaviours	99
	Goes off at tangents on irrelevant things	95
	Crams in a lot of work just before an assessment	88
	Is serious / lacking in humour	86

Helpful behaviours	Frequency
Is friendly and approachable	240
Treats me with respect / like an adult	198
Gives us good notes / handouts to support our learning	186
Has a sense of humour	167
Gives helpful feedback	159
Prepares us well for assessment	154
Uses humour and fun in teaching	151
Shows enthusiasm for the subject and makes it interesting	127
Is helpful and supportive	119
Explains topics fully and clearly	114
Total responses	**2735**

Top 10

Table 2. Teacher perceptions of learner behaviours

Irritating behaviours	Frequency
Has poor or irregular attendance	49
Expects to gain unit without putting effort into developing skills / knowledge	49
Disrupts teaching (e.g. chatting / laughing)	42
Is rude or disrespectful towards me or fellow learners	36
Comes unprepared to class (e.g. without pen / folder / kit)	34
Uses a mobile phone in class	27
Distracts other learners from their work	26
Doesn't take responsibility for own learning or actions	26
Doesn't focus on tasks in class	25
Talks over me or other learners	25

Top 10

Top 10	Helpful behaviours	Frequency
	Is motivated / enthusiastic / willing to work	84
	Has good attendance at classes	66
	Takes responsibility for own learning	51
	Comes to class prepared / equipped	43
	Pays attention / listens in class	43
	Shows respect for fellow learners and staff	43
	Asks for help when needed	42
	Participates in class discussions / activities	40
	Comes to class on time	22
	Submits work on time	21
	Total responses	**530**

Learner Perceptions

The researchers identified five factors that contribute to positive relationships with teachers: communication, organisation, pedagogy, social interaction and integrity.

Communication: Learners want to have topics explained to them clearly, in a context of clarity, about the requirements of the course they are following. Barriers arise when teachers do not check learners' prior knowledge and assume they already know things they don't know.

Organisation: Relations are undermined when teachers arrive late to class, are unprepared, or are slow to mark or return work. They are further hindered when assessments are crammed in at the end of the course or are given at short notice.

Pedagogy: Learners appreciate teachers who use a variety of methods and who include practical activities or demonstrations. They want interaction in the classroom with a teacher who stays focused on the topic, and supports learning with helpful notes and handouts. They also appreciate constructive feedback.

Social interaction: Learners in this study give primacy to this aspect of the classroom experience. They want the learner-teacher relationship to be a mutually respectful, adult-to-adult one in which they feel safe to ask questions and sometimes "have a laugh", in the knowledge that any disruptive behaviour will be managed.

Integrity: It is very important to learners to have teachers who are helpful and supportive, who encourage and take extra time and effort to help their learners succeed. They respond to teachers who demonstrate genuine commitment and enthusiasm for their subject and their work. But more than that, they need teachers to be trustworthy: to do what they say they will do, and to deal fairly and honestly with them.

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers' responses hint at the notion that the learner has to fulfil their side of an unspoken 'learning contract' whose terms include respect, responsibility and commitment.

Respect: What appear to teachers to be disrespectful, rude or disruptive behaviours towards them, or other learners, hinder the creation of an environment within which effective learning can occur.

Responsibility: Teachers want learners to share the responsibility for their learning, and to demonstrate this by participating in class activities, asking questions, completing assigned work, paying attention to feedback and working independently.

Commitment: Teachers can be frustrated by learners saying that something is too hard without really listening or trying. For teachers, commitment is demonstrated by learners who turn up regularly and on time, with the right equipment, prepared to work both in class and outside class time.

Learner / Teacher comparison

Comparing the two studies, it appears that learners and teachers do not always see the teaching enterprise in the same light. The social dimensions of the relationship are very important to learners, less so to teachers who focus more on the procedural aspects of teaching. But there were clear correspondences too. Both groups:

- were irritated when the other came late to class or was unprepared;

- were irritated when the other appeared arrogant or rude;

- wanted the other to show enthusiasm / motivation;

- wanted the other to show them and others respect;

- wanted each other to honour deadlines for handing in work; and

- wanted the other to listen to them.

The authors suggest that vicious / virtuous spirals may be at play here, with negative or positive behaviours on the part of one stimulating negative or positive behaviours on the part of the other. Honest discussion of the impact of these behaviours might lead to new understandings and thus improve the quality of the learning environment.

Apply the findings

The tools used in this study are available in the full report for people wishing to replicate the study. The results could be used as a stimulus for reflecting on practice or in initial training or CPD programmes. Findings could also be shared with learners as a springboard for discussion about helpful and unhelpful behaviours.

Contact
Anne Gillen, Research Manager,
Adam Smith College and Chair of FERRN-East

annegillen@adamsmith.ac.uk

Innovation

Learners give the feedback

Observing teachers in the classroom was once the preserve of the inspector. Today teachers commonly observe one another, as part of the process of professional development. Becky Barnes, a teacher at Farnborough Sixth-Form College, has taken this one step further in a fascinating experiment that puts the learner in the observer role.

She identified a group of ten learners who had aspirations of becoming teachers and organised them as a group of learner researchers to work closely with teachers. The aim was to see if learner observations of lessons could contribute meaningful feedback that would help to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the college. Of course, as spin-off for the student, what better way to think about a career in teaching than to observe an experienced professional at work?

Twelve teachers accepted the invitation to participate and nominated areas they would like feedback on. Learner researchers were partnered with the teacher volunteers on the basis of timetabling matches. The learner researchers were treated as young professionals and received the same formal training that newly qualified teachers receive for lesson observation. This included:

- theory and protocols of observing;

- video clips of lessons to watch; and

- group and individual feedback through completing lesson observation reports.

The process

The process began with pre-observation interviews, 30-minute practice observations and formal feedback using the in-house lesson observation reports. The second phase was organised collaboratively and involved:

- a full 90-minute lesson observation;

- focusing feedback on an area for improvement identified by the teacher;

- making suggestions for a follow-up lesson with the help of the learner researcher; and

- observing the revised lesson.

The learner researchers assigned roles and responsibilities to each other and shared their experience in weekly meetings. Roles included a lead co-ordinator, a minute-taker, writers / reporters and film-makers to record interviews.

Impact

The teachers valued the learner voice highly, commenting for example:

"I was astounded at the professional and perceptive quality of the information that I received."

"I felt I could have an honest conversation with them about what I felt I needed to do in my lessons to make them better. I was able to share my anxieties in a way that I am reluctant to do with colleagues. I felt the whole process was free of judgement!"

"Having a learner voice helps the teacher identify with and reflect on the experiences of a learner."

As a result of the feedback, teachers made a number of changes to their practice. For example, a biology teacher decided to plan more time into lessons for free group thinking by encouraging learners to explore one question in depth as a group before intervention from the teacher. Lessons became less didactic and learners felt that they engaged more coherently as a group. In a law lesson the learner identified one section as being covered too quickly, so the teacher subsequently tried slowing the pace, using role-play and fictitious case studies. A graphics teacher used feedback to alter the structure of tutorials, in particular by asking learners to complete questionnaires before each tutorial, to provide the focus for discussion.

By the end of the project, the learner researchers' opinion of what good teaching involved had also changed. The table below shows the student teachers' rankings of their top ten attributes of a teacher at the start and end of the project.

Student researcher perspective BEFORE	AFTER
1. Patience	1. Knowledge
2. Respect between students and teachers	2. Respect between students and teachers
3. Sense of humour	3. Understanding and resonable
4. Understanding and resonable	4. Organised
5. Organised	5. Set clear aims
6. Set clear aims	6. Inspiring
7. Meet all students needs	7. Patience
8. Knowledge	8. Meet all students needs
9. Confident	9. Confident
10. Inspiring	10. Sense of humour

Readers may be interested to compare these rankings with those found in a different study of learner perceptions of teachers in a group of Scottish colleges; see the article by Anne Gillen on **page 8**.

For readers wanting to pursue this issue further, Becky offers the following suggestions for further reading:

- The full report of her study: **Can we use student observation to provide meaningful information for quality improvement?**

- **Consulting pupils about teaching and learning** – home page of the ESRC network project

- **Students as researchers: enhancing classroom challenges** – a 2008 practitioner research study from the National Teacher Research Panel by Wahiduzzaman, S.M.

- Consulting Pupils: What's in it for Schools? A 2004 book by Cambridge researchers Julia Flutter and the late Jean Rudduck, published by Routledge Falmer

Innovation

"To teach is to learn twice"

"To teach is to learn twice". This quotation from Joseph Joubert captures the spirit of David Herring's novel peer teaching approach in mathematics[1]. A teacher at Farnborough Sixth-Form College, David read about evidence of the positive effect of peer teaching[2] (effect size 0.5[3]) and made a connection with his own observations of his A-level learners.

"Overhearing snippets of their conversations during my A-level mathematics lessons (such as 'How do you do that?') made me realise just how much informal peer teaching usually occurs. I thought it could be beneficial to formalise the process by putting the learners into pairs and asking them to teach each other."

The obvious dilemma he felt was how can anyone teach something they don't already know? He reviewed the literature and searched the internet but turned up surprisingly few resources explicitly designed for peer learning in mathematics and none that gave a learner the ability to "teach" another learner. So he decided to create his own, producing a set of 'You teach – You do' resources. These contained fully-annotated solutions which the learners could use to teach each other, along with questions for learners to solve. The solutions not only provided answers, but in effect created a set of thought bubbles or internal dialogue about the workings of solutions to problems. Using complementary sheets of instructions, learner A was instructed to work on question 1, whilst learner B prompted as required, after which the roles were reversed. It was required that information be transferred orally, articulated by the student.

To work out how to introduce the approach into lessons, David took note of further evidence about effectiveness - that whole class teaching is "one of the most successful teaching methods we have"[4]. He therefore spent the first 30 minutes of the lesson in whole class teaching, then handed over to the class to teach each other the details and nuances of the topic. As a result he observed that:

"Learners began to inhabit a way of thinking about mathematical problems demonstrated by the teacher and to articulate complex mathematical concepts to each other. Weaker learners felt empowered because the 'You teach' sheets allowed them to assist more able learners in the classroom."

The approach was well received by learners, attracting comments such as: "Great, I love these 'You teach' resources." "These are really useful; I get to do harder questions by myself." David has made examples of the resources available as part of his full report at **http://actionresearch.farnborough.ac.uk/Home/Index**
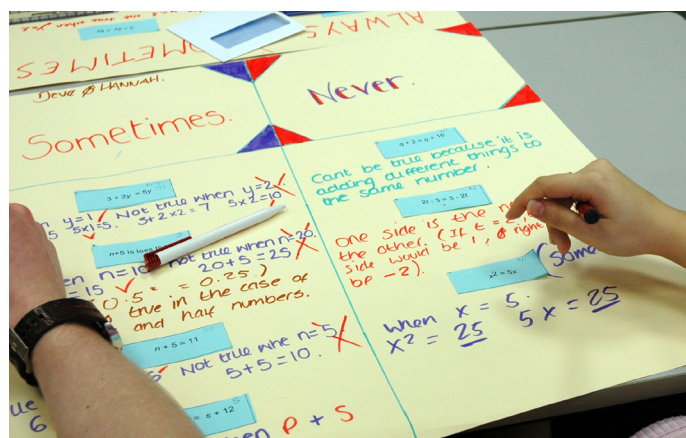
1 Herring ,D. (2011) Enabling peer teaching. Farnborough Sixth Form College. Available online at **http://actionresearch.farnborough.ac.uk/Home/Index**
2 Hattie, J. (2008) Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. London: Routledge
3 An effect size of 0.5 is relatively high for educational interventions
4 Hattie, J. ibid

Innovation

Students collaborating through technology

"Why are Facebook, MySpace and YouTube so popular with young people?" - a key question Matthew Stenning asked himself, having read an article in the Daily Telegraph claiming that teenagers spend around 31 hours a week in front of a computer, mostly on the internet.

One possible explanation he felt was that the content of these sites is mostly generated by the users. At the same time, back at Farnborough Sixth-Form College, he noted a survey showing that most staff (73 per cent) were using the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in passive ways – simply to upload files or compose quizzes for learners. Only 18 per cent were exploiting its more dynamic functionality to actively engage learners in generating content for themselves, through wikis, forums, and database entries. Realising that VLEs such as Moodle employ the same web platforms which young people use in their free time, Matthew put two and two together. He decided to experiment with these functions for his AS English literature learners.

Forums were tried out first, with learners being asked to respond on the forum to extracts from novels and poems. They all commented on the same extracts, and then had to argue in favour of or against particular critical views of a poet's work, using evidence from the poems.

Wikis were tried next, using a cunning technique that enabled all twenty learners in the group to share ideas for each of the possible essays. Learners were put into pairs to work through coursework questions. After each question they moved on to the next one, which had already been started by another group, and were required to add their own ideas. The process repeated until all groups had commented on each others' questions. The result was an abundance of ideas for any one question, from which they could choose as the basis for their own coursework.

The final experiment involved using the database function of Moodle as a revision tool for the summer exam. Learners uploaded the details of any further reading they had done, together with an analysis of an extract, for others to use as evidence for their own response in the exam.

The impact of these novel procedures was evaluated through a questionnaire survey of learners' opinions. For the forum experiment, two kinds of reaction emerged. The vast majority (88 per cent) felt their classmates' contributions helped them, since they had either not thought of the same ideas, or had reassessed their original opinions in the light of opposing evidence. But, at the same time, thirty-six out of fifty learners (72 per cent) felt

anxious about airing their ideas on the forum, mostly for fear of 'getting it wrong'. For the wikis, the overwhelming majority (93 per cent) found the activity useful. They felt they were directly involved in a collaborative exercise with others, making them feel as if they were working as a unit, and helping each other generate ideas and plans.

The final experiment involved using the database function of Moodle as a revision tool for the summer exam. Learners uploaded the details of any further reading they had done, together with an analysis of an extract, for others to use as evidence for their own response in the exam.

The database was also seen as a helpful aid to revision by most learners with twenty-nine out of forty-three learners finding it either useful or very useful, despite the risk that only some learners uploaded their further reading whilst others simply used it without contributing.

Matthew's overall conclusion is that Moodle has some interesting interactive features which can be used to encourage learner collaboration. Learners were particularly positive about wikis as a means of discussing and sharing ideas because it created a feeling of empowerment and provided anonymity – no-one knows who has uploaded content and who has edited it. The forums, on the other hand, weren't anonymous and some learners felt frightened about expressing themselves.

You can see the full report at **http://actionresearch.farnborough.ac.uk/Home/Index** or e- mail Matthew at **mstenning@farnborough.ac.uk.**

Research

Teaching and learning strategies: costs and benefit

Evidence from a study at Durham University[5] shows there is no direct link between spending on schools and outcomes for pupils; but the way the money is spent is crucial. Many of the pedagogical approaches and findings studied are of interest beyond the school sector. The study was commissioned by the Sutton Trust to help schools use the 'pupil premium' wisely. The premium aims to raise attainment among disadvantaged children through additional funding.

The researchers, Steve Higgins, Dimitra Kokotsaki and Robert Coe of Durham University, summarised some of the research evidence on improving learning and attainment. They identified the strength of the existing research evidence and made an estimate of the costs of adopting the approaches. However, as they point out, ensuring that any changes benefit pupils' attainment is still challenging, as there is no simple solution or sure bet.

They went on to create a toolkit to encourage schools and teachers to make their own informed choices and adopt a more 'evidence-based' approach. They combined evidence from a range of different research studies to produce a single average measurement of effect for each area. They do not claim this will necessarily be the impact when schools try them out. Much depends on the context: the school, the teachers (their levels of knowledge and experience), the learners (their level of attainment and their social background) and the educational outcomes that are to be improved (knowledge, skills or dispositions). Nevertheless they believe the evidence will be useful in identifying those sure bets, or striking a note of caution. Though there is not clear evidence of the link between additional spending and learning, the authors interpret this to mean that it is difficult to spend additional resource effectively. As they put it: "There must be some areas which offer a better bet than others, and this is what this toolkit shows".

The researchers, Steve Higgins, Dimitra Kokotsaki and Robert Coe of Durham University, summarised some of the research evidence on improving learning and attainment. They identified the strength of the existing research evidence and made an estimate of the costs of adopting the approaches.

The study focuses on what the evidence indicates is effective in improving teaching and learning using typical measures. The study then works out what additional costs

---

5 Pupil Premium Toolkit by Steve Higgins, Dimitra Kokotsaki and Robert Coe, Durham University (2011) available online at **http://www.suttontrust.com/ research/toolkit-of-strategies-to-improve-learning/**

are associated with these approaches, so as to highlight the issues to be explored locally. Most of the measures used are traditional measures of attainment, curriculum tests and examinations or standardised measures, so not all educational aims and outcomes are captured. Broad approaches are compared rather than specific schemes and the authors are at pains to point out the need to evaluate the actual benefits of any changes locally, in the real context, to ensure the investment really does help pupils from low- income families achieve their educational potential.

The study was carried out with schools in mind and provides guidance on applicability to primary or secondary school settings, and core subjects – English, maths or science; but many of the findings will be of interest more widely. The results are summarised in a table of 20 distinct strategies. A selection of the highest- and lowest-rated ones is given here; others including homework, assessment for learning, ICT, class size and learning styles fall in between. The full table and the terms used are explained at the end of the full document, available **here**

Table 1: Toolkit to improve learning: summary overview

More Effective Approaches

Approach	Potential gain 2	Cost	Applicability	Evidence estimate	Overall cost benefit
Effective feedback	+9 months	££	Pri, Sec, Maths Eng, Sci	■ ■ ■	Very high impact for low cost
Meta-cognition and self regulation strategies	+8 months	££	Pri, Sec Eng, Maths, Sci	■ ■ ■ ■	High impact for low cost
Peer tutoring / peer-assisted learning	+6 months	££	Pri, Sec, Maths Eng	■ ■ ■ ■	High impact for low cost
One-to-one tutoring	+5 months	£££ ££	Pri, Sec, Maths Eng, Sci	■ ■ ■ ■	Moderate impact for very high cost
Homework	+5 months	£	Pri, Sec, Maths, Eng, Sci	■ ■ ■	Moderate impact for very high cost

Less Effective Approaches

Approach	Potential gain 2	Cost	Applicability	Evidence estimate	Overall cost benefit
Learning styles	+2 months	£	Pri, Sec, All subjects	■ ■	Low impact, low or no cost
Arts participation	+1 month	££	Pri, Sec, Maths Eng, Sci	■ ■ ■	Very low impact for moderate cost
Performance pay	+0 months	£££	Pri, Sec, Maths Eng, Sci	■	Very low / no impact for moderate cost
Teaching assistants	+0 months	£££ £	Pri, Sec, Maths Eng, Sci	■ ■	Very low / no impact for high costs
Ability grouping	+1 month	£	Pri, Sec, Maths Eng, Sci	■ ■ ■	Very low or negative impact for very low or no cost

Research

What are teaching models in vocational education?

'Teaching model' is a term that is widely used but little understood, which is a pity, say the researchers, because the correct use of teaching models is very effective in improving teaching and learning. A new guide[6] sets out to explain the theory and to give examples of how it works in practice. It also provides a starting point for teacher- researchers in their own inquiries.

Teaching models are not the same as teaching strategies, although they do contain strategies. Teaching strategies alone are not sufficient to ensure effective teaching and learning; the strategies teachers adopt should be appropriate to the required learning objective and outcome, relate to the context and use all the constituent parts of the model, not treat it as a 'pick and mix'.

The researchers describe five different models and show how they are suitable to different learning objectives and outcomes:

- Enquiry or problem solving model – applied to understanding how to collect information, build concepts and build and test hypotheses.

- Direct interactive teaching model – applied to learning skills and content.

- Role-play model – applied to developing and practising new language and behavioural skills.

- Group investigation model – applied to learners working together to gather and analyse information, build and test hypotheses and coach one another as they develop skills.

- Simulation model – applied to acquiring concepts, performing tasks and solving problems in simulated realistic conditions.

Each model is broken down into a series of steps. For instance, an example of direct interactive teaching in which learners learn cutting techniques using a hacksaw and pipe cutters develops as follows:

Phase 1   Clarify the purpose of the lesson, in which the teacher explains clearly the learning objectives and learning outcomes for the session and how they fit into the topic / course as a whole.

Phase 2   Review previous learning, showing how this will link to the new skills.

Phase 3   Present new material, in which the teacher demonstrates and explains the new skill.

Phase 4   Transition from demonstration to independent practice, in which learners work on a controlled activity.

6 Developing effective vocational teaching and learning through teaching models: a guide by Sally Faraday, Carole Overton, Sarah Cooper for LSN and the Centre for Skills Development is available at: **http://www.skillsdevelopment.org/researchprojects/teaching_and_learning_in_vet.aspx**

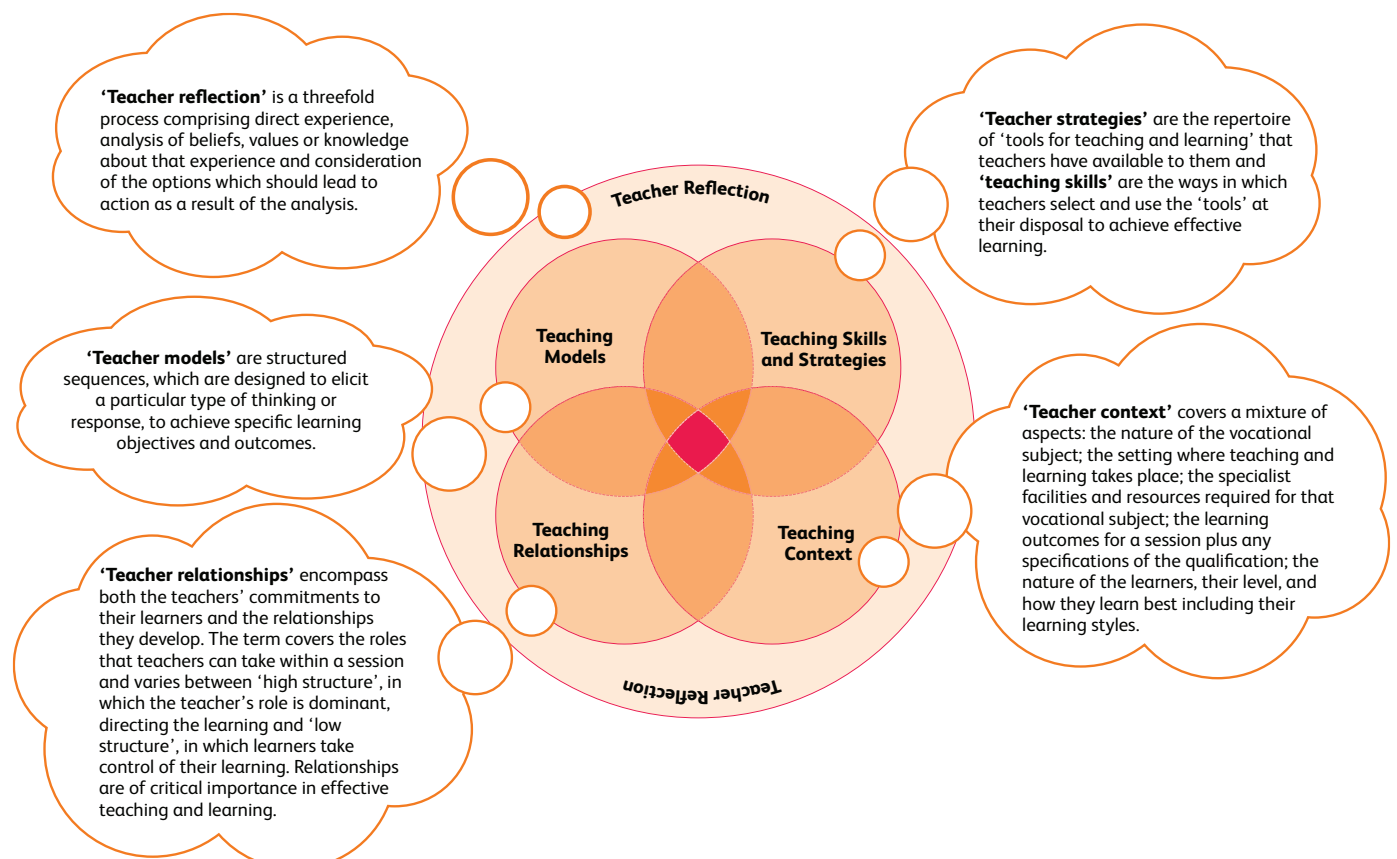**Phase 5** Apply this new learning with a learner activity, in which learners practice the new skill.

Phase 6 Review the skills learned in this session, in which learners formulate what they have learned and what they still need to do.

During the session, the teacher will need to apply their own skills, such as questioning, explanation, demonstration and time management appropriately. The context is important, since the session needs sufficient and appropriate space and equipment. The relationships between the teacher and learners, and between the learners, are also important since they will influence the ways in which it is possible to do whole group, small group and individual work during the session.

Detailed practical examples of each model are given, as well as reference to relevant theory and research.

In the diagram devised by the researchers to describe their understanding of the use of teaching models, the component parts are brought together by 'teacher reflection'. The approach is not to be used mechanistically, but at every stage the teacher will need to reflect on such issues as the learning objective and outcome required; the relationships and abilities of the learners; the space, time and equipment available; the skills of the teachers, and many more. Far from being a tick-box approach, using teaching models needs clear and careful thought and decision-making at every stage.

The components of the framework

'Teacher reflection' is a threefold process comprising direct experience, analysis of beliefs, values or knowledge about that experience and consideration of the options which should lead to action as a result of the analysis.

'Teacher models' are structured sequences, which are designed to elicit a particular type of thinking or response, to achieve specific learning objectives and outcomes.

'Teacher relationships' encompass both the teachers' commitments to their learners and the relationships they develop. The term covers the roles that teachers can take within a session and varies between 'high structure', in which the teacher's role is dominant, directing the learning and 'low structure', in which learners take control of their learning. Relationships are of critical importance in effective teaching and learning.

'Teacher strategies' are the repertoire of 'tools for teaching and learning' that teachers have available to them and **'teaching skills'** are the ways in which teachers select and use the 'tools' at their disposal to achieve effective learning.

'Teacher context' covers a mixture of aspects: the nature of the vocational subject; the setting where teaching and learning takes place; the specialist facilities and resources required for that vocational subject; the learning outcomes for a session plus any specifications of the qualification; the nature of the learners, their level, and how they learn best including their learning styles.

Teacher Reflection

Teaching Models

Teaching Skills and Strategies

Teaching Relationships

Teaching Context

Teacher Reflection

Research

Developing higher level skills in colleges

Acquisition of much-needed higher-level skills by learners is left too much to chance in schools and colleges because of the largely imposed curriculum and unrelenting pressure to gain qualifications[7].

Do people in FE think differently about learning from those in the compulsory education sector, and if so, why? As part of a larger project comparing concepts of learning and development of learner autonomy in FE and the compulsory sector[8], 16 teachers and 64 learners on vocational and Access to HE courses, at Lewisham and Northumberland Colleges, were interviewed. Their ages ranged from school leavers to adult learners.

The curriculum in primary schools looks to develop learning and thinking skills, but FE in recent years has been directed strongly towards employability, with funding depending on qualifications gained. Has this affected the way teachers and learners think about learning? Do learners in FE see learning purely in terms of economic advantage, while those in other sectors are concerned with the development of the whole person?

In practice, however, the Learning to Learn project has found that both school and college learners and teachers prioritise learning skills such as listening, remembering and practising what you have been taught above higher-level skills such as applying knowledge in real life situations, adding new knowledge, developing

their own views and understanding how ideas are connected. Teachers were concerned that FE learners expected to be spoon-fed and did not want to take the initiative to learn for themselves or develop their own understanding.

> **The curriculum in primary schools looks to develop learning and thinking skills, but FE in recent years has been directed strongly towards employability, with funding depending on qualifications gained.**

In both schools and FE, it would seem that an imposed curriculum and the demand for achieving qualifications are restricting the ability to develop the skills that make autonomous lifelong learning for personal development, as well as employability, possible.

But interviews with learners suggested that this may be painting too bleak a picture. Further questioning showed that many of the vocational learners had prioritised listening, remembering and practising not because they

---

7 JVET Vol 63 No 4 2011 by Carl Towler, Pam Woolner, Kate Wall
8 The Learning to Learn in Further Education Research Project (L2L), coordinated by the Campaign for Learning and run by researchers at Glasgow and Newcastle Universities **http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learninginschools/l2l/index.asp**

were seen as fundamentally more important, but because the learners were near the beginning of their course and saw these as the most important skills at that stage; they expected to acquire knowledge and basic competences first and then apply new learning and develop understanding later when they were in the workplace. In contrast, older learners on Access to HE courses were more likely to consider developing these higher-level skills as they went along.

There is no room for complacency, however, since these higher-level skills need to be consciously developed and cannot be left to chance. Both teachers and learners need time to think and to develop enquiry-based methods of learning, which is difficult when courses and assessment methods are heavily content-driven. Further contradictions are, firstly, that Ofsted requires FE institutions to take into account learner needs and preferences, while the curriculum and assessment regimes militate against such individualisation and personalisation in practice. Secondly, employers increasingly require workers who are adaptable and can think on their feet. Neither of these demands can be met by a curriculum and assessment system dominated by detailed performance measurement.

Research

Institute says teachers should have more control over their own professional development

Central control of continuing professional development (CPD) and the tick-box culture are failing to raise standards of teaching and learning with sufficient speed and effectiveness and the classroom teacher and workshop trainer should have a greater say in the process.

This is one of the many far-reaching conclusions of the third and most detailed study to date of the state of CPD in colleges and training organisations by the Institute for Learning (IfL)[9]. The report was published only weeks after the highly critical Ofsted annual review said there was too little outstanding teaching and learning in FE.

Dr Jean Kelly, author of the IfL Review of CPD 2010-11 is in little doubt that, "Current arrangements for professional development are partly to blame because there is too much of the mass 'just in time' updating whereas the best CPD as we know can change teachers' practice and make several grades difference to learners in learning achievements."

Toni Fazaeli, chief executive of the IfL, says in her foreword, "Many employers over- manage and structure CPD for teachers and trainers – thereby squeezing out the very thing they seek: highly effective development leading to brilliant teaching practice." Comments from practitioners themselves repeatedly reinforce this view and the report further concludes, "Directed and mandatory CPD is not necessarily effective and yet employers seem to invest most heavily in this."

Concerns about the ineffectiveness of the top-down CPD approaches that dominated the 1990s and beyond were recently expressed by Geoff Petty, an Ifl patron and author of numerous works on evidence-based teaching, and John Hattie, Professor of Education, University of Melbourne. Petty in particular observed, through meta-analyses of 30 years' CPD research and development, that the most effective CPD can help raise learner achievement by two grades within a year. Petty and Hattie also say the way teachers learn and develop is no different from the way their learners do. Yet, as the IfL report shows, ironically, at a time when staff are expected to personalise and tailor learning to the needs of individual learners, the same rules seem not to apply to them when it comes to their own professional development.

---

9 See the IfL Review of CPD 2010-11: CPD for the future: the networked professional. Available online at
http://www.ifl.ac.uk/cpd/cpd-review-excellence-in-professional-development

Extensive research

The third IfL review of CPD set out to:

- Understand what kinds of CPD make a difference;

- Identify teachers' and trainers' preferences for the way IfL should support them; and

- Encourage the sharing of good methods in order to develop communities of practice.

Analysis was carried out of the CPD experiences of 48,000 teachers who declared their CPD record to the IfL and further research involved 220 IfL members from all parts of the sector in local and regional focus groups, web-based surveys and other meetings.

Key recommendations

The IfL report calls urgently for a move away from target-setting, tick boxes and the audit culture – identified in the survey as wholly counterproductive. "Maintaining autonomy in the face of an audit culture means that there is often a dilemma for the professional between being accountable and being self-regulated." As a result of this, coupled with the long-hours culture and the lack of time and space for self-directed CPD, good reflective practice has been devalued.

The role of teacher as action researcher is strongly backed by the report. Also, by involving learners in development activities and supported experiments, a deeper involvement between the teacher and learner develops. The report thus makes four key recommendations:

1. Sharing the outcomes of CPD is excellent in-service training in itself and should be encouraged.

2. More planning time, effective collaborative and personalised CPD are essential.

3. CPD is vital for career development and readiness for new teaching and learning opportunities.

4. The impact of CPD needs to be better 'theorised' and 'prioritised' as this is deep learning that affects a wide range of colleagues and learners.

Space is needed for self-directed and collaborative development opportunities, says the report which calls for more work-shadowing, active participation of and feedback from learners, more time to undertake professional formation to gain QTLS (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills) and ATLS (Associate Teacher Learning and Skills), and the building of more specialist communities of practice.

When it comes to effectiveness and impact, much the strongest value came from learning with and from colleagues – in snatched conversations, team meetings, CPD events, peer observations, work-shadowing, external network meetings or visits to other institutions. Opportunities to practice one's professional development alongside teaching and to carry out academic research were found to nurture greater confidence in class and improved learner behaviour. Toni has suggested the explanation: "Important conversations between teachers and trainers that are good professional development are too often 'snatched' because no time is protected for teachers to talk to each other about their practice."

On reflection

In terms of where IfL will focus support, six strategies were identified by participants in the study as top priority:

- Reflective practice

- Collaborative learning

- Personalised teaching materials

- Involving learners

- Action learning

- Action research

Participants were pragmatic in the face of coming austerity cuts and saw the need to cut costs and provide mutual support. Typical of the comments were, "The training budget is wasted when, after a training event, people go off and there is no follow-up." Another commented, "Observing a colleague and learning about different methods of teaching made me think about what teaching skills I currently use and others I could adopt." And reflective episodes were described as, "sometimes more meaningful than a three-day course".

Research

Formative assessment – a springboard or a straitjacket?

Teachers who wish to use formative assessment methods as part of wider sustainable vocational education learning programmes often fail to do so because they pay too little attention to the 'learning cultures' of the subjects they are teaching.

This is a central conclusion in a three-year research study[10] by Dr Jennie Davies, of the University of Exeter, and Professor Kathryn Ecclestone, at Oxford Brookes University (since moved to Birmingham University), who scrutinised methods adopted in two vocational learning programmes: AVCE Science and GCSE Applied Business. The Improving Formative Assessment (IFA) project aimed to highlight factors that help and hinder change to formative assessment practices and the ways in which different learning cultures affect different practices.

The use of formative assessment and ways in which it can raise learners' motivation and improve learning in vocational education have been seriously neglected by researchers, they argue in a paper which casts new light on the issues for practising teachers wishing to explore and research the area in more detail.

The article, "Straitjacket or springboard" for sustainable learning? The implications of formative assessment practices in vocational learning cultures, in the Curriculum Journal, explores the influence of learning cultures in vocational education on the practice of

formative assessment and evaluates critically two closely-related questions:

- Why do some learning cultures foster formative assessment that leads to instrumental learning while others foster formative assessment designed for sustainable learning?

- When is the letter of formative assessment a springboard for the spirit of it, and therefore for sustainable learning, and when does it remain a straitjacket and therefore instrumental?

Methodology

The two-year research study covered Level 2 and 3 vocational education courses in a school and three FE colleges, Entry to Employment programmes in three colleges, and six adult literacy, language and numeracy programmes in colleges and local authority adult education centres. Individual in-depth interviews with teachers were supplemented by initial and exit questionnaires to all teachers and learners in the subject / programme team and to all learners in their groups. The project used a problem-based approach to professional development, rather than providing teachers with recipes for formative assessment. While the study therefore drew on the full range of subjects and cultures that could be categorised 'vocational', this paper focused on two courses at the 2,000-pupil school

10 'Straitjacket' or 'springboard for sustainable learning'? The implications of formative assessment practices in vocational learning cultures by Jenifer Davies, University of Exeter, and Kathryn Ecclestone, Oxford Brookes University, Curriculum Journal. Publication details and subscription information: **http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713695259**
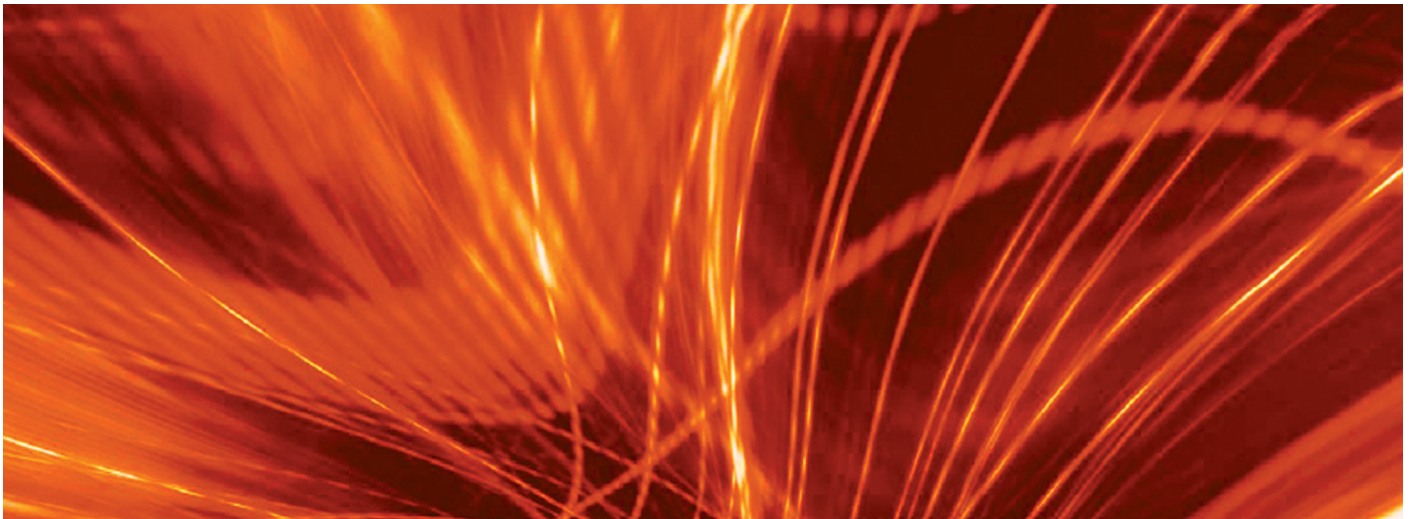
Moorview Community College, judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted. This helped them observe the vocational nature of each course, and its status on the vocational / academic spectrum within the school.

A study of contrasts

What they observed revealed sharp contrasts between the subjects. The "high level of synergy and the expansive nature of the learning culture of AVCE Science both encouraged and encompassed practices in the 'spirit' of formative assessment". Whereas the more restrictive learning culture of GCSE Applied Business "encouraged and perpetuated practices that were essentially in the 'letter' of it". In science, formative assessment was a "springboard" for sustainable learning whereas in business education it was a "potential straitjacket". They say, "There is potential for certain practices to become springboards in Applied Business, but our analysis of the learning culture suggests that this would not be easy."

Teachers are hampered in their efforts to enhance their own professional values and practices by a prevailing climate of instrumentalism, says the report. A 'paradox of professionalism' seems to be emerging among some teachers of vocational subjects, where professionalism is marked by concern for learners' progress and for developing intrinsic interest in a subject, but who work in such an instrumental system that this is threatened.

Formative assessment, as part of learning cultures in vocational courses, is shaped by the ways managers, practitioners, parents and learners themselves perceive such courses. The differences in learning culture of the two courses raised questions about how perceptions and expectations of what counts as 'vocational'. They say, "...the kind of status attached to it was a key factor in shaping the learning culture".

"In AVCE Science, 'vocational' stemmed strongly from the way teachers linked scientific knowledge to real-life situations and to careers. In GCSE Applied Business it seemed simply to be synonymous with the greater ratio of coursework to exams. 'Vocational' courses were generally accepted by learners, their parents and certain teachers as being of 'lower' status than the academic single-subject courses at GCSE or A level."

How formative assessment practices differ

There are wide-ranging differences between the subjects in the role of formative assessment. In science, formative assessment was about how learners learned day-to-day as part of a continuum of teaching and learning techniques – to construct knowledge rather than achieve targets. This also leads learners to a greater willingness to admit misunderstandings.

In business, formative assessment was primarily instrumental, where learners soon learned that formative assessment was a route to, and motivator for, summative assessment, e.g. to improve coursework through redrafting. Here the approach appears to be more to the letter rather than in the spirit of formative assessment.

"The GCSE Applied Business learning culture neither encouraged nor modelled much intrinsic interest in the topics of 'business', reflecting, in part, confusion in the qualification design and in the teachers' and learners' ideas about what 'business' and 'vocational' comprise.

"In contrast, the learning culture of AVCE Science was shaped by the qualification design, the subject enthusiasm of the teachers and a clear sense of 'vocational' knowledge…These features, and the practices and expectations of teachers and learners, combined to produce a much more expansive learning culture, including the way formative assessment was conceptualised and practised."

The report also looks at the implications for improving formative assessment in vocational education. "We suggest that understanding the learning cultures of particular vocational courses has implications for improving formative assessment practices. It might be assumed that the learning culture of vocational courses in general would be reasonably uniform, marked by an emphasis on the practical ('hands on' rather than theory or written work) and the instrumental. However, our comparison illuminates instead that different values and expectations of what vocational education comprises are inherent in the diverse features and practices of a learning culture."

The report by Davies and Ecclestone draws extensively on earlier work including studies for the Nuffield review of 14–19 education and training, which argued for a deeper debate and reappraisal of the values, curriculum base and professional subject skills desired in vocational education and for replacing 'assessment for accountability' with approaches to assessment that are genuinely related to learning.

"Our findings in the IFA project support this view," they say. "However, as we have also shown, the notion of 'learning' is itself prone to both instrumental and sustainable meanings, depending on learning cultures. In many courses, learning and achievement have become synonymous, reinforcing formative assessment as coaching for grade achievement and little more."

Davies and Ecclestone conclude by saying, "We suggest that greater awareness of the levels of synergy and expansiveness of a learning culture, and of the complex interrelations between its various dimensions, together with formative assessment rooted in sound subject knowledge could counter the current prevalence of instrumentalism in many vocational courses."

Further work[11] drawing on the IFA research by Ecclestone and co-workers looks at how further and adult education teachers generally can develop deeper pedagogical insights and improve their professional practice through problem-based approaches including notably the application of formative assessment. They argue that an approach to professional development is needed that costs the minimum and enables large numbers of teachers to develop their pedagogical thinking in an independent way that genuinely improves their professional practice. In other words, the evidence points back to Geoff Petty's argument for self-regulated, teacher-directed CPD, built on peer counselling and allowing time for reflection.

11 Rolling out and scaling up: the effects of a problem-based approach to developing teachers' assessment practice, by Joanna Swann, Irena Andrews & Kathryn Ecclestone Educational Action Research.

Viewpoint

Vocational pedagogy – some thoughts from Geoff Stanton

in December 2011, BIS announced its intention to establish in April 2012 an independent commission into adult education and vocational pedagogy, with support from LSIS and IfL. The groundwork undertaken so far by the two organisations has included a seminar with research specialists in the area of vocational education and practice, to begin to explore the evidence base and identify evidence gaps. This viewpoint article is based on Geoff Stanton's contribution to that seminar in January this year.

The intention to establish an independent commission on adult education and vocational pedagogy, announced by BIS last December[12], is very much to be welcomed. It is to be supported by LSIS and IfL, drawing on evidence from Ofsted. One of the reasons for welcoming it is the possibility that it may mark the end of a lengthy period during which it has been assumed by successive governments that any push to enhance quality of provision can be equated with the reform of qualifications. Having said that, and immediately to look this gift horse in the mouth, it is necessary to clarify some important conceptual issues if progress is to be made.

The first such issue is the obvious point that adult education and vocational education may not be the same thing. In what follows I shall concentrate on vocational pedagogy, rather than adult education per se.

Secondly, just as it has been a mistake to assume that improvement can be just qualifications-led, so it would be an equal error to assume that changes to pedagogy alone would be effective. In fact, of course, pedagogy is only one of several contributors to the quality, effectiveness and status of vocational courses, all of which can constrain and / or enhance the others, and which have to be kept in balance.

Other crucial factors include:

- the content of qualifications and how this is defined (occupational standards, required occupational experience, continuing general education, etc);

- assessment regimes (requirements for external testing, written tests, observation of performance, etc); and

- funding mechanisms, including triggers for funding and funding levels, and therefore performance indicators.

Therefore an important factor in enabling teachers to enhance their pedagogy is ensuring that they can have the appropriate level of influence on these other factors.

Vocational teachers have insight into the needs of learners in terms of such things as the order and pace of learning programmes, which need to influence qualifications design. They also are often a better source of information about the needs of small and local employers than national organisations such as Sector Skills Councils can be, and their advice can help avoid the design of performance indicators that have unintended and sometime perverse consequences for learner well-being.

Thirdly, it is important to recognise the difference between the subject-based design of most academic programmes and the integrated courses that are required for effective vocational provision. In other words, the focus should be on vocational courses rather than vocational subjects, and therefore on the pedagogic performance and management of course teams rather than just individual teachers. Key to the effectiveness of course teams is the way in which subject matter, teaching methods and learning / pastoral support are successfully integrated.

Finally, it would be most constructive to talk in terms of vocational pedagogies rather than assuming a one-size-fits all pedagogy. One often-used categorisation is a three- fold one:

- craft-based (such as catering, construction, hairdressing);

- service-oriented (social care, child-care, retail, uniformed services, etc); and

- paper- or computer-based (such as accountancy, the law, computer programming).

Even here, there is clearly great variation of culture and practice within each category, and a valuable area of research would be to investigate the nature and extent of these differences.

Having said that, all vocational education does have some things in common. One is the overarching requirement successfully to apply the learning in a workplace context. This in turn often requires that learning in the different contexts of the classroom, training workshop and workplace are effectively linked. It also implies that at least some key members of the course team should themselves be able to perform to workplace standards, and have access to industry-standard equipment. More than this, they need to have an up-to-date understanding of the current workplace context. For instance, teaching staff may have trained in a large multi-faceted engineering company but be preparing a new generation for working in much smaller and specialist firms linked in a supply chain.

BIS noted in the consultation document[13] that preceded the December publication that "expertise in vocational subjects needs constant interaction between the sector and industry, for curricula to be up-to-date and relevant to employers and for teachers and lecturers to maintain 'dual professionalism'". It challenged the FE and skills sector "to harness the expertise of business to bring currency and knowledge of the practical application of skills in the work place into classrooms".

---

13 New Challenges, New Chances: Next Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme, Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, August 2011
http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/n/11-1213-new-challenges-new-chances-implementing-further-education-reform.pdf

I would like to suggest a more dynamic and bilateral relationship than this. It is assumed that pedagogy in higher education is enhanced by all lecturers being involved in research or scholarly activity. What would be the equivalent for staff teaching on vocational programmes in the further education sector?

> **My view is that it could be their involvement in development work: the provision of on-going technical support to companies in their occupational area, many of which will be small and in need of help with the development of new techniques, markets or processes.**

My view is that it could be their involvement in development work: the provision of on-going technical support to companies in their occupational area, many of which will be small and in need of help with the development of new techniques, markets or processes.

It would be nice if – by analogy with research in higher education – there was a dedicated source of funding for this, but failing that there are ways of making it self-funding. In many situations there is a business case for the company to pay for this service. Solving a technical problem that was producing a high number of rejects, or using college facilities to help develop and test a prototype, could be worth many thousands even to a small company.

If necessary, initial consultancy could be paid from existing staff development budgets, since such collaborative activity can be much more effective CPD than the average work placement or course. At least one college has developed a membership scheme in which annual subscriptions qualify companies for a certain number of days of consultancy or access to specialist equipment. This provides some up-front income that enables the college to plan ahead.

LSIS has already conducted some research into these and other possibilities from the point of view of colleges helping firms to innovate[14]. It would be interesting to extend this work with a focus on its potential impact on vocational pedagogy.

Geoff Stanton is a freelance consultant and researcher, a visiting fellow at the London Institute of Education, and a Fellow of City and Guilds and of the College of Teachers.

---

14 Innovation Pathfinders: final report. LSIS March 2010 **http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/18542**

Research

Social mobility through education and training – global trends

The UK's longstanding policy of raising levels of education and skills in a broad range of industries is being challenged by research based on interviews with 250 corporate executives and managers and with policy makers in Britain, China, Germany, India, Korea, Singapore and the United States.

In their book The Global Auction, Philip Brown, Hugh Lauder and David Ashton argue that the assumption that workers with higher level skills get higher wages is no longer true, irrespective of the effects of the current recession. The Associate Parliamentary Skills Group, a watchdog on government policy in action, invited the authors to contribute an essay to its publication Open to Ideas[15] detailing their research and reflecting on the implications for further and higher education and employment strategy. The book and essay draw on ten years of comparative research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Asian countries are producing increasing numbers of graduates and this is exerting downward pressure on salaries of knowledge workers in a globalised economy. But lower wages have not just resulted from increased supply: digitalisation has had the same effects on knowledge jobs as the production line had on manufacturing skills in the twentieth century. Complex judgements and processes are being broken down into smaller and smaller chunks, which can be performed by people with less training, reducing the bargaining position of the educated worker still further.

Conversely, high-level managerial skills in a few individuals who are seen to be driving productivity are richly rewarded, resulting in a growing gap between a low-paid majority and high-paid elite, who are recruited largely from the most prestigious universities. Social mobility through education and training is therefore becoming much rarer in developed economies.

The researchers argue that UK policy will have to become much smarter at spotting opportunities to support growth in highly-skilled, specialised industries which will better reward the investment in education and skills.

The Associate Parliamentary Skills Group regularly invites experts and commentators to cast a critical eye over Parliamentary proceedings and their impact on society. The collection of essays combines research, analysis and opinion in order to question common assumptions, identify lessons learned from recent policy experiments an innovations and suggest new approaches to policy and practice.

---

15 Open to ideas: essays on education and skills. Associate Parliamentary Skills Group. available online at
http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/nsfapsg/open-to-ideas

Viewpoint

Apprenticeship rehabilitated in a post-modern world?

Apprenticeships are seeing a revival of interest for social and philosophical as well as commercial reasons, but their effects may not be wholly beneficial, argues a team of behavioural psychologists drawing on international studies of work-based training across three decades[16].

Learning from a master craftsman was the standard way to qualify to work as a manufacturer during the Middle Ages. Apprentices acquired not only the skills but also a view of life that included pride in the quality of their work and a sense of responsibility towards fellow workers and the wider community. They also had to learn to be adaptable and apply their skills to new circumstances, whether to individual customer demand for a tapestry or adapting a timber-framed house to an awkward site.

But this system of education and training went out with industrialisation. Increasing mechanisation standardised the roles of more and more workers, who were reduced to little more than machines themselves, and with the growth of State-funded mass education, learning became increasingly separated from production; first you learned and then you worked.

Now our industrial system is changing again. Mass production has moved to developing economies with lower labour costs and industry in the developed world is becoming increasingly specialised and responsive to niche demand. Once again, there is a premium on workers who are adaptable team players, constantly willing to acquire new knowledge and apply it to rapidly changing situations.

This fits in with changing philosophical ideas about knowledge. For thinkers of the Enlightenment, knowledge was fixed and 'out there' waiting to be discovered and applied through the exercise of science and reason, and available to all. In a post- modern society, knowledge is more fluid, co-constructed and validated by groups. This, say the researchers, is more in tune with the apprenticeship model of joining, and learning, in a community of practice. The community learns and develops together working out, how to deal with new situations as they arise.

But if this sounds like a good model for economic survival, there may be a price to pay. Our sense of identity is bound up with the extent to which we feel capable of achieving a good standard in the work we do, but if this is subject to constant revision in response to consumer demand and becomes an obligation, then lifelong learning undermines, rather than enhances, our sense of ourselves.

16 Apprenticeship rehabilitated in a post-modern world? Klaus Nielsen and Lene Tanggaard Pedersen. JVET Vol 63 No 4 2011

Research networking

The Learning and Skills Research Network

Research can be an isolating experience. You may be the only one in your immediate surroundings doing research or reading up on evidence in your field. Getting together with others can be a real help. Not only is your sense of purpose boosted but new ideas and insights often flow from it. This is one good argument for collaboration in research; it is also the raison d'être of the Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN). It enables people who are carrying out studies to present and discuss their ongoing experiences as well as their findings. Others who simply want keep abreast of new ideas and recent investigations participate to find out what others are saying.

LSRN is group of people who volunteer to help promote research and its use. With a growing number of practitioners carrying out research projects, the network provides a good place for sustaining interest and developing skills. This is one way in which capacity for research in the sector is going to grow. LSRN's annual research event provides a national gathering place for evidence-users and researchers; you can see a review of the last one below. Closer to home for most people are the regionally-based groups. These are gradually being re-energised after their hey-day in the 1990s and 2000s, thanks to a recent resurgence of interest. There are convenors in each region and reports from two of them start on **page 34.**

LSRN 11th annual research event

"Making use of research is a two-way process."
So commented Andrew Morris, heralding a day of dialogue between practitioners and researchers, at the 11th annual research event of the Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN). Practitioners' experience and interests led the agenda with research evidence artfully fed in to inform discussion. Findings from major research studies were used to stimulate round-table discussions, into which highlights from practitioner research were woven. Key propositions were developed in this way and put to a panel at the end.

The innovative approach was made possible by four sponsors, each of whom backed a key theme:

- 'Colleges in their communities' was supported and led by NIACE.

- 'Measuring what matters' by the Centre for Skills Development at City & Guilds.

- 'Higher education in further education institutions' by LSIS.

- 'Identity and professionalism. by the Institute for Learning (IfL).

Hosted by Pearson / Edexcel at its prestigious Thameside Shell Building last November, the event received overwhelmingly positive feedback, so the new format will used again this year, on 9 November at the same venue.

Speakers introducing each round-table session were asked to address a practical question. "What is the role of the practitioner in measuring what matters?" was the challenge to Geoff Stanton and Sharon Walker. The key issue emerging from discussion was: it's time the sector took the lead in defining what it should be accountable for (in terms of cognitive, competency, employability and social outcomes for example). NIACE's Mark Ravenhall outlined the findings of their enquiry into colleges and their communities,

suggesting that colleges become central players in a network of partnerships, as the best are already doing. The ensuing round-table discussion arrived at a key question: "who leads in the spaces left by the economic downturn?"

The IfL discussion on professional identity, introduced by Sue Colquhoun and Stan Lester, focused on the dual identity of the vocational teacher: as specialist engineer or hairdresser, and as pedagogue. One participant pointed to Basil Bernsteins' view decades ago that your sense of professionalism is linked to your specialism, yet teachers are increasingly expected to be generalists. A delegation of practice-based researchers from Australia revealed how similar the concerns were in their different national context and gave insights into how their approaches were working.

A different duality was highlighted by Professor Gareth Parry: the ambiguous role of the HE lecturer in an FE college. How does the pressure for applied research linked to practical development sit with more traditional concepts of scholarship? In an open system of HE delivered through different kinds of institution will there inevitably be quite different kinds of learner experience?

The success of the event means the next one, planned for November 2012 will adopt the same format. Stand by to contribute your research results or reflections on experience. Details will be published on the NIACE website when available.

Regional updates

The regional groups of the Learning and Skills Research Network provide a place for new and experienced researchers from colleges, adult and work-based learning Centres to meet with university colleagues. At workshops, conferences and meetings, findings are shared and methods discussed between like-minded people. Some regions have an active programme, others are just getting re-established. You can get in touch with your regional convenor using the list of contacts. The South West and West Midlands were featured in the previous issue of Inside Evidence; this one sees updates from the recently re-activated Yorkshire and Humberside group and the long- established London and South East group.

Yorkshire and Humberside

Kevin Orr from the University of Huddersfield has recently taken over as convenor of LSRN in Yorkshire and Humberside and is keen to organise events and promote research, especially among practitioners in colleges. He recently met with Sheila Kearney and Colin Forrest from LSIS to collaborate on developing research into the learning and skills sector in our region and will coordinate events where appropriate. A one-day regional LSRN conference will be held at the University of Huddersfield at the end of April (date to be fixed) funded by the Consortium for PCET, a network of around thirty colleges in the north of England involved in teacher education.

North Yorkshire

East Yorkshire & Humberside

West Yorkshire

South Yorkshire
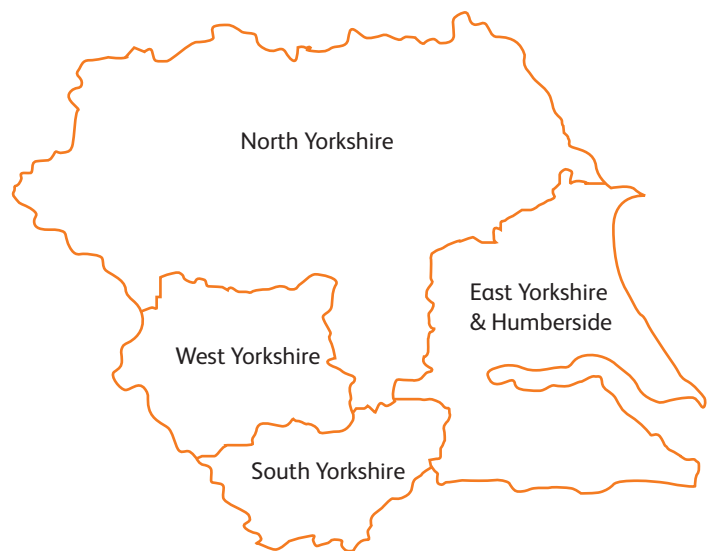
Expressions of interest have already been received from researchers based in Skipton, Barnsley, Leeds, Sheffield and beyond. Topics for presentations suggested so far include an examination of radical teachers in further education and the experience of e-learning among mature learners. If you are interested in presenting or in receiving more information, please make contact.

Kevin Orr, Y&H convenor **k.orr@hud.ac.uk**.

London and South East Region

The Learning and Skills Research Network for London and the South East is a diverse collection of practitioners at the forefront of the sector. Its members come from a diverse range of education settings that include FE and sixth-form colleges, universities, educational consultancies, community groups, voluntary organisations and Non- governmental organisations (NGOs). This diversity provides this region with a strong base for discussion meetings, which take place once a term.

17 The Importance of Teaching – The Schools White Paper, Department for Education, November 2010
https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/CM%207980

Discussion topics have included: Informal Learning by Afro-Caribbean Elder People; Learning in a Climate of Trust and Change; Leadership for Education; Vocational Research in Australia; and the Learning Perceptions of Cultural Objects in Different Settings. Speakers have included a number of leading educationalist, including Prof. Michael Young, Prof. Yvonne Hillier, Dr Marg Malloch, Prof. Ken Spoors, to name but a few.

LSRN L&SE promotes serious critical debate around both policy and practice. The theme for the current period relates to the emphasis on teaching and learning by the recent White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching'[17] . Members are invited to present their ideas, projects and research around this broad theme in order to advance their understanding, enhance practice, and inform their engagement with stakeholders and policymakers.

Sai Loo, **S.Loo@ioe.ac.uk** and Rania Hafez, **rania.hafez@mail.com**, LSE convenors.

Regional convenors

Contact the convenor to find out what is happening in your region:

Region	Name	Email
North East	Maggie Gregson	**maggie.gregson@sunderland.ac.uk**
North West	Tony Fort	**T.Fort@blackburn.ac.uk**
Yorkshire & Humberside	Kevin Orr	**K.Orr@hud.ac.uk**
East Midlands	Lynn Senior	**L.Senior@derby.ac.uk**
West Midlands	Rob Smith	**rob.smith@wlv.ac.uk**
East	Will Thomas	**w.thomas@UCS.AC.UK**
London & the South East	Sai Loo	**S.Loo@ioe.ac.uk**
South West	Claire Gray	**claire.gray@plymouth.ac.uk**
Northern Ireland	Shelly Tracey	**s.tracey@qub.ac.uk**

Plus LSRN's link with the FE Regional Research Network north of the border

Scotland	Anne Gillen	**AnneGillen@adamsmith.ac.uk**

About Research

Improving vocational learning through research-informed practice – LSIS announces its 2012 research conference

The drive to improve vocational teaching and learning in the FE and skills sector is increasingly centre stage, as evidenced by the recent BIS announcement of the establishment of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning, to be chaired by Frank McLoughlin CBE, Principal of City and Islington College.[18]

With an agenda exploring what research has to offer to improving vocational teachers' practices and how it can be used most effectively to do this, details of the 2012 LSIS research conference have just been announced.

Taking place on Tuesday 19 June in central London, the programme has been designed to stimulate discussion around some of these very topical issues. We have been fortunate to secure two keynote speakers whose work is highly relevant to debates about how best to improve vocational education and how best to support teachers in improving their practice:

> Professor Lorna Unwin, Chair in Vocational Education, **LLAKES Research Centre**, Institute of Education, London, a specialist in vocational education, will talk about 'Researching Vocational Learning; building the evidence base to enhance practice and theory'.

Professor Sandra Nutley, Director of the Research Unit for Research Utilisation **(RURU)** University of St Andrews, is well known for her research into how evidence gets used by policy makers and public service practitioners and will explore 'Supporting practitioners to use research in improving practice'.

Perhaps you would like to know more about research in and about the further education and skills sector? Or are you an FE teacher or manager who would like new ideas on how to use research to improve practice and experiment with different approaches, find out about useful resources and make useful contacts? If so, consider enrolling for the LSIS research conference. Further information can be found **here.**

I hope to see you there.

Sheila Kearney
Head of Research, LSIS

sheila.kearney@lsis.org.uk

---

18 The BIS press release can be found here **http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/Detail.aspx?ReleaseID=423507&NewsAreaID=2&utm_ source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+bis-news+%28BIS+News%29**