

Leading learning and letting go

Building expansive learning environments in FE



A paper on the *Leading learning* seminar held at the Institute of Education on 29 February 2012

Supported by



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Terminology

Throughout this document we use the term “teachers and trainers” or “teachers” to cover all those who directly support learning in further education and skills, including lecturers, teachers, trainers, tutors, assessors, instructors and trainee teachers. We use the terms “colleges” and “learning providers” to cover the range of organisations that provide learning outside schools and higher education.

About the Institute for Learning (IfL)

IfL is the independent, professional membership body representing teachers, trainers, tutors, assessors, instructors and student teachers in the further education and skills system.

About the 157 Group

The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 27 large and regionally influential further education colleges in England.

About the Institute of Education (IOE)

The IOE was founded in 1902, as a teacher training college in London. Now a graduate college of the University of London, the IOE is a world-class research and teaching institution.

About the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) is the sector-led body formed to accelerate quality improvement, increase participation and raise standards and achievement in the further education (FE) and skills sector in England.

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Foreword

How can two-and-a-half hours early one winter's evening make a difference? On 29 February 2012, when leaders from the 157 Group and the Institute for Learning were welcomed by Professor Ann Hodgson to the Institute of Education for a seminar on 'leading learning', the touchpaper was lit. The next two-and-a-half hours, we think, generated something special and powerful to support more brilliant teaching and learning in the further education and skills sector.

The report that follows is an account of the presentations and discussions at the seminar, which created a new fusion of international and national research findings and grounded evidence from our practice in further education in England, setting a clear direction for how we can 'lead learning' to best effect over the coming decades.

We propose that strategic leadership of an organisational culture, which is based on the twin principles of 'letting go gets more' and 'learning more gets more', really works.

Those at the seminar felt that expansive cultures promote more grass-roots professional learning generated by and for individuals and teams. And then just as teachers' professional learning thrives, so too does the learning of their students.

We invite you to read on and to delve into the research that is referenced too, and see what you think. Whatever your role is in education, we invite you to talk with others about this report and its implications for where you work.

We hope that you will consider how you may want and need to lead learning differently in the future, as well as what you may want to hold on to as dear in aspects of organisational culture and practices. You may want to create a new 'fusion' for highly effective leadership of learning and more brilliant teaching and learning in your organisation.

We thank everyone who contributed their thinking and expertise so generously to the seminar. The 157 Group and the Institute for Learning work in partnership to promote leading learning and excellent teaching and learning – our shared passion.

Toni Fazaeli
Chief Executive, Institute for Learning

Lynne Sedgmore CBE
Executive Director, 157 Group

Section 1: Executive summary

The *Leading learning* seminar held at the Institute of Education (IOE) in February 2012 brought together academics; sector leaders from the 157 Group; and representatives from the further education sector's professional body for teachers and trainers, the Institute for Learning (IfL).

The aim of the event was to build on earlier work in this area, to discuss and develop ideas and issues relating to the role of leaders and senior managers in giving strategic direction and drive to organisational cultures and systems that support improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in further education.

Specifically, discussions focused on ways in which further education organisations can improve learner outcomes by supporting and promoting professional practice and development for teachers and trainers. The central issue here was how best to lead culture and systems that encourage teachers and trainers to take ownership of their professional practice and development and that deliver measurable improvements in learning outcomes.

A number of recurring themes and issues arose from the seminar discussions.

Key themes

1. The further education and skills system requires a cultural shift to enable it to improve further the quality of teaching and learning.
2. Leaders in further education should make the leading of learning for staff and learners their top strategic priority.
3. Good teaching is born of innovation, and this involves a degree of experimentation that is unlikely to happen if an organisation is highly controlling or risk-averse.
4. Expansive workplaces encourage teachers and trainers to work creatively as teams taking responsibility for their own professional development, and they facilitate and reward innovation and experimentation in teaching and learning.

5. Leadership support for research-informed professional practice and development provides a strong basis for the type of step-change required in teaching and learning.

The aim of this paper is to distil and disseminate the issues and ideas developed in the seminar, to encourage further reflection and debate by teachers, trainers and leaders as part of the process of increasing excellence in further education teaching and learning.

Four broad areas for future consideration and investigation would include:

- the development of more research-informed approaches to teaching and learning
- investigation of the types of support that leaders can provide to promote innovation and best practice in teaching and learning
- how to better assess the impact of professional development on teaching and learning
- the development of professional identities and more networks for teachers and trainers.



Section 2: Introduction

Excellent teaching and learning lies at the very heart of what further education is about and sector leaders understand how crucial it is to get this right, for the benefit of the organisation, the wider community, the economy and, of course, individual learners.

The relentless thirst that most leaders and teachers have for excellence, coupled with competition in the FE market, continually presses providers to raise the quality of their teaching and learning, but the question of how to do this is a vexed and complex one. Sector leaders, though, are rising to the challenges of the early 21st century by examining and proposing fundamentally new approaches to getting this right.

Leaders of large and complex provider organisations often find themselves dealing with external context, and are then being drawn into what one principal described as a myriad of “car parks and toilets” type issues as often as they are into teaching and learning issues. How together do we make leading learning central?

This seminar built on themes and issues identified in the *Leading learning in further education* paper published last year.¹ The paper drew on IfL’s research paper, *Brilliant teaching and training in FE and skills: A guide to effective CPD for teachers, trainers and leaders* and the 2008-09 IfL review of CPD. A survey of 140 IfL Fellows also fed into the *Leading learning in further education* paper and it drew on other relevant research literature and in-depth evidence from sector leaders.

The joint 157 Group and CfBT Education Trust paper concluded that sector leaders should:

- review their own practice in the light of the evidence presented
- note the importance of creating a supportive and enabling culture in their organisations as well as actions more directly focused on teaching and learning
- work collaboratively to help develop a shared sector view of good practice in vocational teaching and learning.

It recommended that sector bodies should:

- provide more opportunities for strategic leaders to debate and discuss approaches to the leadership of learning
- help develop a sector-owned view of what constitutes excellence in vocational education and training
- commission research on the leadership of learning in the specific context of English further education.

¹ 157 Group and CfBT Education Trust, 2011. *Leading learning in further education*. www.157group.co.uk/files/leading_learning_in_further_education_think_piece.pdf

A research paper² evaluating the impact of the 2007 further education teaching regulations said that good progress had been made towards ensuring a qualified and expert teaching profession in the sector.

The level of research-informed practice, professional development and thinking within further education has increased, supported and promoted by IfL, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), the Association of Colleges (AoC), the 157 Group and other partners, including many employers. This has helped create a space within FE and a language by which teachers and trainers are beginning to explore and develop what it is to be a professional educator and to realise more fully their autonomy, supported by accountability being predicated on trust, and status being raised.

The timing is right for a potentially powerful confluence of commercial and professional interests creating the circumstances for a new and dynamic phase in the development of teaching and learning in FE: one that marries strategic leadership and the professional capacities of teachers and trainers so that the highest quality of teaching and learning flourishes.

The IOE seminar was designed to explore and test further this emerging convergence of interests via a series of roundtable discussions.

To help frame and promote these discussions, the chair, Professor Ann Hodgson, professor of education and deputy director of the Institute of Education of the IOE and patron of IfL, set the context for the seminar.

This was followed by presentations from Professor Lorna Unwin, of the IOE; Dr Roger Minett, of Birmingham Metropolitan College, and Dr Jean Kelly, of IfL. Summaries of these presentations are set out in section 3.

Delegates were then divided into separate groups and each was asked to consider one of four questions designed to initiate and guide discussions. The questions were:

- Which models of lifelong learning and continuing professional development should we be developing for the sector?
- How do we fit in professional learning with the constant demands of policy and everyday practice?
- How do we as leaders keep the excitement of teaching and learning and self-development alive?
- How can we (IfL, the 157 Group and other membership organisations) work together to support our teachers, support staff and leaders?

A detailed summary of these discussions is set out in section 4, with the intention of giving readers an insight into the powerful nature of the discourse between sector leaders, academics, practitioners and professional representatives.

But first, section 3 gives summaries of the presentations, in order to set the scene.

2 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2012. *Evaluating the impact of the Further Education Teachers' Continuing Professional Development and Registration (England) Regulations 2007*.



From left: Professor Ann Hodgson, Professor Lorna Unwin, Dr Jean Kelly and Dr Roger Minett.

Section 3: Seminar presentations

Professor Ann Hodgson – Professor of Education and Deputy Director of the Institute of Education

Professor Hodgson opened the seminar by recapping on the *Leading learning in further education* paper published by the 157 Group and CfBT Education Trust, in collaboration with IfL.

In her presentation,³ Professor Hodgson drew on the related but very different research of Lorna Unwin and Alison Fuller on expansive learning environments;⁴ the work of Frank Coffield and Bill Williamson on “Communities of Discovery”;⁵ and John Hattie’s ideas of a “learning leader”.⁶

Professor Hodgson quoted Coffield and Williamson on Communities of Discovery:

“By this term we mean that within schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and civil society, learners and educators must work together with democratic practices and values to discover new ways to address the main threats to our collective well-being.”

And she also quoted Professor Hattie on the idea of a “learning leader”:

“What is needed is more space for teachers to interpret the evidence about their effect on each student ... to spend such time working together to plan and critique lessons, interpret and deliberate in light of evidence about their impact on each student’s learning ...”

Professor Hodgson then spoke briefly on how the wider changes in society could affect teaching and learning practice. Changes included: the information explosion and intensification of work; the growth in the culture of audit systems; and ideas around the “global auction”⁷ for high-skill, middle class jobs and its effects on young people seeking security and prosperity through education.

3 Presentation is available via www.ifl.ac.uk/leadingandlettinggo

4 Fuller, A and Unwin, L, 2004. Expansive Learning Environments: Integrating Personal and Organisational Development. In Rainbird, H, Fuller, A and Munro, A, eds. *Workplace Learning in Context*. London: Routledge.

5 Coffield, F and Williamson, B, 2011. *From Exam Factories to Communities of Discovery: the democratic route*. London: IOE Publications.

6 Hattie, J, 2009. *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. London: Routledge.

7 Brown, P, Lauder, H and Ashton, D, 2011. *The Global Auction: The Broken Promises of Education, Jobs and Incomes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Professor Lorna Unwin – Professor of Vocational Education, Institute of Education, University of London, and Deputy Director of the Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies

Professor Unwin's presentation focused on different types of work-based learning environment and what these meant for staff learning and development.

Titled *Looking inside the Russian doll: work-based learning environments, pedagogy and subversion*,⁸ Professor Unwin began with the deceptively simple statement that “Everywhere is somebody's workplace”.

Professor Unwin said that all workplaces, public and private, are part of a productive system. The nature of that system, she suggested, affects the potential for work-based learning.

The paradox for education organisations is that they often do not fully conceive of themselves as workplaces where staff must learn and develop in order that they can produce the best possible learning environment for their customers and clients. They focus on learning being for learners and students. She drew on the concept of the ‘expansive-restrictive framework’, which she has developed with Professor Alison Fuller of the University of Southampton from research in a wide range of workplaces.

The more support and opportunities for staff to learn and develop, the more expansive the workplace, she said. The less the support and opportunity for staff to learn and develop, the more restrictive the workplace.

In expansive workplaces, employees have dual identities as both workers and learners. These workplaces are defined by the fact that workforce development is aligned with organisational and individual goals.

Expansive workplaces are also characterised by the higher levels of discretion and trust that managers have in their staff. A workplace is, therefore, unlikely to become expansive in nature if learning and development is imposed on staff.

Professor Unwin said that not only were all organisations on an expansive-restrictive continuum, but that within every organisation there was a range of expansive and restrictive working environments.

She used the Russian doll metaphor to convey this sense of organisations comprising many micro workplaces within the whole. In expansive workplaces, expertise and the ability to maintain and increase that level of knowledge is widely distributed.

The Russian doll metaphor also alluded to the risks of a siloed approach to workplace learning and knowledge. An overly siloed approach limits the opportunities for cross-boundary (whether departmental or between the roles that staff hold) sharing of knowledge and practices and so risks creating what is, in effect, a restrictive workplace overall. Expansive workplaces are more likely to be innovative and successful.

Professor Unwin said that, paradoxically, educators frequently used ‘management as pedagogy’ with a clear focus on people learning and developing in relation to their learners, but that this approach was not often applied to the relationship between staff and managers.

So, for instance, managing learners will involve activities such as tutoring, coaching, the development of ideas and peer review and team working. And yet these activities are not always employed by managers in relation to staff learning and development or expected by staff to be part of the way they are managed.

⁸ Presentation is available at www.ifl.ac.uk/leadingandlettinggo

Dr Jean Kelly – Director of Professional Development, Institute for Learning

Jean Kelly presented⁹ the findings of IfL's review of teachers' and trainers' continuing professional development over the last three years.

Dr Kelly described IfL's methodology for monitoring professional development and sharing the good practice that supports individual IfL members and the sector more widely.

IfL's 2010-11 review,¹⁰ based on data from some 48,000 members and seminars with a sample of some 200 teachers and trainers across the country, revealed a consensus of what worked in terms of continuing professional development, as well as what did not work. This was set against evidence of a growing personal commitment to professional development among IfL members, with 82 per cent declaring their CPD hours by 31 August 2011, compared to 66 per cent in 2010. Likewise, the average number of hours of CPD undertaken by members was 49, compared to the statutory minimum of 30 hours for full-time teachers.

Dr Kelly said that a clear finding from the 2010–11 review was that teachers and trainers valued the sharing of professional learning with colleagues or employers as part of a networked approach to professional learning. The review reported that 64 per cent said they shared their professional development with a colleague while 67 per cent shared with an employer. These figures compared to 44 per cent and 46 per cent respectively in the previous year.

Teachers and trainers are finding that more employers are aware now of the importance of supporting staff professionalism and continuing development.

Feedback from peers and employers was valued by teachers and it tended to strengthen the deep learning and impact of any professional development undertaken. The review said that it was critical to establish effective ways of asking for and securing feedback.

Dr Kelly said that teachers and trainers wanted to feel “plugged into a network” both inside and outside their workplaces. But she said that, for sharing to take place, practitioners needed the appropriate time and space. A lack of time for professional learning and updating is a major barrier.

Dr Kelly noted that the review also made clear what did not work in terms of professional development, including “sheep dip” or tick-box approaches, which she characterised as creating “full rooms, empty minds” scenarios.

Such over-timetabled and over-prescribed approaches are worse than useless, Dr Kelly said, as they tend to create resentment among those involved.

Self-directed and evidence-based practice and professional development was the way forward, Dr Kelly said. Within this, the chance to reflect upon and discuss different approaches was vital. This was essential to maintaining the passion, energy and commitment of teachers and trainers. Conversely, a lack of autonomy and control risks killing off that passion, she said.

Dr Kelly concluded her presentation by quoting Professor John Hattie, whose international research on teaching draws on research studies linked to over 240 million students:¹¹

“... what is needed is more space for teachers to interpret the evidence about their effect on each student ... this may require some major rethinking about teachers' work.”

9 Presentation is available via www.ifl.ac.uk/leadingandlettinggo

10 Institute for Learning, 2012. *2010–11 IfL review of CPD: CPD for the future: the networked professional*.

11 Hattie, J, 2009. *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. London: Routledge and Hattie, J, 2012. *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximising Impact on Learning*. London: Routledge.

Dr Roger Minett – Executive Director of Academic Affairs, Birmingham Metropolitan College

Roger Minett's presentation and film¹² outlined the significant changes that Birmingham Metropolitan College has undertaken in teaching and learning over the past year.

He said that the college held a conference for all staff in July 2011 in which people were asked how the college might strengthen its teaching and learning.

Following the feedback and ideas from staff, and evidence from IfL on effective professional learning, the college implemented a number of changes designed to improve teaching and learning.

The college committed to the concept of a total learning environment, one in which a considerable amount of additional time and resource would be offered to staff to help support them in their professional learning and development.

A key aspect of the total learning environment is that it is fed from the bottom by staff voicing their needs as well as being linked to the college's performance management structure and its strategic business plan and objectives.

A three-stage developmental teaching and learning review system allows teachers and observers to engage in professional dialogue, which is designed to improve practice.

Lesson observation is in three stages:

- Stage one is a pre-observation meeting that allows contextualisation of the lesson to be observed, taking into account the learning outcomes set and the nature of the learner cohort.
- Stage two is where the observation takes place and a narrative style is used to record what actually takes place rather than, for instance, shoe-horning the observation into a pro forma system of recording.

- The third stage is a post-observation meeting at which teachers and observers agree points for professional development. All teaching staff agree such plans, regardless of the outcomes of their observations.

A major development at Birmingham Metropolitan College is time set aside on Wednesday afternoons for professional development. This protected time, which can be used flexibly by staff, enables individuals and teams to collaborate on their professional learning and teachers and other staff across disciplines can readily come together to develop new interdisciplinary curricula and share good practice in teaching.

For example, the Wednesday time enabled those working in apprenticeships across sectors to meet regularly and exchange ideas about ways to deliver really high-quality apprenticeship programmes. This prioritising of time and the logistics for this would have been almost impossible to achieve before.

The college also opened new professional development centres on each of its three main campuses. These centres provide space in which staff can study, discuss, reflect and interact electronically with each other on their professional practice and development. The Wednesday afternoon set-aside gives staff the time during working hours to reflect on and develop their teaching.

The college's new professional lecturer project focuses on the teaching and lecturing role. The aim is to identify and seek ways of reducing the more repetitive or routine aspects of the job that contribute less directly to the quality of teaching and learning, in order to give teaching staff more time for activities that have a high impact on learning.

¹² Presentation and film are available at www.ifl.ac.uk/leadingandlettinggo



Section 4: Roundtable discussions

1. The further education and skills system requires a cultural shift to enable it to improve further the quality of teaching and learning.

A significant theme running throughout many of the groups' discussions was that of the prevailing culture in the further education and skills system and the need for that culture to evolve, in order to improve teaching and learning.

One of the most encouraging and, in some ways, radical suggestions was that further education colleges, and by association FE more generally, are in need of an "Enlightenment".

There was a sense in many of the group discussions that change was in the air for further education, driven by research and work on teaching and professional development and by the need for FE providers to offer the best possible education in a highly competitive market.

Some groups noted, as their starting points, the seemingly incongruous needs and demands of teachers and trainers and organisational leaders.

Some floated the proposition that, in essence, the pedagogic culture of teachers and trainers is often at odds with the "cold business logic" of the leaders and senior managers running organisations delivering FE and training.

As one organisational leader put it: "It is very easy not to think about teaching and learning. We talk about car parks and toilets type issues as much as we do the quality of teaching and learning."

Some felt that raising standards in teaching and learning is often a soft target when it comes to making savings, making it relatively easy to actively cut or put a freeze on further investment in staffing and professional learning.

It was felt by some that part of the reason for this vulnerability is the challenge of developing hard measures for improvements in teaching and learning or the role of professional development within this.

So, for instance, while the return on investment (ROI) for a new student cafeteria can be measured to the nearest penny, the ROI on a new professional development programme for teachers and trainers is harder to quantify and will tend to repay investment over a longer timescale and in non-financial ways.

However, it is possible for forward-thinking employers to reassure themselves that investment in staff development is paying off, if not in cold cash terms, then at least in terms of delivery against operational priorities by, for instance, embedding staff professional development into performance management processes. Also, by investing time and resources in evidence-based approaches to professional learning that is most likely to have impact, colleges are assured that they are making a wise investment *very likely* to yield positive impact.

2. Leaders in further education should make the leading of learning for staff and learners their top strategic priority.

It was suggested that leaders have a role in ensuring that staff professional development is part of the culture of their learning organisations as well as being integrated in key operational processes by, for example, being written into every job description.

It was argued that, in the past, greater control over professional development had been devolved to middle managers and with the best of intentions this often grew to become over-systematised and lacking in strategic leadership.

Delegation without strategic direction and support from the very top was seen by some as pointless and, if the culture was risk-averse, it often left those supervising staff training and development unsure of what, exactly, they ought to be doing and why. This risked disaffection among staff. It was said that money delegated to departments for professional development was often significantly underspent as a result.

It was suggested that one way to resolve this problem was for leaders to adopt an “enlightened bureaucratic approach” that sought to rethink further education providers as learning workplaces, picking up on Lorna Unwin’s presentation about expansive organisations.

Participants were eager to point out the difference between this proposed strategic role for leaders and a top-down approach to delivering staff development. One thing most people at the seminar were clear on, and drawing on IfL’s and other research, was that professional training and development could not be “done to” staff if it was to be successful. Staff have to feel ownership of their professional learning and development.

A number of those present argued that such a significant shift in institutional structure and culture could come only from leaders. These “enlightened bureaucrats” had a role in reimagining their organisations as learning workplaces.

3. Good teaching is born of innovation and this involves a degree of experimentation that is unlikely to happen if an organisation is highly risk-averse.

A number of contributors suggested that leaders had to take more calculated strategic risks if they wished to drive innovation in teaching and learning and make step-change improvements.

Central to realising a truly vocational culture in further education would be to allow staff working in teams to drive the process of professional development and delivery. The importance of interdisciplinary team working was highlighted as helping staff rethink what they are doing and the way they go about doing it, as well as provision often needing to be interdisciplinary to meet the needs of the economy: for example, the video games industry needs an integration of art and design, music, marketing and technology.

Although acknowledged as an exciting challenge, some leaders questioned whether an educational institution could be run “on the principle of letting a hundred flowers blossom”.

The point was made that senior managers had to have confidence to deal with the risks of innovation that might, for example, involve greater professional autonomy for teachers and trainers. It was felt that if teaching staff are deprofessionalised over time, and given too little autonomy, this can undermine the confidence of leaders in the ability of staff to take control of and deliver improvements in learning and teaching – a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It was suggested that the challenge was to find a balance between releasing the energy and capacities of staff and aligning this with the organisational business and success. Success for learners is central and so creative, effective and motivated teachers are vital – the case is irresistible.

It was acknowledged by some that professional development had to be in line with the business model of any organisation. Others said that leading learning for all – the young and adult learners and staff – was the core business of learning providers.

Picking up on Professor Unwin's statement that educators can be guilty of thinking that learners are "people other than ourselves", there was discussion too about the role of staff in assuming responsibility for and engaging fully with their own training and professional development. If the role of leaders was to prepare the ground for a professional learning culture, staff had to engage with it to make it work.

But others said that this could happen only when the proper conditions for staff learning and development were present and that the creation of the right conditions and culture was something that only leaders could initiate.

4. Expansive workplaces encourage teachers and trainers to work as teams taking responsibility for their own professional development and can facilitate and reward innovation and experimentation in teaching and learning.

Many at the seminar were impressed by the progress made by Birmingham Metropolitan College and particularly by the college's commitment to providing substantial time every Wednesday afternoon to be used flexibly by staff for their own and teams' professional learning. They were attracted too by the college's commitment to new physical space being created, in the form of professional development centres, for use by members of staff to share best practice and experiences and to engage in more formalised learning and development.

There was a strong feeling among many present that, as well as cultural and contextual space for staff training and development, leading learning also involved the formal protection of physical time and space for that professional learning.

A supportive culture protects time and space to allow staff to explore, reflect upon and even take risks with theory and practice in their teaching. As well as being stimulating and challenging for staff, it was felt that creating this time and space would encourage a feeling of ownership among staff and so encourage people to engage with professional development.

Some argued that, once this happened, organisations were well on the way to becoming truly expansive workplaces. Once up and running, these cultures become self-sustaining and innovative, benefiting the quality of teaching and learning in organisations.

It was clear that different colleges are encouraging meaningful professional development and learning. Participants were hungry to learn from other organisations' best practice in these areas.

Already many employers, who were represented at the seminar, have promoted 'permission to be experimental' and to actually reward measured risk-taking. Measures included the granting of small bursaries; research fellowship for action research into teaching; innovative learning and assessment approaches; and publication of the findings in a whole college journal or magazine.

Such activities were felt to promote teacher engagement, status and credibility and to give them the confidence to extend their professional practice further. For many, therefore, the key focus was engaging staff in a critical collaborative discourse about their professional teaching and learning and that of their students.

5. Leadership support for research-informed professional practice and development provides a strong basis for the type of step-change required in teaching and learning.

During the discussions, some highlighted the growing body of literature and research on pedagogy available now, compared to a decade or so ago.

The contributions of the IOE, IfL, the 157 Group, LSIS and other universities, colleges, academics, practitioners and authors were felt to be transforming people's concept and understanding of professional practice and development in relation to teaching and learning in further education.

This growing body of work provides a professional underpinning and reinforcement to the decisions taken by those colleges that encourage and adopt innovative professional learning to support excellent teaching and learning practices. This, according to some at the seminar, provided the third component part of expansive working, lending vital support to the work of leaders and staff.

Professional development was considered as research-informed thinking that can lead to scholarly activity, including teachers leading seminars and conferences designed carefully to lead to genuine learning, where such thinking could be shared with peers and managers.

It was felt by some that research and evidence from the IOE, IfL and 157 Group, LSIS and others is helping to ensure that the culture of professional learning and development transcends organisational boundaries. In this sense, we create open and neutral spaces for the development, discussion and dissemination of evidence and ideas related to professional practice and development.

Finally, there was discussion of the terminology and whether terms like continuing professional development remain salient and saleable. Part of the problem, it was felt, was that the term, and its acronym CPD, may have been tarnished over the years due to top-down, often ineffective, one-size-fits-all professional development. Professional learning might be a better term.



Conclusions

It is evident from many of the discussions that took place during the seminar that the business-focused culture of leadership and senior management and the pedagogy-driven culture of teachers and trainers are, in many instances, coalescing in common purpose to improve the quality of teaching and learning in further education.

Evidence from around the FE system reveals that growing numbers of employers are seeking new ways to engage with and empower their teaching staff to deliver the improvements in learning quality that are vital to business success.

Birmingham Metropolitan College was held up as an example of “letting go to get more”, although representatives of the college were quick to point out during discussions that its professional development innovations are fully integrated into the college’s performance management arrangements.

In such organisations, perceptions of professional development being something that is done to employees, usually as a punishment or a reward, are being eroded.

They are being replaced by more inclusive approaches that allow staff to play a far greater role in shaping and delivering their own professional learning and development.

The improvement of teaching and learning at such institutions is rooted in a structured and ongoing professional dialogue between staff, management and leadership.

Members of staff who are empowered and trusted to exercise their professional autonomy to deliver improvements in teaching and learning are more likely to support the strategic goals set by leaders and so drive organisational success.

Many at the seminar felt that a significant precursor to the creation of this sort of expansive working was investment in professional development for staff. Some felt that if leaders made learning, in its deepest and widest sense for both staff and learners, their top priority then investment should follow.

It was also felt that little innovation in teaching and learning would occur without a willingness to experiment and take risks.

While in agreement, some sector leaders pointed out that teaching professionals had to play their part to offer reassurance that any risks taken were acceptable in terms of their effects on learners and organisations. Professionally excellent teaching and learning always needs to be alongside or ahead of the curve, and always developing the curve too.

And many at the seminar recognised that teachers and trainers do have a responsibility to manage their own professionalism and professional development.

It was clear from discussions that professionalism ought not to be thought of as an immutable condition that suffers no interference but rather as an evolving state that adapts continually to developments in practice, scholarship and research. The message that teachers are also learners was writ large in the seminar.

The professional back-up from the research community, in the academic literature and provided by professional bodies like IfL, is increasingly important in helping teachers and trainers maintain and evolve their professional capacities and status.

Research-informed and evidence-based practice and professional development are both effective and efficient, and in this sense cannot be optional. This approach also underlines the professional status and autonomy of teachers and trainers. In turn, the research base is seen as crucial to reassuring leaders and senior managers that they can take risks with innovative professional learning and teaching and learning practice.

A final benefit of a flourishing research base is that it is seen as creating a professional territory beyond organisational boundaries, providing an environment that supports the development of ideas and gathering of evidence that will ultimately feed back to and benefit professionals, their organisations and learners.

Based on these observations, this paper proposes the following areas for future investigation, reflection and discussion:

- The development of more research-informed approaches to teaching and learning
- Investigation of the types of support that leaders can provide to promote innovation and best practice in teaching and learning
- How to better assess the impact of professional development on teaching and learning
- The development of professional identities and more networks for teachers and trainers.

It is to be hoped that the discussions held at the Institute of Education on 29 February 2012 and this follow-up paper will help frame and inspire the debate in future, building on the *Leading learning in further education* thinkpiece produced by the 157 Group and CfBT Education Trust, with input from IfL, last year.

As a next step, the 157 Group and IfL will be hosting an innovative and creative one-day national gathering involving senior leaders, managers, teachers and learners. The event will explore the reality of ensuring outstanding teaching and learning from participants' multiple perspectives and establish a collective view of the conditions that will enable great teaching and learning to flourish. This collaborative and inclusive approach will broaden input to the debate and offer a new synergy and set of proposals for the sector to take forward.

It is also hoped that this paper will contribute to the work of the new independent commission on adult education and vocational pedagogy, announced by the further education and skills minister, John Hayes, on 29 February 2012, and being chaired by Frank McLoughlin CBE, principal of City and Islington College.

Appendices

Seminar attendees

Julie Ashton	Deputy Principal	New College Nottingham
Nadim Bakhshov	Head of Centre	Highbury College
Graeme Blench	Assistant Principal HE and Teaching and Learning	Sunderland College
Helen Casey	Executive Director	Natural Resources Defence Council
Andrew Cobb	Consultant	teachersunzipped
Sue Crowley	Chair	Institute for Learning
Chris Davies	Director	Birmingham Metropolitan College
Mark Doyle	Director of Vocational and Foundation	Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College
Jane Eley	Teacher Trainer	Lewisham College
Fiona Evans	Director of HR and Marketing	City and Islington College
Toni Fazaeli	Chief Executive	Institute for Learning
Patricia Forrest	Head of eLearning and Innovation	Lewisham College
Andy Gannon	Project Manager	157 Group
Sally Griffin	Senior Consultant	Cornwall Learning
Steve Griffin	Director of Learning	Cornwall College
Roy Halpin	Head of Division Education	York College
Paul Head	Principal	College of Haringey and Enfield and North East London
Catherine Hill	Vice Principal Curriculum and Standards	Blackpool and The Fylde College
Ann Hodgson	Co-Director	Institute of Education
Melanie Hunt	Principal and Chief Executive	Sussex Downs College
Michelle Jennings	Head of Associate Services	Institute for Learning
Jean Kelly	Director of Professional Development	Institute for Learning
Helen Kinghorn	Quality Improvement Manager	Warwickshire College
Sally Manning-Challis	Assistant Principal Quality	Chichester College
Frank McLoughlin	Principal	City and Islington College
Roger Minett	Executive Director	Birmingham Metropolitan College
Rachel Organ	Policy and Performance Officer	Institute for Learning
Michelle Preece	Team Manager – Quality Improvement	Derby College
Lee Probert	Group Director Organisational Development	Hull College
Jody Seaton	Learning Director and Teaching and Learning Improvement Coach	Derby College
Lynne Sedgmore	Executive Director	157 Group
Geoff Stanton	Fellow	Institute of Education
Alan Thomson	Publishing and Editorial Adviser	Institute for Learning
Lorna Unwin	Professor of Vocational Education	Institute of Education

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