

Ten Principles for Learning and Teaching and the Development of Learning Cultures in Scotland's Colleges

Introduction

Scotland's colleges are unique. The learner experience in colleges is similar to but distinctive from that of the experiences of learners in other educational sectors. This distinctiveness is characterised by the nature of the nurturing learning relationships that colleges have with their learners; the diversity of the student body; the breadth of the qualification portfolio; the responsiveness to particular learner circumstances; the strength of learner support systems; the mutually supportive nature of many college partnerships and the focus of colleges on meeting local need while retaining national coherence.

Colleges are operating in a rapidly changing world in which we are preparing learners for a future of which we have little or no understanding. Therefore, the current view of educationalists is that we need learners who know how to learn and how to apply that learning in a variety of different contexts. Consequently, a paradigm shift has taken place in recent years from a view of teachers as knowledge disseminators to that of co-creators of learning in partnership with learners.

Recent HMIE reports indicate that colleges are, in the main, delivering a high quality service to learners. In 2004, however, the report '**Student Learning in Scottish Further Education**' found that although great efforts were made in colleges to widen access to and provide support for learning, less cognisance was taken of the issue as to *how* students learn.

SFEU therefore, have developed a set of ten principles for learning and teaching, from the original TLRP principles¹, which are intended to reflect *how* learning happens in colleges. A set of principles could act as a frame of reference, which encapsulates the standards, beliefs and assumptions on how learners are learning in Scotland's colleges, depending on the learner, the context and the curriculum. This frame of reference should be flexible enough to epitomise and encompass the different identities and learning cultures in the various institutions which collectively make up Scotland's colleges.

The list of principles is intended to start a conversation on how learning happens in colleges. Therefore, SFEU invites practitioners to consider the following questions: (replies to moira.shemilt@sfeu.scotlandscollages.ac.uk)

- **How far does our learning and teaching practice in colleges reflect the educational principles?**
- **What could be done to improve our practice in line with these principles?**
- **How could we enhance the conditions to support such development?**

¹ Teaching Learning Research Project. (2007). Principles into Practice: a teaching guide to research evidence on teaching and learning.
http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/TLRP_Schools_Commentary_FINAL.pdf

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*Learning and teaching in Scotland's colleges.....
Developing a learning culture in Scotland's colleges....*

1. Equips learners with the ability to learn and apply that ability to changing circumstances throughout life

Learning should provide learners with the self-efficacy, resilience and motivation to be successful learners through out life; to manage and adapt to social and economic change; to be responsible citizens and have an awareness of equity and social justice; to work well with others and to be effective contributors to society.

2. Engages with forms of knowledge which are current, relevant and valued by learners, by employers and by society.

Learners in Scotland's colleges should be exposed to new thinking and new ideas in the subject they are undertaking. The content of programmes of learning should reflect the needs and demands of learners for choice and progression; of employers for skills and enterprise and of society for employability, social inclusion and social justice.

3. Builds on the personal, cultural and prior learning experiences of learners

Learning in Scotland's colleges should place the learner at the heart of the learning experience and build on their prior knowledge, expectations and past experiences in learning. The cultural perspectives of learners should be taken into account in relation to the development of effective learning relationships, the learning process and the development of learning materials. A plurality of effective learning approaches and methods should be adopted to best meet the needs of individual learners.

During the learning process, teachers should avoid a 'traditional' view of literacy; make their literacy requirements of learners explicit and take account of the every day literacy practices of learners.

4. Requires the teacher to structure the learning experience in such a way as to build confidence in the learner over time so that they can construct meaning and knowledge for themselves.

Learning in Scotland's colleges should encourage learners to be autonomous learners. This means that teachers should structure the learning experience; provide support to learners in their learning and provide feedback to learners which help them move on in

their learning. Over time, dependent on the individual, support should be gradually removed and the learner should be able to self-manage their learning.

Support should be provided to learners to diminish any barriers to learning that exist due to a range of factors including physical or mental health; age; race; gender; race; faith or religion.

5. Needs Assessment to be Appropriate and Relevant

Assessment in Scotland's colleges should be meaningful for it to be worthwhile. It should not lead the learning but rather promote learning. Assessment for learning should be engaging, motivating, sensitive, inclusive and essential in identifying the next steps in the learning process. Feedback and feed forward are necessary in order to help learners get the maximum benefit from assessment.

Instruments of assessment should take care to ensure that what is being measured is what is required to be measured. Alternative means of assessment should be available for learners for whom standard or 'taken for granted' methods might present a barrier to moving forward in their learning.

6. Ensures that Learners are Co-creators of their Learning

Scotland's colleges have a long tradition in the delivery of student-centred learning. This principle builds onto this tradition and encourages a development of the learner/teacher relationship and assumes that, when both work together, with both investing effort and imagination, learners are better able to self-manage their own learning and motivated to invest in it.

Learning and teaching approaches should be varied and be targeted to meet the specific needs of groups/ and/or individual learners. This will require a range of modes that can be customised to meet a diverse range of learners.

7. Acknowledges Learning as Being a Social Process

Learning in Scotland's colleges recognizes that people learn with each other and that learners have a responsibilities and rights as members of a learning community.

Learning and teaching recognizes the social nature of learning and promotes peer and cooperative learning and the development of effective, respectful learning relationships. These learning relationships include those between learners and those between learners and teachers.

As members of the learning community, learners should be provided with the opportunity to contribute to the shape, process and content of college systems, procedures and practices as well as the shape and content of their individual learning experiences.

8. Recognises the importance of informal learning

This principal recognizes that learning doesn't just happen in classrooms and learning which happens informally can be just as important as learning which happens formally. Colleges, as learning communities, recognize this by providing learning spaces which facilitate informal learning as well as formal learning.

In relation to learning and teaching, this principal embraces the notion that literacy skills that learners have developed in their personal domain should be recognized in the formal learning situation. Literacies for life are as important as 'traditional' literacy.

This principle also embraces the notion that learning which happens in an 'informal' sphere, such as volunteering, can contribute to the wider notion of learning as being about the ability to learn, to work with others and should develop a confidence and motivation to learn. By informal means, formal learning outcomes can be achieved.

9. Understands that effective learning is dependent on teachers continued professional learning.

Not only do teachers need to continually update their knowledge in relation to their subject area but also need to hone and update their skills and understanding of the learning process. This can happen in a variety of ways, through both formal and informal methods.

The impact of professional learning requires evaluation in order to determine the impact that continual professional learning has on the quality of learner experiences and outcomes. This requires strategic thinking on the part of colleges in particular and the sector in general.

There is also scope for teachers developing roles as action researchers and engaging with and disseminating experiences and findings through communities of practice and the wider educational community.

10. Demands consistent, flexible policy frameworks, with support for teaching and learning as their main focus

The learning and teaching that happens in the classroom needs to be supported by a curricular understanding and a curriculum framework which has been developed through and by key stakeholders and which supports learning. It needs systems and procedures which support learners and learning.

Teaching in Scotland's colleges does not happen in isolation. It needs mutual partnership working between the college as a learning community and the key stakeholders in that community, including those with employers, schools, universities, community learning and development; community learning partnerships; volunteering associations etc. It also requires colleges to develop mutual partnerships with the national community including that with SQA, HMIE, LTS, SFC, LLLUK etc.