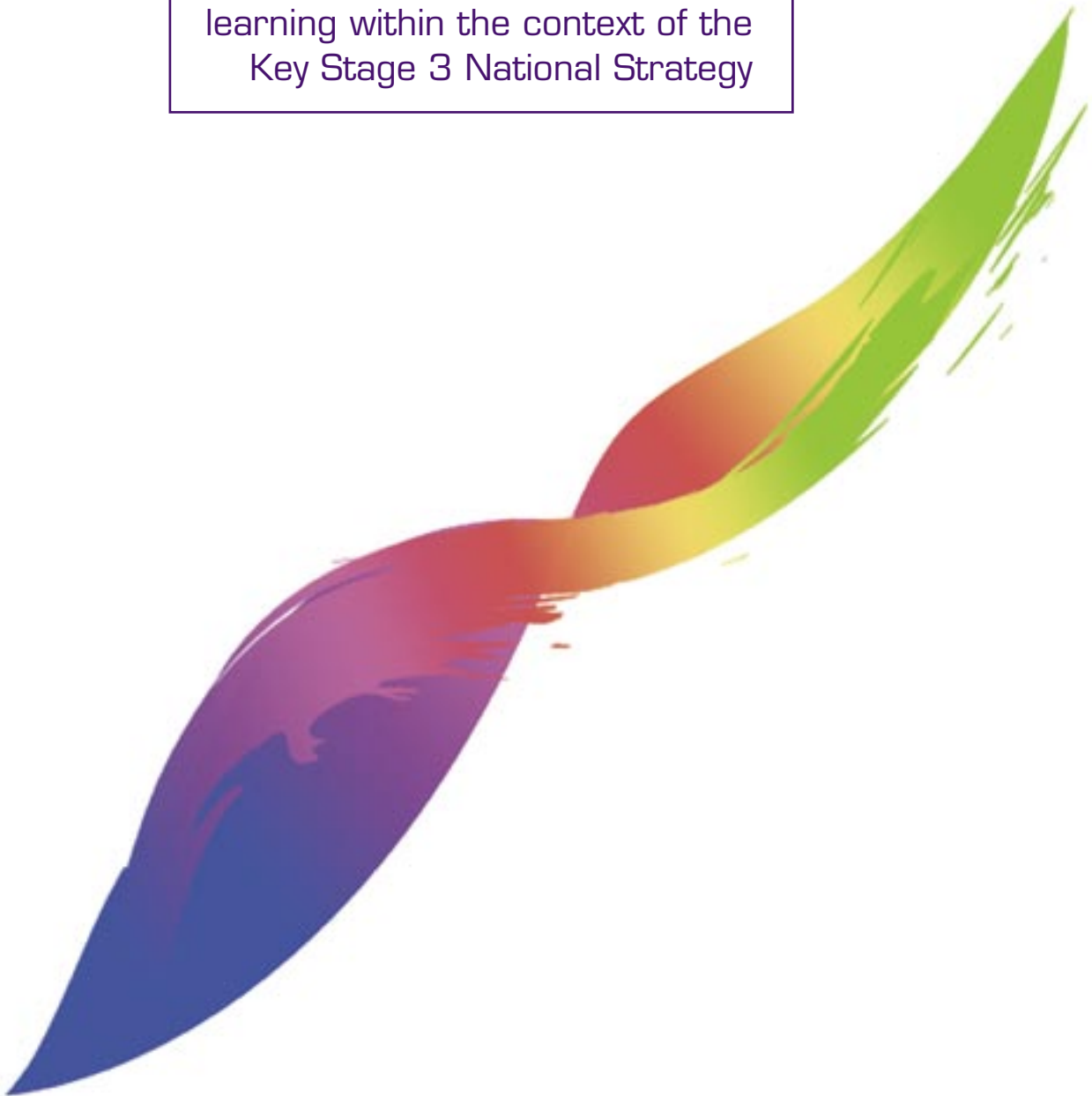


'It's like mixing colours'

How young people view their learning within the context of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy



The Association of Teachers and Lecturers exists to promote the cause of education in the UK and elsewhere, to protect and improve the status of teachers, lecturers and non-teaching professionals directly involved in education, and to further the legitimate professional interests of all members.

For a free copy of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers' publications catalogue, please call the ATL publications despatch line on 0845 4500 009.

© Association of Teachers and Lecturers 2004
All rights reserved. Information in this book may be produced or quoted with proper acknowledgment to the Association.

To receive the text of this booklet in large print, please contact ATL on 020 7930 6441.

1. Summary and appreciations	6
2. Introduction	9
3. The research project	10
3.1. The research method: Appreciative Inquiry	11
3.2. Engaging young people in the research	12
4. The context in which this research was set: The Key Stage 3 National Strategy	14
5. The experiences of young people in Year 8	18
5.1. The best thing about school	18
5.2. Progression through school experiences and effects on learning	25
5.3. A good lesson	42
5.4. What helps learning?	48
5.5. Could school be different?	54
6. Teachers' learning	57
7. A case for a focus on learning and learning-centred classrooms	61
7.1. Language and learning discourses	61
7.2. Conceptions of learning in school	62
7.3. Models of learning	64
7.4. Effective learning and effective learners	67
8. Closing thoughts	76
9. References	80
10. Appendices	84

Foreword

ATL is wholeheartedly committed to listening to what children and young people have to say about school and about their learning. To ignore the voices of children and young people would be both naive and, ultimately, counter-productive.

This research follows on from an earlier ATL-commissioned study of teachers' views of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, *Strategy or Strait-jacket?* (2003). In commissioning this new research, ATL's main aim was to find out more about young people's views of the Strategy. We wanted to explore ways in which the four key principles of the Strategy – expectations, progression, engagement and transformation – were affecting the learning experiences of the students themselves.

ATL owes a huge debt to the author of this study, Dr Eileen Carnell. Not only did Eileen bring with her the professional skills of a researcher, she also approached the task with care, humility, sensitivity and a very genuine respect for the young people and the teachers who talked with her about their experiences.

Two things in particular struck me in reflecting upon the findings of this research. First, the extent to which the Year 8 students in the study were able to empathise not only with their fellow students but also with their teachers. It is all too easy to forget just how perceptive and understanding young people can be. Second, I was reminded how important it is to give young people a sense of their own agency and to provide opportunities for them to make sense of their learning. This takes time – a commodity that is in short supply in today's climate of prescribed pedagogy and high-stakes tests.

Too often these days solutions to the 'problem' of the well-documented 'dip' in Year 8 have focused on two particular manifestations of disaffection: disruptive behaviour and non-attendance. I believe we need to look again at why young people feel a lack of connectedness between 'school work' and the things that matter to them in the world outside school. We also need to look at the perceived irrelevance to young people's lives outside school of some of the national curriculum subjects, and at curriculum pressure resulting in insufficient time for pastoral care.

I believe the students in this study have three important messages that need to be taken seriously:

- they want to talk to their teachers about their learning
- they want to help their teachers help them to learn
- they want to help each other learn.

We need to listen to what they have to say and to find new ways of moving forward together.

Dr Mary Bousted
General Secretary

About the author

For over 30 years Dr Eileen Carnell has been involved in teaching and learning, supporting professional development initiatives and educational research. Her various roles have included classroom teacher, adviser, teachers' centre director, staff development inspector and senior lecturer in higher education. Her particular interest is in effective learning and in promoting young people's and teachers' learning. She has had extensive experience of research and writing. Her last book, co-authored with Caroline Lodge, is *Supporting Effective Learning*.

Summary and appreciations

What do young people like and value about school? What sense do they make of their experiences of being in Year 8? What helps young people's learning? What is a good learner? How do they see themselves making progress? What changes would they suggest?

These were some of the questions examined by 58 young people in Year 8 in a series of 12 group interviews in four mixed secondary schools. Four teachers were interviewed too, the Key Stage 3 managers in each of the four schools.

What can we learn from these young people's responses? This exploratory report analyses some of the common and disparate themes emerging from the interviews and identifies factors that support and factors that hinder young people's learning. This is a small-scale study but many of the key themes and issues connect with large-scale studies.

Young people reported that they value highly their school experiences. In particular they enjoy the social network that school offers, including the numerous clubs, lunchtime and after school activities and sporting facilities. They appreciate the support given by their teachers and expect to get a good education which will lead to them realising their hopes for adulthood.

Year 8 is seen by the young people as a 'perfect year', a 'free year'; free from the pressures of SATs and exams, but teachers are still worried about the lack of motivation, and disaffection in Year 8.

Many examples are identified where young people and their teachers are having rich learning experiences. Effective practices are encouraging activity in learning, learner responsibility and collaboration. Young people expressed a wish that their classroom experiences would include more of these elements. In all four schools, however, there does not seem to be any time for talk about learning.

Young people report that teachers' expectations of them are high. Some young people argue that there are too many pressures on them that interfere with their learning. This reflects a performance orientation in which young people's examination and test results seem to be the sole priority. Strategies to raise expectations such as target setting do not necessarily enhance learning as these also focus on performance rather than learning. The pressures on teachers exacerbated by aspects of the KS3 Strategy result, unwittingly, in an emphasis on teaching and behaviour, testing, the instruction model (teacher transmission from the front) and 'covering' curriculum content.

Teachers agree that the KS3 Strategy has a number of benefits including high quality professional development opportunities and a common language. These aspects help teachers talk about teaching with confidence and help identify good teaching. But a number of reservations and problems emerge in the analysis of the interviews with young people and teachers.

- The Strategy encourages a focus on teaching. There is an assumption that good teaching will lead automatically to good learning. This assumption needs to be challenged. The Assessment for Learning initiative has been introduced to focus attention on young people's learning but it is too soon to tell whether this will have the desired effect.
- The pressure on teachers to 'cover content' and 'deliver the curriculum' means there are very few opportunities for young people to talk about their learning.
- The Strategy's emphasis on the structured lesson appears to encourage teachers to focus on young people's engagement in lessons rather than engagement in learning.
- Attention on control in the classroom reduces the possibilities for learning. Strategies for controlling the classroom often mean young people feel isolated and can be denied opportunities for collaborative learning and dialogue with peers.
- The dominant language does not focus on learning but on work, and performance, and there are terms used to describe young people's 'ability' which some young people find counter-productive. Some school practices of grouping young people are seen as divisive and inhibitive to learning.

The structure of the report

Following a description of the research method and the research context, the report focuses on three areas:

- the experiences of young people in Year 8
- teachers' learning
- a case for learning and learning-centred classrooms.

The report concludes that while the KS3 Strategy has had many positive effects on the teachers, the effects on young people are not as great as had been anticipated.

Five recommendations are made:

1. An holistic view of learning needs to be encouraged, recognising the importance of the social dimension, including learning through dialogue with peers. This would help overcome young people's feeling of isolation in classroom learning.
2. Classroom contexts need to encourage aspects of effective learning including activity, collaboration, learner responsibility and especially opportunities for reflecting on and monitoring young people's learning.
3. Assessment for learning needs to be developed, including the appropriate use of learning (not performance) targets. Learning needs to be made explicit as does the purpose of all learning occasions.

4. A learning-oriented rather than performance-oriented environment needs to be fostered. The language used in such an environment would focus on learning, not on work, performance, tests or levels of 'ability'. This would help young people see the relevance of their learning for their present lives rather than just preparing for the future.
5. Young people's insights and understandings about their experiences of learning need to be listened to and acted upon. Decision-making systems and other structures could be used as a forum for young people to talk about learning and inform decisions about classroom learning.

Appreciations

Many thanks are due to the following people who contributed to this research:

- the 58 young people who told their stories and shared their insights and understandings so freely and with such humour and wisdom
- the four Key Stage 3 Strategy managers in the schools who gave so willingly of their time and who made such careful arrangements for the interviews to take place
- the following colleagues who made such helpful comments on an earlier version of this report:

Sue Askew

Sheila Dainton

Gwen Evans

Gill Frances

Sue Hackman

Mary James

Isobel Larkin

Caroline Lodge

Jean Rudduck

Judy Sebba

Caroline Sharp

Gordon Stobart

Meryl Thompson.

- I would like to thank ATL for commissioning the research. I would especially like to thank Sheila Dainton for her support, enthusiasm and kindness throughout this project.

Introduction

This research was commissioned by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. The main aim of the study was to explore how young people in Year 8 view their learning within the context of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003). It was envisaged that the young people and the Key Stage 3 managers would talk about their learning experiences in relation to the four key principles underpinning the Strategy:

- expectations
- progression
- engagement
- transformation.

As this was a relatively small-scale study, it was decided to focus on young people in Year 8 rather than a combination of Years 7, 8 and 9. Consideration was given to the advantages of focusing on either Year 7 or Year 9, but it was agreed that there would be advantages in focusing on the 'in between' year rather than on what Galton, Gray and Rudduck (2003) describe as the 'entry' and 'exit' years – which have a particular focus of their own. Moreover, by the time the study occurred (spring and summer 2004) the young people in Year 8 were in their second full year of the Strategy.

Given the project's resources the research took place in four secondary schools only: two in London, known by the researcher, and two in Dorset, who volunteered in response to a request by the local ATL branch secretary. It was envisaged that two inner-city and two rural schools would provide interesting and useful comparisons. It was decided that the schools would remain anonymous. For this reason no details of the schools are provided as any information would enable recognition. The four schools are all state, comprehensive schools. The report refers to a school being in London or to a school being in Dorset where appropriate.

There have been a number of reports on the Key Stage 3 National Strategy (for example, Stoll, *et al*, 2003; Barnes, *et al*, 2002). These have focused mainly on teachers' perspectives. The view that young people are experts and should be at the centre of the debate is well argued (Mayall, 2003; Stoll, *et al*, 2001) and what makes this research report distinctive is the focus on young people's views. Their voices structure the report and are used extensively to illustrate the main issues. In this approach young people are seen as knowledgeable, insightful and interested participants in their own learning.

This report is written primarily for KS3 managers and teachers working at KS3. However, it is anticipated that it will be of interest and relevance to other teachers who work and learn alongside young people of all ages and those who have other roles in education.

The research project

The research was conducted at the end of the spring term and at the beginning of the summer term 2004, so young people had been in Year 8 for almost, or all of, two terms. Each school was asked to organise three groups of up to five young people (all in Year 8) to be interviewed. These groups were as mixed as possible in terms of background, ethnicity and gender.

At the start of the interview I introduced myself as a teacher-researcher. This approach allowed me to enter into a dialogue encouraging young people's responses from my own experiences as a teacher. Interviews were taped and I transcribed them myself. It was stressed that all the interview data would be anonymous.

As an organising structure for discussion, students were encouraged to talk about their learning experiences in school, their views on their learning, and their experiences of Year 8. Similar questions were asked in all groups, for example, each interview began with "What is the best thing about school?" Aspects of the key principles underpinning the KS3 Strategy (see section four) were introduced during the conversations at relevant moments. Most interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes.

From an analysis of the young people's conversations five themes emerge:

- the best thing about school
- progression through school experiences including conceptions of Year 8
- a good lesson
- what helps and hinders learning
- how school could be different.

These themes structure the report and are illuminated by the voices of young people.

The KS3 managers in the schools were interviewed too, either in conversation or, in one case, in a telephone interview. Their perspectives are invaluable in extending the debate and in providing information about the experiences of implementing the KS3 Strategy.

The themes are analysed drawing on research on effective learning; a case for a focus on learning and learning-centred classrooms is made.

3.1 The research method: Appreciative Inquiry

A qualitative research approach was developed to match the needs of the research project. This was based on the concept of Appreciative Inquiry that aims to highlight and extend best practices.

The routes of Appreciative Inquiry are in organisational change processes:

- appreciate the best of what is
- envision what might be
- engage in dialogue to generate new knowledge
- innovate (Brighthouse and Woods, 1999: p146).

As a research process this cycle cannot be followed through as it is an exploratory process; it cannot aim to innovate, although there has been an attempt to follow through the first three stages. This method:

- avoids focusing on problems
- assumes that people want to work and learn purposefully and effectively
- recognises multiple realities
- realises that asking questions is influential
- values differences
- understands that the language we use creates our reality (Hammond, 1996).

Throughout the research these assumptions are recognised in practice. For example, the interviews focused on what young people and teachers identified as 'best' features and experiences. The interviews are based more on dialogue than questioning in order to understand young people's and teachers' experiences. It was hoped that trigger questions would help the groups of young people articulate their experiences of learning in school and share their insights and understandings. This approach is based on the idea of 'Situated Constructivism' (Kanuka and Anderson, 1999) whereby knowledge is negotiated socially and everyone has different social experiences resulting in multiple realities.

Appreciative Inquiry is congruent with my own biography and values. As a teacher-researcher I wanted the research and report to focus on learning – to further new understandings of young people's views and experiences and to illuminate ways forward. It highlights positive aspects of young people's and teachers' experiences and avoids a blaming stance. The report purports not to oppose any persons or groups, movements or policies but to attempt to learn about and extend effective practices in the best interests of young people.

3.2 Engaging young people in the research

The way in which young people are engaged in the research has much in common with what Priscilla Alderson identifies as being congruent with Childhood Studies (Alderson, 2003: pp27-28). Those characteristics relevant to this research include:

- talking with children as young people
- meeting them in everyday contexts and relationships where they have expert knowledge
- trying to see young people's perspectives and how they organise and make sense of their lives as rational agents, instead of relying on their parents' or teachers' views
- searching for motives and contextual reasons for young people's behaviour.

The young people were interviewed without a teacher present. They were assured that their contributions and their schools would be anonymous in the report. Any issues they raised would not be mentioned to their teachers. Care is taken not to misrepresent the young people or to use adult prejudices, values and interests in the analysis of data and report writing.

Young people are seen as experts in their own learning. As a researcher I am constantly reminded (and surprised – although I should not be) of how young people are 'profoundly experienced, informed and wise' (*op cit*: p29). Such wisdom and creativity is illustrated in the following response to a prompt about the experience of being in Year 8:

It's like adding colours. Year 8 becomes a different colour. It's like mixing the colour of Year 7 into Year 8. If you put a red with a blue and you mix it for a little while it becomes purple. That shows you have gathered all the information from Year 7 and Year 8 and you put that together for Year 9. It is like you are mixing Year 7 and Year 8. You come to Year 8 with Year 7 inside you as well.

(Male, School 1, Group 3).

All the young people have fascinating and important views about their learning experiences. As Alderson suggests, 'understanding does not correlate with age or assessed intelligence but with their experience' (*op cit*: p19).

Extracts from the interviews, which are drawn upon extensively, show in different ways the insights and understandings young people have about their learning and how they make sense of their school experiences. This is different from consulting young people which may be tokenistic and misleading (*op cit*: p17). It appeared that the young people enjoyed being part of the research. For example, a teacher reported how one young person, whom she

described as being difficult to engage in lessons, behaved after being interviewed: *'He was proud and walked tall and said "I am going to be in a book"*. The resources of the project unfortunately did not allow for the young people to provide comments on the report.

The coding of the data

Young people's comments are coded in the following order: the school, group and sex. For example (s2 g2 f) represents: school 2; group 2; female.

The context in which this research was set: The Key Stage 3 National Strategy

The Key Stage 3 National Strategy began in 2000. It is designed to improve the education of 11- to 14-year-olds in England by strengthening teaching and learning across the curriculum. It is based on four principles:

- **expectations:** establishing high expectations for all pupils and setting challenging targets for them to achieve
- **progression:** strengthening the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and ensuring progression in teaching and learning across Key Stage 3
- **engagement:** promoting approaches to teaching and learning that engage and motivate pupils and demand their active participation
- **transformation:** strengthening teaching and learning through a programme of professional development and practical support.

The Strategy has seven strands ranging from the subject specific to whole school policies including Attendance and Behaviour which was introduced in 2003.

The intentions behind the Strategy reflect a number of concerns echoed by the four teachers involved in the research: *'Everyone recognises the Year 8 dip and our Year 8s did an absolute slide. The brighter ones just mark time. The less bright ones fall into the trap of disaffection and they drag some others with them'*. The 'performance dip' is well-established (Galton, *et al*, 1999; Hill and Russell 1999, cited in Stobart and Stoll, 2004) as is increased disengagement (Barber 1996, Hargreaves, *et al*, 1996). One young person involved in this research refers to Year 8 as *'a free year'*.

Gordon Stobart and Louise Stoll (who led the DfES funded large-scale evaluation of the KS3 Strategy), (Stoll *et al*, 2003) suggest that the Strategy is struggling to offer a coherent approach (Stobart and Stoll, 2004). The teachers involved in this research agree: *'The speed at which so many strands have come on board has made it become unwieldy'* and similar opinions are voiced by other teachers: *'The aims have been so broad and so many they kind of get woolly and lost in the day-to-day running of the school'*; *'The Strategy has just mushroomed without consolidating what it set out to do in the first place'*. However, the Strategy is seen by the teachers to be effective in particular areas.

The most beneficial effects were to do with enhancing teachers' professional development and the support from local consultants:

- *some teachers have been empowered through the training*
- *excellent support from consultants*
- *the opportunity it has provided to share good practice.*

The professional development opportunities led to other perceived benefits:

- *a common language*
- *teachers more open to discussion; more confident about what good teaching is.*

This in turn led to changes in teachers' practice:

- *changed the way teachers teach and that has changed the relationship between teachers and pupils*
- *a focus on planning and objectives.*

Other perceived benefits of the Strategy drawn from an analysis of the teacher interviews include:

- *the materials, especially the booster materials, are strong. Documents have become more relevant and user-friendly*
- *IT focus valuable*
- *the focus on literacy and numeracy in all subjects.*

One teacher felt the Strategy had wider effects saying: *'It has changed the ethos of the school'* and that there was a *'perception that standards have been raised; improvement in end of KS3 levels'*. One teacher felt it was important *'being part of the national picture; the drive for standards coming from central government'*.

The teachers also expressed reservations about the Strategy. The main reservation was about the demands on their time and that of their colleagues:

- *there is too much for the manager to deal with; too much time needed*
- *initiative overload.*

The effects on the staff was an area of concern:

- *the effect on the attitude on some staff who feel it is more work rather than changing their teaching strategies*
- *worry about stifling teachers' creativity*
- *some teachers not seeing the relevance of starters and plenaries; too much of a strait-jacket.*

The nature of the Strategy was also seen as problematic:

- *the aims are too broad*
- *consolidation process not long enough*
- *the language 'behaviour and attendance' unfortunate*
- *with the emphasis on English, maths and science, other subjects not seen as important*
- *confusion about Attendance and Behaviour which does not seem to fit with other strands*
- *provision for Year 8 still poor.*

The two-year Key Stage 3

One of the four schools participating in this research is involved in the project to implement a two-year Key Stage 3. This project, introduced in February 2003, aims to develop ways of increasing the pace of learning and so impact on pupils' motivation, learning and attainment. The project builds on and adapts the programmes and materials produced by the Key Stage 3 Strategy and draws on the Strategy's networks of support. This project is purely explorative and developmental in nature and aims to look at a range of models for a two-year Key Stage 3 that will contribute to raising standards and enriching the curriculum.

The aims of the project are to develop ways of completing programmes of study for Key Stage 3 in two years that will:

- contribute to increasing the pace of learning and raising standards
- impact on pupil motivation and engagement
- improve transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3
- open up curriculum flexibility through the use of saved time in Key Stage 3 and throughout the 14–19 phase.

The teacher in the school involved in the project to implement a two-year Key Stage 3 said:

We were interested because KS3 couldn't stay in its present format. Year 7s come in bright and bubbly. There is a focus in Year 9 because of SATs. In Year 8 there is no focus, nothing to aim for, Year 8 is boring. We found a lot of repetition across the curriculum. What will happen in terms of progress and attainment remains to be seen but it is being evaluated.

Teachers in the other schools involved in this research had some interest but expressed some uncertainties about the two-year KS3 project:

I would welcome it. There is the cliché that Year 8 is a lost year. If there is a weakness in the Strategy it is the provision for Year 8. There is a real tension about how we are going to prepare them for GCSEs without going down the road of teaching skills and knowledge in a very standard format. If you condense it down to Years 7 and 8 you would allow more creativity for Year 9 and would motivate students more, so I would definitely welcome it.

Another said:

Year 8 is seen as a gap year and it might help that, but they may not have a chance to settle before moving on again. It is traumatic for some, great for others. I am undecided. Some people would say it would be good to start the syllabus for GCSEs earlier and push more able ones to do GCSEs earlier.

The views of the young people about their Year 8 experiences are discussed at length in the next section.

The experiences of young people in Year 8

The following sections reflect the interests and concerns that the young people expressed in the interviews.

5.1 The best thing about school

Our conversations began with an appreciative inquiry: 'What is the best thing about school?'. I introduced this theme to all the groups little knowing how it would lead to some surprising revelations. Having begun the conversation other themes easily followed.

There was a remarkable level of agreement among young people about the importance of school regardless of whether they lived in London or Dorset, whether they were male or female.

There were three predominant themes:

- the social network including activities and sporting facilities
- the support of the teachers
- getting a good education.

The social network

The social network that school offers is highly significant to all the young people I talked with. Having fun with friends, meeting new people and making new friends, socialising and communicating with people at play and lunchtime was mentioned in some form by young people in each of the 12 groups.

I was struck when arriving at one Dorset school that many buses were bringing young people to school from rural areas. However, the social network was not just a strong feature for the Dorset youngsters; it was just as important to the London schools:

What's the best thing about school?

Play and talking with friends, socialising at lunchtime (f).

Why is socialising at school so important?

Some of us live a long way away from school and it's kind of late when you get home and you don't have a lot of time. I don't have many friends near where I live.

My friends are all at school (m).

(s4 g3).

I found it surprising that in London young people live a long way from their school and made friends at school not near home. In London, young people may not know their next-door neighbours, 'partly because of current stranger-danger fears' (Alderson, 2003: p.8) and there are few free public places where they are encouraged to meet outside school (*op cit*: p.24). In London, school safety was highlighted more often than in Dorset. As one young person put it, '*meeting other people with different religions everyone feels safe*'.

This emphasis on the importance of the social network may be partly explained by the view that today young people are lonelier, with fewer children in the family, and may be more confined than in the past (*op cit*: p7). In conversation with young people both in London and Dorset several said they were not allowed out in the evenings. Once they had their evening meal and completed homework it was time for bed.

In all the groups there was talk about how young people valued the range of activities that were offered by school: lunchtime activities, sports and 'lots of things to do'. Young people highlighted 'special' days, trips and the opportunities to travel abroad. PE was singled out and often mentioned as the favourite lesson – 'PE brightens up your day'. This focus on activity and engagement in learning led to further prompts about what helps learning and what makes a good lesson. These are discussed later.

The evidence indicates that young people attach great importance to the social possibilities that school offers. However, it appears that the social aspects of learning are not exploited by school. Despite young people seeing different forms of collaborative learning as significant in what helps them learn, this does not happen as much as they would like. As one put it '*I like to sit near the people I want to and not in the girl, boy, girl, boy arrangement that some teachers insist on. This makes me feel uncomfortable*'. This practice may result in young people feeling isolated in the classroom and this can limit their learning. This theme recurs in other sections.

The support of teachers

Young people are highly appreciative of their teachers. The support of the teacher was discussed in each of the 12 groups. The teacher's role emerged as crucial in young people's learning at school. Their appreciations fell into three categories focusing on the teacher's ability to develop:

- effective interpersonal relationships
- conducive learning conditions in the classroom
- involvement in their learning.

The dominant category in this theme focused on fairness, understanding and the willingness to listen to the young person's experiences both in and out of school:

...if something has happened at home they know how to talk with you (s3 g2 f).

Yes they know what they are doing, strict and quite funny at the same time and instead of looking at you they talk to you and if you need help they will talk to you rather than say 'You should have listened' (s3 g2 f).

Yeah, they help with work but you can talk about what's just happened to you (s3 g2 m).

A good teacher is fair and knows when and how to deal with someone/something (s2 g2 f).

Yeah and when then they listen to both sides of the story (s4 g1 f).

Who will listen to you (s2 g2 m).

Who takes an interest in you and listens to you (s3 g2 f).

Relationships are key. Others commented along similar lines indicating that their teachers are able to make appropriate judgements:

Good teachers...

...don't patronise you and they don't talk down to you (s2 g2 f).

...are understanding, they don't mind if you put your hand up (s3 g3 f).

...act like they care (s3 g1 f).

...come and chat with you and check that you are OK (s3 g2 f).

...leave you alone sometimes (s1 g1 m).

...treat everyone the same (s2 g1 f).

Others spoke of the value of building up a relationship with a teacher. A good teacher:

...interacts with the students. They give you little signals and can let you off sometimes and instead of punishing you are more creative with you (s4 g2 m).

The second area was to do with striking the right balance of strictness and fun to create conducive learning conditions.

They are strict, but not too strict and you are not afraid of asking them something and they can make a joke (s3 g3 m).

And they let you have a bit of fun and you can interact with them (s3 g3 f).

But sometimes teachers go on and on and on and you lose concentration (s3 g3 m).

Good teachers are quite strict but know what they are doing (s3 g2 f).

More funny and more enthusiastic (m).

A teacher who knows when to be fun and knows when to be strict (m).

Let's us play around at the end of the lesson as long as you have been working (m). (s1 g3).

In another group the level of strictness was seen as an important issue:

Not being very strict on you so you can produce your best work (f).

Teachers can get strict but they can be strict for good reasons; telling us the work from start to finish and if you can't understand it tells us over again so we know it in our heads (f).

(s1 g2).

The third area centred on how teachers help young people to be involved in their learning. This was seen by a number of young people as extremely important:

Tries to make the lesson interesting and not working out of a textbook or not copying off the board (s2 g1 f).

Doing experiments outside (s2 g1 m).

Yes, when we go out to find things rather than her bringing it to you (s2 g1 f).

They get you involved and it's fun (f).

They make a way for you to participate, not just telling you everything, asking questions, making it two-way (f).

(s3 g3).

Yes, you can have a good conversation (s4 g1 f).

The last set of comments indicate that young people like to be engaged in a two-way process and to have conversations with their teachers. This is the kind of classroom talk that might be described as dialogue which strengthens young people's ability to think and learn effectively (Alexander, 2004a). This is a theme that will be considered in more depth later in this report.

From earlier comments it appears that young people appreciate teachers who are able to be supportive not only about life at school but who can take into account out-of-school issues. Good teachers listen, show they care and are interested in young people as individuals; there can be no escaping the emphasis on the interpersonal (Carnell and Lodge, 2002a). Good teachers create conducive learning environments and help young people engage in their learning in active ways. Young people also expect teachers to be knowledgeable about their subject.

It appears that these may be universal qualities and characteristics. An international survey on what makes a good teacher (UNESCO, 1996) provides similar responses from young people:

You need to be kind, trusting and friendly to me... you must listen and understand us all... never lose your temper or ignore us... I like a smile and a kind word.

Rose, aged 9, from New Zealand (p6)

The teacher shouldn't get angry about trivial matters, should be strict but just.

Maia, aged 13, Russian Federation (p16)

I like a teacher who helps me think and get answers for myself.

Bongani Sicelo, aged 9, from Zimbabwe (p20)

All young people want to be listened to, to be encouraged, respected and helped in their learning. Above all it seems that young people want responsive teachers (Carnell and Lodge, 2002a) and to be helped with their learning in the most effective ways.

So what can we take from this analysis to support more effective learning relationships in the classroom? As teachers and students do not exist in a vacuum but are influenced by one another's expectations and behaviours (MacBeath, 1999), it would appear that discussions

between teachers and young people about expectations and behaviours can lead to increased understanding. Listening to pupils' expressions about good teaching helps build a positive learning culture (Devereux, 2001). Rather than focus on school rules – rules for young people – explicitness about what is valued in teachers and learners can encourage learning-centred classrooms. This is a process that invites dialogue about what it means to be members of a learning community. The good teacher has relationships with students that are based on trust and openness, exactly the characteristics that encourage dialogue about learning (Carnell and Lodge, 2002a).

Getting a good education

The importance of getting a good education was mentioned by the majority of young people: *'school teaches you quite a lot of good things'*. What started to emerge in these conversations was that getting a good education was important for the future: *'so you can do lots of stuff when you grow up'*. Education and learning was hardly ever referred to as having importance for the present. Young people saw their education and learning as *'important for after you leave school'* or *'important for the next year'*.

It is not surprising that young people pick up the view that they are getting ready for the next stage and preparing for the future. It is embedded in talk about school and education. For example, Stephen Twigg, MP, Minister for Young People and Learning, in his speech to ATL's Easter Conference (2004) announced: *'It is essential that we get the curriculum right, so that we can really engage children and equip them for the next stage of their education and for their future lives'*. And Ken Boston, Chief Executive for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), announced in his speech to the Specialist Schools Trust on 11 May 2004 that *'Key Stages 1-3 must prepare all children for 14-19 education, with increasing rates of participation and attainment; that in turn must feed into higher education and lifelong further education, opening up choices and pathways for all learners rather than closing their options down'*. The term 'Persons in the making' (David, 1996) has been used to describe this phenomenon. Berry Mayall suggests: 'The notion that children are best understood as incompetent vulnerable becomings who progress with adult help through stages needed to turn them into mature adults has socially recognised status; it is enshrined in policies and practices affecting children's lives' (Mayall, 2003: p6). This has implications for young people's learning as the view that their school experiences are only for the future means that they are not able to relate their learning to their present lives.

This view that the young people presented – that their education was only for the future – led me to enquire what they thought was the purpose of school.

School is for education – ‘to be ready for the real world’

This is an extract from one conversation:

To educate, get a job when older, to learn more about the outside world, to be ready (m).

It gets you a job in later life (f).

Get an education, get a good job, money, decent job, the job you want to do, not one you have to do (m).

(s3 g1).

The ‘good job’ was stressed by all groups. Others mentioned going to college, university, getting good grades: *‘it takes you to higher places’*. The power to make choices in later life and long-term aspirations predominated.

Having heard similar responses in the first three schools, when I visited the fourth I asked a specific question about learning for the present. I was interested to find out how young people see the purpose of learning in school as being relevant for their day-to-day lives. Even when I pressed the question it was difficult to get beyond the view that learning was just for the future:

You need information for the future because if you don’t get a good education you won’t get a good job (s4 g1 m).

Yes, but what about the value of learning for you now?

The more you know now the more you can use it in the future. The more you know as a child the more you will know as an adult. If you take a lot of information in now you will have it for later on. It is well known that you take in information better when you are a child (s4 g2 m).

In another group a couple of ideas were expressed after a bit of a struggle:

Maths for money and how to spend it (m).

Learning a foreign language. You can then speak French or Spanish on holiday (m).

Science, first aid in case someone gets hurt (m).

This could be perceived as a limited interpretation. This perhaps reflects the need for young people to have some time to talk about their learning in a way which makes it explicit so that their perceptions might be extended. Other responses to this inquiry included: *‘to find out what subjects you like’*, *‘helping you think about what options you might take’* reflecting a view about the usefulness of learning for aspects of their school life. Only one comment reflected a broader vision: *‘so that you know what’s happening in the world’*.

The idea that young people's experiences at school were about constantly preparing for the future, or for the next year or the next stage, continued throughout the interviews and will be returned to again.

5.2 Progression through school experiences and effects on learning

The young people involved in this research had much to say on this theme and its effects on their learning. The transition from primary to secondary school and transitions in the middle years of schooling are well documented (Galton, Gray and Rudduck, 2003; 1999). Galton and colleagues (Galton, *et al*, 2003) found a high degree of consistency in pupils' perceptions of Year 8 around the country and this degree of consistency extends to this small-scale research project.

Many of the young people involved in this research said that when they moved to secondary school their learning was 'on hold'. They lost concentration at the start of secondary school as they were in different surroundings and trying to find their way round. Some found it confusing moving to different teachers. These views are consistent with Galton *et al*'s findings that 'learning (other than social learning) can be overshadowed by the excitements and social risks of "the big school"' (Galton, *et al*, 2003: p.93). Most young people in this study thought that secondary school was more challenging: '*you have to try a lot harder*'. They noticed that there was more help from the teachers and more tests. The induction day was important to give a taste of what was to come. This helped young people feel less frightened and ready to learn.

Young people said when they arrived in Year 7 they were aware of the information teachers had about them and how they used it. They felt that teachers knew them and what they are capable of:

Teachers expect a lot. When we came from Year 7 they knew what we could do from the test results (s3 g1 f).

The results of the SATs tests in Year 6 are brought up so the teachers know what you have and haven't learned (s3 g2 m).

With teachers it emerged that some were suspicious of the KS2 results and that rather than rely on these made their own judgements about young people when they came to secondary school:

There is a lot of concern about coaching for SATs at KS2. The view is that if there is a slump in KS3 the primary teachers have done their work so it is our fault. That is a cynical but popular view (teacher).

Another teacher disagreed saying secondary teachers should not be suspicious of the KS2, results: '*You have to trust the primary marks. If they have done it in primary school they don't need to do it again. You have to move your expectations up and onwards*'.

On reflection the young people said that they felt more sense of responsibility in secondary school:

In primary school they didn't teach us how to act responsibly and in Year 7 we were still acting like kids, jumping around the playground and playing with skipping ropes. Now we just talk with our friends. In Year 7 they look at you and think that's just a little girl and now in Year 8 I feel much more responsible for my actions (s2 g2).

Progressing to Year 8

All young people agreed that Year 8 is more advanced and there was more responsibility given than in Year 7: *'You are allowed to go off in pairs'*. At the time they thought Year 7 was really hard but looking back some thought the 'work' was a lot easier than Year 8, so their expectations of Year 9 were even greater in terms of level of difficulty: *'you learn the basics in Year 7 and in Year 8 you learn more and more'*. Here the amount of learning seems important rather than an understanding of the way learning is built upon. Here again there is consistency with other research findings:

What is missing... is a clear understanding of what learning leads to and how later learning builds on earlier learning, not only in terms of content but also in terms of working. This may not be surprising given that each year is fenced off and made relatively self-contained' (Galton, *et al*, 2003: p93).

Other young people in this research mentioned that there was more independence in Year 8 and more responsibility, and the young people suggested that they were asked their opinion more. One person said he thought you got better teachers in Year 8.

Progression was described by young people as *'carrying on, memorising, revision, remembering and taking it on a level'*. To some, aspects of their work seemed like repetition: *'In Year 8 we got some worksheets that we used in Year 7'*. One other detected 'higher steps'. For example, *'In Year 7 we learned about collecting pollen, in Year 8 we learn about what's contained in the pollen'*. Others talked of their understanding being expanded.

Young people appreciated many aspects of the ways in which teachers treated them differently in Year 8:

Teachers trust you. They stop calling you boys and girls and call you by your name (m).

They treat you with more respect and give you more things to do and are not always with you (f).

You are allowed to do certain things by yourself instead of taking notes from the teacher (m).

*They trust you to do the work and give you lots of responsibility (f).
(s3 g3).*

If the teacher feels that you can go a little step harder then they will expect you to go that little step (s3 g2).

Others felt they should be trusted more:

I don't think we are trusted at all. If they trusted us they would let us out for lunch and they would not have so many staff in the cafeteria (m).

When you are at home your mum trusts you to look after the children in the house, there is more trust at home (f).

(s2 g3).

Jean Rudduck (Rudduck, 2004) has summarised what has been learned about young people's experiences of Year 8 and the problems they encounter, and offers examples of successful solutions. Rudduck's work underlines the importance of schools creating opportunities to give students more autonomy and responsibility. She reports on the way in which schools have tried to strengthen pupils' commitment to learning in Year 8 and the ways they have attempted to make Year 8 seem special.

Conceptions of Year 8

A picture emerged of Year 8 having two main advantages: having a sense of security and a sense of freedom.

Young people in all the 12 groups liked the position of not being the youngest in the school, everyone knew them – Year 8 was a safe place to be. There were 'no worries'. With this sense of security came the view that in Year 8 young people were given more responsibility and were trusted by teachers, but would like to be trusted more. There were opportunities to look after the young people in Year 7. This is summed up in one group's conversation:

What is the best thing about Year 8?

They expect you to look after yourself (f).

In Year 7 you were in a new school and no one knew you. In Year 8 it is much better as everyone knows you and basically you are fending for yourself (f).

Year 8 is good because you can teach Year 7 (m).

In Year 7 people used to bully us but not now (m).

(s1 g3).

As they move through school, peers and teachers regard the young people differently. The older they are the more status they have. As one said: '*There is a certain amount of hierarchy*'. Another said: '*Year 8 is just perfect*'. She described the feeling of being aware of what she knew, knowing there were things still to know, having time to catch up and getting

to know all the things she needed to know for Year 9. She felt secure in the knowledge that *'when it comes to Years 9, 10 and 11 you'll know what to do'*.

Year 8 gives a sense of freedom especially from pressure. It is 'a free year'. Young people in Year 8 said they did not have to work as hard as in other years. The level of work is just right: *'It is not too hard and not too easy. It is the best year, the work is just right'*. The experience is just about preparation for Year 9. The following extracts from different groups give a flavour of what seems to be a very relaxed experience:

What is the best thing about Year 8?

You don't have to worry about much like in Year 9 when you have to worry about choosing. Year 8 is a free year (s1 g1 f).

You can relax. You know the exams are coming but not now. You go on trips – skiing (s3 g3 f).

You can be laid back. You don't really have to work (f).

It's a rest. You don't get stressed out. No tests (m). (s2 g2).

At first you study a little bit in Year 7. Then Year 8 studying is harder so that in Year 9 you can do the tests quite easily (s1 g3 m).

Other research (Galton, *et al*, 2003: p93) indicates that Year 8 is seen as 'a nondescript year' – a lack of a clear and compelling identity with no obvious challenges.

If a phase of learning, like KS3, is constructed over a three-year period, perhaps it is inevitable that the middle year is seen as a more relaxed year. Or it might be interpreted that in a performance-oriented environment, a year without tests, exams and external pressures can be seen as having no value or purpose; the value and purpose of learning for its own sake is lost. There are many imaginative activities that schools construct for young people in Year 8. These, however, do not seem to change the conception of Year 8 for some young people. A programme of learning about learning (Watkins, *et al*, 2000) would be a useful and explicit way of helping young people understand the value of learning – learning for the here and now as well as helping them in their learning in the future. This proposal links with the ideas that emerge from other research (Galton, *et al*, 2003: p94): 'Year 8... seems a pivotal year when pupils need to be helped to think and act strategically in relation to their learning and understand how a commitment to learning now can enhance life chances'. Jean Rudduck concurs: 'Year 8 is a good time to focus on continuities in learning and ways of learning, and to help young people develop confidence in talking about and taking responsibility for their own learning' (Rudduck, 2004: p7).

Some young people involved in this research were aware of the trap of being too laid back in Year 8:

Year 8 is important because it is in the middle of years 7 and 9 and you don't know much in Year 7 and you need to know more in Year 9 so you need to be ready for Year 9 (s3 g2 m).

You need to start concentrating because you are building up for Year 9 (f).

You can muck about, not take it too seriously till you get to Year 9 (f).

*You have to pay attention because in Year 9 you might not know enough. It is preparing you for Year 9 (f).
(s3 g1).*

Given these responses I asked young people to share their views more fully on the purpose of Year 8.

The purpose of Year 8

The notion of being 'in waiting' extended to the young people's view of the purpose of Year 8. Again I was struck by the comments that were made, the majority of which indicated that Year 8 was a year of preparation: 'to prepare you for Year 9', 'to revise for the tests'; 'just revising'; 'to get you ready for your exams'. Another mentioned that while you 'do new stuff, it is advancing, it is still in preparation for Year 9'. One conversation with a group (s1 g3) highlights the view that Year 8 is all about preparing for Year 9 and beyond.

What's the purpose of Year 8?

Gathering ideas that you can take forward to Year 9 (m).

Getting ready for Year 9 (m).

Year 7 is just beginning to get used to the school but Year 8 is to prepare you for Year 9 (f).

...and to have your bit of fun (f).

To prepare for Year 9, to mess around and to start thinking about what subjects you want to do (m).

You don't get to the intense stuff (m).

You don't get to pick what you do. In Year 9 you choose what you want to do. It makes a difference because it's hard to study what you don't like and in Year 9 you study what's relevant to your career (m).

I asked all the groups the question: 'Could Year 8 be more challenging?'. The majority felt

that the level of their studies was about right but they were annoyed by repetition: *'going back to Year 7 books'; 'repeating work'; 'going over and over material'; 'It's annoying if we get the same work over and over again'*.

Insufficient contact with the primary schools may account for repetition in Year 7, but young people spoke of repetition in Year 8 too. In one London school there were 48 'feeder' schools and the teacher said she could only make real links with about six primary schools. Whilst there are fewer 'feeder' schools in the Dorset schools teachers there also felt that links with primary schools were not as effective as they would like:

Enhancing progression is better than it was but nowhere near where it should be between KS2 and KS3. There are still all sorts of problems of looking at Year 6 work and how far Year 5 and 6 teachers are aware of what happens in Year 7 and vice versa and days visiting each way does not necessarily solve that.

One young person said that Year 8 could be more challenging but not too pressured. Some felt that the challenge needed to come from themselves: *'I challenge myself. I know what I can do'*. Another said *'it is your future that you are deciding. It is not anyone else's. If anyone else tries to push you harder you just fall back'*.

The distinction between challenge and pressure might be interpreted as the difference between a learning-oriented and a performance-oriented environment. This links with the young people's beliefs about their learning. It was striking how some young people understood their own agency – a sense of responsibility for themselves as learners, which matches a learning orientation.

It's all up to you. No one is stopping you or forcing you (f).

Some pupils don't want to learn or take responsibility. They bunk off but I am organised. I bring my equipment and bring the right attitude to class. You are ready to learn. You say I am going to learn (f).

(s4 g1).

This contrasted with other young people's sense of dependency on teachers for their learning.

The phrase 'self-theories' is used by Carol Dweck to describe what learners say about themselves (Dweck, 2000). What they say is based on their beliefs. Most people respond in one of two ways, depending on the context and other variables. Those who hold a learning orientation, like the young woman above who is ready to learn, have a love of learning, seek challenges, value effort and persist in the face of obstacles. Others, like those described below possibly, hold beliefs that prevent them from learning, especially in challenging situations because they make a connection between lack of success and ability.

While young people recognise their own responsibility they felt they did not have responsibility for others in the class. That was definitely the teacher's role. One group was adamant:

Some kids don't care and come to school to muck about so it is not really the student's responsibility to control other students. If they have troublesome students they should send them elsewhere. If they don't want to learn they shouldn't be holding everyone else up, destroying others' learning. It is not up to me to control other pupils' learning. I can only be responsible for myself (m).

In the end it is up to you whether you are going to learn (m).

If you are concentrating enough then you don't get disturbed by loud people. You try and ignore them (f).

(s4 g3).

When asked what aspects of school life young people would like to change several mentioned that teachers need to maintain discipline in class so that their learning was not disrupted.

Tracking progress

Despite, or because of, the widely held view that Year 8 was a more relaxed year the young people were able to talk about the ways in which they could detect that they were making progress. Two contrasting positions emerged: one was to do with the way external factors indicated progress; the other was how individuals were aware of and understood their own progress.

In what ways can you detect you are making progress?

My contact book is full of good merits (m).

My levels are going up and my teachers tell me I am getting better. I can spell better. I don't know but my friends ask me for help so I think I am more clever than them (f).

I am building up my credits. It is very hard to get a credit but some teachers give them out more easily (m).

It goes on your school record and that gives me confidence (m).

I don't bother getting them. I am not interested and it doesn't mean much for me (f).

I get them because my dad pays me if I get them (m).

(s2 g1).

Relying on test results, working up through levels, knowing 'positions' because of being in the 'top', 'second' or 'bottom' group and comments like "well done" from teachers were indicators that individuals were doing well.

In answer to the same question other young people were able to make their own assessments:

I feel honestly I've become a better learner because I am more interested in the things I need to know and I go to the library and I want to find out more things (m).

I've changed a bit in order to get a better life when I leave school (f).
(s1 g3).

Using this cue I pursued the idea of whether they got a different sense of themselves as learners. Some said they felt proud, special and more able to trust themselves, *'I kind of feel willing to learn'*. Some said they felt more focused, had a sense of direction, more *'adulthood and have more responsibility to do more learning'*.

As young people were getting more interested in the careers they might undertake this had an effect on their view of themselves as learners:

You take it more seriously. You know what you want to be, like a vet, and you know what courses you want to take (s3 g1 f).

As you get older you get wiser and you move on to bigger things and then move on to college and university and have different areas of study and feel proud of yourself (s1 g1 m).

Only one declared that he was naughtier now. This period of transition is reflected in their views of themselves as learners.

Making your mark

Another significant response from several of the groups was the importance of 'making your mark', both in Year 7 and Year 8. Again this was seen as crucial for success in the future:

You still need to work hard in Year 8 so you can get into the top set because you get the best teachers in the top set. That's what my mum says (s3 g1 f).

To get you into a smart group for Year 9 (s2 g2 m).

Year 7 is the most important year because you have got to make your mark and the teachers will put you in a particular group and that will be important for Year 11 work and teachers think about you in a particular way (m).

Year 8 is important too because you are still making your mark (m).
(s3 g2).

The view that teachers think about young people 'in a particular way' was a theme that emerged in a number of interviews. It appears to them that first impressions are really important and that no matter what the young person does that first image remains fixed with the teacher either in relation to their perceived 'behaviour' or 'ability'.

If you are really bad in Year 7 teachers know you are going to be like that. You can change but you would lose respect (m).

When teachers meet you they make their choice of what they think you are going to be like. If you are naughty the first time then they probably think you are going to be naughty for the rest of the time as well (f).

(s4 g3).

The grouping of young people in 'ability sets' was an important issue, mentioned by over half of the 12 groups. In the following extract the humiliation suffered was palpable. This young person is very perceptive about the effects on his own learning:

You get put into sets for maths, English and science on how the tests went. If you are in the lower set you are disappointed in yourself and I think that all the people in the top set are laughing at us and I feel really bad about myself and that might get in the way of me learning (s1 g1 m).

Young people spoke about 'top', 'middle' and 'bottom' sets and had the view, sometimes incorrectly, that being in the 'top' set meant certain privileges like having the 'best' teachers. The messages that young people had picked up included notions about being in 'mixed ability' groups, and that *'if you are all clever then you are not going to be able to help each other'*, whereas *'slow learners need more help'*.

The effects of the use of 'crude, oversimplifying and debilitating constructs of ability in teaching' have been written about by Susan Hart and colleagues in *Learning without Limits* (2004). This powerful book critiques the practices of ability labelling and ability-focused teaching and constructs a model of pedagogy based on 'transformability': the mind-set that children's futures as learners are not pre-determined, and that teachers can help and ultimately transform young people's capacity to learn:

The core idea of transformability contrasts with the underlying fatalism associated with ability labels. It means that things always have the potential to change, and that people have the power to change things for the better by what they do in the present. Classroom conditions can change, and be changed, to enrich and enhance learning opportunities and free learning from some existing constraints. All young people can become better learners, if the subjective conditions needed to support and empower their learning are developed and consolidated through everyday experiences in the classroom. (Hart, *et al*, 2004: p192).

Teachers in all four schools discussed ability groupings and the practices of setting as part of their everyday conversations. In one school a decision had been made to extend the practice in more subjects. It might be interpreted that such decisions are based on teaching considerations rather than on what facilitates young people's learning most effectively.

Young people's and teachers' expectations

The expectations young people felt that the teachers had of them can be divided into two categories: short-term, for example, behaviour in lessons, and long-term, for example, career prospects. It was thought that teachers had very high expectations both in terms of success in school and lifelong achievement.

The vast majority of the responses were about the teachers' expectation of young people in lessons. Some mentioned that teachers expect young people to increase their levels and reach their targets but the most responses were about behaviour – teachers expect students 'to be perfect'. This mirrors the responses on what makes a good learner (see pages 36-7). There is consistency:

In lessons, teachers expect you to be sensible, to put your hand up if you are stuck and not just sit there (m).

*Get your head down and try not to be distracted by others around you (f).
(s3 g3).*

The list of teacher expectations, sometimes conflicting, was long. It included:

- *concentrating*
- *getting on with your work straight away*
- *not talking and not stopping others from working*
- *not chatting even if the person next to you needs help*
- *working in complete silence*
- *asking lots of questions*
- *not mucking around*
- *settling down quickly.*

It was felt by some young people in Year 8 that teachers' expectations of classroom work were too high. They described this as teachers pushing people too hard: '*my brother was doing really well in maths and he was pushed too much and then he refused to do any work*'. In another group one said: '*they push you too much sometimes and that is when pupils stop doing their work and you withdraw. They push you till you refuse*'. In another school one young person spoke about pressure on all fronts and that if this continued in lessons it would interfere with his learning:

The teachers expect too much. More pressure. There is too much pressure in our lives. Pressure from home, like do housework and stuff and pressure in the

playground to be cool and stuff so when you are in class you don't really want pressure. You need to feel more relaxed so you can concentrate on your work (s4 g2 m).

Here again the performance-oriented environment can be detected where there is an emphasis on achievement rather than learning.

One teacher said that of the four principles of the Strategy (expectations, progression, engagement, transformation), raising expectations was the most successful. There had been low expectations of the pupils especially those who came to school with English as a second language or those who came with 'marked behavioural difficulties'. Teachers in the past have not expected some children to do very well. She went on to say that the KS3 Strategy raised the game across the board and set a bench mark that was achievable.

From the teachers' perspectives higher expectations both of teachers and consequently of young people come from 'objectives-led lessons and individual target setting':

If you are emphasising quality planning and episodic lessons and not relying on good activities and focusing on structure, then you are increasing expectations on yourself and that has got to come through to the kids. We are telling kids at the beginning of lessons 'This is what we expect of you'. Kids are coming into the lessons that are working, more aware of expectations and behaviour and what they have to achieve by the end of the lesson. Now they realise the importance of thinking things through and analysing it and are expecting more in lessons to think and teachers are happy to get them to think hard and that has implications for us. For example, teachers are taking more risks, expecting more paired discussion and more group work (teacher).

Does increasing teachers' expectations of high-quality lessons have an effect on the young people? Would a focus on the learning be more effective? Higher expectations did not seem to connect with the idea of learning being unlimited or that young people's capacity for learning could be endless. The continued use of the label 'low-ability' in schools and other references to ability groupings might perhaps suggest some teacher expectations of young people remain somewhat fixed.

In the long-term it was felt that teachers expected young people to get a good education and all that that would bring: *'the teachers expect us to get good jobs, good careers and have a good life'* (s2 g2).

Young people's expectations of themselves

In conversation on this theme, young people voiced a greater majority of long-term expectations of themselves. This would seem to echo the view that school is about preparing for the future.

The responses included: going to university and getting a degree, or having a job they really wanted, for example, to be a mechanic. One group expressed it like this:

To have a good life (f).

To be healthy, have money, not too much, just enough (f).

Not to worry (m).

To do something I enjoy and not to have financial difficulties or constraints (m).

A lot of money so you know you are safe (f).

(s4 g3).

In school young people hoped to get good grades, do well in their GCSEs, and get a decent education including preparation for the future: *'stuff you need in life. I wish we'd have more social lessons that teaches you about what will happen in life and how to deal with it'*. The importance of personal and social aspects of education were discussed. Others felt they would like to be more confident in themselves. There was a disagreement about the range of subjects that would be useful to students. One said he would like to study only the lessons that were his favourites, or would be useful for his job, while another thought that if he was going into dentistry, for example, he wanted to study a wide range of subjects.

What makes a good learner?

'Someone who listens to the teacher and does their work' was the answer according to a number of young people involved in this research. This response was echoed in a number of other groups:

Good at listening so you can remember things for next time (f).

Listening and memorising fast (f).

Taking in all the information (m).

Intelligent. Basically you grasp concepts easily and understand things. Mostly you have a larger vocabulary (m).

(s4 g3).

Views of what makes a good learner mirror the conceptions young people hold of how learning happens. In the vast majority of responses the dominant model is of instruction, mainly listening to the teacher, as we see elsewhere in this report. The last response (above) to do with grasping concepts and understanding connects with the notion of construction of knowledge. There were very few comments that reflected this view. No specific comments were made about being engaged in dialogue with peers or being part of a learning community which would reflect a co-construction model.

It has been suggested that while teachers may be firmly committed to a view of young learners as active, independent, questioning and thinking (Willes, 1983, cited in Hart *et al*, 2004) the messages young people pick up about what makes a good learner may be different. The dominant conception is that a learner is passive and conforming.

When young people talk about being a 'good learner' it is as if they are seeing themselves as a 'pupil', a particular role that is set against that of a 'teacher'. They address their answers in a particular role not as young people. They do not see themselves, and teachers may not see themselves either, as participating together in the learning process.

In a study I conducted in 1999 in one of the four schools involved in this research about what helps learning, I also noticed the young people in the role of 'pupil', as if passivity and conformity was expected. The following was a typical response:

I sometimes sit down and work on my own, I sometimes work with others. I sometimes ask the teacher for help. It depends. I am not worried about getting a higher grade. I am more interested in getting a good reputation.

Q. A good reputation?

Just to sit down and get on with your work quietly and not run around the classroom
(Male Year 8, from Carnell, 2000: p58).

In this case the learner, a 'pupil', selects a superficial approach to learning to match context expectations (Carnell, 2000). This contrasts with a 'strategic learner' (Ertmer & Newby, 1996), that is, someone who uses knowledge about her/himself and the task or context to select strategies to achieve the desired goal. A strategic learner would embrace complexity, use many strategies and engage with peers and teachers, more as equals participating together in the learning process.

In the young person's view (quoted above) a good reputation is about 'performing' as a model student. He expects to work alone, sit at his desk and wait for the teacher to direct activities. His work (not learning) is done quietly to please. In fact, he may not be learning at all. Docile children do not learn. Indeed they fail because they are 'afraid, bored and confused': afraid of failing, disappointing or displeasing adults; bored because what they do in school is trivial, dull and makes narrow demands; confused because a lot of what they do makes no sense (Holt, 1965: p9).

Has the view of what makes a good learner changed since the KS3 Strategy was introduced? Some of the conceptions of Year 8 students in this research appear to be the same as students in previous studies. If active engagement, collaboration and responsibility are seen to be aspects of effective learning then conceptions of learning and what makes a good learner need to change.

Target setting and the links with learning

There were mixed views about the value of target setting. Some said targets had an important role but most young people thought target setting unhelpful. The following extract is fairly typical of the responses in the groups.

What do you think about target setting?

It gets in the way. I know you have to aim for something but there is too much pressure and if you don't get it you feel really let down (f).

Yeah, I feel the same (f).

In some ways it is good, in some ways bad. Good because it gives you something to work for but bad because it like gets in the way and there is too much pressure (m).

You feel let down if you don't get your targets and it doesn't boost your confidence (m). (s3 g2).

Several young people thought that targets were pointless and some went as far as saying they were counter-productive and limited learning:

I think it is pointless because if you want to do something then you will do it yourself. If you set targets then you just go for those targets rather than going for an overall. You try and do everything for yourself to do your best, the best you can do in school so you don't need targets because you could do everything to the best of your ability and you don't need targets (s2 g3 f).

This young person has a view of learning that is not confined to specific demands and narrow boundaries. She goes on to say how she rejects the idea of bribery: 'Well, I have got a mate who gets £2 from home when he gets a merit but rather doing it to get money and doing it for other people you're doing it for yourself and it is more rewarding'. She appears to have developed aspects that could be described as learning-oriented rather than performance-oriented (see table 1).

Table 1: Learning and performance orientations Source: Watkins, *et al* (2002) (adapted from Dweck, 2000).

Learning orientation	Performance orientation
Belief that effort leads to success	Belief that ability leads to success
Belief in one's ability to improve and learn	Concern to be judged as able, to perform
Preference for challenging tasks	Satisfaction from doing better than others
Satisfaction from success at difficult tasks	Emphasis on competition and public evaluation
Problem-solving and self-instruction when engaged in tasks	Helplessness: negative self-evaluation when task is difficult
About improving	About proving

Teachers talked about how they bribed young people: *'We bribe the kids to do the booster classes with vouchers for coming in and vouchers if they have achieved their level. Without that they would not have been well attended. The funding has been vital'*. Such practices do not encourage a learning orientation.

Others pointed to the drawbacks of the yearly school review system and a number of young people identified the pointlessness of having targets set for them:

You get targets about once a year but then you forget about it (f).

*They don't help much as you forget. The teacher writes it but you can't read it (f).
(s3 g1).*

The person setting the targets appears to take responsibility for the young person's development. In such a scenario they cannot take ownership of the target. Other references were made to the futile exercise of setting targets that young people knew they could already achieve or writing something down and then not taking any notice: *'You don't really follow them. They are just there'*. Caroline Lodge points out that efforts to help young people improve through setting targets are often thwarted because the purpose of the session becomes the completion of the form (Lodge, 2004). The very term 'setting targets' emphasises their creation rather than their completion. Lodge goes on to say that teachers often try to engage young people in talking about targets but the talk does not extend their understanding of learning because the conversation focuses on performance rather than learning. As a result such conversations do not generate understanding about learning.

Young people in this research pointed to the need for encouragement and help in understanding what is needed to achieve targets: *'they don't understand that I need them to help me and give me encouragement and help me know what I need to do to get my target'*. This again emphasises the creation of targets which once done is abandoned. One teacher spoke about such a pitfall: *'I overdid it at the beginning and was spending too much time setting targets and didn't have enough time to act on them'*.

Other comments made by young people indicate some insightful perceptions about the connection, or lack of connection, between target setting and learning. In one there was the observation that: *'It doesn't help your learning but it helps to know how well you are doing'*. Many others include perceptive insights that a focus on performance may inhibit learning: *'It makes you worried so that you may not get it because you are worried'*. *'It gets in the way of learning because you are expected to get a target and you keep working and then you get stressed and get told off and you don't think you will ever get there'*. These views underscore the perception that a focus on performance may inhibit performance whereas a focus on learning may enhance performance (Watkins, *Learning about Learning Enhances Performance*, 2001).

Testing times

The young people were divided in their views about testing although the 'stop the tests' lobby was greater.

Some young people expressed positive views about testing:

I enjoy tests. I know it sounds weird but I like the fact that everything is there and it just needs a straight answer (m).

At the start of a test you feel nervous and you start to sweat but when you have finished you think 'That went really well and I am confident with myself' (f).

Tests improve you (f).
(s3 g1).

The first comment *'...it just needs a straight answer'* reflects the view that testing is about the retrieval of information; a limited perception of learning. Complex learning, where there may be many different answers is not so easily tested.

Other young people expressed reservations:

I don't think testing is that good because sometimes people crack under the pressure and get nervous. Coursework is better (f).

You should have one in Year 7, one in Year 9 and one in Year 11 instead of all these rubbish tests in between. There are pointless tests in Year 8 (m).

*I don't see the point of it. There are too many and it stresses you out (m).
(s2 g3).*

Young people were frank about the pointlessness of practice tests and most agreed that the high levels of stress caused by tests interfered with their learning. Stress levels are increased when schools over-emphasise the importance of tests, for example, in a school I visit (not part of this research project) I notice that teachers are referring to the SATs exams when talking with young people.

One young person had conflicting thoughts about tests:

I don't like them but I think you need them because they tell how you are getting on in school life and what you need to do to improve it. It doesn't help me enough because you don't know what you have done right or wrong anyway (s3 g1 f).

This person seems to be making a useful point about the need for feedback on test results. Without feedback, she is without information on what she needs to do. Feedback needs to be accessible to help young people make sense of their learning. Feedback has more impact on young people's progress if it is focused upon learning intentions and suggests explicit strategies for improvement (Clarke, 2000).

Tests and exams closely relate to models of learning. While some examinations and coursework offer great opportunities for young people to show their knowledge and skills, the content and methods of other tests do not (Alderson, 2003). For example, there are no tests that measure skills in collaboration, co-constructive dialogue (learning through conversations) or meta-learning. These are crucial aspects of effective learning (see section 7).

Pupils in schools in England are subjected to more national assessments than in any other country in the world (Richards, 2000). Today young people are tested and assessed more often than in any previous period, with statutory assessments at ages five, seven, 11 and 14. There are also 'optional' tests produced by the National Assessment Agency (formerly a part of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) for Years 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 and Progress Tests for Year 7 pupils who are on the borderline between level 3 and level 4. Practice tests are also included in young people's school experiences, the majority of young people seeing these 'extra' tests as 'useless', 'irritating' and 'time-wasting'. The emphasis on test results and performance, rather than on learning, reinforces the view that any year without tests is pointless. So where there is a year without tests, practice tests are included. Effective learning, on the other hand, requires formative rather than summative assessment.

There is a vast industry of testing and statistically classifying children today (Alderson, 2003: p25). A response from ATL to the Labour Party National Policy Forum Document: *The Best Education for All* (2003: p8) suggests:

Those responsible for determining the broad design features of the education system have seen the needs of the learner as subordinate to the needs of the system itself.

... There is now a wealth of evidence to show how the learner's experience of learning is narrowed, shallowed and seriously distorted by relentless testing and public examinations. ...Goodhart's law applies: What's counted counts – and teachers do what is inspected not expected.

Elsewhere there is a call for SATs to be replaced. Testing for 11- and 14-year-olds is to be abolished in Wales now that the recommendations of ACCAC (the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) and the Daugherty Assessment Review Group have been accepted.

5.3 A good lesson

In describing their experiences of school, a predominant topic was lessons and what makes a good lesson.

Of all the 58 responses the single most important aspect of what makes a good lesson was the teacher. Next in importance came the individual young person's involvement in learning and aspects of the learner's role. The balance of learning and enjoyment seemed a crucial point for many.

The teacher's role

The most striking impression that comes across from the interviews is that a good lesson depends to a very great extent on the teacher.

What makes a good lesson?

A good teacher to teach you (f).

A good teacher you can have fun with (m).

A teacher that understands you and understands what it's like for you and a teacher you can talk to (m).

A teacher that respects you. They still want you to listen to them but they give you space to do kind of what you want to do in a lesson (m).

(s1 g1).

In a number of other interviews with young people in this research there is a sense of the teacher being in charge and instructing young people about what they have to do. From an analysis of the responses there is a clear sense that 'everyone is listening and doing what the teacher says'. The teacher is 'quite strict' and gives 'good instructions'. A good lesson depends on the enthusiasm of the teacher and the sense that effective personal relations are being developed. The teacher is 'not having a go at you', 'not a stressy teacher' or 'not

too strict'. In a good lesson the teacher is able to provide an environment where there is *'enjoyment and learning at the same time*'. This dual sense of fun and worthwhileness was expressed by a very large number of young people.

The following extract underscores the view of the teacher as the main source of information. Here peers are not seen as a learning resource. There is no sense of young people being part of a learning community.

When you have a good lesson a teacher is enthusiastic and you think "this is good"
(m).

Is it always up to the teacher?

No, it is up to the class too. Sometimes the class is messing around and sometimes the class pays attention (f).

Do you learn without the teacher?

No (f).

Well with my parents (m).

In the textbook you could be looking something up so it's not always the teacher that tells you stuff, but nearly always (f).

What about others in the class?

You can collect good answers (f).

Not really, I don't think the class can teach you (m).
(s1 g3).

Other research (Morgan and Morris, 1999) has come up with similar findings: young people see learning as dependent on teachers; teachers see young people's learning as dependent on the young people's circumstances. Both point away from themselves. There is little recognition of inter-dependence in learning.

The context in which young people are learning needs to encourage effective learning practices that do not only rely on the teacher as a source of knowledge (Watkins, *et al*, 2002) including collaboration and dialogue with peers (Alexander, 2004a). Robin Alexander's research findings suggest that well-structured oral and collaborative activities maintain young people's time on task more consistently than solitary written ones, yet in classrooms written and text-based tasks predominate.

Young people's involvement in learning

From the analysis of the young people's responses, an important aspect of the teacher's role in a good lesson is their ability to involve young people in their learning: *'A good lesson is when the teacher knows what he's doing and doesn't make you do copying out and is fun'* (s3 g2 f). Many other young people talked about this aspect describing it as 'getting stuck in':

A good lesson is when teachers get you involved, like dance and drama. You get to do stuff and you are not just sitting around (f).

PE because you are out and getting some exercise (m).

Practical work and then you can get stuck in (f).
(s3 g1).

Making the 'work' relevant to their lives in the here and now appeared helpful. One youngster got very excited when he talked about how his teacher did that: *'Teachers break it down in a way that you can understand. Like in science if they relate digestion to your favourite football team or a match'* (s4 g2 m).

'Not just writing' and *'not just using a textbook'* were examples from a large number of young people indicating their preference for engaging learning although one young person thought that writing enabled her learning: *'If you concentrate a lot and do lots of writing your handwriting gets better and you are collecting stuff inside your brain'* (s2 g1). This is a good example of what Freire (1970) describes as the 'banking' conception of education where knowledge is deposited. This is not the kind of learning that helps young people in the 21st century (Watkins, *et al*, 2002).

Other groups identified further the particular characteristics of what being involved in learning meant for them:

Discussion, descriptive writing, not just copying (f).

Interesting debates, asking and answering questions (f).

And when it doesn't bore you out of your skull (m).
(s4 g3).

PE because you have a certain part in a team and you are really important and you're involved because others are relying on you (f).

Yes you are part of something (m).

And in RE because you can put your opinions across like when two sides of the room are discussing things (f).
(s3 g2).

Here we can trace the importance of the social dimension of learning. One young person expressed it really well:

A good lesson is about communicating, like learning to appreciate other people in the groups you are with (s2 g1 f).

Others mentioned friends being in the same class and that ‘good students around you helps’. In different conversations with young people there is a paradigm shift from reliance on the teacher to being interdependent with peers. These comments indicate that young people see the value of their peers as a resource for learning. Learning does not entirely rest with the teacher – a sense of learning community is more evident here.

There are similarities with those aspects the young people identified as helping their engagement in learning with the principles Robin Alexander (2004a: pp.22-23) has identified as essential features of the ‘dialogic’ classroom:

- **collective:** children address learning tasks together rather than in isolation
- **reciprocal:** people listen to each other, share ideas and consider different views
- **supportive:** ideas are articulated freely without fear or embarrassment
- **cumulative:** people build on ideas and link them into coherent lines of thinking and inquiry
- **purposeful:** teachers plan ‘dialogic’ teaching with particular goals in mind.

Involved in learning or engagement with the lesson?

A striking distinction emerged in the way young people talked about being involved in their learning and the way in which the teachers talked about young people’s engagement with the lesson. It would appear that the KS3 Strategy influences the ways in which teachers talk about engagement, especially in relation to ‘starter activities’.

We have a common language now. For a long time teachers have introduced lessons in different ways and have been aware of having a good start to a lesson but simply talking of engagement as a term has been really important. It has been much easier to talk in the staffroom or on a training day. The language has had an impact on teaching. Teachers are much more open to discussion about their teaching because they are much more confident about what we see as good teaching. This has been excellent (teacher).

From this extract it can be interpreted that the emphasis is on what the teacher is doing and not on what will help young people in their learning. Engagement is referred to as important for starting a lesson well. Elsewhere this teacher says: ‘There has been a massive range of engagement activities at the beginning of lessons that has started lessons with a bang and brought them (young people) in more quickly’. This teacher goes on to say that there is more

talk about planning and structure and that focusing on the planning and objectives has been key for a certain percentage of teachers. The language of the KS3 Strategy, and underpinning rationale, reinforces the focus on teaching. What is missing is talk about learning. This has serious implications for young people's learning. As one teacher put it:

I have not really seen the Strategy increasing engagement. There is nothing markedly different to what I saw as a teacher five or six years ago. What I have seen is the lower ability students being able to access and get on board through catch up. But I wouldn't say there was a marked increased engagement since the Strategy has come along. ... I am not sure if the KS3 Strategy has transformed the learning but it certainly has transformed the teaching so it probably has transformed the learning.

Learning cannot be assumed. This assumption that transforming teaching transforms learning needs to be challenged.

The three part lesson was first introduced (although English had four parts) and was then referred to as the structured lesson: a starter activity (to engage and activate pupils), a whole class main lesson, and a plenary session at the end in which what had been learned (content) is discussed. I came across a couple of examples where young people thought this was helpful:

Teachers get you involved and at the end of the lesson review what you have learned (m).

*Sometimes in science we have a quiz at the end (m).
(s4 g2).*

One teacher said that he thought the plenary was the phase of the lesson done least well in his school and stated that if teachers have concentrated on engagement activities at the beginning they risk over-running.

There was very little indication that the focus in the plenaries was on the process of learning. It appeared to be only on the content of the lesson. In another research project (unpublished) one teacher used the 'Do, Review, Learn, Apply' cycle of learning (Dennison and Kirk, 1990) to review both the content and process of learning as the plenary (see appendix 1). She remarked that before she used this cycle she was unsure of what to do in the plenary but the cycle has transformed the plenary and made total sense of it for her and the young people.

The change of name to 'the structured lesson' perhaps reflects the difficulty in practice of dividing every lesson this way and the dangers of it becoming mechanistic (Stobart and Stoll, 2004). This is precisely what one teacher felt:

People are worried about it stifling creativity. I don't talk about three-part lessons much because that's too much like a strait-jacket. You could have seven parts in a lesson. There's a lot who say they can't take it on. Some teachers in practical subjects don't see starters fitting in with their lessons. They never dabble in it at all. Plenaries they think of as the last five minutes clearing-up time. It's a question of relevance and people are questioning that.

The relatively short time-tabled periods, usually up to 50 minutes, have created difficulties for teachers in allowing pupils to finish off tasks and develop ideas, as well as getting to know pupils (Galton and Hargreaves, 2002, cited in Stobart and Stoll, 2004). One teacher made an observation about the pace of lessons underscoring the Strategy's focus on teaching. This teacher points out the paradox:

The pace of teaching is challenging. The pace of learning is still behind. The pace of teaching is better. It is not marking time or repeating but the pace of learning comes after that. We have still a long way to go on that one.

One of the aims of the two-year KS3 project is to develop ways of increasing the pace of learning and so impact on pupils' motivation, learning and attainment. Does this mean faster teaching or faster learning? Pace was an issue for many of the young people. They felt that they were often hurried and that in some subjects, especially PE, by the time you are ready it is time to pack up again. Emphasising pace *per se* may frustrate understanding rather than promote it (Alexander, 2004a).

For teachers, Julie Fisher claims, pressure to increase pace causes them:

- to focus on their agenda rather than young people's
- to cover the curriculum and move young people on, not because they are ready but because they will fall behind their targets
- to miss opportunities for learning (Fisher, 2000).

The pressure to move on may result in bite-sized activities. This denies young people: opportunities to experience making slow progress on complicated, ill-formulated tasks and to find out what it feels like; pleasure in cumulative progress; opportunities to develop resilience, that is, 'strengthening the learning muscles that sustained engagement requires' (Claxton, 1999: pp282-283). When asked what aspects of school they would want to see changed, a number of young people suggested that lessons should be longer so that they did not feel rushed.

It would appear that one of the purposes of the structured lesson is to make the learning objectives of the lesson explicit and to evaluate the extent to which they have been achieved.

As one teacher put it:

Teachers had an initial worry about using whiteboards but teachers are pleased with the results. When you put the objectives up on the whiteboards 10 minutes into the lesson you have 30 eager faces.

Planning to teach to objectives as opposed to activities has been really important to one teacher. This is noticed by young people:

In lessons sometimes the aims and objectives are put up (f).

*In music she gives you a clearer perspective about what you are going to do at the start, the middle and end. She is a really good teacher (f).
(s2 g2).*

When we are told before we start what we are going to be learning it helps because it makes you concentrate and gives you the aim of that lesson and you try and achieve that aim (s4 g1 f).

These examples indicate the ways in which teachers share the lesson construction which young people find helpful for their learning, giving them a sense of purpose. Young people do not give the impression that this is ever a negotiated process.

One teacher said: *'The children really notice the end of lessons and say that a good lesson is one where teachers refer to the objectives throughout the lesson. They notice this does not happen enough'.*

The importance of this sense of purpose was evident in the responses from young people. The results from this research match evidence from the large-scale evaluation report of the KS3 Strategy (Stoll, *et al*, 2003). In the survey of over 2,000 Year 8 pupils one of the most frequent answers to the question 'What helps learning?' involved the teacher making clear what the learning goals were.

5.4 What helps learning?

In this research young people were also asked 'What helps learning?'. Three distinct categories emerge. In order they were: the teacher, classmates and interesting and involving work.

The teacher

The overwhelming response to this question reflected the importance of the teacher in young people's classroom learning. As in other sections of the report young people highlighted aspects of the teacher's role that they depended on.

What helps your learning?

The teacher explaining what you have to do in full so that you don't get confused (m).

Teachers helping you (f).

When the atmosphere in the room is good and when the teacher is in a good mood and the atmosphere is good with the pupils as well (f).

The teacher. If you are stuck she will help you. It is not that she just explains it and then sits down to mark but will help you (f).

(s3 g2).

The last comment indicates how appreciative young people can be of the support that the teacher gives in helping individual learners. In other groups young people mentioned this too. It appears that once the class settles after the teacher has given explanations to the whole class, the teacher will talk with individual learners separately. A picture emerges of a patient and helpful teacher: *'teachers won't mind if you don't understand'; 'you can put your hand up and she will come to you'; 'she explains something difficult in a really simple way'.*

Talking with classmates

Next in importance in what helps learning was support from classmates. Overcoming a sense of isolation was highlighted: *'when your friends help you. You know someone else is there to help you and you are not on your own' (f).*

However, one group identified that getting mates to help you can be a risky business. Talking can be a source of trouble if the teacher mistakes talking about their learning with off-task chat:

What helps your learning?

Who you sit next to. In a hard lesson you can learn from them but then you get told off for talking (m).

If you sit next to someone who is smarter than you in that lesson then they can help you (m).

To make sure you are listening because that won't stop the class from learning. You have to find ways to help your friends to learn while you are not disrupting others (m).

(s1 g1).

The last comment indicates the sensitivity of being a helpful learner in a busy and noisy classroom. The young people were able to express clearly with whom they were able to learn most effectively. They were also aware of the need to have different class groupings for different purposes.

Opportunities to discuss learning and work in groups was considered highly with peers. This matches other research evidence. For example, in the pupil survey of a large-scale evaluation of the KS3 Strategy, the importance of group work was the most frequent response to the question ‘*what helps you learn?*’ (Stoll, *et al*, 2003).

Interesting and involving work

The nature of the ‘work’ young people do in lessons was identified as important: ‘*discussions; different activities; giving your own point of view. That makes you feel really involved*’.

One group explained how alternatives to writing and using textbooks resources can make learning ‘real’, provide different perspectives and reduce pain:

What helps your learning?

Not working out of textbooks all the time (m).

But if you are working out of a textbook you aren’t learning anything you are just copying (f).

In history you sometimes have a video like Gladiator (m).

And the video helps with our learning and about the slave-trade and the video told you everything you needed to know about it. The textbook gives you information but no pictures but in the video you can see what actually happened (f).

And you get a different perspective (f).

And the film has loads of information for you and it’s more real (m).

You don’t have to do loads of writing and reading because they have already done the research (m).

It hurts your brain when you are just sitting there writing. It hurts your wrist and it hurts your head and it’s horrible (m).

(s2 g1).

A number of young people were quick to point out that copying did nothing to help learning, ‘*Sitting and copying off the board doesn’t make you think*’, and sitting for long periods of time writing was counterproductive. This led to conversations on the subject of computers. All agreed the use of computers had huge advantages:

- *it’s faster to type than to write*
- *using the computer helps with communication – it is a different way of talking with other people*

- *you have freedom to find out what you want*
- *it breaks up the normal routine*
- *helps with coursework*
- *helps with research and projects*
- *you can find out answers to questions*
- *helps your understanding*
- *you can get information faster*
- *it is more efficient than listening to a teacher*
- *a computer is like a teacher but can give more information.*

One young person said he looked forward to working on the computer. He said it did not matter what you did on the computer because it was 'high tech': *'on the computer you can write out formal letters, research and go on Google and find out stuff you need for homework, typing an essay. It looks more neater than handwriting for presenting your work'.*

It was striking that young people had limited computer use in school and the use made of the computer was limited. Young people in this research seemed to have a rather narrow view of computers in their learning. Accessing information in the transmission/reception model dominated; co-construction and other possibilities offered by the technology seem to be unexamined.

The revolution that was predicted in the ways technology might change learning in classrooms has not happened. Technological changes have revolutionised literacy and information supply in recent years but schools are slow to embrace the changes the new technology offers as reflected in the title of Cuban's (1993) article 'Computers meet classroom: classroom wins'. While written over 10 years ago the state of technology has not changed classrooms much since as the following extract indicates:

Whiteboards aren't used much. Teachers use them for GCSE or A-Level students (m).

The teacher is writing faster and we can copy it faster and you can see films on it (f).

*On whiteboards it is easier to read but when you are sitting at the back you can't see (f).
(s4 g1).*

There is huge potential for schools to help young people learn and become literate in completely different ways but there needs to be a change in conception about classroom learning and the development of the literate person and the role of the teacher and the role of the text. If conceptions do not change then learning will not change (Carnell and Lodge, 2002a).

Classrooms and schools remain relatively unchanged compared with the organisation of work. With the advance of technology offices can be open 24 hours, seven days a week, located on multiple sites and have dramatically different communication systems. Bloomer (1999) concurs: ‘...verbal exposition, questioning, the printed word, paper and pencil remain the essentials’, (cited in McGhie and Barr, 2000: p45).

What hinders learning?

Two main areas could be identified in hindering learning in the classroom: disruptive behaviour and the influence of peers.

There was remarkable agreement that ‘naughty students’, ‘mucking around’ and ‘shouting’ were the main hindrances to classroom learning. Waiting for the class to be quiet was frustrating and the teacher having to spend time with the ‘kids who are noisy’ was also mentioned. The whole class being blamed when the teacher ‘*don’t know who done it*’ got some people really angry and their feelings got in the way of learning.

One comment stood out in terms of the influence of peers and that was: ‘*you can’t show that you want to work really hard*’. Later in the conversations I returned to this point. In one group it emerged that the social pressure was greater on boys:

Girls seem to be smarter because they get on with their work (m).

There are some smart boys (m).

I am a boffin in science. Sometimes in English I am quite good (m).

I think girls are cleverer because if someone calls a boy a boffin they can’t really take it but girls can show they are interested (f).
(s2 g2).

One young person said he thought Year 7 was your ‘make or break time’ in this respect:

What you do in Year 7 will get you respect. If you are known as a proper geek you are not going to get any friends in Year 8.

Proper geek?

Basically it means someone who is a total bookworm and doesn’t have any proper friends (s4 g3 m).

In another group one said that by the time he got to Year 8 his reputation was made but that in Year 7 it did interfere with his learning:

What gets in the way of learning is having to be cool so that people will like you. That’s more in Year 7. In Year 8 you don’t have to prove yourself. I don’t but some people do (s4 g2 m).

One explanation for the ‘disturbing downturn in motivation’ (Anderman, *et al*, 1994: p294, cited in Galton, *et al*, 2003: p95) is the mismatch between the environment of learning in the school and young people’s heightened awareness of emerging adulthood. This period of early adolescence claim Anderman, *et al*, is when ‘autonomy, self-determination and social-interaction’ are important.

In this research a different group in the same school told me how sexual stereotyping was challenged in lessons but it appeared their own experiences reinforced the stereotyping:

Boys do their work but girls try to do better (m).

In one lesson we were shown a piece of work and were asked if a girl or boy had done it. It was really neat and we thought a girl had done it but it was a boy (f).

Girls try to make it look nice (f).

Boys are more easily distracted (f).

Boys have messier handwriting (m).
(s2 g1).

In response to a question about how young people would like school to be different one said: ‘*to be able to show that you are smart*’. It appears that there is pressure on some to act in a way that they would rather not. In a different school it was expressed in this way: ‘*boys want to act up and be big and we want to get on with our learning*’.

When there is a discontinuity of learning, for example, when young people have supply teachers, learning can be inhibited. Some young people recognised that a bereavement or external issue might affect their learning in the classroom:

If a family member dies you might be feeling sad (f).

Something on your mind might give you a different attitude but there are people in the school that will help you clear your mind – mentors (f).

And help you get along and get over problems (f).
(s4 g1).

Finding space to talk about inhibiting factors was important to the young people.

A useful summary about what can go wrong in Year 8 is provided by Galton, *et al*:

- the impact on motivation of Year 8 having no clear identity in pupils’ eyes
- the examination work being presented, and seen, as being what really matters in school
- the widespread failure to acknowledge pupils’ social maturity and their readiness to take on more responsibility when they are no longer the youngest in the secondary school

- the low priority given in staffing matters to the kind of teacher that Year 8 needs (Galton, *et al*, 2003: p95).

The first three points in Galton, *et al*'s list connect very strongly with this research. Many young people did not see Year 8 as being special in any way; there were no challenges. Tests and exams reflected a performance orientation and with only 'pointless' practice tests Year 8 was not an important year. It also emerged that young people wanted more responsibility for their learning and also more freedom. A question about how school could change was asked of all the groups. The following section considers their responses.

(It was beyond the scope of this research to consider staffing issues, so the kind of teacher that Year 8 needs – point 4 in Galton, *et al*'s list – was not addressed in this research.)

5.5 Could school be different?

Of all the conversations in all the four schools the most diverse responses came from this question. When asked their views the young people's responses (58) can be divided into 14 categories. Table 2 displays the different suggestions and number of individual responses across all the groups.

The first four categories, more than half the number of responses (31 out of 58), focus on more effective classroom experiences. It is obvious that young people want to learn and they want to be in school. They enjoy many aspects of their school life and they value the social network that school offers very highly. Two young people did not want to see school or Year 8 to change in any way at all.

The next category indicates that young people want to be trusted and to be given more freedom. One called himself 'a hostage'. This lack of freedom suggests schools treat all young people as if most of them were potential truants instead of only a relatively tiny minority (Alderson, 2003).

This research was carried out with young people in Year 8. Other studies show that when they become older, young people's enjoyment of school and interest may decline (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001: p85; Alderson, 2000; Pollard *et al*, 1997). Taking serious note of what young people say about school and acting on their views may increase their enjoyment and interest and enhance their learning. But some of the young people in this study were not convinced their views would be acted upon.

Table 2: How could school be different?

Suggestions	Number of individual responses
Changes to learning in classrooms to make learning more active, interactive, practical and more hands-on	9
Learning environment more conducive, for example, brighter classrooms	9
Disruptive pupils being dealt with so that classroom learning can be effective	7
Changes to the pattern of the school day, for example, longer lessons and breaks	6
More freedom, to go out at lunchtime and to move around the school when necessary	5
More resources, books, equipment	4
More lunchtime clubs	4
More school outings and trips	3
Teachers more understanding, to really listen and act on what you say	3
School and Year 8 to stay exactly the same	2
Better food: vegetarian options	2
More fairness in detentions and school rules, 'not being punished for things that are not your fault'	2
Uniform	1
To be able to show that you are smart	1

Listening to young people and taking note of what they say

The issue of school councils cropped up in conversations:

Are you asked your opinions?

We did have a questionnaire about what you would change about school and this goes back to the school council. But sometimes I feel it doesn't actually do anything. Sometimes they listen but sometimes it isn't important enough to do anything about (m).

I think our views are taken into account more now because there is a new head and he wants to do something about it (f).

(s2 g3).

Other groups expressed their frustrations. Change does not appear to them to happen despite the school council:

If we are not happy we can go to the school council. If we don't understand something then it goes back to the teacher (f).

Yeah, but the school council is not like a proper council because people are not voted on to it because of their politics or policies but because their friends vote for them. Collectively there are only a few things they can actually do. Even if teachers say they are given an actual amount of power, they can't change things. They are not the ones with the money. They are suggesting things to the head or staff but we haven't seen any changes (m).

No, I haven't seen any changes (f).
(s4 g3).

Research conducted by Sally Inman and Helena Burke (Inman and Burke, 2002) indicates that some school councils can act as a vehicle for pupil empowerment providing them with the right to be heard and consulted, the power to make decisions and giving them the responsibilities associated with these rights. Effective schools councils are not involved in 'tokenistic' activity but are engaged in serious purpose. Where school councils are effective young people are aware that the council can make decisions that affect their lives and can bring about real change (Inman and Burke, 2002: p7).

What might be concluded from Inman and Burke's research is that the way in which a school council operates reflects the extent to which young people are seen as people who have the right to make decisions about school life. When the school council operates well it suggests that the school holds a serious view about involving young people and listens to and acts on their views. The effectiveness of the school council will reflect the culture of the school and the ways in which the school involves young people in decision making throughout the school. This is a significant issue as it concerns the transfer of power to young people.

Young people's views have often been ignored by teachers, school management and education providers and some schools still cling to self-fulfilling Victorian prejudices about social class, ethnic origin and inherited ability (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000, cited in Alderson, 2003) and submissive childhood (Alderson, 2003: p20). It appears difficult, especially for teachers, to challenge the school as a system because we are so used to it being as it is. It is also difficult to transfer power to young people to be involved in wider decision-making processes.

Teachers' learning

In the four interviews with teachers, professional development was singled out as one of the main benefits of the KS3 Strategy reflecting the huge investment in this area. The language used by teachers to describe their professional development experiences reflects the dominant view – the concept of ‘training’. The instruction model (transmission) is evident rather than construction or co-construction. Teachers spoke of excellent opportunities: *‘The training has been invaluable. Training on how to deliver’*; *‘We have had consultants in to show the teaching strategies’*. This is a functionalist, didactic view focusing on what the teacher can do not on how learning can be transformed.

The practical focus was welcomed and teachers agreed this approach did have an effect on their teaching and gave teachers the confidence to recognise ‘good teaching’:

There has been much better training. This was a big feature. It brought cohesiveness on what was taught and how it was taught across the year. There is now a framework for all teachers. It didn't depend on good teachers.

Teachers highlight the value of professional development experiences within the context of their school. The dominant view emerging is of the external expert modelling what the teachers should be doing, ‘Training on how to deliver,’ or as another teacher put it:

I am not into staff going off to INSET. It's unhelpful. Our staff development programme is based on modelling, coaching and mentoring; observation, coaching and team teaching. That's how our advisers work. Modelling the real situation and staff see it working, strategies they can actually use.

The personal benefits were expressed in positive terms:

I am so much more analytical. I spend more time planning for the lessons and getting people to discuss and analyse what they do has come largely from the Strategy. If the Strategy hadn't come in I wouldn't have taken risks. So I think the Strategy has been very valuable (teacher).

The way in which teachers are ‘taught’ reinforces the dominant view of learning: experts instruct, recipients absorb. It is not surprising this view underpins young people’s classroom experiences. This model does not focus on the experiences of learning but on teaching – a teaching-led model.

In contrast, one teacher spoke of the occasional benefits that staff had of working together, collaborating and using their own expertise rather than relying on external consultants:

In school we are using money to send out departments and giving them quality time to work together because there is nothing that can beat letting people sit down together for the whole day and talk about important issues in school.

This is an example of teachers having ownership and taking responsibility for their learning. This approach is more likely to promote 'inquiry, collaboration and community' seen to be successful professional learning (Little, 2001, cited in Stobart and Stoll, 2004). Effective learning for teachers requires the same elements – activity, collaboration, responsibility and meta-learning, that are significant for young people's learning.

Transforming teaching and learning?

The transformation of teaching and learning is one of the four principles underpinning the KS3 Strategy, a process of strengthening teaching and learning through a programme of professional development and practical support.

The term 'transformation' implies radical change, although as Gordon Stobart and Louise Stoll (2004) suggest, the language around this principle has softened. This was in response to the negative view teachers had of the implication that their current teaching and learning practices needed 'transforming rather than tweaking' (*ibid*). A necessary condition for teacher change is for teachers to see their existing implicit knowledge about learning valued (Munro, 1999). Other conditions include: teachers having the opportunity to learn through active construction processes; framing goals or challenges for learning; having the opportunity for individual and collegiate activities; engaging in self-direction and systematic reflection in their practice and exploring and demonstrating teaching procedures in their classrooms (Munro, 1999). It would appear that some of these conditions have been met; others have not. What is missing is a focus on teachers' own learning.

Other research indicates (Carnell and Lodge, 2002b; Carnell, 2001; Carnell, 1999) that a focus on teachers' own learning is more likely to have an effect on young people's learning. Systematic exploration of the learning process, with teachers making explicit their knowledge of learning, has a direct impact on effective teaching and teachers' personal explicit theory of learning (Munro, 1999). The KS3 Strategy has not encouraged schools to become learning communities or provided structures or systems which develop 'learning teachers'. Teachers' professional development experiences need to reflect re-definitions of teacher professionalism: recognising oneself as a learner, using that learning-centred spirit to transform schools into learning organisations, and asserting one's own moral autonomy to provide space and time for serious, reflective thought and study (Sockett, 1996).

A need to focus on learning

The large-scale evaluation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy conducted by Louise Stoll and colleagues (Stoll, *et al*, 2003) matches the findings of this small-scale research: the Strategy has extended many teachers' repertoires in the classroom, encouraged more clarity of learning intentions, and raised expectations. However, this appears to be a 'teacher-centred rather than a learner-centred Strategy' (Stobart and Stoll, 2004), neglecting attention to how 11-14 year pupils may learn best. Teaching may have been transformed but learning has not. Changing teaching does not automatically change learning.

If teaching is transformed to transform learning there are certain things that need to change. Maryellen Weimer suggests five areas that change when learner-centred teaching is promoted (Weimer, 2002). I use her five headings and connect these with the issues that have emerged from this report.

- **Balance of power.** The balance of power is shifted to young people when they construct knowledge for themselves, make decisions, identify what is important for their learning and influence the curriculum. Learners are encouraged to assume responsibility for their own learning.
- **Function of content.** Learners make sense of their experiences by engaging with the content. Content is used and extended as knowledge is constructed. Knowledge is created through dialogue. This view recognises a constructivist approach to learning.
- **Role of the teacher.** The focus is on the learner. Teachers are guides, facilitators, and designers of learning experiences. The teacher shares their learning and supports learners by offering guidance, critique, and encouragement.
- **Responsibility for learning.** Learning is driven by learner agency so effective learners take responsibility for their own learning. Learners monitor and review the effectiveness of approaches and strategies for their own goals and for the context.
- **Purposes and processes of evaluation.** The learner demonstrates understanding, shifts in learning and meta-learning processes. Assessment helps learners understand their learning and assists the planning, monitoring and reflections on learning.

One initiative, Assessment for Learning, linked with the last point, represents an attempt to adjust the balance in favour of learning (Stobart and Stoll, 2004). This is a formative process in which teachers and learners gather evidence 'to decide where students are in their learning, where they are going and how to take the next steps' (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). One teacher described how this was having an effect on his teaching:

Assessment for Learning is one of the great things that come out of the Strategy. The kids are having a lot more ownership over how their work is marked and target setting. You can be involved in a dialogue. This is what I'm doing. This is what I am working towards and that's got to be crucial.

This focus on dialogue is an indication that the teacher and learner are in a different relationship where the possibilities for learning are extended. Dialogue might be described as 'interthinking' (Mercer, 2000, cited in Alexander, 2004a). Such talk in learning is not one-way linear communication but a reciprocal process in which ideas are bounced back and forth to take learning forward. But the nature of the dialogue is crucial (Lodge, 2004). Focusing on learning would be transforming; focusing on performance would not.

In another school a teacher said they were beginning to put a good emphasis on assessment for learning: *'Now you know what they can do in terms of assessment and now you can change your practice from there'*. She said there was a long way to go on involving pupils in the assessment of their own learning but in some subjects they were setting their own targets. In this school they have plans to interrupt lessons and give time for young people to stop and set targets. But the twice yearly review is piecemeal, resulting in a lack of consistency across the school. Another teacher reported that the initiative had a long way to go before it could be seen to be effective:

Assessment for Learning has been a good tool for teachers. This is linked to target setting – where the pupils are now and what they need to do to get to the next level. It is early days for Assessment for Learning but the seed has been sown.

Again, it is the nature of the targets that is crucial. Focusing on learning targets would be transforming, focusing on performance targets would not.

The Assessment Reform Group makes a distinction between assessment of learning for the purposes of grading and reporting and assessment for learning which calls for different priorities, new procedures and a new commitment. Much current classroom practice falls short of providing assessment for learning (ARG, 1999) but advice is provided to teachers on what they can do to avoid the negative impact of tests on motivation for learning and actions that can enhance motivation for learning (see appendix 2).

In the next section a case is made for focusing on learning and learning-centred classrooms.

A case for a focus on learning and learning-centred classrooms

In this section I examine the case for a focus on learning rather than a focus on teaching. I draw on the young people's and teachers' responses to illuminate the issues. In the first section, 'Learning discourses', the quotes come from throughout the interviews. In the following sections the quotes from young people come from direct questions that I asked young people towards the end of the interviews. Unlike the earlier part of the interview which focused on the young people's agenda these questions were directed by me to help understand young people's conceptions of learning and their views of when their learning is most effective.

7.1 Language and learning discourses

In making a case for a focus on learning, first we need to consider the language that is used by young people and their teachers to talk about their experiences.

Some research findings suggest that the dominant language in secondary classrooms does not relate explicitly to learning at all but to 'work', 'task completion' or 'achievement' reflecting the current obsessions with performance and standards (Lodge, 2001). I did not observe the classrooms, but in all the four schools involved in this study, the discourse of work was dominant in the interviews and referred to in many different ways in many different conversations especially in relation to what happens in classrooms. Even when I talked about learning the young people referred to what they did as work:

...the work you have got to do (s3 g3 f).

...understanding work (s3 g3 m).

...concentrating on the work (s3 g2 m).

...as long as you have been working (s1 g3 m).

...so you can produce your best work (s1 g2 f).

...telling us the work from start to finish (s1 g2 f).

...praises you when you have worked really hard (s2 g3 m).

Caroline Lodge (2004) argues that there are significant issues for young people's learning when learning is framed as work or as performance. Drawing on a number of research studies (Morgan and Morris, 1999; Munro, 1999; Lodge, 2001) she claims that there is not much talk about learning in classrooms. The discourse is meagre, making it less likely that young people will develop an understanding that effective learning requires activity, collaboration, responsibility and learning about learning. This will limit learners' effectiveness reinforcing learning as individual, isolated and disconnected. Richer discourses imply collaboration and learner responsibility.

Earlier in the report the discourse of ‘ability’ was discussed which also limits the learning capacity of young people. As Susan Hart and colleagues suggest, such discourse:

...deprives teachers of the chance to base and develop their practice upon a more complex, multifaceted and infinitely more empowering understanding of teaching and learning processes, and of the influences, internal and external, to the school, that impinge on learning and achievement. The inherent ability explanation traps teachers in the uncomfortable paradox that, while their professional responsibility and commitment is to promote learning, the most important determinant of learning (inherent ability) is identified as something over which they have no control (Hart, et al, 2004: p17).

Instead of a ‘work’, ‘performance’ and ‘ability’ discourse there needs to be a shift for classrooms of the future to focus on a learning language. This would result in richer conceptions of learning (Watkins, 2001).

7.2 Conceptions of learning in school

Related to the language used to describe experiences are the conceptions people hold about learning. Towards the end of the interviews I asked young people to focus on specific themes in order to discover their conceptions of learning. Their responses to the first theme: ‘What is learning?’ indicate that learning is difficult to define. Of all the themes in our conversations this one was met with most puzzlement. Young people were tentative with their responses and some struggled – ‘*an experience – I can’t really expand*’ or did not feel able to come up with anything at all.

Their responses to the question ‘What is learning?’ can be grouped into two areas.

1. What learning is for – conceptions of learning.
2. How learning comes about – models of learning.

Conceptions of learning

Like other research findings the most dominant conception of learning is that its purpose is to acquire knowledge (Marton, *et al*, 1993):

Getting information (s2 g3 m).

Storing information into your brain (s2 g3 m).

Finding out new stuff (s2 g3 f).

Finding out more things for each of the different subjects (s3 g1 f).

In the following extract knowledge acquisition and storing knowledge (memorising) is seen as learning. Knowledge is stored in case it will be useful later, or not.

Something you gain. Something new that you didn't know before (f).

It is like you don't remember it today or for a few weeks after when you see something that's relevant to it you remember what you have been taught (m).

Learning stuff that you might need or you may never need... (m).

*...like cross-stitching (m) (much laughter).
(s3 g1).*

Taking in stuff that will help you now and in the future (f).

Expanding knowledge (f).

Taking in information that you store and process for later use (m).

*Developing your mind so you will know a lot for tests (m).
(s4 g3).*

Linked with this conception is the view that learning is for the future, for example, when you go for a job. Learning is not for the here and now.

You are answering all the questions you might need in later life (s3 g2 f).

Something you will need later on in life (s2 g3 m).

Remembering things and thinking about things. When you get a job you might actually need to know loads of things, so basically learning is remembering what you might need in life (s3 g2 f).

Others related learning to the development of skills:

Learning is about finding out things you didn't know before, different strategies for the work you have got to do, different ways of doing things (s3 g3 f).

Conceptions like the ones above relating to knowledge acquisition, memorising, reproducing and applying facts and procedures have been described as 'thin' conceptions (Watkins, *et al*, 2002). These are quantitative conceptions, 'loads of things', whereas the following may be regarded as richer conceptions, qualitative, and are about understanding and seeing something in a new way:

Understanding work and the different possibilities in your head, exploring what's out there... (m).

...finding out, exploring, opening your mind to new things, getting to know more stuff so you are open to more things and not closed down, experiencing different things (s3 g3 f).

It is important to pay attention to conceptions of learning because they affect how people approach learning. If learners hold richer conceptions of learning they approach their learning differently and their learning experiences will be richer. They expect to have an active role in learning. This point relates to views about how learning comes about.

7.3 Models of learning

In relation to views about how learning comes about the most dominant perspective is of being taught: the instruction model (transmission). This represents individual activity:

Learning is getting taught by teachers (s3 g1 m).

Being taught something that will stick in your head and doesn't float away (s2 g3 m).

Like you know what to do, the teacher is teaching you (s1 g2 f).

Concentrating on the work, writing and writing and then it sinks in (s3 g2 m).

This contrasts to views that learning comes about in an active way, where the learner is involved: the construction model:

Using cards and matching up. The teacher used it because he thought it was fun.

Using dice and cards it makes it fun (s2 g1 f).

In the following group interview the young people were attempting to put into words how they make sense of their experiences in a collaborative way. This is an example of co-construction, where the social dimension of learning is seen as important:

In school you meet friends and that is kind of a little bit like learning and you communicate and you can learn a lot of things and communicating with friends is kind of learning, not really, but they can help you...

Yeah, when you are stuck or something your friend can help you (s2 g2 f).

As evidenced in the above extract the young people found it challenging to say what learning is, indicating lack of experience. Talking about learning can extend young people's conceptions of learning both in terms of what it is and how it may come about and the possibilities of different approaches. Talking about learning leads to richer conceptions of learning.

Some considerations – the instruction model

If young people hold the view that learning is only about gaining knowledge and depends on the teacher, this is limiting and confining. They will be passive recipients and dependent on others. As one young person put it:

In Year 7 the teacher gives you the answer straight away and they don't give you the answer in Year 8 straight away but I know they will give me the answer anyway.

This model is the most dominant in classrooms across the world. It links with the dominant view of teacher as more knowledgeable and in control and the learner as passive and dependent (transmission from the front).

A problem with the instruction model and view that learning is about gaining knowledge is that it encourages closed or fixed conceptions of the learner. Often these conceptions refer to 'ability' or 'intelligence', which teachers may assess early in their contact with classes, and construe as stable (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996). Earlier in this report we saw that some young people were convinced that they had to 'make their mark' in Year 7. They thought that teachers would make decisions about them that would not change. Learners may come to define themselves in terms of ability and this can lead to belief about inability when it comes to difficult learning tasks. This model does not require the kind of learning young people need now, or in the future.

Some considerations – the construction model

If young people hold the view that learning is about constructing knowledge and understanding for themselves there is a greater possibility for richer learning. Where they are constructing knowledge and understanding through activities, as described earlier in this report, the learner is helped to make connections and gain new insights. The teacher is seen as a facilitator, *'he makes it fun'*, but the responsibility for learning rests with the learner. The learner's capacity for learning is not seen as fixed, but capable of development through experience. The teacher is interested in extending each learner's capacity, skills and interests. The relationship of the teacher to the student, however, remains one of expert to novice.

This model of learning encourages aspects of effective learning. The learner is encouraged to develop judgement about what is important. It can also encourage transfer of learning to different contexts, and may help the learner understand more about being a learner. While encouraging more aspects of effective learning, this model falls short of promoting the kind of learning young people need for their futures. They may remain dependent upon the teachers and not develop those dispositions required for future learners, for example, learning through dialogue or being part of a team.

Some considerations – the co-construction model

If young people hold the view that learning is about constructing knowledge and understanding with others the possibilities for learning are endless.

The essential features of co-construction are that it relies on dialogue. As one young person put it: *'you communicate and you can learn a lot of things and communicating with friends is kind of learning'*. The responsibility for learning shifts from individuals to emphasise collaboration in the construction of knowledge. Learning involves collaboration by learners in

critical investigation, analysis, interpretation and reorganisation of knowledge and in reflective processes, in areas that have meaning in the learners' lives.

This model of learning takes an holistic view of the learner. It takes into account the emotional aspects of learning, the dynamics of learning with others in groups, the significance of context and the purposes, effects and outcomes of their learning.

Dialogue prompts reflection, critical investigation, analysis, interpretation and reorganisation of knowledge. In this way, feedback and reflection become part of the same process, enabling the learner to review their learning in its context and related to previous experiences and understandings.

The model is not common in schools especially where there is an emphasis on performance rather than on learning, but it encourages the kind of learning that young people will need for their lives in the 21st century. It engenders confidence in dealing with complexity, flexibility and making connections. It encourages people to learn together, and above all it can help learners to become explicit about their learning. There is a need for more of this model in schools, but the forces working against it should not be underestimated.

For a summary of the three models of learning discussed see table 3.

Table 3: Three models of learning – a summary. Source: Carnell & Lodge, 2002a.

Models of learning	Elaboration
Reception	<p>Concerned with quantity, essential facts and skills; often dependent on transmission of knowledge from an external source (e.g. teacher). Emotional and social aspects are not attended to.</p> <p><i>Learning is being taught.</i></p>
Construction	<p>Concerned with the learners' construction of meaning through discussion, discovery, open-ended learning, making connections.</p> <p><i>Learning is individual sense-making.</i></p>
Co-construction	<p>Concerned with the learners' construction of meaning through interaction and collaboration with others, especially through dialogue.</p> <p><i>Learning is building knowledge with others.</i></p>

7.4 Effective learning and effective learners

From the analysis of the data in the earlier part of this report it emerges that some young people find learning is best when they are engaged, active and involved and can talk through ideas with peers. Later in the interviews I asked them to consider occasions when their learning is most effective. I analyse these responses under four headings: active learning, collaborative learning, responsibility for learning and meta-learning. These categories come from a definition of effective learning and an effective learner (see table 4).

Table 4: Definition of effective learning and an effective learner

Effective learning is...	An effective learner...
an activity of construction	is active and strategic
handled with (or in the context of) others	is skilled in collaboration
driven by learner agency	takes responsibility for their learning
the monitoring and review of the effectiveness of approaches and strategies for the goals and context.	understands her/his learning and plans, monitors and reflects on their learning.

Adapted from Watkins, *et al*, (2002).

Active learning

In the following conversation we can see that some young people regard effective learning as an activity of construction to develop understanding; effective learners are active and strategic.

When is learning most effective?

When learning is fun because kids don't really like things that are boring. If we have exciting things and are involved in the lesson like practical things it helps you understand better (m).

Yes, same for me. You have to enjoy lessons otherwise it is boring (m).

Yes, music on the keyboard you are really engaged and its yours (m).

Different chances to explore (f).

Like science when we have different experiments and it is fun, using magnets seeing what happens when you watch (m).

(s3 g3).

Views like these emerged in a number of other groups. Young people put a lot of emphasis on physical activity and the freedom to talk with others about what they are doing. They also found learning to be effective when it was challenging, *'when it is not babyish'*, *'when you have to struggle'*. Acting out and discussions also featured highly. This contrasted to what young people described as 'writing', or 'copying out of textbooks' or 'worksheets' which they found boring.

When young people talked about their learning out of school they referred to activity as being very helpful for their learning:

Trips show you how to work in a team and that is quite helpful (m).

Learning out of class is more fun but you are learning at the same time (m).

And you are not cooped up in class (f).

(s3 g2).

There are issues to be made here about learning in different contexts. There are some characteristics of learning out of school that are different from learning in school. Learning out of school is usually:

- contextualised – they learn about issues of interest to them
- first-hand – they connect their own experiences to their learning
- less structured – whereas in school their learning is often constrained by the curriculum and time.

These categories are used by Resnick (1987) to describe how learning might be characterised if it were taking place outside school. In comparison, school learning is usually deconceptualised and the learning tends to be more formally structured.

Out of school, the roles of 'pupil' and 'teacher' are less restrictive and teachers may be able to treat young people as persons not pupils. The context has a powerful effect on roles.

Some young people gave examples of how their learning could be enhanced through active involvement: *'If it was a bit more fun the children would learn more. In music, instead of writing down where it came from you could tap out the rhythm. Doing instead of copying'* (s4 g2 m).

There is an inverse relationship between frequency and perceived effectiveness. Classroom activities are dominated by copying from the board or book and listening to the teacher talk. What the students actually want is more balance, including group discussion and problem solving, a more brain-friendly environment, and the freedom to wander (Crace, 2000: p48).

Classroom constraints result in an underestimation of learners' capabilities. Experiences may be of low complexity – short-term, focusing on content or skills and requiring no judgement. Research cited earlier indicates that secondary school classrooms are more likely to foster less rich conceptions of learning.

Collaborative learning

The second feature of effective learning I asked young people about was learning with peers. Two forms of collaboration emerged. In the first extracts young people identify friends helping with work, sharing skills and providing a more comfortable environment. These might be described as less effective forms of collaboration.

What about collaboration?

You do get a chance to work with your mates. Say you were good at writing and your friend is good at drawing, you can help each other (s3 g3 m).

You have got your mates and if you are really stuck you can talk to them (m).

*When you are with people you are comfortable working with and with your mates you are more focused (f).
(s3 g2).*

It helps because it makes it more fun and it gets in your head because you are having fun while you are learning. But if you don't know most of the people in the group you don't talk because it is uncomfortable (s4 g2 m).

In the next extracts collaboration takes a stronger form. Learning is seen as dialogue. Young people are co-constructing knowledge by piecing ideas together. Peers are seen as resources and they are not dependent on the teacher. The young people puzzle, share and try and make sense of their combined experiences.

Yes, two minds are better than one. One of you might know something the other doesn't and you could combine what you know and that would be better (m).

Why would combining make it better?

Well you would have more information, different views (m).

*You would get both sides of the argument and would achieve a lot more because there's two of you doing it (f).
(s2 g3).*

This is a good example of 'dialogic' learning : '...knowledge and understanding come from testing evidence, analysing and exploring values, rather than unquestioningly accepting somebody else's certainties' (Alexander, 2004a: p24).

In science if one person knows about something like the first bit then others might know other bits and then you can put it all together (s2 g1 m).

Everyone has different abilities and talents. If you are not particularly good at something you can learn something from them that you don't find particularly easy. Yes and also it's more fun learning with your friends (m).

It is better to learn with your mates because it is good to get their opinions so that you can think about it and not think one-way (f).

You can listen to other people's opinions and you can understand why they think that (f). (s4 g3).

Many of the young people valued opportunities for the stronger form of collaborative learning, for example, teamwork and dialogue, where everyone's opinions are heard. This form of collaborative learning suggests, equality of engagement (more or less equal contribution) and mutuality of engagement (extensive and connected discourse). These interactions require interdependence. Interdependence is about the ability to get to a point that could not be attained when learning alone.

The discipline of dialogue involves learning about group processes that support or undermine learning. The ability to communicate effectively about group relationships is essential for co-constructivism. The learning involved in peer dialogue gives learners greater control and responsibility rather than relying on the teacher. Dialogue is grounded in the assumption that learners are teachers and teachers are learners. Hierarchies are broken down and boundaries less evident. The role of the teacher is to encourage a dialogue between and with their students, based on their common experiences, but often the roles of teacher and learner are shared. In this approach learning is seen as complex, multi-dimensional, endless and involving everyone.

In collaborative learning there are opportunities for learners to practice new roles and behaviours. These new behaviours may include risk taking. Risk taking is more likely to happen in an environment which is supportive and allows people to be unsure and tentative, and to doubt, question, challenge, make mistakes and change their minds.

The collaborative classroom will be less constrained by boundaries. There will be movement in and out of the classroom to the library and other locations for research.

The issue of group selection was a hot topic. It emerged that in some classrooms young people had little choice about which groups they joined. They preferred groups where there was an element of choice. Some classroom strategies kept young people away from their friends in an attempt to stop young people talking. The following examples illustrate young people's concerns:

I have a friend who sits next to me and I try and help him but one teacher really hates him sitting next to me and he moves him. But my friend often gets stuck and that's why I try to help him and if the teacher moves him and then if I stand up to go and help him then I get into trouble (s1 g2 f).

If teachers put you into groups that you deliberately don't like, you are sitting there and no-one is talking with you (s1 g1 m).

Most lessons you can work in groups but not when the teacher is stressed and if you are naughty, like in science, the teacher says you can't do experiments so how are you supposed to learn then? (f).

But then they say it's your fault (f).

If you choose who you can work with then you get a lot more work done (m). (s2 g1).

Classroom control can lead to what has been described as 'defensive teaching'. When the emphasis is on teachers' responsibility to maintain control, potential for participation is curtailed. In this scenario classroom 'work' is easy, unemotional and non-controversial (McNeil, 1986). Such classrooms are not set up to encourage collaborative interdependent or responsible learners; learners remain dependent on the teacher.

Responsibility for learning

The third theme in the definition of effective learning and effective learners is responsibility. In the interviews young people said they appreciated having responsibility for learning. This helped develop confidence, gave young people the opportunity to help each other and gave opportunities for making decisions. The following extract shows the learning advantages young people can identify in taking responsibility for learning.

What about being responsible for your learning?

In RE we have to design a leaflet and it makes you feel good (m).

We had to make a video and we helped each other (f).

It's like you are teaching other people and that helps you with your learning (f).

You have to search out books and get hold of different sources (m).

You have to make decisions (m).

You get to show what you can do and you can show to other people that you are better than they think you are and you can improve yourself (f).

You can go forward and in a class you have to go slowly but on your own you can go at your own pace (f).

*You can show to yourself how capable you are. You can expand on a subject. If you try really hard and push yourself and prove something (m).
(s3 g3).*

Young people also mentioned how project work was challenging, fun, encourages interdependence with peers and self-reliance. Young people's experience of taking responsibility for their own learning encourages effective and responsible learning. Competence is linked to experience and not to age (Alderson, 2003). There is growing evidence that very young children can make informed and responsible decisions (Alderson, 2000b) and can learn to be responsible learners (see Watkins, 2001).

Others mentioned that their reliance on the teacher meant they were unused to being responsible for their own learning:

You muck around at times (m).

It leads you to be more naughty (f).

*Others wind you up. If one kid is naughty then another one is naughty (m).
(s2 g1).*

These young people's experiences have not enabled them to develop their own responsibility for learning. They said they acted-up if the teacher was not looking. They view the teacher as being the person responsible for learning. Young people learn about playing the role of child or pupil within a set of ideas about what children are and ought to be like, and how they should behave and relate to adults (Alderson, 2003).

Responsibility for homework or home learning?

When I asked young people what helped their learning they never mentioned homework. When it did arise young people only mentioned their dissatisfaction with it: *'Homework is boring. It doesn't teach you anything. I'd like less homework'*. One said that they had to repeat what had already been covered in class, another that it was difficult to get parents involved which was something that schools encouraged. The following quote sums up some of the problems young people face:

Homework over a long period is OK but when you have got to do it overnight for the next day it is pointless. You have not the time to think about it as you have to do it as soon as you get home and too quickly – next day stuff and if you get stuck there is no-one there to help you because your parents have gone out.

These findings echo a number of issues raised in the research review conducted by Susan Hallam (Hallam, 2004). Young people do not see homework of real value in extending their learning. Hallam's findings suggest that schools appear to be actively encouraging parental involvement where young people are experiencing difficulties. There is the likelihood of tensions developing between parents and their children over homework. This can cause frustration and disappointment and may be counterproductive to the young person's functioning in school. The requirement to do ever-increasing amounts of homework therefore has no real impact.

Connections can be made here to other aspects of effective learning. Susan Hallam's guidance about effective homework (Hallam, 2004: p92-94) recommends:

- clearly specified aims, purposes, instructions and guidance
- a regular and frequent system of marking and providing constructive feedback so students know what to do to improve their learning
- encouragement for young people to evaluate their own learning and increase meta-cognitive skills through adopting formative assessment techniques and actively engaging students in their own learning
- that homework is relevant and young people have choices
- a focus on the purpose and quality of the homework, not the amount, putting young people's learning at the centre of the debate.

In this research after school clubs where teachers could help with homework were appreciated by a number of young people. Here young people have access to a teacher who can provide support, give guidance when necessary and talk with the young people about what may be blocking their learning.

The dominant view of how 'children' should behave in school appears to limit a perspective on learner agency. Without opportunities to discuss learning about learning (meta-learning) young people may be unaware of their potential limitless learning capacity and range of appropriate strategies.

Meta-learning (learning about learning)

In all the four schools involved in this research there appear to be few opportunities to monitor and review the effectiveness of learning approaches and strategies. Young people found it difficult to talk about learning and said they had little encouragement to understand their learning or to reflect on their learning. As one young person put it: *'You don't talk with teachers about learning you are just taught the subject'* and *'In maths you talk about maths'*.

Another said: *'You don't talk in lessons. You only get chance to speak if it is to do with what we are learning but we can speak to the teacher when the lesson is over if we've got any problems'*.

One young person described how a teacher explained how the lesson was constructed: *'Our teacher says you can only concentrate for ten minutes then there needs to be some activity'*. Opposing concentration with activity is a distortion.

In Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), tutorials or circle time there are occasions when there is a focus on learning:

In tutor time we are asked to say one thing we have learned today (f).

*In registration time we are told to read for 10 minutes to get our brain working (f).
(s1 g3).*

In another school Citizenship and PSHE was a time for *'You and your life and school but we mainly talk about the future and your career'* (s4 g2 m).

However, the young people do not seem to be helped to make connections about their learning across subjects. A response from ATL to the Labour Party National Policy Forum Document *The Best Education for All* (2003: p7) suggests that it fails to address the central issue of whether the learner's experience of the system as a whole makes any coherent sense as, all too often, learners are marched along disconnected paths from one phase of education to the next. Far too many get lost, confused and alienated. There is scant evidence that the learner, and the needs of the learner, are at the heart of the system.

I asked the teachers about the ways they helped young people make connections and understand their learning. One talked about using learning styles in their school but soon became aware of meeting a dead end:

Teachers are aware of the kids' learning styles and plan for the variety of learning styles. We went through it four years ago where we identified all the students' styles and it fizzled out. It is interesting but you can't really have five activities going on all at once. The learning isn't as strong as the teaching in terms of teachers' understanding (teacher).

Caroline Lodge points out (Lodge, 2004) that teachers find the idea of learning styles attractive. It reminds them that young people learn in different ways, and that they have to provide a range of strategies and approaches. But as the teacher suggested, this presents a dilemma as it is not possible to cater for the whole range. The findings of Frank Coffield, who led a study on personalised education, suggest that many of the methods, or instruments used to identify pupils' individual learning styles were unreliable and had a negligible impact on teaching and learning (2004: p12).

It can be concluded that it is not enough to talk about learning but that this talk needs to enhance young people's understanding of learning (Lodge, 2004). Conversations about learning need to: connect with young people's experience; provide a range of strategies; develop the language to talk about learning and support learner responsibility.

Closing thoughts

To close this report I have selected a comment from a teacher that highlights the fundamental difficulty emerging from this research:

I was having a conversation with the Gifted and Talented Adviser. He pointed out how much time is devoted to teaching and how little time is devoted to learning and how do we flip these two?

This comment underscores the view that the KS3 Strategy has been a teacher-centred initiative. From the teachers' perspectives there have been successful changes. For example, some teachers feel empowered, they are changing the way they are talking to each other about their teaching and changing the way they are planning their lessons.

Questions remain unanswered about this 'transformation':

- Do the Strategy writers assume, as some teachers do, that transforming teaching will automatically transform learning?
- Was the nature of the transformation ever made explicit to teachers?
- Has the transformation been as far-reaching as was intended?
- What do these changes amount to?
- Does it mean that teachers are better at giving information in the instruction model?

To return to the other principles of the Strategy (expectations, progression, engagement) the following related issues emerge:

- teachers have high expectations of young people, but more in relation to their performance than their learning, unsurprisingly
- there are still difficulties with progression, especially between KS2 and KS3, where there is mistrust and lack of knowledge about what goes on in primary school classrooms
- some teachers report that young people's engagement is no different now than it was five years ago.

This research has clarified that a shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning requires greater understanding of the learners' experiences rather than on teaching as a performance. The research findings suggest there has been a change in what the teachers do but that unless there is a focus on the learners' experiences, transforming learning is unlikely. The teacher quoted above goes on to say:

The best teachers are increasingly analysing how the kids are learning and the next best teachers are those who are analysing their teaching.

This sounds promising. But the only examples I found of teachers analysing how young people are learning were through the questionable use of learning styles inventories (Coffield, 2004). There are far more examples of teachers analysing their teaching with the view that if teaching improves learning will too. This is not the case, as this research has demonstrated. It is interesting to speculate whether or not the young people's views would have been different had they been interviewed before the introduction of the KS3 Strategy. Earlier research suggests not (Carnell, 2000).

There are comparable findings from other research projects. For example, Stobart and Stoll (2004) conclude that a more radical approach to the learning of 11-14 year olds is needed. In his paper *Still no Pedagogy* Robin Alexander (2004b) questions the view that other government strategies have been successful at improving the quality of teaching and raising standards in schools. Quoting a number of research projects he concludes that intended changes to teaching and learning have not yet been fully realised and that it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effects on young people's learning. The problems that emerge relate to initiatives across the education system. Many of them do not change practice below the structural surface.

In response to the question the teacher posed – 'how do we flip these two?' – this research argues that we need to make learning the priority and we need to listen to what learners are saying.

Before writing this final section I read through young people's comments again. Although it is difficult to reduce the complexity of what the young people are reporting I noticed five main themes.

Young people want:

1. less focus on learning alone in the classroom
2. learning to be enjoyable, involving the learner in a supportive environment where relationships with teachers are effective for learning
3. to be trusted more and given responsibility for their learning
4. less stress and fewer pointless tests that interfere with their learning
5. to be listened to and have their views acted upon.

So how can we achieve what young people want in a way that will enhance their learning? The following recommendations relate to these five points:

1. An holistic view of learning needs to be encouraged, recognising the importance of the social dimension, including learning through dialogue with peers and ‘teaching through dialogue’ (Alexander, 2004a). This would overcome the young people’s sense of isolation in the classroom. An holistic view connects learning across all subjects. Tutorial time might be an appropriate occasion for this (Carnell and Lodge, 2002c – *Support for Students’ Learning: What the Form Tutor Can Do*).
2. An involved learner needs an appropriate supportive context (see appendix 3). The context needs to encourage activity, collaboration, learner responsibility and opportunities for reflecting and monitoring young people’s learning (see appendix 4). In a supportive learning context, learners would be seen as active and questioning, not passive and conforming; relationships with teachers would be open, fair, trusting and support learning. Peers as well as teachers would be seen as a source of knowledge; knowledge is co-constructed with peers and teachers. There needs to be time for teachers to listen to young people and there would be sufficient time for learning, conducted at the appropriate pace, not bite-size activities to fit into short time-tabled periods.
3. Assessment for Learning needs to be developed, including the appropriate use of targets. For example, young people need to be responsible for the construction and development of their targets (see appendix 2). Targets would be learning targets not performance targets (see Carnell and Lodge, 2002a). Learning needs to be made explicit as does the purpose of all learning occasions. Lesson plenaries, so often not well used, would focus on how learning comes about as well as making the content of learning explicit (see appendix 1).
4. A learning-oriented rather than performance-oriented environment needs to be fostered with time for young people to talk about their learning experiences. A research review has pointed to four inter-related activities for teachers and learners to focus on learning which result in improving both performance and learning (Watkins, 2001):
 - noticing learning
 - making learning the subject of conversation
 - reflecting on learning
 - learning about learning.

This is reassuring to teachers who are facing pressures to focus on young people’s performance at the expense of their learning. For young people these inter-related activities would help them see the relevance of their learning to their present lives rather than just preparing for the future.

The language used in such an environment would focus on learning, not on work, performance, tests or levels of ability. The language used would extend conceptions of learning, extending the potential for learning. Learning experiences would be enriched through co-constructive dialogue. Young people would become aware of their potentially endless learning capacity and range of appropriate learning strategies.

5. Effective school councils would be used as a forum for young people to focus on learning and to consider what aspects of school life help and hinder learning. Other school structures could include young people's views, in particular school learning and teaching discussion and policy groups. Finally, young people and their teachers could carry out appreciative inquiries to celebrate their learning and life at school. This would encourage more of what young people identify as the best kinds of learning.

This research shows very clearly how essential it is to take account of young people's insights and ideas. Learning would transform in a highly effective way if their views were acted upon.

References

- Alderson, P. (2000a) 'Practising Democracy in Inner City Schools', in A. Osler (ed.), *Democracy in Schools: Diversity, identity, equality*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Alderson, P. (2000b) *Young Children's Rights*. London: Jessica Kingsley/Save the Children.
- Alderson, P. (2003) *Institutional Rites and Rights: A century of childhood*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Alexander, R. (2004a) *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking classroom talk*. York: Dialogos.
- Alexander, R. (2004b) 'Still No Pedagogy? Principle, pragmatism and compliance in primary education'. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. 34 (1): 7-33.
- Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (2002) *Testing, Motivation and Learning*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.
- Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) (2003) *Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers to the Labour Party National Policy Forum document: The Best Education for All*. London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.
- Barber, M. (1996) *The Learning Game: Arguments for an Education Revolution*. London: Gollancz.
- Barnes, A., Venkatakrishnan, H. and Brown, M. (2003) *Strategy or Strait-Jacket?* London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.
- Bloomer, K. (1999) 'Education in the Next Millennium'. Contribution to the Scotsman Conference, Edinburgh.
- Boston, K. (2004) Speech to the Specialist Schools Trust on 11 May 2004.
- Brighouse, T. and Woods, D. (1999) *How to Improve Your School*. London: Routledge.
- Brookes, J. G. and Brookes, M. G. (1993) *In Search of Understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Carnell, E. (1999) 'Understanding Teachers' Professional Development – An investigation of teachers' learning and their learning contexts'. Unpublished PhD thesis. Institute of Education: University of London.
- Carnell, E. (2000) 'Dialogue, Discussion and Feedback: views of secondary school students on how others help their learning', in S. Askew (ed.), *Feedback for Learning*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Carnell, E. (2001) 'The Value of Meta-Learning Dialogue', *Professional Development Today*, 4 (2): 43-54.
- Carnell, E. and Lodge, C. (2002a) *Supporting Effective Learning*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Carnell, E. and Lodge, C. (2002b) 'Teachers Talking about Learning: Developing richer discourses with young people.' *Professional Development Today*. 5 (3): 63-74.
- Carnell, E. and Lodge, C. (2002c) 'Support for Students' Learning: What the form tutor can do'. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 20 (4): 12-21.
- Clarke, S. (2000) 'Getting it Right – Distance marking as accessible and effective feedback in the primary classroom', in S. Askew (ed.), *Feedback for Learning*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Claxton, G. (1999) *Wise Up*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Coffield, F. D. (2004) *Learning Styles for Post-16 Learners: What do we know?* Summary Report. London, Learning and Skills Development Agency.

- Cooper, P. and McIntyre, D. (1996) *Effective Teaching and Learning: Teachers' and students' perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Crace, J. (2000) 'Mind Games', *The Guardian*, 14 March, p3.
- Cuban, L. (1993) 'Computers meet Classroom: Classroom Wins', *Teachers, College Record*, 95(2): 185-210.
- David, T. (1996) 'British Babies: People or Possessions?' in D. Hayes (ed.) *Debating Education: Issues for the Millennium*. Canterbury: Canterbury Christ Church College.
- Dennison, B. and Kirk, R. (1990) *Do, Review, Learn, Apply: A simple guide to experiential learning*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Devereux, J. (2001) 'Pupils' Voices: Discerning views on teacher effectiveness', in F. Banks and A. S. Mayes (eds.) *Early Professional Development for Teachers*. London: David Fulton and The Open University.
- Department for Education and Skills (2003) *What is the Key Stage 3 National Strategy?* (online). Available: <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3> (9 March, 2004).
- Dweck, C.S. (2000) *Self Theories: Their role in motivation, personality and development*. Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis.
- Ertmer, P. A. and Newby, T. J. (1996) 'The Expert Learner: Strategic, self-regulated, and reflective', *Instructional Science*, 24 (1): 1-24.
- Fisher, J. (2000) 'The Foundations of Learning', transcript of a lecture in *Early Education*, London: BAECE.
- Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos). London: Penguin.
- Galton, M., Gray, J. and Rudduck, J. (1999) *The Impact of School Transitions and Transfers on Pupil Progress and Attainment, Research Report RR131*. Nottingham: Department of Education and Employment Publications.
- Galton, M. and Hargreaves, L. (2002) 'Transfer: A future agenda', in L. Hargreaves and M. Galton (eds.) *Transfer from the Primary Classroom: 20 years on*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Galton, M., Gray, J. and Rudduck, J. (2003) *Transfer and Transitions in the Middle Years of Schooling (7-14): Continuities and Discontinuities in Learning*. London: Department of Education and Employment Publications.
- Gillborn, D. and Youdell, D. (2000) *Rationing Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hallam, S. (2004) *Homework: The evidence*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Hammond, S. A. (1996) *The Thin Book of Appreciative Enquiry*. London: BT Press.
- Hargreaves, A., Earl, L. and Ryan, J. (1996) *Schooling for Change: Reinventing education for early adolescents*. London: Falmer Press.
- Hart, S., Dixon, A., Drummond, M. J., McIntyre, D. (2004) *Learning without Limits*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Hill, P. W. and Russell, V. J. (1999) 'Systematic Whole-School Reform of the Middle Years of Schooling', in R. J. Bosker, B. P. M. Creemers and S. Stringfield (eds.), *Enhancing Educational Excellence, Equity and Efficiency: Evidence from evaluations of systems and schools in change*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Holt, J. (1969) *How Children Fail*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Hughes, M. (1997) *Lessons are for Learning*, Stafford: Network Educational Press.

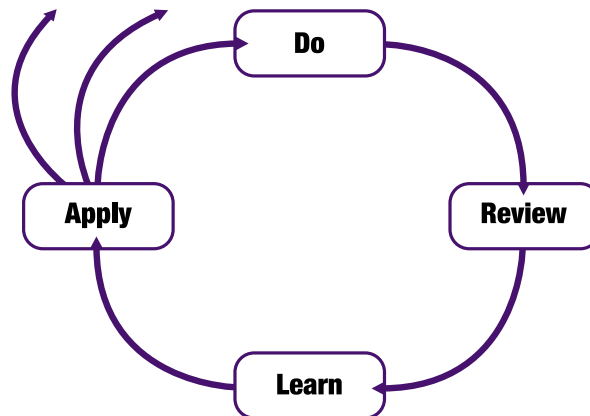
- Kanuka, H. and Anderson, T. (1999) 'Using Constructivism in Technology-Mediated Learning: constructing order out of the chaos in the literature', *Radical Pedagogy*. ISSN: 1524-6345.
www.radicalpedagogy.icapp.org/content/vol1.1999/issue2/02kanukal_2.html
- Inman, S. and Burke, H. (2002) *Schools Councils: An apprenticeship in democracy?* London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.
- Little, J. W. (2001) 'Professional Development in Pursuit of Reform', in A. Lieberman and L. Miller (eds.) *Teachers Caught in the Action: Professional development that matters*. New York: Teacher College Press.
- Lodge, C. (2001) 'An Investigation into Discourses of Learning in Schools'. Unpublished EdD Thesis. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Lodge, C. (2004) 'The Questions they Ask!' *Teachers and Students talk about Learning* (in press).
- MacBeath, J. (2000) 'Schools for Communities', in C. Watkins, C. Lodge and R. Best (eds.) *Tomorrow's Schools – Towards integrity*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- MacBeath, J. (1999) *Schools Must Speak for Themselves: The case for school self-evaluation*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- MacBeath, J. and Mortimore, P. (eds.) (2001) *Improving School Effectiveness*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Marton, F., Gloria, D. and Beaty, E. (1993) 'Conceptions of Learning', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 19 (3): 277-300.
- Mayall, B. (2003) *Sociologies of Childhood and Educational Thinking*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- McGhie, M. and Barr, I. (2000) 'Curriculum for the Future', in C. Watkins, C. Lodge and R. Best, (eds.) *Tomorrow's Schools – Towards Integrity*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- McNeil, L. (1986) *Contradictions of Control: School structure and school knowledge*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Meighan, R. (1993) *Theory and Practice of Regressive Education*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press.
- Mercer, N. (2000) *Words and Minds: How we use language to think together*. London: Routledge.
- Morgan, C. and Morris, G. (1999) *Good Teaching and Learning: Pupils and teachers speak*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Munro, J. (1999) 'Learning about Learning Improves Teacher Effectiveness.' *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 10 (2): 151-171.
- Pollard, A., Thiessen, D. and Filer, A. (eds.). (1997) *Children and their Curriculum: The perspectives of primary and elementary school children*. London: Falmer.
- Resnick, L. B. (1987) 'Learning In School and Out', *Educational Researcher* 16 (9): 13-40.
- Richards, C. (2000) 'Testing, Testing, Testing.' *Education Journal*, June, issue 46: 19.
- Rudduck, J. (2004) *The Challenge of Year 8: Sustaining a commitment to learning*. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing.
- Sockett, H. (1996) 'Teachers for the 21st Century: Redefining professional development', *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 80 (580): 22-29.

- Stobart, G. and Stoll, L. (2004) *The Key Stage 3 Strategy: What kind of reform is this?* (in press).
- Stoll, L., MacBeath, J. and Mortimore, P. (2001) 'Beyond 2000: Where next for effectiveness and improvement?', in J. MacBeath, and P. Mortimore (eds.). *Improving School Effectiveness*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Stoll, L., Stobart, G., Martin, S., Freeman, S., Freedman, E., Sammons, P. and Smees, R. (2003) *Preparing for Change: Evaluation of the Implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy Pilot*. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Twigg, S. (2004) Speech to the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2004 Easter Conference.
- UNESCO (1996) *What makes a good teacher?: Children speak their minds*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Watkins, C., Carnell, E., Lodge, C. and Whalley, C. (1996) 'Effective Learning.' National School Improvement Network, *Research Matters* No 5. London: University of London, Institute of Education.
- Watkins, C., Carnell, E., Lodge, C., Wagner, P. and Whalley, C. (2000) *Learning about Learning: Resources for supporting effective learning*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Watkins, C. (2001) 'Learning About Learning Enhances Performance'. National School Improvement Network, *Research Matters*, No 13. London: University of London, Institute of Education.
- Watkins, C., Carnell, E., Lodge, C., Wagner, P. and Whalley, C. (2002) 'Effective Learning'. National School Improvement Network, *Research Matters* Series No 17. London: University of London, Institute of Education.
- Weimer, M. (2002) *Learner-Centred Teaching*. San Francisco. CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Willes, P. (1983) *Learning to Labour*. London: Saxon House.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Reviewing learning

Using the learning cycle to review (Dennison & Kirk, 1990):



What have we done so far?

What have your feelings been about it?

What new insights and new understandings have you gained?

How do you imagine applying this learning in the future?

Appendix 2: Assessment for learning

The Assessment Reform Group (ARG) has been highly influential in developing effective assessment practices to promote young people's learning. The group suggests that: *'Assessment is one of the most powerful educational tools for promoting effective learning. But it must be used in the right way'* (ARG, 1999). It concludes that there is no evidence that increasing the amount of testing will enhance learning. Instead the focus needs to be on helping teachers use assessment, as part of teaching and learning, in way that will raise pupils' achievement. Successful learning occurs when learners have ownership of their learning; when they understand the goals they are aiming for; when, crucially, they are motivated and have the skills to achieve success.

Assessment which is explicitly designed to promote learning is the single most powerful tool we have for both raising standards and empowering lifelong learners.

Implications for the work of teachers in the classroom

As outlined in the table below, the ARG review *Testing, Motivation and Learning* emphasises what teachers in classrooms can do to avoid the negative impact of tests on motivation for learning and actions that can enhance motivation for learning.

do more of this...	and do less of this...
<p>Provide choice and help pupils to take responsibility for their learning.</p> <p>Discuss with pupils the purpose of their learning and provide feedback that will help the learning process.</p> <p>Encourage pupils to judge their work by how much they have learned and by the progress they have made.</p> <p>Help pupils to understand the criteria by which their learning is assessed and to assess their own work.</p> <p>Develop pupils' understanding of the goals of their work in terms of what they are learning; provide feedback to pupils in relation to these goals.</p> <p>Give feedback that enables pupils to know the next steps and how to succeed in taking them.</p> <p>Encourage pupils to value effort and a wide range of attainments.</p> <p>Encourage collaboration among pupils and a positive view of each others' attainments.</p>	<p>Define the curriculum in terms of what is in the tests to the detriment of what is not tested.</p> <p>Give frequent drill and practice for test taking.</p> <p>Teach how to answer specific test questions.</p> <p>Allow pupils to judge their work in terms of scores or grades.</p> <p>Allow test anxiety to impair some pupils' performance (particularly girls and lower performing pupils).</p> <p>Use tests and assessment to tell students where they are in relation to others.</p> <p>Give feedback relating to pupils' capabilities, implying a fixed view of each pupil's potential.</p> <p>Compare pupils' grades and allow pupils to compare grades, giving status on the basis of test achievement only.</p> <p>Emphasise competition for marks or grades among pupils.</p>

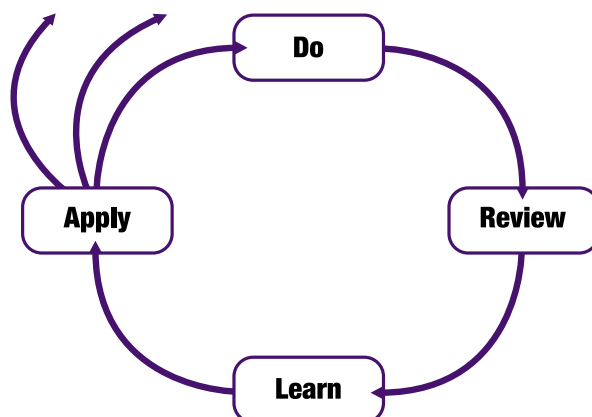
Appendix 3: Some features of classrooms for effective learning

(Adapted from Carnell and Lodge, 2002a, and developed from Brookes, J. G. & Brookes, M. G. 1993)

- the focus is on learning not on teaching; reciprocal teaching occurs – teachers are learners and pupils are teachers
- participants identify joint goals, plan activities and group tasks that require interdependence
- the pace is appropriate for the learning
- language focuses on learning and meta-learning
- learning is connected across all contexts
- learners construct their own questions, help each other develop their ideas through investigation and research
- learning is seen as dialogue
- learning is holistic involving social, emotional and cognitive aspects
- the learning community is fostered through goals, tasks, activities and social structures
- many different sources challenge the learners' thinking and take their learning forward.

Appendix 4: Planning for effective learning

Using the learning cycle, (Dennison & Kirk, 1990):



with the four aspects of effective learning, the matrix below is produced.

	Active learning	Collaborative learning	Learner responsibility	Learning about learning
Do	Tasks are designed for learner activity, not teacher activity	Tasks in small groups connect to create a larger whole (by roles or by parts)	Learners exercise choice and plan their approach	Learners are encouraged to notice aspects of their learning as they engage in tasks
Review	Learners stop and notice what happened, what was important, how it felt, etc.	Learners bring ideas together and review how the group has operated	Learners monitor their progress and review their plan	Learners describe what they notice and review their learning (goals, strategies, feelings, outcomes, context)
Learn	New insights and understandings are made explicit	Explanations of topic and of how the group functioned are voiced across the group	Factors influencing progress are identified and new strategies devised	Richer conceptions of learning are voiced and further reflective inquiry is encouraged
Apply	Future action is planned in light of new understanding. Transfer to other situations is examined	Future possibilities for group and community learning are considered Plans are revised to accommodate recent learning	Plans are revised to accommodate recent learning	Learners plan to notice more and to experiment with their approach to learning

¹Watkins C, Carnell e, Lodge C, Wagner P and Whalley C (2002), *Effective Learning*, London: Institute of Education School Improvement Network (Research Matters series No 17).

Association of Teachers and Lecturers 2004

ATL members	FREE
Non-members	£12.99
ATL product code	PR20
ISBN	1902466381

Any shift in focus from teaching to learning requires a much greater understanding of the experiences of the learners themselves. As part of its commitment to education, ATL commissioned this ground-breaking research to find out what young people thought of their learning within the Key Stage 3 National Strategy environment in Year 8. This publication provides an important and honest exploration of young people's learning.