Attachment 11



School of Education

**BA Early Childhood Studies**

**[Single Honours]**

**Building Learning Power**

***- helping you to learn better and faster***

# 2005

#

### Introduction to Building Learning Power

We are all different.

We have all had different experiences in life.

We all learn in different ways.

This programme of undergraduate study is a time when you will gain new knowledge and learn new skills. What you do with your new-found knowledge will be up to you of course. Making sense of it so that you begin to understand will be high on your list but whilst understanding is essential it is not all there is to learning. There are many beliefs about learning that you can read up on but mostly these are based on our own cultural heritage. There is no one way to learn, in fact, we are learning all of the time. Learning is not something we just decide to do sometimes it is part of our being. Guy Claxton, whose work this booklet introduces, says that *‘to be alive is to be learning’* (2005, p.6). This programme of study leads to a degree in Early Childhood Studies and during this period of study you will develop a greater understanding of child development so when Claxton describes the new born baby as *‘arriving unfinished’* he offers a particular image of the child in relation to the power of learning.

Learning is acquired and that stimulus for learning to develop comes from the experiences we have in life. Learning is often portrayed as a journey. This journey requires some knowledge, some understanding and some skills: one is not necessarily more important than the other, they come as a package. Assumptions about learning can get in the way for many of us and one such assumption is that *‘proper learning involves understanding’*, (Claxton, 2005, p26). Do not be deterred if at first you do not understand. On this particular journey practical experience of working with children and experienced professionals will help you realise some of your learning.



As a student expect to find your attention wavering at times, as your mind quite easily turns to thinking about other things going on in your life. This is not good news when you are faced with a challenge. Strategies are needed at such times but you also need to understand the situation. Learning about learning and thinking about the learning process is not a solution to problems but research is showing that students are helped considerably when they are in charge of their learning.

The brain is a very powerful organ and you can find some interesting reading about the explosion in brain research over the last 20 years. Scientists are helping educators to understand more about how the brain naturally learns best. The strongest message to learners is to *‘quit playing ‘victim’’* (Jensen, 2000, xii).

*Lizzie, a Yr 1 ECS student, came to us after spending two years at her local college of Further Education where she achieved a child care qualification. She enjoyed her placements and received high praise for her work with children. She liked doing her assignments and achieved many at Distinction level. She felt ready for a degree course and was very excited in gaining a place. Towards the end of semester 1 Lizzie’s tutors noticed a change in her: she was not keen to contribute in class; she did not appear happy; she even talked about ‘packing it all in’ and leaving to find work in a nursery. What was happening to cause this change, we wondered?*

*After spending some time talking with Lizzie her tutor was not much the wiser until one day Lizzie’s frustrations came to the fore which gave the tutor some insight into what was possibly going wrong for Lizzie.*

*Lizzie was being challenged and was not coping with the challenges that were coming her way. She had faced challenges before and overcome them but this time her approach to learning was being challenged. She was used to thinking about things in a particular way, a way that had proved successful in the past, but now she was being asked to challenge some of that thinking. She was not able to understand a particular concept that the tutor was trying to convey. Lizzie’s reaction was, ‘I’m not clever enough for this!’*

Lizzie was wrong to think that her intellectual skills were not sufficiently well developed for this level of study. It was possible that she had not developed, or retrieved, the right learning tool, (Claxton, 2005, p6). Lizzie was helped through this situation and thankfully continued to grow in confidence so that her marks were not affected and of course she continued with her studies. Lizzie was not used to being given such freedom of thinking: she expected to find that she would be shown how to do things; what to do and in what order; and, even which books to use. Once she realised that she had the time to use to go away and work things out for herself, in her own way, Lizzie was once more a happy, lively member of the group. If you would like to read more about assumptions we have about learning chapter 1 of Claxton’s (2005) book, *Wise Up. Learning to live the Learning Life* is recommended

Stella Cottrell tells us that a reflective, active, self-evaluating approach to learning develops deeper understanding in the long term but there is also a place for quick tips. You will find as you study that you have immediate needs and long-term needs and you will, therefore, approach these challenges in different ways. Stella Cottrell’s books are to be recommended as an introduction to a range of study skills. Working your way through various activities suggested by Cottrell will make you think. There are many benefits to developing thinking skills. Cowley (2004) suggests that benefits could be felt in the following:

* ***conceptualising***: thinking effectively, making connections between different thoughts or experiences
* ***empathising***: having compassion and understanding about other people and learning to think about how actions and behaviour affect others
* ***developing morality***: dealing with the ‘big issues’ such as exploring different beliefs, values and how these affect a way of life
* ***common Sense***: finding practical and common-sense solutions to the issues is a vital part of learning
* ***concentration and focus***: good-quality thinking comes from an ability to concentrate and focus to a high standard

This booklet aims to introduce an approach to learning developed by Guy Claxton. He has found that students who are ***‘building learning power’*** become more confident in their own learning ability and become more successful.

**The Four Rs of Learning Power**

Claxton’s work has shown that students who are more confident of their own learning ability learn faster and learn better. They concentrate more, think harder and find learning more enjoyable – they do better. Furthermore, in a world of uncertainties, particularly in employment opportunities, people need to see themselves as life-long learners. Claxton believes his approach helps people to be tenacious and resourceful, imaginative and logical, self-disciplined and self-aware, collaborative and inquisitive, (Claxton, 2002).

There are four aspects to learning:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| resilience |  | shawna_resourceful_bunsha |
| **RESILIENCE** |  | **RESOURCEFULNESS** |
| reflectors |  | globalinterdependence |
| **REFLECTIVENESS** |  | **RECIPROCITY** |

**[1] Developing Resilience**

* ***be ready, willing and able to lock on to learning***

Claxton suggests that you need to:

* + be absorbed in your learning
	+ manage distractions
	+ notice
	+ persevere

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Try to become aware of how absorbed you actually are during an activity, e.g. reading. It is possible to use your distractions to help you study.

*Just before you need to do something other than study give 5 or 10 minutes to browsing through some reading first. Then give in to your distraction, BUT, go over what you have just read as you do it.*

*When it is hard to start a piece of work just decide to give yourself 10 minutes of work time. Then do something else but try to keep thinking about what you have just written or read. As your brain starts to think about things you need to write your ideas down quickly. If your brain just will not question or even remember you will need to refresh your memory for only a moment or two and then you can continue with the distraction activity.*

*If you interrupt your work by ringing your friends let them know to ask you if you’re working and ask them to help you focus on your assignment. Set limits for calls.*

(Cotttrell, 2000, p.71)

**[2] Developing Resourcefulness**

* ***be ready, willing and able to learn in different ways***

Claxton suggests that you need to:

* + question
	+ make links
	+ imagine
	+ reason
	+ capitalise

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Try to develop different attitudes to work because it is important that you are in the right frame of mind. In a world full of many challenges there has to be many ways of sorting things out so if your first attempt did not work try a different way. What is important is that you know that this is the right thing to do because being resourceful means being skilful. Avoid a feeling of helplessness. If you are successful in solving one problem you will actually want more to solve. The learning journey suddenly becomes an adventure!

*ED1701 of this degree introduces you to a variety of approaches to observation and assessment of learning and development. Putting this theory in to practice is important if you are to be able to explore and evaluate different observational methods. Furthermore, you will need a range of experiences and data on which to draw to feed in to this assignment. You are likely to benefit by being* ***resourceful*** *as you work towards this assignment: question your methods and consider alternative approaches; analyse the data in more than one way and draw on different sources of authority to help you make an assessment of the child’s learning; capitalise on opportunities by seizing the moment – observations do not always have to be planned for in advance; and finally, if someone offers support then capitalise on their greater knowledge and experience.*

**[3] Developing Reflectiveness**

* ***be ready, willing and able to become more strategic about learning***

Claxton suggests that you need to:

* + plan
	+ revise
	+ distil (including meta-learning)

**OPPORTUNITIES**

You will doubtless achieve this degree if you do not develop ***reflectiveness*** because without planning, revising and distilling then you are likely to find that your learning is disjointed and possibly unimportant to you. You probably find that without careful planning you are unable to manage your time well and this can lead to frustration and often stress.

*ED1703 Child Protection and the Law is a module in year 1. This module of study brings with it many challenges. For many students assimilating and accommodating the knowledge associated with this subject is demanding especially if they have no prior learning in this area. Adopting a mature and professional approach through this module of study is equally tough and for many, being assessed under exam conditions is uppermost in their minds.*

***Building Learning Power*** *can be of great value at this time. Taking a strategic view, i.e. taking stock, breaking the task down into more manageable pieces, assessing available resources, gauging time, thinking about the journey including the possible hurdles on the way, will help. Monitor and review your learning journey in case some changes to your plans are needed. Mulling things over is an aspect of being* ***reflective*** *so get together with some friends and study as a group: share resources etc and share ideas of how you intend to work in the exam room, e.g. how much time you think you’ll spend on question 1, 2 and so on because this is a seen paper so you will have time to prepare but of course you are on your own when it comes to writing it all down.*

Whilst a good learner is intuitive they also need to be aware of how their learning is going, (Claxton, 2002, p.31). Early childhood professionals who talk about learning with children demonstrate good practice. Here children are encouraged to select and make decisions as they construct their own learning. They develop dispositions to learn: think of a child in a particular situation *(construction in the sand pit),* developing a strategy for their play *(which materials to collect, which tools to use, how to make the sand wet, what role their friend will take in this project etc),* as well as a strong sense of motivation *(seeking two pairs of hands when one pair was not enough, adding more water to the sand because it kept slipping, swapping the metal truck for a smaller plastic one because it was lighter, starting again because the structure was not quite right).*

*‘Dispositions to learn’* is not exclusive to young children it is something we continue to develop. In support of your learning, as a student on this degree course, you are advised to think about your dispositions to learn. Take the ***learning dispositions*** used to provide a framework for assessment in early childhood settings in New Zealand:

* *taking an interest*
* *being involved*
* *persisting with difficulty or uncertainty*
* *communicating with others*
* *taking responsibility*

(Carr, 2001)

These are applicable to us all as life-long learners as they are to young children. By talking about learning itself and articulating how learning works understanding yourself as a learner begins to take place. This is known as meta-learning and there is a wealth of research which shows that good learners know a lot about learning.

There is an additional bonus to demonstrating ***reflectiveness*** and that is in relation to a possible career in teaching. If during this programme of study you become a skilful in reflective practice you are well placed for selection for post-graduate study with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) because this is a sought-after skill. Being able to evidence this through an application form and to demonstrate this at interview will help to secure that place.

**[4] Developing Reciprocity**

* ***be ready, willing and able to learn alone and with others***

Claxton suggests that you need to:

* + be interdependent
	+ collaborate
	+ empathise and listen
	+ imitate

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Learning is not an isolated activity: well at least it is not encouraged on this programme. Reference has already been made to some long held assumptions about learning and how these are now being challenged. Believing that you must always do things on your own is one assumption that can be dispelled during the learning process, however, submitted work that is not your own amounts to plagiarism, so it is important to separate the two.

You will find a range of teaching styles used in sessions: some group or paired work when you will be left to your own devices to achieve the task in a given time limit and some independent study. Both demand self-discipline. In group work, however, interdependency will feature and this is no bad thing. Group work is about collaboration. It is a time to develop the skills of learning with others. Group work can (and should) promote empathy as individuals listen attentively to each other and respond in a non-judgemental way. At this time it is important for everyone in the group to try to get into each other’s minds otherwise there will doubtless be some pulling and tugging in different directions that do not benefit or progress the project.

There is great value to be placed in learning from others. Think back to a subject that you particularly enjoyed at school. It is likely that you admired this teacher, you envied their knowledge and understanding, their ability to share learning with you. Most trainee teachers have a role model in mind as they learn to be a teacher. It was a Russian scientist, Lev Vygotsky, who drew the world’s attention to the ways in which we try to make sense of the world: in particular the role of significant others. His work has had a strong influence on the way in which the *significant other* is considered in supporting children’s learning and development. Students, must therefore, not feel guilty in sharing learning with others or in modelling the good habits of their friends.

*Induction and beyond tutors and students continually share expectations of each other both in standards of work, adult responsibilities and level of contribution. During semester 2 there is a module that focuses on children and families. During these sessions there is considerable time for discussion, time to hear different points of views. In this module it is essential because all families are different, they all have differing needs at different times and we have all had different life experiences. There is a danger when discussing action to improve the life chances of children that ideas are based on our own experience so you can see the value of listening and discovering from each other in this module. There can also be hidden benefits for some students as they quietly identify with someone else’s situation/experiences (empathise) and learn from this even to point of being proactive in their own lives. The expectations are: that everyone is entitled to contribute; everyone is entitled to be listened to; and nobody is to be judgemental. Discussions that take place during sessions should also be treated in confidence. In this way students feel more comfortable and able to contribute.*

Collaborative work features in this programme of study. ED1704 demands group work with individual assessment featuring in the assignment of this module. This is important preparation not only to further collaborative work with a higher level of expectation that features in year 2 but developing effective team work is part of the BLP journey and it is a strong element of any future work with children and families. Working with others is a key skill that students are expected to develop and everyone will come to this from different starting points. For some students this can be a difficult challenge for a variety of reasons: they do not find it easy; they are not used to being listened to; they are lacking in confidence in the spoken word as well as subject matter. Support outside the *classroom* is available for students to access via SGSS if needed.

The group work that is a feature of the assignment for ED1704 requires students to work collaboratively though there is scope for delegation of specific tasks. Working as part of group presents many problems and these are compounded when there is a tight deadline, when students are unable to physically meet up regularly, when communication links crash or when there are personality issues within the group. These all have to be overcome if the group is to be successful so drawing on the ***Four Rs of Learning Power*** could be useful. Groups, therefore, might consider the following:

* *share contact details for effective communication with everybody in the team*
* *share information and ideas*
* *share personal experiences that are relevant to the topic*
* *use language that is encouraging and positive rather than critical*
* *listen carefully and if keeping notes helps, then do it*
* *acknowledge important points that someone else is making*
* *communicate progress with each other on a regular basis*
* *take control and responsibility for personal learning*
* *challenge the group if the distribution of responsibility (delegation) is not in manageable chunks*
* *if someone in the group is really struggling to show empathy seek outside support so that this person can be helped through encouragement*
* *make good use of the Discussion Board on IBIS for sharing information and seeking outside support*

**PARTNERSHIP IN LEARNING**

This is only a brief introduction to *Building Learning Power* ***(BLP)*** and so far the focus has been on the student as learner. Tutors also consider themselves to be constantly learning and learning about ***BLP***, particularly about their part in the process of helping students to ***build learning power***, is a commitment shown by many in the School of Education.

For our part we will continue to learn how to put ***BLP*** into action because this is no seven day wonder – this is as much a journey for tutors as it is for students.

***We aim to:***

* talk explicitly about the process of learning during sessions;
* facilitate group and individual work;
* facilitate, support and encourage independent work;
* provide visual images, prompts and records either visibly in the teaching room or electronically on the learning engines for this programme on IBIS;
* help student to realise a sense of purpose behind activities and discussions;
* *scaffold* learning by asking questions to promote further learning;
* suggest follow-up work in the form of directed activities;
* respond to students in a way that shows respect for the contribution they make, clarify misconceptions, and try not to leave any question unanswered;
* respond to student’s work constructively;
* model good practice of collaboration within the team;
* listen and respond to student feedback;
* create a learning culture with our student groups

**Perspectives of Learning**

***BLP*** is presented here to you as something for you to consider though we hope you will take it seriously. There is nothing compulsory about learning about learning in this Early Childhood Studies degree programme. The intention here has been to draw attention to new ideas that appear to be working. Where interest is keen students will doubtless access a range of literature on the subject. In this way they will begin to develop the habit of thinking about their own learning which is being seen to be powerful. Student can take a structured approach to developing the ***Four Rs of Learning Power*** by drawing on this in planning for their own development. The tools of the Progress File on IBIS may be useful in this respect.

Tutors in this team hold strong beliefs in students taking responsibility for their own learning. They will not assume the role of teacher as being central to transmitting bodies of knowledge, skill and understand. The belief is that students can learn to learn more effectively when they see opportunities and not difficulties in their learning journey. Challenges can be overcome if students have the right tools for the job.

Claxton’s work is not pie in the sky it has been built on research. There are other authors whose work in understanding how we learn can be accessed and Claxton’s books will direct students to many of these. There is a body of research that is very keen to improve the learning experience for students and this includes learning about learning in pre-school. For those who do not underestimate young children’s learning this will not come as a surprise and whilst this programme of study will touch on some of the theory behind young children’s learning it will be up to the individual to read wider around this exciting work. Much of this research is centred on meta-learning dialogues, where children’s greater awareness of their own learning is developed. (Spring 2001, No13 issue of NSIN Research Matters for paper on learning about learning enhancing performance)

During this programme of study you will learn about the influence of early pioneers of early years education: Rousseau (18thC) advocating greater acknowledgement for childhood; Froebel’s (19thC) profound respect for children’s play; Monetssori and Steiner (19thC) promoting a meaningful curriculum with the freedom to learn. Young children should be free to learn. More recently Chris Athey and Cathy Nutbrown are helping practitioners to think about young children learning in a dynamic and creative way through observations of children at play and the identification of children’s *schemas*:, (Athey, 1990 & Nutbrown, 1999). Here are influential authors trying to make sense of children trying to make sense of their experiences. Students on this early childhood studies degree would, therefore, not be out of place in trying to make sense of their experiences!

For each of these authors play is deemed important though it is perceived in different ways. For each of these authors the power of learning through play is strong. In thinking about the value of children’s playful experiences there are obvious links to the ***Four Rs of Learning Power***. In a learning environment that values freedom to learn*,* you will find children:

* showing ***resilience*** because they have selected an activity that they are interested in, they become absorbed at which point they become unaware of the activities around them, they use their senses extraordinarily well because this is intuitive and whilst they can easily become frustrated when things do not go right with a supportive adult alongside they do persevere and celebrate success;
* being ***resourceful*** because at any early age they have not yet been conditioned into particular ways of learning, children naturally ask questions, seek answers, they use their imagination powerfully in their play, they demonstrate a methodical approach in their play and they are the champions at making good use of resources;
* being ***reflective*** because they plan their play and doubtless this plan will be revised constantly as the play progresses. For the most part they have good role models and they draw on their experience in their play, copying and modelling other people (mostly adults) and some would argue that children are capable of understanding learning and themselves as a learner because given the chance they will talk about what they are doing in their play and why;
* demonstrating ***reciprocity*** – theorists will present differing views on the age/stage in which children show a willingness to learn (play) alone and with others. Piaget’s stage theory tells us that this is a staged process but others challenge this view because of the evidence of interdependence and collaboration seen in infants. Similarly, the age at which children show empathy has been shown to be much younger than Piaget would suggest. Children are however dependent on a supportive adult or a significant other.

***Building learning power*** starts early.

Other modules in this programme will make links to learning and as students progress they will become increasingly aware of international influences on practice. Most notably a philosophy held by the pedagogues of the pre-schools and infant toddler centres in Reggio Emilia, a city in northern Italy. Here there is no curriculum for learning. Here the children take responsibility for their learning. Here the *significant others* in these children’s centres do not see themselves as teacher rather that the environment is teacher. They create a stimulating environment providing opportunities for exploration. This *significant other* is someone who helps children to negotiate learning through design, documentation and discourse, (Edwards, et al, 1998), learning about learning through the quality of their interaction (teacher as researcher). The child’s ‘voice’ is powerful in these early childhood settings. Creativity is expressed in many ways (*‘their hundred languages’*). This is radical thinking about learning that students will hopefully enjoy exploring and possibly use to challenge their own way of learning.



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Much importance will be given to the different aspects of your engagement with learning over the three years of this programme but if you can try to understand yourself as a learner you will be helping yourself to achieve at a high level.

# ***Kate Wilkinson, Programme Leader***

k.wilkinson@chester.ac.uk

**Supportive Texts**

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