My Learning Power
Using ELLI in Higher Education

A Guide to Understanding Learning Power with
the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory – ELLI

A product of the Dispositions to Stay and Succeed Project

Karen J. Williamson
Annika Coughlin
Tim Small
Jamie Thompson

Introduction

The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) has proved to be a powerful tool for generating awareness, reflection and personal development planning about learning over the last five years in Higher Education. It has been used effectively across a range of institutions, subject areas and levels of study to raise learner self awareness and to promote learner development. Most recently ELLI has provided both useful quantitative data and been a catalyst for much valuable qualitative data in the Dispositions to Stay and Succeed project.

This Guide is for teachers and learners in Higher Education and is to help you understand and improve your capacity to learn using ELLI.

The Guide is designed to help you after you have completed the ELLI questionnaire to prepare to review and interpret your ELLI spider-gram. The definitions of the seven dimensions will increase awareness of your own learning capacity and the ideas for improvement will help you plan improvements in relation to current contexts in which you want to learn, do well and help others do the same.

Aim

The aim of The Guide is to provide learners teachers and tutors in Higher Education with an easy to use resource for interpreting and improving their own learning power and the learning power of others.

My Learning Journey

The preoccupation in Higher Education is the transfer and acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding. Programmes of learning are described in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding outcomes, they are delivered by discipline experts and are assessed as part of quality assurance mechanisms designed to secure standards of achievement. However Higher Education needs to deliver more than this. Individual learners expect personal growth and development and an experience of University that is transformative. Employers seek self aware graduates with a sense of purpose who are equipped to be lifelong learners. ELLI helps us to engage with these issues that lie beyond the curriculum. Students can raise their awareness of themselves as learners and set themselves targets for change. Staff can think critically about the impact of the processes of learning in HE and how best the experience of HE can support and sustain the development of lifelong learning dispositions.

We can think of learning power as one of four stations in a learning journey that connects an internal sense of your identity, values and motivation at one end to an external sense of your competent performance and achievement at the other.

Me and My Story	My Learning Power	My Knowledge and Skills	My Competent Performance
Identity Values Motivation	Dispositions Attitudes Behaviours	Understanding Knowledge Skills	Competence Performance Achievement
Internal	⟵————————⟶		External

As the arrow indicates, awareness of and improvement in learning power has an impact on the development of identity, as well as the development of knowledge, skills and competence.

Implications for Teachers, Tutors and Learning Facilitators

In this holistic view the role of those facilitating learning is to enable and support individual learning journeys for a given context and for a certain time in their lives.

This role requires professional skill in learner-centred practices, especially for the improvement of learning power.

Understanding My Learning Power

The dimensions of learning power are like attitudes or dispositions rather than capabilities or skills. It's helpful to see them as:

- Personal qualities, dispositions or attitudes
- Enabling understanding, learning and performance
- Embodying thinking, feeling and action
- Deeper and more holistic than learning styles or preferences
- Best understood in relation to a context or situation
- Amenable to development and change

While some dimensions may be stronger and more familiar than others, they are all to be found in each of us and, with the right kind of learning and coaching, they can all be improved.

Here are the brief definitions of each dimension:

Changing and Learning: a sense of yourself as someone who learns and changes over time; the opposite is being 'stuck and static'

Critical Curiosity: an orientation to want to 'get beneath the surface'; the opposite is being 'passive'

Meaning Making: making connections and seeing that learning 'matters to me'; the opposite is simply 'accumulating data'

Creativity: risk-taking, playfulness, imagination and intuition; the opposite is being 'rule-bound'

Learning Relationships: learning with and from others and also being able to learn alone; the opposite is either being 'isolated' or 'over-dependent'

Strategic Awareness: being aware of your thoughts, feelings and actions as a learner and able to use that awareness to plan and manage learning processes; the opposite is being 'robotic'

Resilience: the orientation to persevere in the development of your own learning power and relish challenge; the opposite is being 'fragile and dependent'.

Assessing your Learning Power

The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory, or 'ELLI', was developed to test out and refine the researchers' understanding of learning power.

In the questionnaire, you rate yourself against statements on a four point scale.

ELLI is a 'self-report' questionnaire – it re-organises what you say about yourself into a profile of the seven dimensions in the form of a spider diagram. Here is an example:
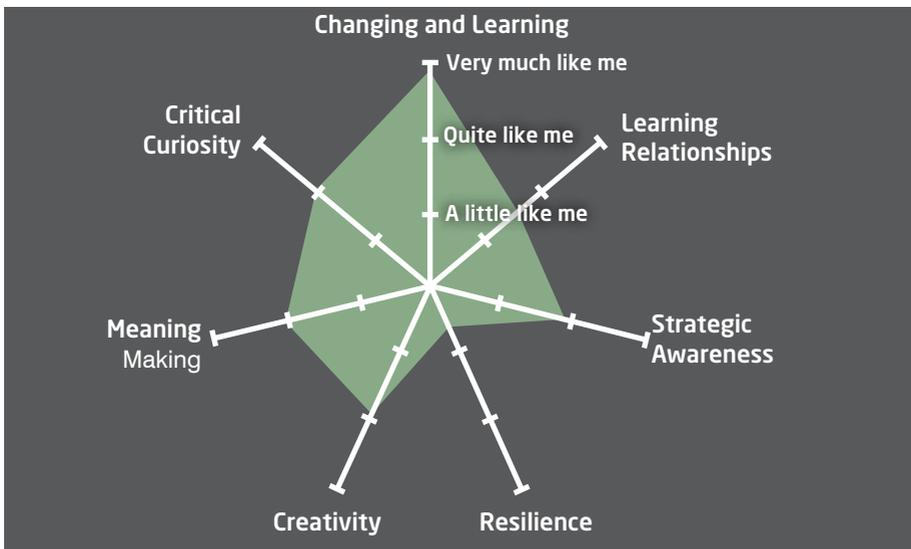
The profile provided by ELLI is contextual – your ELLI profile is affected by your perception of yourself at a point in time and in relation to the learning context (or contexts) in your mind at that time.

The tool reflects changes in your perception of yourself as a learner and/or changes in your learning context. This means that learning facilitators and tutors can support you with strategies that improve selected dimensions of your learning power.

Interpreting your Learning Power Profile

Your profile illustrates how you see yourself as a learner at a specific point in time and in relation to the contexts you referred to when completing the self-assessment. As you learn more about your profile, you will become more aware of yourself as a learner. The dimensions offer a new language for learning and as you begin to use the language, you are likely to gain interest in improving the dimensions you want to develop. With reference to the definitions of learning power in this booklet and what you know about yourself, look at your profile and consider these questions:

- What do you think about your profile?

- How much do you agree with it?

- How well does it describe your learning capacity as you know it?

- How would you like your profile to be?

- How could you use your learning power to improve your learning and performance?

- What might you learn about your self from this?

Reflect on how you learn in different situations. As your understanding of the seven dimensions increases, consider how well you use each of them.

Improving your Learning Power

With support from a tutor or coach, you can plan and implement learning improvement strategies, making improvements that increase your likelihood to perform well, achieve better results and fulfil your potential.

Research shows that by choosing improvement activities that are

relevant in the context of your own learning and supported by good learning relationships, you can improve your capacity to learn.

With reference to the improvement ideas in this booklet, you could prepare for a discussion about your Learning Power profile by using these questions:

- How do you experience the stronger and weaker dimensions in your life?

- How could your stronger dimensions help you develop the others?

- What difference would it make if you improved these dimensions in situations that matter to you?

- How could you think, feel and act differently to strengthen your learning power?

- Which learning dimension(s) is it important for you to improve?

Thinking ahead, identify situations in which you want to learn and perform successfully. Begin to identify ways in which you could use and improve your learning power in these situations.

The Seven Dimensions of Learning Power

Definitions, Behaviours and Improvement Ideas

Changing and Learning

Critical Curiosity

Meaning Making

Creativity

Learning Relationships

Strategic Awareness

Resilience

Use this section to deepen your understanding of learning power and to identify how you might improve your own.

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Changing and Learning

A sense of oneself as someone who learns and changes over time; the opposite is being 'stuck and static'

What's this About?

This dimension is about believing in yourself as someone who can and will change and learn and get better over time. It is having a positive learning story or journey to reflect upon. This gives you a layer of confidence, helping you to cope with obstacles and difficulties by putting them in perspective. Learners without much of this are likely to feel 'stuck and static' instead of having a 'trajectory': a sense of having 'come a long way' and of being able to 'go places' with their learning.

From the Research

Effective learners know that learning itself is learnable. They believe that, through effort, their minds can get bigger and stronger, just as their bodies can and they have energy to learn. They see learning as a lifelong process, and gain pleasure and self-esteem from expanding their ability to learn. Having to try is experienced positively: it's when you are trying that your 'learning muscles' are being exercised. A growth orientation includes a sense of getting better at learning over time, and of growing and changing and adapting as a learner in the whole of life. There is a sense of history and hope.

The contrast pole of growth orientation is **fixity**, or being **stuck and static**. Less effective learners tend to believe that 'learning power' is fixed, and therefore experience difficulty negatively, as revealing their limitations. They are less likely to see challenging situations as opportunities to become a better learner.

Changing and Learning

Typical Behaviour

- Sees learning as a positive experience
- Seeks out new learning opportunities
- Accepts responsibility for learning
- Believes in their capacity to change

Improvement Ideas

- Think of yourself as a Learner – the best thing to be, all life long!
- Think about how your body gets stronger and fitter with training and stimulus and start a regime for your mind and brain
- Look out some of your old development plans (PDPs) or projects and compare what you were doing a year or more ago with what you are capable of doing now
- Keep a learning journal: recording 'What have I learned?' with your hopes, plans, successes, failures and other milestones, monthly or quarterly
- Think of your progress as a 'learning journey'
- Ask your tutor or fellow learners to help you to notice the new things you are learning to achieve
- Remember, there are no such things as 'mistakes': only lessons to learn! Every experience moves you forward, if you want it to
- Read biographies of people in relevant fields, who you are interested in, and think about how your own life might look when you have achieved your dreams
- Talk to people with more experience in your field. Ask them about the journey they have taken, how they have changed over time and what they have learned

What can tutors do to help?

- Boost confidence through positive and encouraging feedback both individually and collectively

- Design activities through which students can use feedback from early formative assessment to improve – help students to recognise improvements they are making

- Provide support for 'how' to write reflectively – for example through informal study networks/blogs/conversations

- Facilitate of group discussions into how others/peers have changed to recognise that learning is sometimes difficult for everyone and that this is a challenge rather than a limitation.

- Share your own change 'narrative'

- Talk about students' learning and the things they found difficult.

- Provide assessment feedback that supports learning and change ('feed forward').

Critical Curiosity

An orientation to want to 'get beneath the surface'; the opposite is being 'passive'

What's this About?

This dimension is about your desire to delve into topics and get beneath the surface, find things out and ask questions, especially 'Why?' If you are a critically curious learner, you will be unlikely simply to accept what you are told without the reasoning behind it. You might challenge what a colleague says, rather than take it at face value. Learners who lack Critical Curiosity might generally turn up and expect to be 'told things', including what to do and how to improve, rather than expect to do the work themselves, seeing themselves as passive recipients of their learning, rather than active agents in it.

From the Research

Effective learners have energy and a desire to find things out. They like to get below the surface of things and try to find out what is going on. They value 'getting at the truth', and are more likely to adopt 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning strategies. They are less likely to accept what they are told uncritically, enjoy asking questions, and are more willing to reveal their questions and uncertainties in public. They like to come to their own conclusions about things, and are inclined to see knowledge, at least in part, as a product of human inquiry. They take ownership of their own learning and enjoy a challenge. The Dispositions to Stay and Succeed project demonstrated a significant relationship between high scores in Critical Curiosity and high marks at University and found that academic success was associated with a motivation to study based in strong interest in the subject.

The contrast pole is **passivity**. Passive learners are more likely to accept what they are told uncritically, and to believe that 'received wisdom' is necessarily true. They are less thoughtful, and less likely to engage spontaneously in active speculation and exploratory kinds of discussion.

Critical Curiosity

Typical Behaviour

- Enjoys a challenge and confronting complexity
- Learns by working things out, solves problems, seeks out information and understanding
- Enjoys questioning, finding out and self-directed research
- Refuses to accept propositions at face value

Improvement Ideas

- Think of yourself as a 'learning detective': not only interested in answers but clues, patterns and incongruities
- Look for opportunities to ask questions, of colleagues first if it's easier, then your teachers
- Say, respectfully, "I'm not sure I agree with that" and challenge people to explain and justify their opinions
- Tell your tutor what you're up to and ask for encouragement
- Practise climbing the 'Why?' Ladder:
  - Think of a question – e.g. "Why do I work so hard?"
  - Think of an answer – e.g. "It's expected of me!
  - Ask "Why is it expected of me?"
  - Think of an answer… and so on!

  See how far you get. Write it down if you like.

- Keep a dictionary nearby and pounce on words you don't understand – so you do now! Use your existing contacts and resources to create a 'work glossary'

- Welcome the feeling of being challenged or perplexed and use it to drive your learning forward, like a quest for the light!

- Play with 'What if…' scenarios - as organizations have to do in 'future planning' – building your competency to 'find solutions'.

- Ask your learning facilitator or tutor to help you create an open climate – e.g. no criticism allowed – so that you are able to speculate, try out 'whacky' ideas on each other and ask 'What if…?' and 'Why?' questions with confidence

What can tutors do to help?

- Encourage students to think for themselves, to ask questions and not to expect immediate answers.

- Ask 'what if' questions, encourage 'thought experiments' etc.

- Encourage students to argue from both sides of a question.

- Acknowledge that some students may find the material difficult

- Explore ways to assess and reward students' questions as well as their answers

- Explain that sometimes there are no clear answers.

- Don't shy away from controversial/challenging questions

- Encourage students to ask sceptical questions to identify particular bias/slant/perspective in arguments.

- Encourage students not to fear making mistakes

- Acknowledge areas where your own understanding may not be perfect or where you have uncertainties.

- Design assignments which encourage and reward critical curiosity

Meaning Making

Making connections and seeing that learning 'matters to me'; the opposite is simply 'accumulating data'

What's this About?

This dimension is about your ability to make sense of everything by 'relating' to it: relating to facts and ideas, linking them up, seeing patterns and connections and constructing a 'map' of your learning,

so you can see how it all fits together and 'know your way around'. The personal nature of Meaning Making is important: it includes feeling that 'learning matters to you and 'connects with your story'

and so helps you to become engaged, linking new ideas to more familiar ones, connecting the present with the past and the here and now to more remote ideas and experiences. Without this, everything seems fragmented and nothing really makes sense.

From the Research

Effective learners are on the lookout for links between what they are learning and what they already know. They get pleasure from seeing how things 'fit together'. They like it when they can make sense of new things in terms of their own experience, and when they can see how learning relates to their own concerns. Their questions reflect this orientation towards coherence. They are interested in the big picture and how the new learning fits within it. They like to learn about what really matters to them. Meaning Making is another learning dimension found by the Dispositions to Stay and Succeed project to be significantly related to higher marks at University.

The contrast pole is **fragmentation**. Less effective learners are more likely to approach learning situations piecemeal, and to respond to them on their own individual merits. They may be more interested in knowing the criteria for successful performance than in looking for joined-up meanings and associations.

Meaning Making

Typical Behaviour

- Seeks to make connections and integrates ideas
- Makes a whole from separate parts
- Relates new learning to relevant past and current personal experience
- Connects learning from different sources

Improvement Ideas

- Choose a field or topic you know quite a bit about and create a mind-map for it. Use your 'map' to connect up:
  - Why it matters to you – your feelings and connection with it
  - Facts and figures
  - History and development
  - Current state of play
  - People associated with the topic
- Use mind-mapping to start you off with any project or assignment in which you have to organise and present knowledge
- Take an everyday object – e.g. the first manufactured thing you used today – and think about everything that had to happen for that object to be there for you
- For a group project, your team could create a 'mega mind-map' so everyone can add new connections whenever they see them
- For every new piece of learning you come across, think about how it relates, or could relate, to something you remember experiencing or hearing about
- For every new project, complete the sentence, 'What matters to me about this is…' and write down three ways in which it will make a difference to you.

- Look out for ways in which your life and the world around you connect to your subject: the news, books you are reading, films you see, conversations you have, things you see and observe.

What can tutors do to help?

- Use active learning approaches such as case studies and role play

- Consciously make connections between the material covered and previous or other topics, other modules, the overall programme of study.

- Help students to make sense of data and its relevance by connecting it to the real world, to new research, to your experience and to the students' experience

- Use assessments that encourage thinking and understanding rather than memorising and regurgitation.

- Use case studies and other approaches that make connections between the topic and future learning inside or outside of the curriculum.

- Demonstrate the use of mind maps in your teaching and encourage students to use mind maps in note taking and in group exercises.

- Identify students' particular interests and help them to make connections to the subject

Creativity

Risk-taking, playfulness, imagination and intuition; the opposite is being 'rule-bound'

What's this About?

This dimension is about being able to learn differently sometimes, by using your imagination and intuition rather than just logic and reasoning; being playful and 'dreaming', rather than just 'racking your brains' or looking things up; going 'off the beaten track' and exploring ideas that might seem 'wacky' at first, trusting that they will lead to an unexpected train of thought that starts to resolve the problem for you. It recognises that learning is sometimes about surprise, wonder, inspiration, 'dawning moments', and not just about following rules, routines and procedures.

From the Research

Effective learners are able to look at things in different ways and to imagine new possibilities. They like playing with ideas and taking different perspectives, even when they don't quite know where their

train of thought is leading. They are more receptive to hunches and inklings that bubble up into their minds, and make more use of imagination, visual imagery and pictures and diagrams in their

learning. They understand that learning often needs playfulness as well as purposeful, systematic thinking.

The contrast pole is **literalness** or **rule-boundness**. Less effective learners tend to be unimaginative. They prefer clear-cut information and tried-and-tested ways of looking at things, and they feel safer

when they know how they are meant to proceed. They function well in routine problem-solving situations, but are more at sea when greater creativity is required.

Creativity

Typical Behaviour

- Explores possibilities and enjoys novelty and uncertainty
- Uses intuition and creative imagination
- Plays with ideas and concepts
- Willing to let go of control and take risks
- Sees 'mistakes' as opportunities for learning

Improvement Ideas

- Practise thinking 'outside the box' rather than sticking to the way you have always thought about a problem or challenge.
- Try guessing at solutions before working them out; see how good your guess was
- Visualise characters and situations in which the concepts, ideas and facts in your learning become real for you
- Use visual representation: colour, pictures, diagrams, symbols, imagery to illustrate your points and not just text
- Make mind-maps with labels or draw 'trees' with 'meaning branches' to show how possibilities multiply when you think about alternative scenarios
- Use a different approach to present your work: e.g. a stream of consciousness, diary, cartoon, news article; try a storyboard with illustrations, to explain the topic to someone less experienced
- Think about the processes and procedures you tend to follow in your work and see if you can break away from them constructively by doing things differently

- Let your mind 'float free' when you are stuck or puzzled; see if your 'dreams' or imagination come up with a way forward, allowing yourself time to consider new and different options

- Trust your subconscious mind as much as you do your thinking ability: notice how you sometimes come up with an answer or see something thing more clearly by 'sleeping on it'

What can tutors do to help?

- Set a task that leaves students to determine the method they choose to complete it

- Provide time and space for students to be creative and playful

- Ask students to share their mistakes (requires a group who know and trust each other)

- Asking students to build group mind maps to shape and expand the relevance of a topic

- Encourage the use of a range of media such as films, posters, images, drawing cartoons or designing games

- Encourage students to take risks and share 'What if?' questions

- Set problem solving activities with no 'correct' answers

- Enable students to design their own assessment method

- Expect students to blog questions and answers after a seminar (and giving them credit for doing so).

- Encourage students to transfer knowledge and skills across their course from one subject or module to another

- Model a creative and playful approach to the subject

- Explain the importance of creativity in your subject area

- Can you assess the creativity of students? Should you?

Learning Relationships

Learning with and from others and also being able to learn alone; the opposite is either being 'isolated' or 'over-dependent'

What's this About?

This dimension is about how you develop and use your relationships, or the 'social resources' available to support your learning, whether in the family, at work or at play. It involves learning from and with others, collaborating well, being a good 'team player', but also managing without them when necessary, rather than being either dependent, or withdrawn and isolated. If you are strong in this dimension you can move easily between the group or team and learning on your own.

From the Research

Effective learners are good at managing the balance between being sociable and being private in their learning. They are not completely independent, nor are they dependent. They like to learn with and from others, and to share their difficulties, when it is appropriate. They acknowledge that there are important other people in their lives who help them learn, though they may vary in who those people are, e.g. colleagues, friends or teachers. They know the value of learning by watching and emulating other people, including their peers. They make use of others as resources, as partners and as sources of emotional support. And they also know that effective learning may also require times of studying – or 'dreaming' – on their own. The Dispositions to Stay and Succeed project found strong evidence that good learning relationships, founded on mutual respect and a level of informality, between students and between students and staff are significant factors in building student satisfaction and success.

The contrast pole we might call **isolation** or **dependence**. Less effective learners are more likely to be stuck either in their over-dependency on others for reassurance or guidance; or in their lack of engagement with other people.

Learning Relationships

Typical Behaviour

- Has good social resources to learn through

- Knows how to work with others

- Benefits from pooled learning and shared expertise

- Enjoys collaboration but confident and capable of working independently when required

Improvement Ideas – Learning with Others

- Make a list of people who can help you learn: at home, at work and amongst your fellow students. Next to each one, write down what they are good at: ways they can help; projects and skills they can help with. This is your 'Learning Team Sheet'

- Imagine whose team sheet you're on; what they say you're best at

- Think of those who help you learn as part of your 'learning resource kit': use them to help you think through problems, identify learning opportunities, discuss your work and test your learning power together. Remember, you are helping them, too

- When working in pairs or small groups, remember to: ask questions; listen carefully; say things like, 'Well done!' or 'That's good!'; admit what you don't know and contribute what you do know, when it's relevant. You don't have to say a lot to be a good team player

Improvement Ideas – Learning Alone

- When you accept responsibility for a task or project, don't leave the group before you have asked all the questions you need to understand it; found out roughly how long you are expected to spend on it; checked you have all the resources – equipment, clear brief, access to knowledge – needed to complete it

- Create a learning environment for yourself in your private area: clear space to set out your work; all you need within easy reach; no interruptions or distractions; an atmosphere of welcome and concentration that you look forward to being in, whether a break out area, meeting room or a space at home

- Keep a pad to jot questions to ask others when they are available

- Build quiet time or 'thinking time' into your schedule.

What can tutors do to help?

- Provide informal and social events to enable students to develop 'support networks'

- Use 'icebreaking' activity – not just at the start of a programme but at regular intervals to help students broaden and overlap their social and learning networks

- Help students to see each other as relevant and useful resources by suggesting practical ways in which they can support each other

- Encourage collaboration in learning and explain the difference between collaborative activity and collaboration as academic misconduct

- Establish actual and virtual (online) student-led support networks

- Provide activities where students work and learn collaboratively

- Use group work and collaborative activities in assessment

- Model strong learning relationships in your behaviour

- Support student learning about forming and sustaining relationships and working in groups

Strategic Awareness

Being aware of one's thoughts, feelings and actions as a learner and able to use that awareness to plan and manage learning processes; the opposite is being 'robotic'

What's this About?

This dimension is about your readiness and capacity to take responsibility for your learning, manage yourself and the processes involved, have a sense of purpose and direction, plan ahead and accomplish your intentions. It is about seeing how this task in front of you – and this moment – fit into a bigger picture. It helps you fulfil your potential and develop the self-belief and responsibility you need

to survive changes in your life, such as a change of job or new level of responsibility, where there is less structure, support and guidance. Learners with very little of this can be a bit like robots, living in the moment and 'waiting till their buttons are pressed' before they decide anything.

From the Research

More effective learners know more about their own learning. They are interested in becoming more knowledgeable and more aware of themselves as learners. They like trying out different approaches to learning to see what happens. They are more reflective and better at self-evaluation. They are better at judging how much time, or what resources, a learning task will require. They are more able to talk about learning and about themselves as learners. They know how to repair their own emotional mood when they get frustrated or disappointed. They like being given responsibility for planning and organising their own learning.

The contrast pole to this is **robotic**. Less effective learners are less self-aware, and are more likely to confuse self-awareness with self-consciousness.

Strategic Awareness

Typical Behaviour

- Thoughtful about intentions

- Makes conscious choices about how to learn

- Plans and applies effective learning strategies

- Reflects on personal learning experiences

- Takes responsibility for own development

Improvement Ideas

- Remember plotting your progress with the seven learning power dimensions is itself an example of strategic awareness. Keep a 'learning log' of key moments and milestones (see also Ch & L)

- Make planning charts for yourself in 3 formats: weekly for time you control; quarterly for assignment deadlines and main events; a year plan, with holidays, project deadlines, key events you're involved in

- Make practical lists: daily to-do lists; questions to ask others; bright ideas that pop into your head at odd times; shopping lists of what you need to buy or ask for. Use post-it stickers that can move between your work area and your diary/planner and be thrown away when all items are crossed off

- Take a step back to refocus in the middle of a concentrated piece of work, to check whether you are still on track and following the guidance you were given. Ask someone with 'fresh eyes' to review what you are doing and renew your perspective

- When you step back, ask 'What have I learned?' (see also Ch & L)

- When you are starting a major piece of work, create a mind-map to help you see the whole picture and then make a timeline to help you plan a step-by-step approach that will work

- Use your Strategic Awareness to decide when and how much time to give to these 'stepping back' and organising ideas, so that you don't lose momentum and fail to get the job done

- Use Strategic Awareness to help you decide when and how to use the other learning power dimensions: when to 'be creative' and when to 'follow the rules'; when to question and when to accept; when to seek help and when to manage on your own.

What can tutors do to help?

- Encourage conversations and collaborations about learning strategies

- Help students to identify and how to use the learning resources they have available – each other, access to teaching staff, library/ on-line resources etc

- Encourage students to manage the time for learning and assessment in a realistic way

- Model strategic planning in explaining how learning will be scaffolded and facilitated and encourage students to build their own strategies around this template

- Share (and explain) assessment criteria with students and offer opportunities for students to work together to plan strategies for completing their assignments

- Use Feed-back to Feed-forward effectively and explain how this can be used to improve learning and performance

Resilience

The orientation to persevere in the development of one's own learning power and relish challenge; the opposite is being 'fragile and dependent'

What's this About?

This dimension is about keeping going when things get tough. When you have this 'inner strength' to draw on, you are less likely to give up; you know that obstacles can be overcome with persistence, help, creativity, steadiness of purpose… You have the self-belief you need to cope with feelings of failure or uselessness and you know from experience that these feelings are temporary and also a natural part of the learning journey. Learners who lack this quality are fragile and dependent, whether through anxiety about maintaining high standards or by having had their self-belief damaged by negativity, especially in close relationships such as with their parents.

From the Research

Dependent and fragile learners more easily go to pieces when they get stuck or don't succeed. They are risk averse. Their ability to persevere is less, and they are likely to seek and prefer less

challenging situations. They are dependent upon other people and external structures for their learning and for their sense of self-esteem. They are passive receivers of knowledge, rather than active agents of their own learning constructing meaning from their experience.

The contrast pole for dependence is **resilience** and robustness. Effective learners like a challenge, and are willing to 'give it a go' even when the outcome and the way to proceed are uncertain. Theyaccept that learning is sometimes hard for everyone, and are not frightened of finding things difficult. They have a high level of 'stickability', and can readily recover from frustration. They are able to 'hang in' with learning even though they may, for a while, feel somewhat confused or even anxious. They don't mind making mistakes every so often, and can learn from them.

Resilience

Typical Behaviour

- Enjoys problem-based learning

- Willing to wrestle with difficult concepts

- Persists in pursuing personal goals

- Good at accepting and managing negative emotions, fears and frustrations related to learning

Improvement Ideas

- When you are really struggling to understand something, remind yourself that uncomfortable feelings are an important part of learning: all effective learners have them!

- Just as your body needs exercise, so does your brain. Don't give up when it starts to hurt: that's when it's getting fitter!

- Instead of waiting till you've 'sorted' a problem, before writing anything, try describing your initial uncertainties, doubts and confusions: they may turn out to be part of the answer.

- Fear makes the thinking brain shut down. Being afraid of failure can cause it to happen. Adopt a new motto for your learning, like: 'Give it a go!' 'Who dares, wins!' 'Feel the fear and do it anyway!'

- Practise taking calculated risks; talk them through first with someone sharing responsibility for your success. As your risks work out, your confidence in your own judgment will be strengthened

- Set yourself a 'risk-taking' objective for a Personal or Professional Development Plan (PDP), so you have some support for it

- Talk with your tutors in advance, so you are clear about the criteria by which your work will be judged. Assess your own work objectively against these criteria before it is judged by anyone else, so you become gradually less dependent on external judgments

- Create your own 'private' assessment system, based on how well you have tried, risked, failed and tried again. Use it to reward yourself in small ways

- When you've done everything you can and a task still seems impossible, put it down and do something completely different. Come back to it when you are fresh.

What can tutors do to help?

- Ask open questions "What are you looking forward to at university? Why did you come to university?" and help students to understand their objectives cannot be achieved without struggle. Learning is not easy. It will be difficult at times. This is the challenge of succeeding as a learner.

- Look at and try to understand students' backgrounds, the contexts of their lives and the issues and problems they face

- Ask them to share examples of when they have been resilient (in personal or academic life) in the past

- Build confidence and self-esteem

- Be sensitive to students' feelings when they are struggling with their learning

- Build a safe and secure learning environment where it is permitted to express doubt, uncertainty and to make mistakes

- Ensure that students are clear that it is not possible always to be sure, to be confident, to be right

- Ensure that all students experience challenge and difficulty. All students will need to have learned resilience to cope in their working lives

- Share your own doubts and uncertainties and tell your own stories about 'bouncing back'

Research Background

Learning Power and the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory were researched and developed by Patricia Broadfoot, Guy Claxton and Ruth Deakin Crick at the University of Bristol's world-leading

Graduate School of Education. In wanting to know what makes someone an effective learner, they reviewed previously published studies and undertook original research of their own to conclude that our capacity to learn has seven dimensions. Together, they called them: '**Learning Power**'.

Learning Power and its assessment instrument, the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory, or 'ELLI', were first published in 2002. Since then, it has been used in learning improvement projects in primary, secondary and higher education; in corporate organisations and in community-based development programmes.

In 2004, the University of Bristol set up a charitable company called Vital Partnerships to be its 'knowledge exchange partner'. The company's role is to take research-validated innovations in learning improvement from the university where they are developed, out into the world where they make a valuable contribution to society. As of 2011, there have been over 50,000 ELLI users from an increasingly international context. Outside the UK, ELLI is in use in Australia, New Zealand and Bahrain and ELLI practitioners are working in China and the USA. Language versions exist in Italian, German and Mandarin Chinese.

Publications

The two main publications documenting the original research are:

- Broadfoot, Patricia; Claxton, Guy and Crick, Ruth Deakin (2004), 'Developing an Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory: the ELLI Project', Assessment in Education Vol. 11, No. 3, 247 – 272.

- Crick, Ruth Deakin (2007) 'Learning how to learn: the dynamic assessment of learning power', Curriculum Journal, 18:2, 135 – 153.

Benefits of Learning Power and ELLI

Findings from research and development projects indicate that learners who are aware of their learning power profile using ELLI and who have structured learning opportunities to improve it, become:

- More reflective and aware of themselves as learners

- More confident and motivated to learn

- More willing and able to take responsibility and 'own' their learning

- More keen to carry on learning

- More likely to attain higher levels and grades

- More likely to fulfil their potential (i.e. Stop underachieving)

- More sociable and able to learn with and from each other

- More able to manage change and transitions

Improvement Needs to be Supported

The research also found that improvement in learning power is more likely to occur when:

- Learner-centred practices are used for enabling improvement
- Learning relationships are trusting, affirming and challenging
- A shared language of learning is developed from the seven dimensions of learning power
- Behaviour and attitude toward learning is modelled and imitated
- Everyone's voice is respected in the learning dialogue
- Time for reflection is prioritized and used to consolidate
- Learner self-awareness and ownership are encouraged
- Learners are given choice and responsibility for making decisions
- Materials are sequenced and framed to create challenge and deeper understanding
- A toolkit of skills and strategies is individualized to learning improvement needs

Developing Learning Power in Higher Education

With clear links between learning, engagement and performance, Learning Power gives universities a powerful tool for supporting student development, raising learner awareness and lifelong learning capacity, stimulating learning and teaching development and structuring curriculum change. Learning Power helps learners discover and improve their capacity to learn, achieve learning success and to frame their time in Higher Education in a broader and more meaningful context. Furthermore Learning Power and the ELLI instrument can provide a powerful tool to explore, evaluate and improve the relevance of the university experience by making available quantitative cohort data that can be measured over time, against other variables, across disciplines, institutions and levels and modes of study.

To pursue the use of ELLI and Learning Power both as a catalyst in teaching and as part of properly constructed research and development projects, contact:

ViTaL Partnerships

Vital Partnerships provides consultancy services for the design and delivery of learning improvement interventions as well as training for learning professionals in the education, corporate and community sectors.

Training and Accreditation

ViTaL's current range of training includes:

- Learning Power and Coaching for Learning
- Authentic Enquiry and Coaching for Enquiry
- The Assessment of Learner-Centred Practices
- Systems Leadership for Learning Organisations

For Further Information

ViTaL Partnerships is the knowledge exchange partner of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Bristol, UK

Please contact Tim Small at

tim@vitalhub.org