FAR OUT

What are your students really learning when you teach them? **Professor Bill Lucas** suggests looking at your classroom through alien eyes

Imagine you were a Martian visiting English secondary schools today as part of your galactic education study tour. It is the year 2112 and you have chosen to wind your atomic clock back by a hundred years to see what Earthlings were doing. In the first school you visit, you are immediately impressed by the building. Apart from the lack of red landscape that is so much a feature of your own planet, the space is not so different from your own Learning and Knowledge Ministry, all glass and white metal. But the lesson – all about some war with people running around like rats in trenches – is dull in the extreme. The teacher is talking a lot and the students seem to be writing or reading throughout the hour. From time to time the educator puts up a question, which the students have fifteen minutes to answer. This is all happening despite the impressive looking touch screens on each desk.

In the second school it is all very different. For a start the lesson seems to be being taught by two of the pupils, one of whom is dressed as a peasant and the other as a rather fat king. The students are trying to understand what life was like in the Middle Ages, before deciding on how they will present a webinar called 'The Tudors – myths and reality'. Wherever you look there is a buzz of engagement, with small groups of learners purposefully engaged in a range of activities. The physical environment looks strangely old-fashioned to your one Martian eye... yet somehow you prefer it to the other school.

In these two imaginary tableaux I am deliberately contrasting a restrictive educational environment with an expansive one. In both schools the teachers are teaching history. In the first example young people are being taught about the First World War but they are really learning some other, unintended habits such as sitting still, getting dates right, reproducing the opinions of others, working alone and remembering facts. While in the second example the subject is Tudor England, but the learning is also about empathy, critical questioning, taking responsibility, group problem-solving and self-organisation.

Both groups of students are learning about the past and being taught by knowledgeable teachers. Both scenarios show how it is senseless to talk simply at the level of subjects – in this case history – without recognising the fact that knowledge cannot be presented neutrally. The organisation of the lesson offers opportunities for learning that will help, or possibly hinder, the students throughout their lives. While both classrooms deal in history, the vision of the subject and of what it is to be an effective lifelong learner is very different. And the second model is clearly more likely than the first to cultivate resourceful learners who can take control of their own learning.

EXPANSIVE CAPABILITIES

+ ADAPTABILITY
+ MINDFULNESS
+ COLLABORATION
+ COURAGE
+ OPTIMISM
+ CREATIVE THINKING
+ PROBLEM-SOLVING
+ REFLECTIVE PRACTICE
+ RESILIENCE
+ RESOURCEFULNESS
+ RESPONSIBLE RISK-TAKING
+ CREATIVITY
+ EMOTIONAL SELF-MANAGEMENT
+ EMPATHY
+ IMAGINING
+ INQUISITIVENESS
+ INTUITIVE THINKING

MEMBERSHIP OF THE EXPANSIVE EDUCATION NETWORK (EXPANSIVEEDUCATION.NET) ENTITLES YOU TO:

+ THREE ACTION RESEARCH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS
+ ACCESS TO THE MEMBER ONLY PART OF SITE TO DOWNLOAD FREE RESOURCES
+ THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE YOUR OWN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROFILE AND COLLABORATE WITH OTHER LIKE-MINDED MEMBERS, AND TERMLY DIGESTS OF SUMMARIES OF RESEARCH INTO ALL ASPECTS OF EXPANSIVE EDUCATION.

Getting connected

It was to help teachers to create more and better opportunities for expansive learning that my colleague Guy Claxton and I coined the phrase 'expansive education' and developed the Expansive Education Network (eedNET) in partnership with a number of other pioneering organisations. It's a professional learning community with an online meeting place as well professional development provided locally by a range of innovative universities. It brings together teachers who see expanding the capabilities of their students as being their core role. It is likely to appeal to teachers and schools who are already drawing on a variety of different approaches to expansive education, such as the RSA's Opening Minds, Philosophy for Children, Habits of Mind, Thinking Schools or Building Learning Power. It explicitly demonstrates how certain kinds of teaching and learning can lead to both better examination results and the creation of more confident and powerful learners.

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Schools that choose to join the network are investing in a chance for their teachers to learn how to undertake their own action research. These teacher-researchers then publish short reports of their investigations on expansiveeducation.net. There is powerful evidence of the impact of this kind of professional development on student achievement. Professor John Hattie makes the connection between teachers as learners and achievement explicitly in *Visible Learning for Teachers*: 'It is' he argues 'the specific mind frames that teachers have about their role – and most critically a mind frame within which they ask themselves about the effect they are having on student learning', which matter most. 'Fundamentally, the most powerful way of thinking about a teacher's role is for teachers to see themselves as evaluators of their effects on students. Teachers need to use evidence-based methods to inform, change, and sustain these.'

What's it all about?

Even if the expression 'expansive education' means nothing to you may be familiar with some of the terms on the mind map shown below.

Start in the bottom left-hand corner, and move round the map in an anti-clockwise direction as you read the following sentences: Education is *expansive* when it is premised on a belief (clearly evidenced in the work of, for example, Professor Carol Dweck) that learning is learnable and young people's capabilities can be expanded. It is *expansive* in the sense that it moves out from the school classroom into the real world. It is *expansive* when teachers let their learners into the secrets of effective learning, when its processes (learning to learn or meta-learning) are explicitly taught. And finally, some methods – peer learning, problem-based learning, for example – clearly promote more *expansive* learning, as we saw in the earlier examples of the Martian study tour active.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PROFESSOR BILL LUCAS IS CO-DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR REAL-WORLD LEARNING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER AND CHAIRMAN OF TLO (THE COMPANY THAT PRODUCES BUILDING LEARNING POWER). HE IS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS MANY BOOKS ON LEARNING, CREATIVITY AND PARENTING, AND AS THE FOUNDER OF LEARNING THROUGH LANDSCAPES AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR LEARNING.

Action stations

Action research is, if you like, research with a small 'r'. It involves learning some evidence-based methods to get better at noticing the impact of teaching on learners. It does not require huge amounts of reading of research papers (although this can be useful and is easily done using Google Scholar). Rather it takes persistence, gumption and a passionate concern to improve student outcomes.

Action research into expansive education starts from a question that, over the period of, say, half a term, a teacher seeks to begin to answer. Here are just a few real examples. As well as monitoring the development of resilience or confidence, teachers will be tracking improvements in attainment.

- **If I encourage my pupils to develop growth mindsets will their resilience improve?**
- **If I stop answering my pupils' questions will they become more resourceful?**
- **Does extended project work develop reflectiveness in Year 8 design and technology students?**
- **If I encourage pupils actively to monitor their levels of concentration will their absorption improve?**
- **If students identify and undertake one new/different risk a week, will it increase their ability to seek and embrace new experiences?**
- **If I arrange for year 10 students to listen to year 7 students reading out loud, will both age groups become more confident at reading?**
- **If I provide maths games for parents to use at home, will their children's confidence in maths increase?**

What you choose to do as a teacher will depend on your own context. But our hope is that you will be inspired by the concept of expansive education, and join one of the most exciting and powerful movements in pedagogy today. You might just be able to look any passing Martian in the eye with confidence!