

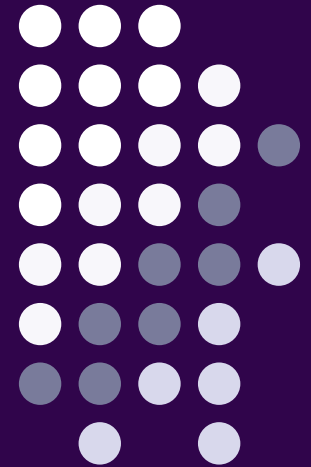
# Issues in Higher Education: Is the concept of a 'powerful learning environment' useful?

Lin Norton

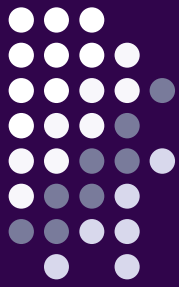
Dean of Learning and Teaching

Professor of Pedagogical Research

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# What are some of the issues facing higher education?

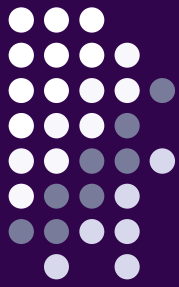


The future is unknowable and unpredictable



Life is fast and change is even faster

# Some headlines in the UK press

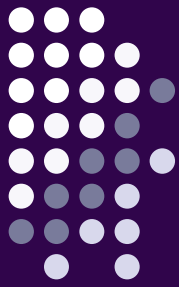


Forces veterans to be offered free university education  
The Guardian  
14.07.08

American universities sharpen competitive edge in battle for international students.  
THE 4.09.08

**'Green giants'**  
People and Planet publishes its annual league table of how green our universities are, thereby putting useful pressure on higher education.  
The Independent  
3.07.08

# The influence of government agencies in the UK



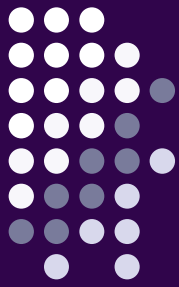
**E-learning  
established  
as core activity for  
UK higher education**

QAA (26.08.08)

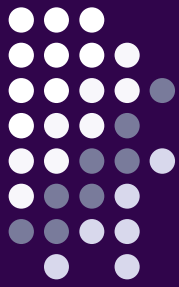
**HEFCE**  
proposed changes  
to funding for teaching:  
Increased widening  
participation

HEFCE supporting  
employer engagement  
in Higher Education

# Key areas of uncertainty



- Level of economic growth
- Public funding of HE
- Govt regulation of fees & quality
- Cost pressure on institutions
- Quality of provision
- Changes in pre-18 education & training
- Student and employer demand
- Changing aspirations
- Internationalisation
- Impact of technology on learning
- Levels of study flexibility
- The nature of the HE workforce & human resources management
- The future of HEIs as we know them

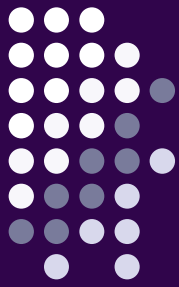


# Demographic-based projections of full-time undergraduate student numbers 2019/2020 and 2026/2027 in the UK

<b>2005/06 (000's)</b>	<b>2019/2020 (000's)</b>	<b>%age change</b>	<b>2026/2027 (000's)</b>	<b>%age change</b>
1,199	1,129	-5.9%	1,208	+0.8

Source: Universities UK (2008) The future size and shape of the higher education system in the United Kingdom: demographic projections and GAD 2006 projections.

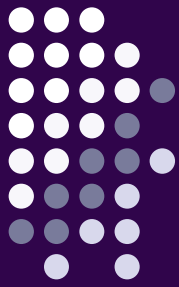
# Uncertainty in Higher Education



What are the implications for:

- LEARNING?
- TEACHING?

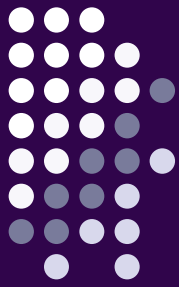
# ‘Personhood in the learning journey’ (Broadfoot 2008)



‘pursuit of learning as a co-operative enterprise,’  
but currently in HEI’s:

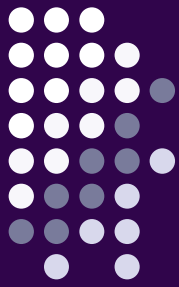
1. depersonalisation – students not seen as individuals;
2. too much focus on content, not about the people we are teaching;
3. modular system does not encourage learning communities of students;
4. ‘the alienated student (Mann, 2001, 2005) - like conscripts they do exactly what is necessary;
5. much of the focus is on the cognitive and intellectual at the expense of the emotional and affective.

# Being a student in an age of uncertainty (Barnett 2008)



- Barnett talks about uncertainty not just out in the world but inside ourselves- students feel uncertain, anxious but also exhilarated.
- He argues that ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ is the foundation of what it means to be a student and likens it to a bungee jumper where the pedagogical situation should provide exhilarating (but safe) spaces to take those risks and confront those fears.
- Barnett ends that ‘teaching that brings about such inspiration and ‘being- for -complexity is demanding; impossible even. But there can hardly be a more significant human calling’

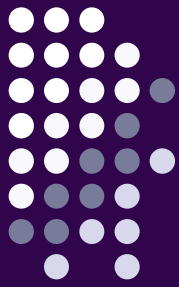
# How do we nurture our students as learners?



Some suggestions from the literature:

- Create learning communities/provide for relationships
- active learning;
- students to be researchers ( a context of enquiry makes learning significant to the learner);
- reduce and tailor assessment;
- extend the student experience;
- encourage intrinsic motivation;
- build confidence;
- give a sense of ownership and control;
- provide detailed (and constructive feedback)
- encourage collaboration between students.

# What is a powerful learning environment?



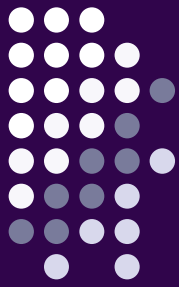
Commonly attributed to De Corte (1999):

A powerful learning environment *focuses on:*

- *knowledge construction instead of knowledge transmission,*
- *competencies instead of declarative information,*
- *social exchange instead of individual learning'*

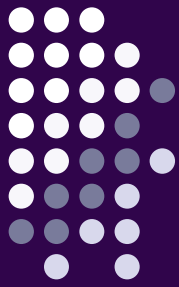
(Gerjets & Hesse 2004: 448)

# Characteristics of a powerful learning environment:



- always complex and contextual;
- involves learners being active, constructivist, collaborative, intentional, conversational and reflective;
- gives learners the opportunities to make mistakes and receive feedback on these mistakes;
- not exclusively built around learning goals, but also starts from appealing and challenging situations that are relevant for experts or practitioners;
- takes the specific needs, prior experiences, abilities, and motivations of learners into account;
- recognises the affective, emotional aspect of learning (Broadfoot 2008)

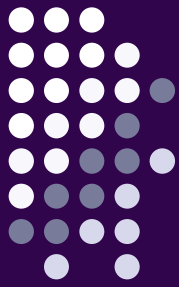
# Seven defining features of a powerful learning environment



Dochy et al (2005):

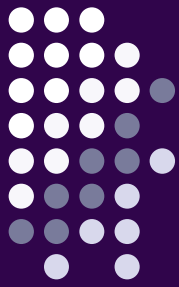
- Learning is more important than instruction.
2. Teaching is no longer the transmission of knowledge, but is rather supporting students to actively construct knowledge by assigning them tasks that enhance this process.
  3. The significance of learners' previous knowledge, beliefs and conceptions, because learners construct new knowledge on the basis of their existing knowledge.

# Defining features continued



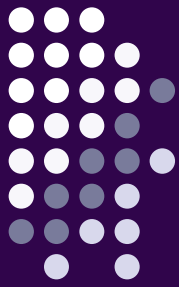
4. Co-operative learning includes the need for emphasis on negotiation and sharing of meanings through discussion and different forms of collaboration.
5. Authentic problems are the starting point of the learning process.
6. Learning is contextualised. Knowledge is partly the result of the specific activity, the context and the culture in which that knowledge is acquired.

# Assessment: the 7<sup>th</sup> feature



- Assessment is not a separate activity, only performed at the end of the course; the assessment procedures have to be integrated in the learning process itself;
- Assessment should focus on authentic tasks and take into account learners' individual orientations and foster their meta-cognitive skills

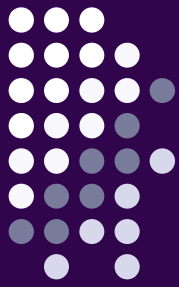
# Principles of effective learning: can we agree on these?



## From the research on student learning:

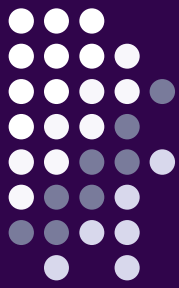
- Affective/relationships
- Autonomy (gradual and supported)
- Self efficacy/mastery
- Confidence
- Constructive and frequent feedback
- Ownership of learning
- Identity with the discipline

# Characteristics of effective learning: can we agree on?



**From the research on effective lifelong learning:**

- Disposition, Awareness, Skills
- Relationships
- Beliefs, Attitudes, Values
- Motivation, Emotions
- Metacognition
- Epistemological understanding
- Social context
- ‘When students study issues that are unsavoury or unpalatable, or involve alien ways of thinking, there is a tendency for them to undergo conceptual avoidance’  
(Lundholm, 2008)



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