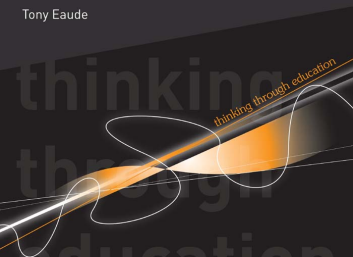


Thinking Through Pedagogy for Primary and Early Years

Tony Eaude



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About the author

Dr Tony Eaude has been a teacher and headteacher for over 30 years, working initially in a special school and then in suburban, new town and multicultural primary schools. He completed a master's degree in Educational Research Methodology and a doctorate on how teachers of young children understand spiritual development, both at the University of Oxford, where he is a Research Fellow in the Department of Education.

He works as an independent research consultant, evaluating educational programmes, leading training, teaching at Masters' level at the Institute of Education, London and Westminster Institute, Oxford Brookes University and writing for both teachers and academic audiences. He continues to teach young children in an urban primary school.

Other publications which Tony Eaude has written include three short books, one as co-author, in a series for parents, several booklets for teachers, including *New Perspectives on Spiritual Development and Values Education – Developing Positive Attitudes*. His book *Children's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development – Primary and Early Years* is published by Learning Matters. He has also written a range of academic and practical articles on related subjects.

More details of Tony Eaude's work can be seen on www.edperspectives.org.uk. He welcomes comments and feedback on this book and can be contacted on tony.eaude@education.ox.ac.uk.

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Introduction

This book, the first in the series called Thinking Through Education, explores pedagogy for those working with young children. Pedagogy is usually associated only with teachers. However, this text will suggest that pedagogy applies, in different ways, to all of those who support children's learning – referred to as educators – considering, later, what is distinctive about teachers.

The term 'pedagogy' remains unfamiliar in the English educational system, as indicated by the title Alexander's 2004 article, 'Still no pedagogy?'. However, his view (2004, page 11) that it is *what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted* is a good starting point. Chapter 1 of this book examines this in more depth, drawing especially on the findings of the Teaching and Learning Research Project (TLRP, 2006). One issue explored throughout the book is to what extent primary and Early Years education has features distinctive from other phases, and from each other; and what these are. This indicates that pedagogy is more complicated and interesting than teaching in terms of transmitting subject knowledge, or the mechanics of planning and assessment, important though these are; and goes far beyond simplistic appeals to 'what works'. So, it is an ideal area for 'thinking through'.

Who is this book for?

This book is primarily for those:

- training to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) to work as a teacher in primary or nursery schools or other Early Years settings, so that it refers to the Standards for Achieving QTS (TDA, 2007);
- studying on courses such as education studies and early childhood studies, so that it refers to the QAA Benchmark Standards (QAA, 2007a, b).

However, you may already work in an Early Years setting or a school, in one of many other roles such as a nursery nurse, learning mentor or teacher. Whoever you are, it will be valuable for you to continue to think through pedagogy throughout your professional life.

For many reasons, how children are educated may change substantially in the next 20 to 30 years. This calls for flexible, committed and thoughtful professionals, able to adapt to changing circumstances and expectations, but conscious of how children learn best

and the values and the models that adults present. The importance of these stretches beyond the profession, so you might even be a governor or a parent.

Let me say a few words about myself. I have taught for about 35 years in special, primary and first schools and, more recently, on courses for teachers. I was the head teacher of a first school for nine years and am now a researcher who also teaches in a primary school. My particular interest is in young children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. I believe that education has the power to transform lives, but too often schools fail to do so. The reasons cannot be understood without considering the wider context in which children learn and the beliefs that we, individually and as a society, have about children, learning and schools.

This book tries to help you think through how you can enhance young children's learning. Although this book concentrates on children up to the age of 11, I do not define what I mean exactly by 'young children', because children's learning is so varied that educators should draw ideas from different traditions and Key Stages in thinking through what is appropriate for their children.

Using 'you' reflects my belief that knowledge is created, not transmitted; and that most learning is reciprocal, requiring the learner's active engagement. These ideas are explained during the course of the book, but, briefly, they suggest that the answer to important questions does not lie 'out there', in a book, a policy or anywhere else. Rather, we learn by constructing and refining our understanding, encountering new experiences and ideas, sometimes directly, sometimes through conversation, sometimes through books, films and other media, and incorporating these into new understanding. So, what I call 'thinking through' involves you being engaged with what these may mean for you in your own context. You will be encouraged to take the long view and challenged to think 'outside the box'.

Although I draw on research, inevitably my own views and interests will be evident. In particular, I shall suggest what pedagogy 'looks like' when practised by an expert and how you can work towards this. This involves challenging many current assumptions, for example about the aims of education, the most valuable types of learning and how to enable these. Naturally, I hope to persuade you that these ideas are right, but you may disagree. More important is to engage your interest, so that you think deeply about key ideas and questions – and add your own. This involves you using a range of skills – to be explained – to examine your assumptions and think differently, sometimes laterally and usually more broadly, about concepts such as learning and knowledge and how this might, and can, apply to your own context and practice. I hope that this approach will help you to engage with the questions raised, to think of examples, to challenge my, and your, ideas, to recognise the benefits of 'thinking through...' pedagogy; and above all to enhance children's learning and lives.

What does 'thinking through' involve?

As we shall see, pedagogy is complicated and fascinating. Courses on using a new piece of software or athletics or teaching phonics help mainly with *what* to teach. I am

encouraging you to think through the much harder question of *how* to enhance children's learning. This entails examining – and re-examining – our assumptions on what we often take for granted about children and schools, about learning and knowledge. It requires a willingness to ask questions, be creative and open-minded and understand ideas and concepts in new ways – rather than simply doing as one is told or looking for simple answers, since thought is linked to action and our beliefs and actions affect each other. Let me give an example.

I wonder what image comes to mind when you read the words 'think through'. My guess is probably of someone – most likely a man, probably middle-aged or older – sitting on his own at a desk, perhaps touching his head and looking worried. I may be wrong. You may have imagined a cook adapting a recipe by adding herbs and spices, tasting the casserole from time to time. Or a parent and toddler reading, discussing and laughing at a picture book. Or a group of four-year-olds rearranging a pile of bricks and jumping up and down with enthusiasm at successfully completing a task they planned together.

Are all of these thinking? Is thinking only a cerebral process? How does 'thinking' relate to action?

We tend to imagine thinking as a solitary activity, separate from action. Yet, much of our best thinking occurs through sharing ideas with other people; and success in most activities requires constant reflection on what is happening and how best to adapt one's approach. Moreover, many good ideas emerge as we work them out in practice; or in the 'spaces' when we stop focusing directly. Schön (1987) makes the distinction between reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action – about what is happening and what has happened. Since working with children is a practical and often unpredictable activity, reflection in action is an essential part of understanding what is happening and adapting our actions and expectations. But because it also relies on knowledge and understanding, reflection on action can help us realise why one lesson worked, or one group of children responded well, and another not; and decide what to do differently next time.

How are the skills involved in 'thinking through' presented in the QTS and QAA Standards?

The Professional Standards for QTS (TDA, 2007) are in three sections. These are:

- professional attributes;
- professional knowledge and understanding;
- professional skills.

Interestingly, the Standards neither consider explicitly what is meant by ‘professional’ nor specify attributes as such, but we will explore these. The knowledge and understanding relate mainly to the content of what is required to achieve the Standards.

Skills highlighted include demonstrating positive values, attitudes and behaviour, communicating effectively, recognising and respecting other people’s contributions, reflecting on practice, identifying priorities, being creative and constructively critical and acting upon advice and feedback. Those more specifically associated with pedagogy include planning for progression, designing opportunities, assessing learning needs and evaluating the impact of teaching.

The Quality Assurance Agency Benchmark Standards set out what is required for students to complete degree programmes in education studies (QAA, 2007a) and early childhood studies (QAA, 2007b), respectively. Different courses will have varying content, but the two sets of Standards highlight skills to use and develop in reading this book.. To give one example, Education Studies

“*is concerned with understanding how people develop and learn through their lives, and the nature of knowledge and critical engagement with ways of knowing and understanding. It offers intellectually rigorous analysis of educational processes, systems and approaches and their cultural, societal, political, historical and economic contexts...[Courses] all include critique of current policies and practice and challenge assumptions.*

”

(QAA, 2007a, page 1)

Among the skills highlighted for Education Studies (QAA, 2007a, pages 4–5) are:

- application, including considering different dimensions of education, accommodating new ideas, analysing complex situations and using examples;
- reflection, including reflecting on one’s own values, development and practice, questioning concepts and theories, and interrogating assumptions;
- working with others and analysing, synthesising, evaluating and identifying problems and solutions.

The Benchmark Standards for Early Childhood Studies (QAA, 2007b, pages 5–7) highlight a long list of similar skills, adding observing, generating and exploring hypotheses, taking and evaluating different perspectives, integrating and demonstrating. Some are subject-specific, some generic, that is not directly related to the subject matter of the course, though QAA (2007b, page 5) recognises that *this distinction is a fairly artificial one since the distinction...is not clear-cut*. All the skills you will be expected to use during your course, and subsequently, are interlinked. However, Table 1 highlights 14 which will help as you read, on your course and in the classroom – and then as you apply these to your practice. I refer to specific skills at particular points, indicating those which are most important at the start and end of each chapter and in each critical thinking exercise – but keep thinking all the time.

Table 1 Critical thinking skills

Observe	what you have seen (and heard and felt) yourself, other adults and children do
Explore	what sense one can make of these observations
Analyse	what reasons there may be for these actions
Consider	the factors which influence these actions
Interpret	people’s motivation and the consequences of their actions
Illustrate	your views by using examples
Compare	different actions, people and contexts
Articulate	your beliefs and assumptions (in speech or in writing)
Challenge	your own and other people’s assumptions
Discuss	with other people – tutors, other students, teachers – the issues raised
Imagine	how you might act differently and the consequences of this
Synthesise	these ideas to decide what you might do differently
Identify	what you have to do, or to avoid, to make your plans successful
Experiment	with different approaches, but keep observing, exploring, considering, imagining...

Using these skills in reading this book

Each chapter starts with a box to highlight the critical thinking skills, from the list above, most valuable in reading what follows and those aspects of the Standards and Benchmarks to which it is most relevant. Each chapter includes at least one case study, key ideas and questions and critical thinking exercises, with further reading recommended at the end. Each exercise includes a series of questions to prompt your thinking and is followed by a commentary on the issues raised, linking these to ideas raised elsewhere in the book. The ideas and discussion are drawn from policy and research drawn from disciplines related to education, such as psychology, sociology and philosophy. The last section of this introduction provides a brief overview of the main themes, to help you see the ground to be covered.

This is presented, as far as possible, in simple language. To gain maximum benefit, I suggest that you read slowly, maybe in small sections, using the skills outlined above. If possible, discuss the issues with other people, either as part of your course, in your school or separately. Learning works better as a social, interactive process than as an individual, isolated one. A book such as this can only touch the surface of these complicated issues; and at times will, inevitably, oversimplify. However, I hope that you will be encouraged to read the Further readings to probe deeper. A particularly rich source is the recent Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2010), on which I draw extensively, though at times critically.

The case studies and examples are drawn from Early Years settings and primary school classrooms and from different subject areas and groups of children such as those with special educational needs, English as an additional language and the gifted and talented. These raise the questions I see as especially pertinent to encourage you to think through what pedagogy involves and the practical implications. However, thinking through will raise others. I can provide examples and ideas, but only you can supply two essentials: a knowledge of the context in which you work and your own questions. For ease of reading, all schools and settings are referred to as 'schools'.

Many issues raised are contested. For example, you may disagree strongly (with me or others) about the purposes and aims of primary education; or about whether certain aspects are appropriate especially for young children or possible in the current educational climate. Frequently, we shall encounter one policy or aim contradicting or making difficult another. However, a belief that an emphasis on the basics entails too little time spent on the arts or that creativity is inhibited by focusing on test scores does not mean that one is right, the other wrong. Rather, this demonstrates a reality of classroom life – constantly trying to steer a passage between these often unresolved tensions and conflicting expectations. Asking the right questions matters more than agreeing. Be prepared to defend and, if need be, change your views.

While pedagogy is shaped by one's beliefs, there will always be expectations from government, Ofsted, the local authority, head teachers and other colleagues, and you have to take account of these, often involving compromise. Educators always have to balance theory and practice, idealism and pragmatism. All sorts of pressures prevent us from thinking deeply about how best to enable children to learn – other people's expectations, our own doubts about how to cope, the busy-ness of classroom life, commitments outside school. However, I shall suggest that professionalism involves making your own judgements, not just doing what you are told, and moving beyond unthinking compliance. Underlying this is a belief that how adults think about children and education is more important in enhancing children's learning than specific techniques or programmes.

Working with young children requires enormous skill, sensitivity and expertise. Experts make what is difficult look easy, but because teaching is a practical activity, what this involves is hard to pin down. Much is what Polanyi (cited in Schön, 1987, page 22) calls 'tacit knowledge', acquired mainly by experience. This book tries to help you articulate tacit knowledge and assumptions – your own and other people's – and enrich your theoretical understanding, to synthesise these and identify the practical implications.

Linking theory and practice: an overview of this book

I am encouraging you to look beyond the present, to 'take the long view', to think through the practical implications of the issues raised. I expect (and hope) that you will constantly say 'but, if that's the case, then...'. In particular, you may feel that some of the ideas and implications are unrealistic for you to implement as an inexperienced educator, though I shall suggest that much of what you can do to build up expertise

can be achieved in relatively simple ways; and gradually. So, it may help to know what will be discussed, though never entirely resolved. In this section, I outline briefly the content of each chapter to provide an overview of the main ideas considered. You might like to think of this as like the picture on the box of a jigsaw, to guide you in assembling the pieces.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a historical background, to help you to recognise that the assumptions and practices often taken for granted in the current educational climate are not the only ones possible and to imagine possible alternatives. Chapter 1 opens up the discussion on what is meant by pedagogy, as the range of practices and the underlying range of understandings involved in educating children. This indicates that pedagogy can only be understood within a particular context and that the purpose and aims of education and how children learn should be the first consideration in thinking through what constitutes effective pedagogy. It goes on to discuss the features of professionalism, suggesting that the level of autonomy is one important, though contested, aspect and that judgment based on professional expertise is vital, while leaving open what this consists of.

Chapter 2 shows that teaching methods have always been a matter of debate, depending on a society's answers to questions such as 'what is education for?' and 'what do we value?' This is intended to demonstrate that an education system depends on, though it also helps shape, its social and cultural context; and that the current assumptions about education, pedagogy and childhood are not the only ones possible. This is illustrated by a discussion of different traditions of pedagogy for young children, drawing historical and international comparisons. In particular, policy and practice in English education in the period before and after 1988 and the rationale and assumptions behind these are explored. This indicates how policy often draws on different theories and traditions, resulting in a range of tensions between policies and with educators' beliefs about the best way to enhance children's learning.

Chapters 3 and 4 offer a brief consideration of theoretical issues related to young children's learning, drawing especially on the insights of psychology and sociology of education. This is to help you to explore and interpret what occurs as children learn and to articulate and analyse your own beliefs about learning and teaching. Chapter 3 looks at young children's learning and development, showing how cognition and emotion, the conscious and unconscious, the formal and informal aspects of learning are more intertwined than is often recognised. The importance of children's prior experience and of social and cultural influences and of agency and engagement are introduced, as are less direct influences such as example and story. Chapter 4 examines some key concepts, such as knowledge, intelligence, and ability, whose meaning is often taken for granted, but shape our thinking about children and pedagogy. This is illustrated with reference to ideas such 'gifted and talented' and emotional intelligence. This emphasises how knowledge is created and integrated into existing patterns of understanding, both individually and through social interactions, involving processes such as feedback and dialogue, habituation and metacognition.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore what constitutes successful learning, in the long term, and the conditions which encourage this. This is to prompt you to identify and analyse what attributes and qualities matter most and discuss the best type of environment in which to develop these. Chapter 5 starts by considering the attributes of successful learners, of any age. It continues by examining what helps to build children's self-concept, sense of self-as-a-learner and motivation; and what enhances or inhibits these. The role of reward, punishment and praise are considered. In particular, we explore why some children find it so hard to engage with learning, drawing on the idea of cultural capital to suggest that the types of knowledge and activity most valued in school should be re-considered. Chapter 6 explores why the learning environment matters and what an inclusive environment entails, emphasising relationships and expectations. Expectations on educators, both within-school and external, affect this, but it is argued that young children's learning attributes are often fostered, or inhibited, by little, everyday actions. A balance of safety and challenge, of space and pace, of breadth and focus are presented as key elements of what young children need, recognising that this balance will vary according to the children's age, their prior experience and the type of activity.

Chapters 7 and 8 move into the more practical implications of what enhances children's learning and how adults can encourage this. This encourages you to challenge some basic assumptions and consider how these may relate to your own specific role. Chapter 7 starts by questioning the idea of 'the basics', emphasising the importance of breadth and balance. We then go on to examine the types of activity, experience and interaction which enhance young children's learning, exploring in particular play, first hand experience and the expressive arts and humanities, both in themselves and as ways of engaging children's interest and confidence and developing their linguistic, mathematical and scientific skills. This is developed further in Chapter 8 which discusses scaffolding and feedback to emphasise adult-child interactions and how these can best support successful learning. The importance of dialogue and of a learning community, and to what extent, and how, young children can learn to work as experts is considered.

Chapters 9, 10 and 11 focus more on the educator's role, relating the discussion about children's learning to your own development, both now and in the future. This is to encourage you to synthesise the ideas in previous chapters and to imagine the future implications for you and how you might, where appropriate, experiment with new approaches. Chapter 9 considers the link between assessment, planning and pedagogy. It suggests a broad view of assessment, as how one discovers the child's current understanding, presenting this as one of the teacher's main skills, done both in-the-moment and separately, and as the basis for planning. This must offer some flexibility to enable children to pursue their interests and adults to respond to these, reflecting the emphasis on agency, feedback and reciprocity. Chapter 10 explores how you can build up your own expertise. This starts with what expertise working with young children 'looks like' and what is distinctive about the expert teacher, notably fluidity and confidence to depart from predetermined formulae. It then considers continuing

professional development and how best to build up your expertise, emphasising that this is a gradual and collaborative process.

Chapter 11 is more speculative, about how to prepare for a future in which none of us know the challenges ahead, in the light of technological and cultural change. In particular, we consider how pedagogy may involve using a more varied range of learning opportunities than at present, since education is much broader than schooling. The argument is made that:

- the subject-specific knowledge required changes more than knowledge about learning;
- pedagogical skills need to be selected from a repertoire and adapted according to the age of the children, the social, cultural and school context and the subject area; and
- professional attributes and values are what vary least with changes of time and place; and
- pedagogy is at the heart of school improvement;

re-emphasising the importance of adaptability, of professional judgment and of constantly thinking through pedagogy.

Further Reading

QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) (2007a) Education Studies Benchmark Statement www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/Education07.pdf

QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) (2007b) Early Childhood Studies Benchmark Statement www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/EarlyChildhoodStudies07.pdf

Training and Development Agency (TDA) (2007) Professional Standards for Teachers – Qualified Teacher Status www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/s/standards_qts.pdf

1

Revealing assumptions about learning and teaching

Chapter Focus

The critical thinking exercises in this chapter focus on:

- ⊙ **analysing** widely held assumptions and beliefs related to pedagogy and effectiveness;
- ⊙ **challenging** these, and your own, assumptions;
- ⊙ **considering** the link between pedagogy and aims;
- ⊙ **identifying** key features of professionalism and how this affects personal beliefs and policy expectations.

The key ideas discussed are: **pedagogy, context, effectiveness, professionalism**

This chapter is particularly relevant to QTS Standards: **3 a,b, 7 a, 8, 26 b** and to Knowledge and Understanding and Application (*Education Studies*) and Subject knowledge and Subject skills (*Early Childhood Studies*)

Introduction

This chapter introduces several themes and ideas discussed in greater detail subsequently. It starts by exploring different meanings ascribed to 'pedagogy', drawing especially on the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP, 2006) to emphasise that one should focus initially on how children learn rather than what adults do, though later chapters explore the interaction between these. Discussion of effectiveness leads into a consideration of the purposes and aims of education and the idea of what professionalism entails. This is the basis of the view that pedagogy for young children must take account of:

- children's differing backgrounds and prior experience;
- the varied and complex ways in which children learn;
- the multiple, sometimes conflicting, aims of education;
- assumptions made about children and learning;

showing that many current assumptions, often unexamined, are not the only ones possible.

CASE STUDY

I taught a series of lessons each week on science, focusing on forces, to a class of eight- and nine-year-olds. In groups of three or four, the children conducted simple experiments – for example, rolling different items down ramps and making parachutes – to explore concepts such as friction and gravity, recording these simply and then discussing the results as a class.

The children were not familiar with such an approach. They enjoyed the experiments, gradually learning to plan these more systematically. They were keen at first to work with their friends, but got used to working with others, since I ensured that the groups kept changing. Accurate observation and, especially, recording they found difficult, but practice helped with the first and a worksheet to encourage them to draw or write exactly what they saw with the second. Most children enjoyed and benefited from the whole-group discussion, though some found it hard to listen to others and some were reluctant to join in. Rules to encourage them to listen and participate were helpful, especially at first.

This description inevitably tidies what happened. At times, there were balls rolling over the floor, interrupting other groups. Some children complained at working with others, though they got used to it. The recording, at times, was unsystematic, though when the children became familiar with what was expected, this improved significantly. The whole-class discussion was rather dominated by me initially, but most of the children became more confident in explaining their thinking. They showed a wide range of understanding, with some demonstrating remarkable insight and explaining ideas more accessibly than I could; and others whose understanding remained at a simpler level.

This case study illustrates how complex learning is in a fairly ordinary series of lessons, rather than how science should be taught, showing some difficulties the children encountered, what seemed to help them most and what changed as time passed. The challenges were not just cognitive, related to science. Some were organisational, as in controlling the experiments and recording the results. Some were social, such as the groupings, and listening and speaking in a large group. Some were emotional, like being uncertain about whether their ideas were acceptable. Especially for young children, these are closely interrelated. The experiments were what most children enjoyed best. The practical activity led to most children being engaged and active, though a few remained tentative. The structure of setting clear expectations and rules helped to limit the range of possibilities and to enable a thoughtful discussion, though often they found too much freedom a challenge. Working both in small groups and coming together as a large group meant that they learned from each other. Indeed, children explaining what they thought had happened seemed to improve the understanding of both the person talking and those listening. Over time, the children

became more used to what was expected and the rules, in some respects, could be interpreted more flexibly. Much of the discipline they showed resulted from what the activity demanded, rather than being externally imposed. Practice, building on previous feedback, led to more accurate observation and recording and enhanced the discussions.

We return to these themes in future chapters. Some ideas, such as agency and self-concept, may sound complex, others like rules and groups more familiar. Some are general, others more specific to a particular situation. You may have identified others. However, they are all part of the detailed tapestry of pedagogy.

Key idea: **Pedagogy**

Doesn't teaching just involve common sense?

The TLRP is a large-scale, cross-phase project, which provides a good starting point to think about pedagogy. This identifies ten principles, set out in the next section, and suggests that three fundamental changes applicable to all ages are required.

1. *Learning processes, as distinct from learning contexts, do not fundamentally change as children become adults, with the interventions of teachers or trainers most effective when planned in response to how learners are learning. So we [TLRP] have retained 'pedagogy'. The term 'pedagogy' also has the advantage of highlighting the contingent nature of effective teaching, i.e. the interventions of teachers or trainers are most effective when they are planned in response to how learners are learning.*
2. *The conception of what is to be learned needs to be broadened beyond the notions of curricula and subjects associated with schools.*
3. *More prominence needs to be given to the importance of learning relationships.*

As we shall see, the first of these is more controversial than it may appear. Several reports and researchers (e.g. Anning, 1991; Ball, 1994; Siraj-Blatchford, 1999) suggest that Early Years pedagogy has distinctive features. The second reflects the many (often-overlooked) opportunities outside school to support children's learning in school and, importantly, to learn in ways other than those available, or valued, in school – ranging from football training to the Brownies and from reciting the Quran to computer games. In emphasising relationships, the third takes account of the interactive and social nature of learning.