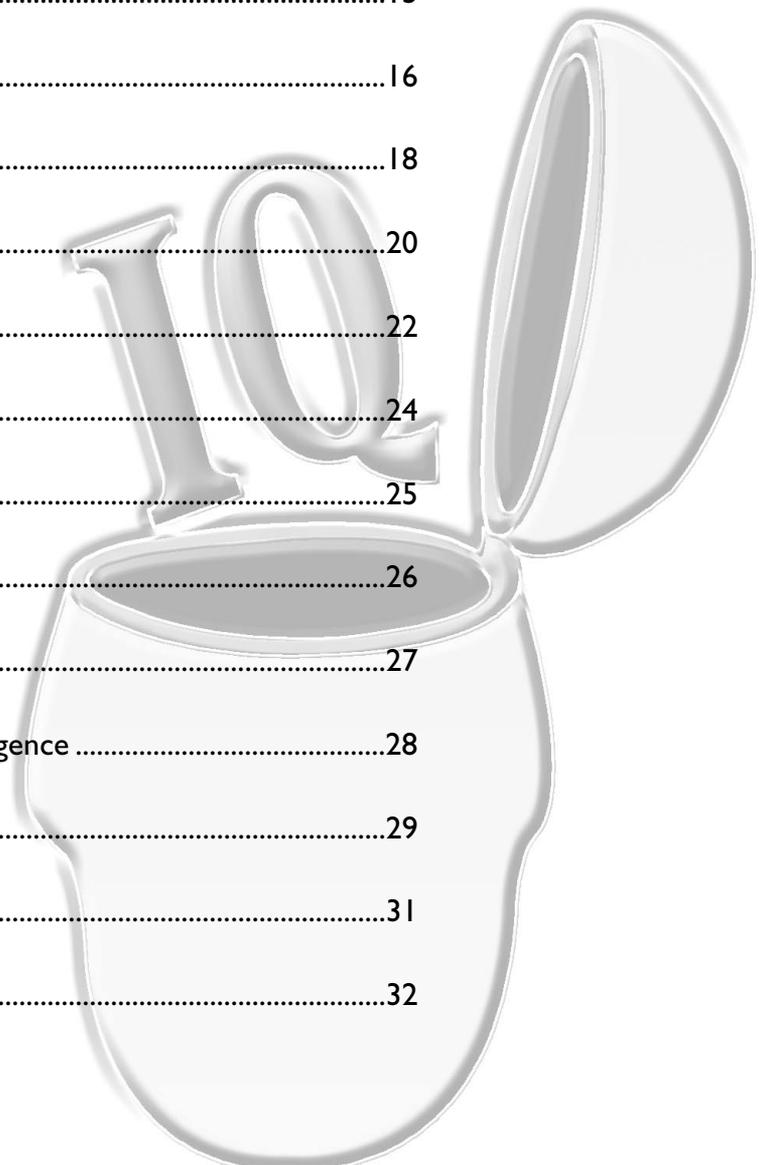




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Foreword

This is the first in a series of occasional papers being published by Learning Unlimited and Hawker Brownlow Education. These papers are being produced in response to a growing demand from teachers to be brought up to date with our current understandings about how children learn and how good teachers teach.

It has been pointed out that you would not go to a doctor who had failed to keep up to date with what we know about medicine over the past twenty years. Yet a large percentage of the teachers in Scotland have been in post for more than twenty years, and many have not had the opportunity to update their knowledge about learning and teaching in that time.

There will be two kinds of occasional papers. Some will focus on what we know. They will draw on a wide body of research to summarise our current understandings about a key aspect of learning and teaching. Written on the assumption that most teachers do not have the time or the energy to read lengthy academic texts at the end of a busy day, they will be short and, we hope, readable. Further references will be given for those who feel inclined to explore further.

It is clear, however, that teachers not only need help to reflect on the ideas that underpin what they do in the classroom, they need practical help and support to put them into practice in the classroom. For this reason some of the papers will focus on ideas and techniques, which work in the classroom, and some will describe case studies of good practice in schools.

Given the name of our company, it was important for us to tackle, very early on in this series, the issue of what it means to be clever in our society. Our beliefs about cleverness are very deep-seated. On a number of occasions over the past few years, when talking with teachers in Scotland, about the huge potential of the human brain, I have been asked the same question: 'surely you are not saying that everyone can become a brain surgeon?'. The fact that I have been asked the question so often illustrates the way we think about intelligence. Yes there are limits to what individuals can learn, but none of us will ever know what these limits are, let alone reach them. In that sense, learning is unlimited.

I am grateful to Robin Lloyd Jones and Bob Bissell for their support and help in putting this paper together; to Liz Callaghan for proof reading, and to Joan Black, Centre for Education and Training Development, Glasgow Caledonian University for desk-top publishing and publication.

We are happy to consider suggestions for future titles in the series from potential authors, whether classroom practitioners or academics.

Ian Smith, January 2001



Why we need to change our minds about intelligence

‘We sorely need a new view of intelligence in our schools, our universities and our businesses. A view of intelligence that is less exclusive, far more democratic, and with far wider application to the real world.’

Robert Sternberg

This paper will argue that it is important for us to change our minds about intelligence for the following reasons:

- Intelligence is of great practical importance to us all in our everyday lives. We see lots of examples of unintelligent behaviour around us. If we are honest, all of us could do with a bit more intelligence.
- Our beliefs about intelligence (what it is, and how we come to be intelligent) run deep and they have a profound effect on the way we see ourselves, the way we relate to other people, on our beliefs about society in general and how our country should be run. Intelligence is by no means simply an educational issue: it is a political one too.
- Our views about intelligence also have cultural origins. What counts for intelligence in Western society is very different from what counted as intelligence in previous centuries or what counts as intelligence in other parts of the world today.
- The traditional view of intelligence this century in our society has been narrow and simplistic, limiting and pessimistic. It can lead young people to believe that working hard and making an effort doesn't count and it can lead parents and teachers to believe that they can't make much of a difference.
- Our education system, despite the many changes it has gone through and despite the rhetoric of politicians and school mission statements, still perpetuates the traditional view: a view which stands in the way of raising achievement for all in our schools.
- This traditional view is outdated. We need a different view: less simplistic and less narrow, less limiting and more optimistic and based on empirical evidence. However, this doesn't mean throwing out the old view entirely.