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**The tools are here. The  
time is now. The script is  
yours to write – or dance,  
or sing, or play, or act, or  
draw, or orchestrate.  
Welcome to tomorrow.**

**Gordon Dryden and Jeannette Vos**  
*The Learning Revolution*

## *Introduction*

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I had a dream recently in which I was a doctor telling a patient that there was nothing more that could be done for him. He was astounded when I told him that in fact there were techniques and strategies that could help him a great deal but that no one in the profession used them, most doctors simply prescribing leeches. I confirmed that, in normal circumstances, if the leeches were not having any effect then more leeches would be prescribed.

I went on to explain to him that as our understanding of the human body had developed and techniques and strategies had evolved to build upon this new knowledge, there was a fear that any advances in methodology and the abandonment of the leech would lead to a decline in standards. I went on to explain that doctors were being placed under increasing pressure to achieve results, with ever more outrageous targets being imposed upon them and that, in the opinion of the Chief Medical Inspector at least, the best way to achieve them was to prescribe more and more leeches. I defended my position by explaining that the motive for such a strategy, as it always had been, was to reduce suffering and prolong human life. Strangely, this failed to appease him.

In a second, separate, yet strangely related dream, I was a teacher telling a young child that there was nothing more that could be done to help him. He too was astounded when I told him that there were techniques and approaches that could help him a great deal, by accelerating and deepening his learning, but that few in the profession used them, most teachers sticking to tried and trusted traditional methods. I confirmed that if these approaches were failing to help him learn then we would suggest he spend more time on them – a few more hours after school or even a few weeks of his summer holiday.

I went on to explain to him that, although the rapid advances in our understanding of the human brain had enabled us to develop learning strategies that are compatible with the way in which the brain works, and so considerably enhance learning, there was a fear that the abandonment of traditional methods would lead to a decline in standards. I replied to his question, confirming that the methods that I was referring to were indeed the same ones that had failed so many and limited the attainment of countless others.

I was determined, however, not to be sidetracked and went on to explain that teachers were being placed under increasing pressure to achieve results, with evermore outrageous targets being imposed upon them and that, in the opinion of many politicians at least, the best way to achieve them was to ‘prescribe more leeches’. I defended my position by assuring him that the motive behind such a policy, as it always had been, was to achieve the highest possible standards. Strangely, this failed to appease him.

Sadly, there is a considerable danger that the situation described in the second conversation becomes a recurring reality as we cling, leech-like, to the status quo, blindly equating traditional methodology with high standards. For in much the same way that increased understanding of the human body leads to medical advancement, is it not inevitable that increased understanding of the human brain will lead to developments in the way in which we help people learn? The objective may remain the same but the pedagogy will surely evolve.

**There are no guarantees;  
no magic wands – we are  
simply suggesting  
strategies that make it  
more likely that students  
will learn effectively.**

Our understanding of the brain and the learning process is greater than ever before, with dramatic advances in the last few decades. Equally as dramatic, however, are the enormous learning gains that have resulted from learning programmes and approaches that have been based upon this new knowledge and designed with the brain in mind. As we further unlock the complexities of the human mind, so our approaches to teaching and learning will continue to evolve. It is as inevitable as the disappearance of the leech from medical practice.

Certainly we should be cautious as a profession – as cautious as our medical counterparts – with new approaches, rigourously evaluating and researching the new methodology prior to embracing it. There is, however, a considerable difference between treating scientific advancement with caution and dismissing it out of hand. We are on the verge of a ‘Learning Revolution’. The motives may be the same, but now we have the methodology to achieve them.

## **Brain-based learning**

These methodologies are often referred to as ‘brain-based’, ‘accelerated’ or ‘super’ learning and, although not particularly new, have generated much interest in recent years. However, the extent to which these techniques are having an impact in the classroom, despite the range of books and the extensive training opportunities, is debatable. Indeed, my considerable excitement at the rapid advances in our understanding of the learning process and the subsequent developments in pedagogy is matched only by my frustration that these developments have, as yet, failed to become established in the majority of schools.

*‘Brain-based learning’ and ‘accelerated learning’ are simply umbrella terms that encompass approaches to learning that are compatible with the way in which the brain operates and learns most effectively. They have been warmly and enthusiastically embraced by some but rejected as gimmicky and dismissed as the latest fad by others. They are neither a gimmick nor a fad, but effective, common-sense learning strategies. Those that dismiss them often fail to understand them, tarring them with the progressive, ‘find out for yourself’ brush and struggling to see beyond the perceived jargon of the label.*

I was once asked during a training session, how OFSTED would view a lesson taught along accelerated learning lines. I replied that if an OFSTED inspector observed a group of highly motivated pupils thoroughly engaged in their learning – making sense out of the information that was presented to them and making obvious and significant learning gains during the course of a lesson – they would be suitably impressed. At least I hope they would! OFSTED, like the rest of us, simply want to see pupils learning and making progress. They might use a slightly different language; referring to teachers *sharing the learning objectives with pupils at the start of a lesson*, as opposed to *providing pupils with the Big Picture*, but the meaning is the same.

There are numerous reasons why so many teachers have failed to adopt what may be loosely termed the ‘accelerated learning’ methodologies. A curriculum that remains horrendously overcrowded and a suffocating climate of accountability being just two of the factors that have deterred teachers from straying too far from a track that they have individually and collectively trod since the days when they were the ones being taught.

**Translating the research into practical strategies that are effective, even within the constraints of the classroom, is the key to enhancing learning and raising attainment. That is the focus of this book.**