**Can we really track and measure the journey undertaken by young people?**

'I need to measure progress.' 'I have to find evidence.' 'Yes, I'm sure it works and everyone gets a great deal out of it, but where are the outcomes?'

These are some of the comments made to me whilst working on the development, testing and implementation of a non-formal Learning Framework. It was also suggested to me that it was as a consequence of this pressure that some youth organisations were moving away from a traditional style of youth work towards a more prescribed approach with set outcomes, and of course FUNDING.

But to start at the beginning. During 2007 whilst meeting with regional CEOs of a national youth organisation a challenge was presented to me. 'We know we have good effective youth programmes, and they work, could you create a transparent tool that can overlay our work and demonstrate the progress the young people make?' The challenge was accepted.

This framework was not to be prescribed but would overlay any existing youth / community task or activity. It was not intended to alter or compete with 'good' practice but would be used to bench mark the individual and measure the impact of any given interventions over periods, that being set by the practitioner.

Having observed a number of youth work projects I discussed with a colleague the content and process of the projects observed. We considered whether there would be a means by which these tasks and activities could be categorised. I was soon directed towards the Cognitive Learning Skills proposed by NACE (National Association for Able Children in Education). NACE's six skills were Enquiry, Problem Solving, Creative Thinking, Processing Information, Reasoning and Evaluation.

I presented these skills to a number of fieldwork practitioners who were assisting with the development of the Learning Framework. Whilst some of the skills may have been defined differently, the practitioners clearly identified these skills as 'the skills we are working with'.

The details of the framework and the ongoing research necessary to underpin the principles upon which it was developed must be left for another occasion.

However, I now want to open up a wider debate on the process required to measure the journey taken by the young people, in particular those involved with the different youth work sectors.

To assist this, I have included in the APPENDIX below the Learning Tower. This was constructed to offer a visual interpretation of the structure and principles of the Learning Framework.

The Learning Tower proved a useful tool when recently introducing the Learning Framework to practitioners in Ireland. It provided an acceptable link between the processes that are embedded in the framework and those being used in the field. Likewise, at a presentation to stakeholder in Dublin it was useful to explain the continuum that I believe exists through Incidental, informal, non formal and is a key element to support formal learning.

In conclusion, two key pieces of research that contributed to my work and the Learning Framework were, Bloom et al. (1956) and Feuerstein, (Feuerstein, R. Feuerstein, S. Falik, L & Rand, Y (1979; 2002). Some additional reading on Feuerstein and his early work in the new Israel can be found in Kozulin. Kozulin, A. (ed.) (2003).

**APPENDIX**

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*(1) NON-FORMAL LEARNING*
a. *A structured learning environment that differs from formal learning through the lack of a curriculum.*
b. *A range of cognitive skills that are required to create learning.*
c. *These cognitive skills are the observable changes in the behaviour of a learner as an outcome from contact with or participation in a non-formal learning activities or task (A stimulus).*

*(2) INFORMAL LEARNING*
a. *A non-structured environment that provides the educator with the opportunity to highlight affective attitudes and behaviours to the learner.*
b. *The focus of an activity or task to facilitate the necessary attitude and behaviour to undertake the non-formal learning activity and task.*
c. *An affective learning style that provides a pathway into non-formal learning.*

*(3) INCIDENTAL LEARNING*
a. *A non-structured environment that will be used by the educator to challenge any negative aspects of Social Capital presented by the learner.*
b. *An environment to challenge cognitive dissonance by the learner towards learning.*
c. *A random learning approach within which a positive attitude towards learning is fostered.*

**In this sense, the Learning Tower rests upon the framework skills,**
a. *Enquiry: Ask question.*
b. *Problem Solving; Find answer to a problem.*
c. *Creative thinking; Bring into existence.*
d. *Process information; Method of operation.*
e. *Reasoning; Argument, motive, cause or justification.*
f. *Evaluation; Ascertain.*

**the framework skills rest upon the Bloom classifications**

a. *Knowledge*

b. *Comprehension*

c. *Application*

d. *Interpretation*

e. *Synthesis*

f. *Evaluation.*

The three learning styles incorporated in the Learning Tower, Non formal. Informal and Incidental Learning are underpinned by:

1. Concrete experience.

2. Observation and experience.

3. Forming abstract concepts.

4. *Testing in new situations*

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## Alun Davies

Alun Davies, STYLEtraining, is an independent consultant now working within youth and community learning.

Alun first trained as a computer programmer and prior to his present work was a child and family social worker.

STYLEtraining has been involved in projects across Wales and England.

- Project Managing a young people NEET programme in Berkshire funded by the Learning Skills Council, being the co-author of Research Report.
- Business Development and Project Manager for a Sector Skill Council in Wales. Developed sector working groups across Wales.
- A range of projects and research associated with young people NEET in Wales.

- Marketing and Business Consultant to two Welsh University Colleges. Developing several business partnerships schemes in addition to offering strategic support on graduate and postgraduate programmes.
- Developed the TEAM UP and WIN learning initiative to engage learners who were becoming detached from the formal learning process.
- Presently developing the non formal learning framework with a national youth organisation in Ireland.

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