

# Zest for Learning

Developing curious learners who  
relish real-world challenges

**Bill Lucas and Ellen Spencer**



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# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>i</i>
<b>Series Introduction: Developing Capable Young People</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Changing roles for schools .....	1
The purposes of education .....	4
Which capabilities matter most? .....	5
Lifelong learning .....	6
The idea of signature learning experiences .....	7
About the series .....	9
<b>Chapter 1: Zest for Learning</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Bodies of knowledge .....	13
Developing a model of zest for learning .....	15
Psychology for flourishing .....	16
Education for flourishing .....	49
Summary .....	78
<b>Chapter 2: A Framework for Zest for Learning</b> .....	<b>81</b>
Balanced .....	83
Curious .....	87
Purposeful .....	90
<b>Chapter 3: Cultivating Zest</b> .....	<b>95</b>
Signature learning experiences .....	96
<b>Chapter 4: Promising Practices</b> .....	<b>159</b>
Arbib Education Trust .....	159
Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship .....	164
Bedales .....	172

Explorer Scouts.....	176
Forest School Association .....	181
FORM .....	186
Holyport College .....	198
Kopernikus .....	203
Royal Yachting Association.....	211
Shireland Collegiate Academy .....	215
Steyning Grammar School .....	221
West Rise Junior School.....	226
<b>Chapter 5: Brave Leadership .....</b>	<b>231</b>
Partnerships for learning .....	232
Creating a supportive ecology.....	237
Understanding and communicating a vision for zest .....	238
Rethinking the curriculum – expanding the formal curriculum and valuing co-curricular and extra-curricular learning .....	239
New roles for staff .....	240
Tracking the development of zest in young people.....	240
Zest for learning – celebrating success.....	245
<b>Chapter 6: An A–Z of Ideas for Developing Zest .....</b>	<b>249</b>
Balanced learners value relationships .....	249
Balanced learners maintain perspective.....	250
Curious learners explore the world.....	250
Curious learners embrace novel experiences .....	251
Purposeful learners find meaning .....	252
Purposeful learners perform well.....	253
<i>Appendix: Signature Learning Experiences .....</i>	<i>255</i>
<i>References .....</i>	<i>267</i>

# Series Introduction

## Developing capable young people

Ensuring that all people have a solid foundation of knowledge and skills must therefore be the central aim of the post-2015 education agenda. This is not primarily about providing more people with more years of schooling; in fact, that's only the first step. It is most critically about making sure that individuals acquire a solid foundation of knowledge in key disciplines, that they develop creative, critical thinking and collaborative skills, and that they build character attributes, such as mindfulness, curiosity, courage and resilience.

Andreas Schleicher and Qian Tang, *Education Post-2015: Knowledge and Skills Transform Lives and Societies* (2015, p. 9)

## Changing roles for schools

Across the world there is a great shift taking place. Where once it was enough to know and do things, our uncertain world calls for some additional learning. We call them capabilities. Others call them 'dispositions', 'habits of mind', 'attributes' or 'competencies', words we find very helpful. Some refer to them as 'non-cognitive skills', 'soft skills' or 'traits', none of which we like given, respectively, their negative connotations, tendency to belittle what is involved and association with genetic inheritance.

Our choice of capabilities is pragmatic. A country in the northern hemisphere like Scotland is actively using the term, as is Australia at the opposite end of the earth. If we had to choose a phrase to sum up our philosophy it would be 'dispositional teaching' – that is to say, the attempt specifically to cultivate in learners certain dispositions which evidence suggests are going to be valuable to them both at school and in later life.

We know that the shift is underway for four reasons:

1. One of the ‘guardians’ of global comparative standards, PISA, is moving this way. In 2012, as well as tests for 15-year-olds in English, maths and science, they introduced an ‘innovative domain’ called ‘creative problem-solving’. This became ‘collaborative problem-solving’ in 2015, ‘global competence’ in 2018 and will become ‘creative thinking’ in 2021.
2. Researchers the world over are beginning to agree on the kinds of capabilities which do, and will, serve children well at school and in the real world. We’ll explore this increasingly consensual list later on, but for now we want to share just some of the key thinkers to reassure you that you are in good company: Ron Berger, Guy Claxton, Art Costa, Anna Craft, Angela Duckworth, Carol Dweck, K. Anders Ericsson, Charles Fadel, Michael Fullan, Howard Gardner, Leslie Gutman, Andy Hargreaves, John Hattie, James Heckman, Lois Hetland, Bena Kallick, Tim Kautz, Geoff Masters, David Perkins, Lauren Resnick, Ron Ritchhart, Sir Ken Robinson, Andreas Schleicher, Ingrid Schoon, Martin Seligman, Robert Sternberg, Louise Stoll, Matthew Taylor, Paul Tough, Bernie Trilling, Chris Watkins, Dylan Wiliam and David Yeager. We would include our own work in this field too.
3. Organisations and well-evidenced frameworks are beginning to find common cause with the idea of capabilities. The Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills Project, Building Learning Power, Expeditionary Learning Network, the Global Cities Education Network, Habits of Mind, New Pedagogies for Deeper Learning, Partnership for 21st Century Learning and the Skills4Success Framework are just a few examples. We would include our own Expansive Education Network here too.
4. Inspirational leaders across the world are very gradually showing us that you can powerfully embed capabilities into the formal, informal and hidden curriculum of schools, if you have a mind to do so. Here are seven examples: Col·legi Montserrat in Spain, Hellerup School in Denmark, High Tech High in the United States, School 21 and Thomas Tallis School in England, and Rooty Hill High School and Carey Grammar in Australia. You’ll doubtless have your own favourites to add in. We love these schools and their courageous teachers. Throughout the series we hope that their

stories and our grounded practical advice will serve to ensure that hundreds of thousands of schools across the world see the value of systematically cultivating capabilities *as well as* deep disciplinary knowledge and useful academic and practical skills.

Increasingly ‘character’ is the word used to describe the cluster of capabilities which are useful in life, with a further clarification of the term, ‘performance character’, suggesting those attributes which are associated with excellence in situations where performance is called upon – an academic test, examination, sports match or any extra-curricular activity in which concentrated demonstration of skill is required.

Indeed, character education has seen a popular resurgence among politicians in the UK in recent years, with former Secretary of State for Education Damian Hinds (2019) arguing that character education is as important as examination success, and promising the development of ‘a new framework to help teachers and school leaders identify the types of opportunities that will help support their pupils to build character. The framework will also provide a self-assessment tool for schools to check how well they are doing.’

The UK’s Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues argues that teacher education must encompass preparation to teach character education (Arthur, 2014). England’s Department for Education’s *Strategy 2015–2020: World-Class Education and Care* (2016a) holds as one of its twelve strategic priorities ‘build character and resilience’. Character education is seen as a means to:

support the development of character traits associated with: improved attainment at school; improved employability skills; making a valuable contribution to British society as a good citizen. Embedding character education within the school system will create opportunities for all pupils to develop the skills they need to succeed in education and in adult life. (Department for Education, 2016b, p. 10)

In the second of Art Costa and Bena Kallick’s book series on the habits of mind, Curtis Schnorr (2000, p. 76) argues that character education should have thinking at its centre because ‘Successful character education is grounded in thoughtful processes.’ Thinking processes and the capabilities of good thinkers – like persisting or managing impulsivity – are foundational to character education.

All this means that as well as ensuring that, as Andreas Schleicher and Qian Tang put it, all young people develop a solid foundation of knowledge and skills while at school, they also need to acquire a set of important capabilities.

## **The purposes of education**

Parents, educators and policy-makers alike have many hopes for the education of children and young people. But with so many ideas about what schooling might achieve, it is hard to reach any kind of consensus. Nevertheless, in late 2015/early 2016, the UK parliament initiated an inquiry into the 'purpose of education'. On the one hand, it's a telling admission if a government has to ask such a fundamental question. On the other, it could be construed as a sign of strength, as a recognition that times are changing.

At the Centre for Real-World Learning, we worked with a number of national bodies to see if common agreement could be reached. The following list is what we came up with and is indicative of the sorts of things we might all wish for our children's education to achieve (Lucas and Spencer, 2016). The first half a dozen are particularly relevant to this series of books, but the remainder also give a sense of our values. We want educational goals which:

1. Work for all young people.
2. Prepare students for a lifetime of learning at the same time as seeing childhood and school as valuable in their own right.
3. See capabilities and character as equally important as success in individual subjects.
4. Make vocational and academic routes equally valued.
5. Cultivate happier children.
6. Engage effectively with parents.
7. Engage well with business.

8. Use the best possible teaching and learning methods.
9. Understand how testing is best used to improve outcomes.
10. Empower and value teachers' creativity and professionalism.
11. Proactively encourage both rigorous school self-improvement and appropriate external accountability.

## Which capabilities matter most?

Let's look in more detail at the third item on our wish list: seeing capabilities and character as equally important as success in individual subjects. In the last decade, we have begun to understand with greater clarity those capabilities which are particularly useful. Here are two lists, the first from an economic perspective (Heckman and Kautz, 2013) and the second through the eyes of educational researchers (Gutman and Schoon, 2013). Both sets of researchers are trying to describe those capabilities – or, in some cases, transferable skills – which will improve outcomes for individual learners and so for wider society.

### **Heckman and Kautz:**

Perseverance  
Self-control  
Trust  
Attentiveness  
Self-esteem and self-efficacy  
Resilience to adversity  
Openness to experience  
Empathy  
Humility  
Tolerance of diverse opinions  
Engaging productively in society

### **Gutman and Schoon:**

Self-perception  
Motivation  
Perseverance  
Self-control  
Metacognitive strategies  
Social competencies  
Resilience and coping  
Creativity

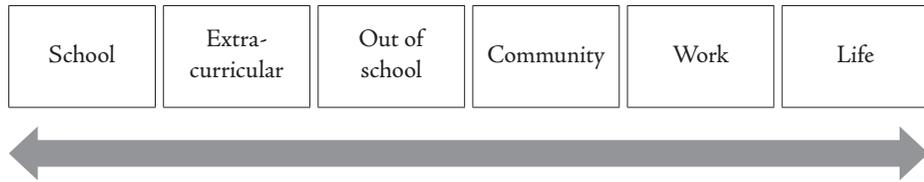
The striking thing about these lists, to us, is how similar they are. With regard to this book's focus on zest, we will see how important some of these transferable skills or dispositions are, including perseverance, openness to experience, empathy, tolerance of diverse opinions, self-control, engaging productively in society, motivation, social competencies and creativity, and how they contribute to our thinking.

While we may want to interrogate these terms more closely, the general direction is clear. The demand side, from employers, is similar in its emphasis. In 2012, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) launched a campaign suggesting the kinds of capabilities it wanted young people to acquire at school. Their list included grit, resilience, curiosity, enthusiasm and zest, gratitude, confidence and ambition, creativity, humility, respect and good manners, and sensitivity to global concerns. This book takes the CBI's idea of zest and provides a theoretical and practical underpinning to the concept.

## **Lifelong learning**

As well as preparing pupils for their next immediate steps on leaving, we argue that schools also have a role in preparing young people to be learners throughout their lives. That this is an important aspect of school life has become clearer over the last two decades (Lucas and Greany, 2000; Schuller and Watson, 2009). Specifically, it is appreciated that much of the preparation for lifelong learning is informal, experienced based and often coordinated by organisations outside school. In *Zest for Learning*, we focus on the role of these often charitable organisations in enriching the lives of young people and instilling a love of learning beyond school. In particular, we are keen to understand how schools can best interact with outside bodies.

The progression from classroom to life outside school via interest-led activities is shown in the figure below.



Learning beyond the school

## The idea of signature learning experiences

If we are reaching consensus as to the kinds of capabilities increasingly being seen as valuable, what about the kinds of teaching and learning methods that might cultivate them? In the first two books of the series we asked you to consider these two questions:

- If I wanted to teach a student how to become more creative and better able to solve problems, what methods would I choose?
- If I wanted my students to become more resilient, what methods would I choose?

To help you think about them we introduced the idea of signature pedagogies, as suggested by Lee Shulman, in the context of preparing learners for different vocational routes. These are ‘the types of teaching that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions’ (Shulman, 2005, p. 52). He talks of the three dimensions of a signature pedagogy:

1. Its surface structure: ‘concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning, of showing and demonstrating, of questioning and answering, of interacting and withholding, of approaching and withdrawing’ (pp. 54–55).
2. Its deep structure: ‘a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how’ (p. 55).

3. Its implicit structure: 'a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values, and dispositions' (p. 55).

It's not much of a leap to think not about the fundamentals of a particular profession but instead of a particular capability. Suppose it were perseverance: how would you model and demonstrate it? What know-how does someone who is a good 'perseverer' show, and how can you impart the clues of persevering to students? What are the underpinning self-belief and can-do dispositions that reinforce perseverance?

Signature pedagogies are the teaching and learning methods which are most likely to lead to the desired capability, and in books 1 and 2 we explored these in some depth. But with zest, as we have begun to indicate, it is slightly different. Pedagogy is not quite the right way of describing the more informal ways of learning encountered in the more informal learning associated with extra-curricular and out-of-school activities. So instead we suggest the phrase 'signature learning experiences' to characterise them. The question we invite you to consider is:

- ✦ If I wanted my students to be full of zest for learning, what learning experiences would I want them to have?

In this book you will encounter a variety of answers to this question with some common themes. The experiences are often outward-looking and involve making things, giving time voluntarily, being outdoors, meeting new people and going on journeys. Or they might be more inward-focused, such as reading, practising, reflecting or even meditating.

Within and beyond school there are core techniques that need to be mastered, just as students will need to become comfortable with their times tables, irregular verbs or acids and bases. These include:

- ✦ Giving and receiving feedback.
- ✦ Practising deliberately.
- ✦ Drafting and prototyping.
- ✦ Using design processes.

- Goal-setting.
- Mentally rehearsing.
- Verbalising the processes of learning.
- Reflecting on processes and progress.
- Self-testing.
- Working in groups.
- Teaching others.

In each of the books in this series, we explore the many ways in which such techniques can be cultivated in many different contexts.

## About the series

The Pedagogy for a Changing World series is action oriented and research led. The books are guides for teachers, school leaders and all those working with schools who want to develop capable young people. Each book offers practical suggestions as to how key capabilities can best be developed in learners, building both theoretical and practical confidence in the kinds of pedagogies and methods which work well. The books are aimed at both primary and secondary levels.

The first two in the series are:

1. *Teaching Creative Thinking: Developing learners who generate ideas and can think critically*
2. *Developing Tenacity: Teaching learners how to persevere in the face of difficulty*

This is the third book and will explore the idea of zest for learning and how this can be developed in young people in and beyond school.

## Zest for Learning

It is structured in the following way:

- A clear definition of zest and why it matters.
- A framework for zest for learning, with some practical examples for getting started.
- An overview of the signature learning experiences which cultivate zestful learners.
- Promising practices – case studies of schools which are adopting these approaches.
- A focus on the brave leadership needed by schools consciously looking outside their gates.
- An A–Z of ideas for developing zest.

## Chapter 1

# Zest for Learning

### What it is and why it matters

*zest, n. figurative.* Enthusiasm for and enjoyment of something, esp. as displayed in speech or action; gusto, relish. Frequently with *for*.

*Oxford English Dictionary*

We wrote this book for teachers because it seems to us that there is an absence of zest and an abundance of both blandness and examined predictability in too many schools at the moment. For many young people, their learning stops just when it is getting really challenging and engaging. The bell goes and out they file. Where their learning interests might ideally take them is beyond the scope of a particular subject or syllabus. And in these form-filling, litigious times it is ever more tricky to organise educational forays out into the real world.

We like the word 'zest' because it suggests the kind of engaged curiosity we see as being at the heart of all good learning. We have looked hard at the evidence to understand more about zest. Research suggests that it is a valuable capability, central to human flourishing and eminently learnable.

This book draws together a far-reaching literature exploring zest and zest-like attributes, offering schools and organisations working with schools a model of how it could be at the heart of children's educational experiences. We hope it will give encouragement to head teachers, teachers, proactive parents and all those in the many voluntary, charitable and business organisations who work with young people to be expansive in their thinking. *Zest for Learning* is a call to action for us to broaden our horizons of what school can be and to take heart from the ideas which others are already using.

We believe there are two essential outcomes of education: flourishing and real-world challenge-readiness. By flourishing we mean thriving and growing with an underlying sense of direction and purpose. By being ready for the world's tests we

mean prepared both morally and practically for the challenges of living in complex times. We need to understand where we've come from, how we've arrived at this place in time, and where we want to be as a society. It is not just about being able to come up with a creative solution to an engineering or biomedical problem. Beyond problem-solving is problem-setting: asking which problems are worth looking at, and seeking knowledge, understanding and wisdom that allows ethical decisions to be made based on more than just blind progress. Both flourishing and meeting real-world challenges are about embracing learning with both hands.

So what do we mean when we say a person has 'zest for learning'? Using the definition of zest on page 11, such a person might take a certain enthusiastic enjoyment in their learning; they are hungry to learn and find it a stimulating end in its own right. They enjoy the way learning opens up a richer understanding of other aspects of their life, seeing the interconnectedness of things. They are deeply satisfied when something that was formerly fuzzy and grey becomes clear to them, like the pieces of a jigsaw fitting together. They are keen to develop themselves, to experience new things, to try some and to master others. They try not to be discouraged by setbacks. To some degree, they are discontented with the status quo, with their own understanding of things, if not with the world at large. Zestful learners use hand, head and heart in much of their lives.

We know that human beings are born with an instinct to learn, boosted by the feedback they receive from every encounter with the objects and people around them. It's more than a proclivity; small babies *are* learners. In this book we will be wondering how best we can help young people to maintain a child-like fascination with the world as they grow older, wiser and more experienced in the ways of the world. The amount of zest for learning we each possess will, of course, be down to both nature and nurture. Positive learning experiences will impact people in different ways. There is much in the psychology literature to unpick here.

You could be forgiven for wondering whether this book's focus represents more fanciful territory than either creative thinking or tenacity, which we dealt with in our two earlier books. Are we really going to argue that all children, whatever their background, can benefit from zest? Or that schools can cultivate it? The answer is yes! In *Zest for Learning* we argue that zest is a public good, that learners with zest are more likely to be keen learners in and beyond the classroom, and that teachers deep down want to help foster zest in any way they can.

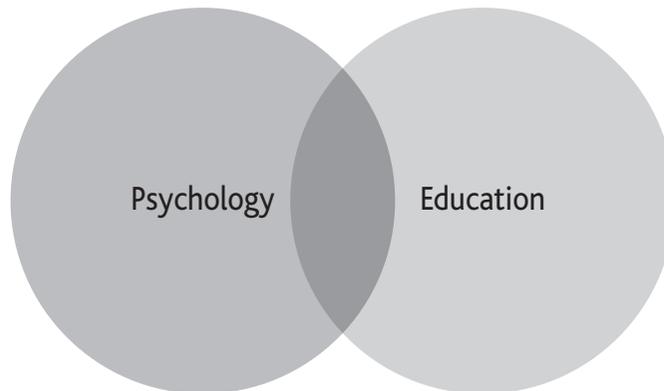
## Bodies of knowledge

Perhaps because zest is used as shorthand for something everyone is assumed to understand, definitions of zest are conspicuous by their absence in the bodies of literature that use the word. In this book we offer a framework for zest: a practical guide for teachers, underpinned by theory. We draw on a number of areas of knowledge and practice that each have something to contribute to the concept of zest for learning, clarifying the concept of zest and bringing together ideas in concrete and actionable ways. As we do this we will constantly be asking: *what might this tell us about developing zest for learning in and from schools?*

More than fifty years ago, John Holt (1967, p. 175) came close to putting into words the essence of zest for learning:

Since we cannot know what knowledge will be most needed in the future, it is senseless trying to teach it in advance. Instead we should try to turn out people who love learning so much and learn so well that they will be able to learn whatever needs to be learned.

The concept of zest for learning sits broadly within two large fields of knowledge: psychology and education. We are interested in the specific contribution each makes to our understanding of zest for learning, represented by the area where the two intersect:



Our understanding of zest for learning comes from two broad areas of knowledge and research

**Young people need more than subject knowledge in order to thrive – they need capabilities. The Pedagogy for a Changing World series details which capabilities matter and how schools can develop them.**

A key capability is zest: the curiosity and desire to experience new things. *Zest for Learning* offers a powerful new synthesis of thinking about what it takes for young people to flourish both in education and in the wider world, especially at a time when preparing them for life beyond school often calls for brave leadership.

The spirit of *Zest for Learning* is clear – a rallying cry that I’d signed up to in an instant. Refreshingly, the neat conceptual framework is articulated by a constant flow of examples illustrating what fostering zest might look like in practice. If you worry that your school curriculum doesn’t yet fully deliver the deep, rich, contemporary education you’re reaching for, then this book – packed with ideas on every page – is the guide you need.

**Tom Sherrington, education consultant and author of *The Learning Rainforest***

*Zest for Learning* will inspire, challenge and ultimately blow your mind with its message. The best education book on the market!

**Mike Fairclough, Head Teacher, West Rise Junior School**

Lucas and Spencer present a rich study of pedagogical approaches, exploring what effective, joyful, holistic learning looks like.

**Sarah Lawfull, Director, Forest School Association**

*Zest for Learning* is a powerful book which challenges our preconceptions about the best ways to learn. The practical examples in this book will inspire young people to become more engaged in the big issues which face all of us today.

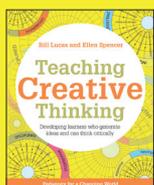
**Matt Hyde, OBE, Chief Executive, Scouts**

What Lucas and Spencer have done so brilliantly with this book is provide us with an illustrated map for the journey we need to make as we try to dramatically improve the quality of the learning that all young people receive, wherever they are in the world.

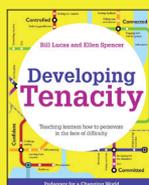
**Paul Collard, Chief Executive, CCE**

**Professor Bill Lucas** is Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning. A global thought-leader, Bill is co-chair of the PISA 2021 test of creative thinking and an education adviser to the state of Victoria in Australia, to the LEGO Foundation, to the Royal Yachting Association and to the Church of England.

**Dr Ellen Spencer** is a senior researcher at the Centre for Real-World Learning. Ellen is an expert on the assessment of creativity and pedagogy for practical learning and, together with Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton, is co-author of *Expansive Education: Teaching learners for the real world*.



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