

Hello – and welcome to my September newsletter. The last few weeks have seen the usual variety of announcements and reports, but three quite different ones caught my attention. An Intense Activity Programme (IAP) for job seekers, unimaginatively termed “boot camp”; a protracted LinkedIn discussion on the observation of teaching and learning and the monthly blog of David Russell, CEO of the Education and Training Foundation, highlighting seven things not to do to help make teaching great; identified by the Sutton Trust in their commissioned research “[What makes teaching great](#)”.

Issue 10 September 2015 **Why is a tin of peas like the observation of teaching and learning?**

So where does the tin of peas come in? I

recently bought a couple of tins and spent some time sorting through those on the shelf to find a couple that weren’t dented, as I refuse to buy those that are. I am regularly told that the state of the tin doesn’t matter as the contents will be fine. That seems to me to be missing the point. My argument is that the tin doesn’t leave the factory in that condition and the only reason it ends up being dented is because it isn’t handled properly; suggesting that the item and therefore the end-user are not valued. And that, I think, is something we see, and put up with, all too often.

This leads me to Matthew Hancock’s IAP proposal. The ever-informative AELP (Countdown 736) reports that the IAP “will comprise classroom based sessions run by Jobcentre Plus”. Those of you who have read my earlier newsletters will know that my daughter headed off to Australia about a year ago and she is now back and looking for work. I sent her off to register at the jobcentre in part, to ensure she is included in the jobless statistics and to keep her national insurance record up-to-date. Last week, she attended a group workshop covering job search, application forms, CVs, covering letters, interview preparation, use of social media, transferable skills and the value of recruitment events. Far from the 20ish hours a week put forward by Hancock’s model, all this was achieved in – wait for it – 40 minutes! It consisted of a Job Centre job coach reading, word-for-word, a PowerPoint presentation. My daughter brought the PowerPoint handout home with her (yes, the same thing displayed on screen, given as a handout and read aloud!). I have to say, the presentation was shocking; littered with spelling mistakes, punctuation errors and graphics that didn’t fit on the screen so you couldn’t read the content. I am still trying to work out how one would “Prepare and host a CV”!

It seems to me we are back to the peas. What does that group training session say about the

value placed on the client? If that is the standard of delivery that a client can expect as part of their period of IAP, Matthew should perhaps change his name to Tony!

I couldn’t help but wonder what the quality assurance of those sessions would look like and whether those arrangements would include observation, which leads me conveniently into the LinkedIn discussion I followed but gave up on! It started with a simple question based on Ofsted’s decision to no longer grade learning sessions and whether that would give organisations who still wished to grade, the freedom to implement a more imaginative grading system. The debate that followed seemed to consist of pieces of research carefully selected to support the views of the main contributors, couched in such language to make it as complex as possible. Something in my experience that the sector does very successfully, but should in fact, attempt the opposite.

Thinking of the opposite brings me neatly to David Russell’s blog, which considers the seven things not to do to help make teaching great, as identified by Coe et al (2014). I won’t list them all here, but there are three that stand out for me:

- Use praise lavishly – I wholeheartedly agree. I recall working for a manager who praised everything someone did, which simply resulted in the praise becoming worthless – a training equivalent of the boy who cried wolf!
- Allow learners to discover key ideas for themselves – somewhere we seem to have lost the notion that teachers are there to teach and think of them only as facilitators – there must be room for both.
- Group learners by ability – one I’m not sure that I agree with but happy to debate further.

The point of all of these though, whether you agree with them or not, is that they are kept simple and value the individual – something we should all, including Jobcentre Plus, strive for!