

**Read and reflect:**

## **KEY NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS**

Mary Simpson and Jenny Ure, in their study of differentiation in Scottish secondary schools some years ago (see below) concluded that there is no one strategy which is **in itself** more effective than any other. The key to success, they found, is the extent to which the strategies used enable teachers to be responsive to the needs of individual learners. If teachers do not respond to individual needs, or are unsure how to create the conditions which allow them to do so, **no** strategy will be very effective. If teachers acknowledge the needs and finds ways of meeting them that they and their pupils are comfortable with, success is likely to follow. Teachers' range of strategies may be wide, or it may be limited. The wider the range of strategies teachers can employ, the more likely they are to be able to meet the needs of a wide range of learners.

Simpson and Ure point out that all pupils share certain learning needs. Their list of key requirements for successful learning, reproduced below, apply to **all** learners. Note how well these chime with the four capacities of A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE) and with the approaches associated with the Assessment is for Learning (AifL) programme.

***Learners have shared needs associated with the following:***

***the curriculum*** - the need to be given appropriate levels of work; to know about what is to be learned; to be set realistic, short term targets; to have support in the acquisition of component or pre-requisite skills; etc.

***cognition*** - the need to have explanations which are comprehensible; to have misunderstandings and misconceptions identified and rectified; to be given 'conceptual scaffolding' which will enable the organisation of detail or the elaboration of abstract concepts; to have available such strategies as concept-mapping, to assist in the development of understanding; etc.

***the management of learning*** - the need to have support in the self-pacing or management of work; to be assisted in understanding how to work profitably in groups or teams; to be able to identify strategies for problem-solving/tackling exam questions/taking notes/highlighting key points/revising etc; to develop a strategy for asking for assistance with problems; etc.

***motivational factors*** - the need to be motivated to learn; to expect success and progression in learning; to be confident; to expect problems to be capable of resolution; to have high but attainable goals; to recognise purpose in the learning process; to value the skills and knowledge acquired in school and to have an expectancy that these are a springboard for future learning; etc.

**personal factors** - the need to have idiosyncratic personal issues taken note of, eg times of crisis or stress; to have personal circumstances taken into account, eg lack of facilities for doing homework, lack of parental support or encouragement; to have assistance with improving personal and inter-personal skills; low self-esteem etc; to have help in dealing with peer group pressure etc.

Simpson, M. and Ure, J. *What's the Difference?*  
*A study of differentiation in Scottish secondary schools.*  
*Northern College Publications, 1994*  
(page 85)