1. Working in post-compulsory education

1.1 What is Chapter 1 about?

This chapter will set out a series of problems and choices which face all teachers and trainers in PCE. Section 1.2 attempts to define what ‘post-compulsory education’ means and raises the problem of what, if anything, can be understood by talk of teacher professionalism in the ever-expanding PCE sector. The notion of ‘professionalism’ is related to different discussions of the nature and importance of knowledge. A discussion of the knowledge base of PCE then leads us to examine the relationship between ‘education’ and ‘training’, and ‘teaching’ and ‘training’ in PCE, and their relation to a new professionalism based on the notions of responsibility and duty. Section 1.3 examines the views of three educational philosophers whose ideas are central to thinking about PCE today and invites the post-compulsory teacher to consider their own philosophical standpoint. Section 1.4 discusses how forms of ‘vocationalism’ have come to dominate thinking across the post-compulsory sector and the challenges this poses for the PCE teacher or trainer.

**Task 1.1: Preliminary reading**

Our assumption is that the reader will already know something of the changing nature of further, adult and higher education, such as:

- The role of government quangos such as the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs); Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK).
- The range of qualifications from National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at various levels and the structure of GCSEs and A levels (including ‘vocational’ A levels) to new initiatives such as Foundation Degrees.
- The role of professional bodies such as the University and College Union; the Association of Colleges (AoC); the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA); the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) and the Institute for Learning (IfL).

However, if you are unfamiliar with this field, we would particularly recommend the
Chronology of PCE in Chapter 9 of this book as a very useful starting point and reference work. Other than this, there is a range of introductory books. For example, Vince Hall’s *Further Education in the UK* (1994) is a standard work, and Prue Huddleston and Lorna Unwin’s *Teaching and Learning in Further Education*, first published in 1997, gives basic information in a straightforward way. With the introduction of mandatory teaching qualifications for lecturers working in further and adult education settings a range of introductory books has come onto the market that provide an introduction to the PCE sector and what is currently required of teachers (see Hayes et al. 2007: chapter 8, for a discussion of these). The issues discussed throughout this book are of a universal character, dealing with topics such as the nature of professionalism and the conflict between education and practicality.

### 1.2 Contested concepts of professionalism in PCE

#### KEY ISSUES

PCE implies a notion of professionalism that is grounded in paid employment. This is the first and most minimal definition of professionalism.

This professionalism is a broad notion but one which implies subject expertise.

Educational thought of the 1960s and 1970s led to theoretical subjects achieving primacy in the curriculum. Does this create a gap between the academic and vocational which excludes a great deal of what happens in PCE?

Is there a permanent deprofessionalization of PCE teachers and trainers or is there a reprofessionalization around new concepts of responsibility, being promoted by the IfL?

What does the popular phrase the ‘new’ professionalism mean?

The term PCE is often no more than an alternative for FE. However, this is to forget or ignore the ‘training’ dimension of PCE, and as a result PCE is sometimes referred to as post-compulsory education and training (PCET). Then there is adult education (AE), further and higher education (FHE), higher education (HE), university education, training in industry and commerce, and informal teaching and training situations. There have been recent government-inspired attempts to define aspects of PCE policy such as the attempt to redesignate PCE as the ‘learning and skills sector’. This is too narrow a definition although it should forewarn us of the future trend of policy (see Chapter 9). We could attempt to cover all these areas of PCE with the term ‘lifelong learning’ (LLL) but this is more of a slogan to be defined than a catch-all.

Where do we begin the process of defining PCE? Helena Kennedy starts her report, *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* with the throwaway definition ‘Further Education is everything that does not happen in schools or universities’ (Kennedy 1997b: 1). Likewise, we could define PCE as everything that does not happen in schools up to the age of 16. This is a general and not very useful definition. (It is not even true, as it ignores the range of vocational and academic courses provided for 14–19-year-olds in schools and colleges.) The field is obviously vast and it is
becoming commonplace to talk as if PCE was about any learning that takes place outside compulsory schooling. But this is a dangerous and misleading perspective. A good and proper starting point is to say that we are only talking about learning in which there is normally a ‘cash nexus’: someone is paying or being paid for the learning that goes on, or someone is being trained to enter paid employment. There are many marginal cases that might be raised in objection. For example: Percy has retired but still teaches his daughter-in-law German in his home; Alan provides a group of interested young students with an introduction to history outside of their formal programme. These unpaid or informal learning sessions do not differ in any way that matters from ‘paid’ sessions. They are simply imitations of them that become less and less recognizable as they become less formal. This distinction is very crude but it has its point. An idealistic colleague recently declared that she would go on teaching even if she wasn’t paid. Advocates of the ‘learning society’ or ‘learning organization’ often promote learning, with an evangelical fervour, as the responsibility of all, in a way reminiscent of the ‘de-schoolers’ and certain adult educationalists. We will return to these views later. What they represent here is an elementary attack on professionalism. The sort of learning we are talking about is the learning that is brought about by an individual or individuals who see themselves as professional teachers or trainers who are paid for what they do. In the LLL literature there is a tendency to discuss other sorts of learning than formal learning. This can even include such concepts as ‘family learning’ which we might think has gone on for centuries (Alexander and Clyne 1995; Alexander 1997). We argue that this is to elevate less important forms of knowledge as equivalent to serious forms of study. Rhetorical talk about ‘the information society’, the ‘knowledge economy’ or ‘the learning society’ often fosters the acceptance of a very wide definition of knowledge that also encourages a lack of discrimination about different sorts of knowledge. This must necessarily diminish the worth of the paid professional. Issues about professionalism, therefore, are closely connected with a PCE teacher or trainer’s view of knowledge and its worth.

**Task 1.2: Identifying elements of professionalism in PCE**

Do you consider yourself to be a professional? Try to identify what makes you a professional. If you do not describe your role as ‘professional’, how do you describe it?

Apart from being paid, are there other elements to the professional role within PCE? The traditional discussion has always looked at two other criteria of professionalism: ‘knowledge’, which we have already touched on, and ‘responsibility’ (Langford 1985: 52-3). The debates of the 1970s and 1980s were concerned with whether teaching was a ‘profession’ or a ‘job’. Issues such as status and salary were crucial. The legacy of this historical discussion of professionalism is a focus on the teaching and personal style of individuals. In this light you might have thought of ‘professionalism’ as a mode of presentation of self or of subject: sharply dressed,
perhaps, with a ‘PowerPoint’ presentation and a study pack for your audience! Alternatively, you might have listed activities in your wider role: serving on committees, undertaking quality audits, designing courses and distance learning packs, recruitment and marketing. Most of this is managerial and administrative work that will often be included as part of a ‘wider’ understanding of the professional role. The requirement to undertake such wider roles is an element of the ‘managerialism’ that has become part and parcel of PCE today. What we want to examine here is a more narrow ‘professionalism’ which we could describe as ‘subject professionalism’.

It is an assumption throughout this book that there can be both professional teachers and professional trainers. To establish this we need to explore the distinction between the two. This will require further discussion of the sort of knowledge that is being passed on. It might be thought that what ‘teaching’ and ‘training’ mean will depend to some extent on what individuals teach and how they go about it. As this book is addressed to a wide audience, we will sketch a general picture to illustrate the problems that this approach would present us with. Consider the following typical teaching and training activities:

- a university lecturer giving lectures based on his or her research into ‘learning styles’;
- a researcher giving seminar papers on her or his research into ‘bullying’;
- an AE tutor teaching A level English literature;
- an FE lecturer teaching art and design;
- a practitioner giving talks on his or her research findings in chiropody;
- a lecturer teaching a motor vehicle NVQ;
- a hairdresser teaching trainees within a private scheme;
- a police officer teaching crime-scene management;
- a human resources manager disseminating her or his firm’s equal opportunities policy;
- an instructor teaching social and life skills to adults with learning difficulties.
- a counsellor teaching basic counselling skills (awareness) to teachers;
- a tutor facilitating a discussion of citizenship with play workers;
- a part-time (sessional) lecturer teaching parenting skills to a group of young mothers;
- a mother talking to her children about their family history and the forms of their extended family;
- a personal adviser talking about a student’s Individual Learning Plan (ILP);
- students taking emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) tests.

These teaching and training activities are varieties of ‘subject’ teaching in a very ordinary sense of the word. But there is another sense in which some are ‘theoretical’ or knowledge-based subjects, some are ‘practical’ subjects and others are more
difficult to classify but could be important to the college or in wider social life (e.g., the ILP).

**Task 1.3**

Review the list of ‘subjects’ above and divide them into ‘practical’ and ‘theoretical’ subjects. Are there any subjects that are difficult to place?

In a paper written in 1965, ‘Liberal education and the nature of knowledge’, Paul Hirst gave a famous description of liberal education as being ‘determined in scope and content by knowledge itself’ (Hirst [1965] 1973: 99). He further classified knowledge as follows: ‘(1) Distinct disciplines or forms of knowledge (subdivisible): mathematics, physical sciences, human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, philosophy. (2) Fields of Knowledge: theoretical, practical (these may or may not include elements of moral knowledge)’ (p. 105). In this catalogue, if a subject was ‘practical’ it was not part of a ‘liberal education’ as defined. This is not to say that it was not of use – the utility of the practical cannot be denied – but it had no logical connection with the forms of human knowledge. Using this description, very few of the activities above would be part of a liberal education. They might be part of a ‘general education’ but this means something like ‘schooling’ or ‘the college curriculum’.

**Task 1.4**

Consider the list of teaching sessions given above in the light of Hirst’s distinction between ‘forms’ and ‘fields’ of knowledge. Do you now look at it differently?

A parallel distinction to that between liberal education and the practical fields of knowledge is that between teaching and training. Making the latter distinction is straightforward if we base it on the former. But it must not be held to undervalue the role of the trainer in society. This would not be a wise move as the teacher and trainer may be the same person in different contexts. Both the teacher and the trainer aim at getting a student or trainee to think or act for themselves. Gilbert Ryle has examined in some depth the differences between teaching and training and notions such as ‘drilling’ or the formation of ‘habits’ and ‘rote’ learning (Ryle 1973: 108–10). When we talk of training we do not mean to reduce it to this limited caricature which, Ryle comments, comes from memories of the nursery. Teaching and training involve teaching and training how to do something. They are not ‘gate shutting’ but ‘gate opening’ activities (Ryle 1973: 119). We would see the trainer with specialist knowledge and a set of practical skills as equally ‘professional’ as the teacher of academic subjects. We would add that recent developments, to be discussed below, threaten the professional ‘gate opening’ activities of both the teacher and the trainer.
In the 1960s and early 1970s, educational thought was dominated by rationalist principles. Human beings were characterized by their cognitive capacities. A powerful and positive concept of human rationality dominated educational thought. Judgements about objective truth could be made. Human beliefs, actions and emotions could be guided by reason. Hirst has come to see his earlier view to be a ‘hard rationalism’ (Hirst 1993: 184) and says of his previous position, ‘I now consider practical knowledge to be more fundamental than theoretical knowledge, the former being basic to any clear grasp of any proper significance of the latter’ (p. 197). Hirst now sees education as primarily concerned with social practices. More specifically, he prioritizes ‘personal development by initiation into a complex of specific, substantive social practices with all the knowledge, attitudes, feelings, virtues, skills, dispositions and relationships that it involves’ (p. 197).

Underpinning the rationalism of the 1960s described above was the thinking of the early Enlightenment philosophers of the seventeenth century, such as Newton, Locke, Pascal and Descartes, who established modern intellectual values such as a belief in knowledge, objective truth, reason, science, progress, experimentation and the universal applicability of these to all of mankind’s ability to control nature. It has to be said about Hirst’s explanation of forms and fields of knowledge that he in some ways merely reflected the current thinking of his time (see Chapter 9 – the 1960s was the decade of the space race and the first moon landing). This does not make his educational epistemology false, but it does mean that as times have changed and people have become less confident about science and knowledge. Hirst has begun to reflect this in his thinking.

There have also been attacks on such confident views of the importance of knowledge by postmodernists (Usher and Edwards 1994) and seemingly radical thinkers (Bloomer 1996, 1997; Harkin et al. 2001). Postmodernists will ask ‘Whose knowledge?’, stress a variety of truths and distrust reason. They further distrust science and the notion of progress and question the damage done by attempting to control nature. They seek to emphasize different and particular views rather than universal ‘theories’ which attempt to explain how the world or society works. It is better to see such views as a reflection of less confident times rather than as a serious contribution to educational thought, although like all extreme and distorted philosophies they are not without their insights. As far as the relativity of knowledge – the notion that there are different ‘truths’ – is concerned, postmodernists have to answer a fatal critique first made by Socrates in Plato’s Theaetetus (Burnyeat 1990) over 2000 years ago. A simple formulation of this critique is to express the postmodern viewpoint in a simple statement – ‘All truths are relative’ – and to ask ‘Is this statement true?’ The consequences of the question are that either the statement is true or its negation is true. Therefore there is a true statement that is not relative. This simply
shows that the more facile forms of relativism that some postmodernists desire are contradictory if they are articulated. Fortunately, postmodernist thought has had little impact on the PCE sector other than, and most worryingly, in some sectors of HE.

This is not the case with the increasing numbers of PCE teacher-educators and trainers influenced by ‘critical theory’. Critical theorists and their followers see the challenge of PCE teaching and training as making ‘classrooms more open in language practices’, which means that ‘Differences of gender, culture and outlook should be celebrated as part of a democratic endeavour’ (Harkin et al. 2001: 135). Martin Bloomer’s somewhat artificial notion of ‘studenthood’ comes out of this school of thought. He notes that ‘studenthood’ conceptualizes the ways in which students can begin to learn independently and recognize ‘the problematic nature of knowledge’ (Bloomer 1996: 140) through reflection on their own learning experiences. The consequence is that they can begin to ‘exert influence over the curriculum’ in ‘the creation and confirmation of their own personal learning careers’ (p. 140). Bloomer’s conceptualization of PCE teaching situations might be an example of what is often called ‘praxis’ or ‘practical wisdom’. The result of these individualistic applications of what were originally Marxist ideas is not radical because it leaves students engaging in a critical self-reflection that is a sort of therapy (see Therborn 1978: 125–8). The appeal of this to some PCE teachers and trainers is a false sense of being able to solve social problems through ‘the enlightened efforts of critical students and scholars’ (Therborn 1978: 139).

This radical view of the potential of teachers, trainers and students has a parallel in a more conservative view of PCE and one that is widespread. Radical teacher-trainers may see education as transformative for individuals, but managers and government policymakers are more likely to promote the idea that FE, in particular, can regenerate the economy. We can call this the Bilston College Fallacy as that college did much to promote this view in a series of publications (see Reeves 1997 and, for a critical assessment, Bryan 1998). (Ironically, Bilston College experienced severe financial difficulties shortly after the publication of its well-known book.) Both the radical and conservative views of FE overestimate the role of education in, respectively, politics and the economy (see Section 1.4).

**Task 1.6**

Consider the knowledge content in your subject or area of practical expertise and how you present this to students. Do you see yourself as having the traditional role of initiating students into worthwhile forms or fields of knowledge, or areas of practical knowledge; or are you inclined towards the postmodern or relativist school of thought that sees education as something particular and of many varieties; or do you see it in the more radical way as transformative in terms of communication or through ‘praxis’? If you see yourself as primarily a trainer, do you consider any of these approaches to knowledge relevant?
It can be argued, however, that such challenges to Enlightenment thinking open the door to at least two factors which could seriously undermine the status of knowledge. The first is the introduction of the concept of competence into discussions of education and training. Hyland has made three general criticisms of competence-based education. These are that it is no more than a confused slogan, that it has foundations in behaviourist theories which ignore human understanding, and that there is no coherent account of knowledge in the competence literature (Hyland 1994: chs. 2, 4, 5). Hyland has made some excellent criticisms of various writers on the nature of competence as having a crude understanding of know-how, of skill and of the complexities of judgements required in making a knowledge claim. All that is held to be required are certain stipulated outcomes that we can pick out. This is linked with a ‘tendency to reduce all talk of knowledge, skills, competence, and the like, to talk about “evidence”’ (Hyland 1994: 74). This gives some competence statements a spurious and vague meaning. However it provides us with a very impoverished concept of what it is to ‘know’ something, that relates only to the performance of work functions.

**Task 1.7**

Competence and knowledge: find examples of competence statements from your own or another subject, or from a teacher training course. Consider what concept of knowledge they embody, and see if it makes sense. Do they refer to narrow skills or dispositions or to broad general capacities? Do they adequately take account of the nature of judgement? You might like to review Hyland’s criticisms (1994: chs. 5, 8) and how far the introduction of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and subsequent changes has gone to meet them.

There is a hint of paradox in that competence-based training schemes are often couched in the empowering ‘student-centred’ language of progressive or humanistic education. But by emphasizing learning by doing, rather than becoming critical thinkers, competence-based programmes require students to be both intellectually passive and yet very busy. Keeping students working at gathering evidence to establish competence seems to many critics to be the introduction of the discipline of the workplace in the interest of any future employer.

**Task 1.8**

To what extent have you observed the conjunction of competence-based training programmes and humanistic or student-centred philosophies? Try to find a clear example of such a conjunction in a course document or handbook.

The second way in which knowledge could be seen to be devalued concerns the introduction of competence-based programmes of teacher training. The absence of
theory and academic knowledge in teacher training programmes is a result of many years of government spokespeople blaming theory, particularly that of the 1960s, for all the problems in education, if not all the ills of society! It is hardly surprising, therefore, that we find competence-based schemes predominating in teacher education. In FE the early 1990s saw the introduction of the competence-based vocational assessor qualifications (D32 and D33) by the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB), the launch of a competence-based C&G Further and Adult Education Teacher’s Certificate and the start of many competence-based Certificate in Education (FE) courses. The outcome of many of these courses could be said to be the deprofessionalization of the post-compulsory teacher (Hyland 1994: 93). The replication in teacher training, at all levels, of the competence-based model means that the model of control applied to students could also operate with staff. It would be a work-related, operational form of discipline that would be adopted, but it would be self-imposed. Many staff who have been working in PCE for some time will have obtained D32 and D33 and other competence-based qualifications. Despite some early cynicism, these programmes are now universally accepted. The consequence of all this is that teachers and trainers in AE and FE have come to see themselves as assessors, checking portfolios to see if there is evidence that student learning has occurred. It is difficult to find ways of opposing these schemes when not only your own subject knowledge but academic knowledge itself is being challenged. The shift in terminology from ‘competences’ to ‘standards’ is an example of a simple change of label and should not be seen as of any importance, except that ‘standards’ seems to be less obviously work-related. It is, of course, much harder to object to ‘standards’ than ‘competences’, which are obviously work-based. There is a danger of this approach to teacher education spreading to HE through the implementation of recommendations from the Dearing Report *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (Dearing 1997). Dearing’s report led to the formation of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT), now absorbed into the Higher Education Academy (HEA), that has rapidly expanded teacher training in HE with the specific aim of redressing the balance between teaching and research. The most likely outcome of this development will be a competence-based scheme similar to those found in FE. The crucial difference here is that the business of HE is knowledge and research, not competence or skills. It is the ethos created by this focus on advancing knowledge that makes teaching so exciting for many at this level. Dearing’s proposals to make HE teaching more learner-centred will not necessarily help students. The idea is that the student is not to be passive but must actively engage in the learning process. At HE level this is to turn the focus of education away from the knowledge and understanding needed to ultimately engage in research, to playing with methods of learning, something that could turn the academy into a mere centre of ‘edutainment’. But, crucially, Dearing’s general view of knowledge is as a commodity that can be delivered by teachers or through IT. His report reveals no clear understanding of what a university is. This failing could reduce all teachers in HE to the position that many FE teachers now find themselves in: as assessors checking off whether they have evidence that learning has occurred. The engagement and interaction with research-based knowledge could become a rare experience (see Hayes 2002).
Task 1.9: Teaching, assessing or guiding?

The argument we have put forward is that there is a danger that in devaluing knowledge and critical thinking we necessarily turn from being teachers to being assessors. However, the latest shift is for staff in PCE to take upon themselves the role of educational guidance workers, assisted by personal advisers from the Connexions Service (the service intended to provide a single point of contact, offering advice to all young people). Although this may seem to be a shift away from assessing, it is a complementary activity that requires that teachers and trainers now assess more and more aspects of a student’s life rather than theoretical or practical learning. The emphasis now being placed on individual guidance is more the formalization of an existing change than something qualitatively different. Many PCE teachers will say that although their formal job is to assess learning, much of their time is taken up with coaching, advising and getting students to reflect and explore their ideas, and that therefore the assessment part of their work has become a formality. Consider whether this is true by reflecting upon how much of your own teaching involves imparting knowledge and developing critical thinking, or involves personal (and educational) guidance.

It may be thought that the notion of the post-compulsory teacher or trainer as a ‘reflective practitioner’ could be a way out of the teacher or assessor dilemma. There are problems in understanding what the phrase ‘reflective practitioner’ means to most people and even of making sense of the most careful expositions (see Gilroy 1993). The term appears to replicate the use of humanistic, student-centred rationales for competence-based programmes for students and trainees. It confines the teacher or trainer to their particular concerns in the classroom and redefines ‘theory’ to mean the systematic restructuring of the teacher’s own experience and ideas. In this way, the model rejects a rationalist model of objective truth (see Elliott 1993). In the context of a general attack on academic knowledge and critical thinking, the term ‘reflective practitioner’ might not, as we may be tempted to think, allow us to subvert the competence-based curriculum. The theorists of reflective practice could be involved in an implicit attack on just this possibility, however much they dislike the competence-based approach. Some of them would respond that they do offer a sort of theory: critical theory. ‘Critical theory’, which is the product of former Marxists of the ‘Frankfurt School’ is essentially a politicization of PCE that works through an emphasis on questioning all assumptions (Hillier 2005). The aim is a critical consciousness to promote positive or even revolutionary social change but the practical result, in what are far from revolutionary times, is to leave PCE teachers and trainers confused and uncertain, even anxious about what they are doing, as too much has been questioned (Hayes 2005). Others have abandoned any meaningful notion of theory and celebrate a totally subjective ‘I Theory’ (McNiff and Whitehead 2002; McNiff 2003).

The force of this criticism of reflective practice can be understood by considering the traditional way in which academic studies, such as some of those on any Certificate of Education (post-compulsory) programme, relate to professional practice. This was often posed as the question of the relationship of theory to practice. The attempt to link the two produced perspectives such as those involving a notion of
‘praxis’ (see above) but once this becomes more than an attempt to relate theory to practice and slides into talk about ‘practical wisdom’ or ‘reflective practice’, the traditional question has been turned on its head and practice is re-presented, however subtly, as theory. Tutors and students then begin to systematize and elaborate a description of their practice and call it ‘theory’. This is a very special use of the term ‘theory’ and we would argue that the traditional way of looking at the relationship of theory to practice is still important, if only in that it reminds us that much of the work that has been done in psychology, sociology, philosophy and other disciplines is still important for the teacher to know as it is a part of the framework through which we understand the world, whether or not it is of immediate practical use.

The debate about the behaviourist philosophy of competence-based education and training (CBET) and the seeming paradox of humanistic delivery of CBET through the PCE curriculum is almost historical. This is in part because of the understanding made possible by the recent popularizing in Britain of the work of the French academic and political propagandist Pierre Bourdieu. As a result of Bourdieu’s work and his discussion of what he calls ‘cultural capital’ it is possible to see that a different notion of ‘competence’ is developing that resolves this seeming paradox. There is also a more important shift in the nature of this seeming paradox which gives more attention to process – the humanistic delivery – and less to content – competence based or content based – because of what has been called by Dennis Hayes, the ‘therapeutic turn’ in PCE (see Hayes 2003b, 2004; Hyland 2005, 2006).

However, this needs some contextualizing and we have deferred a discussion of this new notion of competence to Section 1.4 (see p. 29).

However, at this stage it might be useful to consider the concept of ‘guidance’ a little further. This is the third of our three criteria of professionalism, in addition to our being paid for what we do and, most importantly, that we possess knowledge of a specialized sort. The notion of guidance we want to consider in the final part of this section is not restricted to the tutorial, personal or career guidance provided by teachers, trainers or personal advisers but ‘guidance’ related to the concept of making students aware of their duties. Increasingly, teachers and trainers find themselves dealing with cross-curricular themes rather than subjects. Key skills have already made inroads into subject-based teaching and it is possible to find whole degree programmes written in terms of the development of key skills, now that these are a required element in all HE programmes. Key skills are content-free. This is not true of other ‘neglected’ cross-curricular themes such as ‘citizenship’ and the ‘environment’. It is guidance in these issues that is new. These topics are part of a new professional ethic that stresses the importance of ‘duties’ within an emerging ‘global conception’ of citizenship and the ‘public good’ (Bottery 2000: 235).

What is important to note about the new professionalism is how far the idea of being a professional has moved from someone being paid, or having expert knowledge, to the concept of the professional who is the vehicle for giving students a particular (and contestable) set of moral and political ideas.

With the establishment of a professional body, the Institute for Learning (IfL), there is, on its website and in its publications, evidence of the conscious working out of a notion of professionalism for PCE that reflects the above discussion. The IfL has drawn on discussions of professionalism in teacher education and is tending to adopt
an external concept of professionalism that requires PCE teachers to commit to certain values, including those of environmentalism (IfL 2006a), and to a code that is, at the time of writing, tending towards the authoritarian and, it has to be said, that presents a somewhat paternalistic set of criteria for professionalism in its ‘code of professional practice’ (IfL 2006b, c). Whether this will develop into a more open idea of professionalism that is grounded in subject knowledge and allows a freer, if contested, moral space depends on the IfL engaging in further debate around the issues in this chapter.

Task 1.10

Which model(s) of teacher education does your Certificate of Education course presuppose? Do you consider any of the dangers of competence-based or reflective practitioner approaches outlined above have the potential to affect you? Do you think that part of a professional role is to ensure that your students have certain sets of values?

1.3 Three educational thinkers

We have selected three educational thinkers to illustrate the philosophical basis of contemporary, if theoretically underdeveloped, ways of thinking about PCE. Following our discussion of the ‘new professionalism’ above, the inclusion of Socrates will be obvious. There are other reasons related to the discussion of professionalism as to why we have picked Rousseau as he is the first significant thinker to stress personal growth as an educational goal and all the problems and difficulties of sustaining such a view are apparent in his work. Our third choice of John Dewey is now a necessity. His thinking dominates all recent work in the area of PCE and, arguably, other areas of education (see Pring 1995). Every contemporary idea from ‘relevance’ and ‘building on experience’ to ‘democratic’ education and the possibility of a ‘vocational education’ that is not merely training for a job are to be found in his first major work (see Dewey [1916] 1966 and below). A case could be made for the inclusion of other thinkers. The British empiricist philosopher John Locke has been influential with a commonsensical approach to education that was intended for the English gentleman. Aristotle is in vogue with philosophers and a case could be made for including him because of his historical influence. But our selection is not meant to cover historically or fashionably influential thinkers. Our intention is to stimulate some philosophical thinking about education so that the PCE student can put contemporary thinking into perspective and not be restricted to the eclectic thinking provided in policy documents or, indeed, in books such as this.

We may never think to formulate our educational philosophy, but the terms in which we describe our professional practice will nevertheless indicate a leaning towards some form of articulated philosophy. Our argument is that we all have a ‘philosophical style’ as much as we have a ‘teaching and learning style’.
Task 1.11: Identifying your educational philosophy

Consider the three groups of ideas below and select that which best describes your idea of what education should be about.

1. Critical thinking, the development of knowledge, the search for objective truth, with the teacher having authority about these matters (Socrates).
2. Personal development, autonomy in learning, growth to reach natural potential, the teacher as the facilitator of learning (Rousseau).
3. Knowledge should be useful, socially relevant, involve problem solving and be taught through practical activities; teaching should be cooperative and democratic (Dewey).

Each of these sets of ideas reflects the views of one of the philosophers we discuss below. You might have found it difficult to choose just one view and this is understandable but, in the end, we argue that they are largely incompatible. Review your choice after reading this section.

Socrates

Socrates (469–399 BC): Athenian philosopher, whose ideas come to us from Plato (429–347 BC). In 387 BC Plato founded a school in a grove in Athens that became known as the ‘Academy’, which existed for over 900 years. Plato’s major educational works are the Republic (366 BC) and the Meno (387 BC). Another work referred to below, the Apology, was written in the decade after Socrates’ death.

‘The Socratic education begins . . . with the awakening of the mind to the need for criticism, to the uncertainty of the principles by which it supposed itself to be guided’ (Anderson 1980a: 69). Criticism is at the heart of the Socratic philosophical method, but it is a criticism that seeks to show that wisdom is ‘not thinking that you know what you do not know’. Socrates is wise to the extent that he does not claim to have knowledge but nevertheless seeks knowledge by a ruthless examination of the claims of individuals to have knowledge or wisdom. It is not an empirical method proceeding by reference to facts but a rationalist approach that works through the exposure of contradictions and absurdities in someone’s thinking. This method can be irritating for the modern reader of the Platonic dialogues who sees his or her opinions and beliefs subjected to it (Buchanan 1982: 21). Something of the impact of this method on individuals can be gleaned from Socrates’ cross-examination of Meletus at his trial, recounted in the Apology. Here Meletus is forced into a contradiction by being made to claim that Socrates believes in no gods and yet to see that his charge against Socrates could only be made against someone who believed in gods (Plato, Apology: 37–67). This is a method of teaching through which the teacher reveals a person’s ignorance to them through the dialectic of discussion and the questioning of answers. Although there is a debate about this, the term ‘philosophy’ originally meant not ‘love of wisdom’ but ‘love of a wise friend’. It is a wise teacher who shows you your ignorance and education thus requires a teacher to be in an entirely superior position.
to the pupil. An example of this method is given in the celebrated passages in the *Meno* (Plato, *Meno*: 82a–85c) where Socrates questions a slave boy about geometry. The slave boy responds confidently to the early questions but ultimately recognizes his ignorance: ‘It’s no use Socrates, I just don’t know’ (84a). This ‘numbing’ and ‘perplexing’ part of the Socratic process, or the *elenchus*, does away with false knowledge and instils the desire to learn. We are not concerned here with this proof of the theory of anamnesis, or the remembering of the immortal soul in its contemporary state, but with Socrates’ methodology. For Socrates, unlike Plato, there is no end to the process of critical questioning.

It is a common mistake to confuse the views of Plato and Socrates because almost all of what we know of Socrates’ teaching comes from Plato’s dialogues. Some commentators make excellent distinctions between the two thinkers (Holland 1980: 18; Perkinson 1980: 14–30; Tarrant 1993: xv–xxii). We will only make the broad distinction that for Socrates education was solely about learning to be critical whereas for Plato education led, by the process of criticism, to truth. The view that education is fundamentally about criticism, however, does not require us to accept the Socratic view of wisdom or the metaphysic of Platonism.

Most discussions of the Socratic idea of education in colleges and in educational textbooks look at the system of schooling set out in the *Republic*, ignoring the discussion of the dialectic in Book VII (Plato, *Republic*: 546–84) and in the earlier dialogues. This gives undue emphasis to what Plato would consider the lower processes of education, which are really forms of training and habit formation (see Holland 1980: 18–21). In our short discussion we have tried to give an indication of the power and value of what is now dismissed by the proponents of reflective practice as ‘theory-based and impractical’ rationalism (Elliott 1993: 1).

In summary, the Socratic education is about the need for criticism. To overcome ignorance it utilizes a certain method: the dialectic of questioning and testing ideas. In turn, this demands that the teacher guide the pupil through a process of learning to be critical which may be perplexing and numbing. Finally, the process may or may not lead to knowledge in the form of objective truth, but that is always the goal.

**Task 1.12: Education as critical thinking**

Is the development of critical thinking at the heart of your concept of education? If not, what role has criticism in your idea of education? Consider how important the element of critical thinking is in your particular subject area. If you are a trainer, are there ways in which you encourage a critical approach?

*Further reading:* Plato’s works are accessible and easy to read. The *Apology* and *Meno* are good starting points. Both are short and relevant to contemporary educational debates about the role of the teacher. There are many editions but it is an advantage to have one with a commentary.
Rousseau


Rousseau is a thinker of the Enlightenment period but stands in romantic reaction to it. In Section 1.2 we have already considered criticism of the Enlightenment tradition, but it may be helpful to state once again the basic principle of the Enlightenment as: a belief in the universal applicability and value to humanity in overcoming our dependence on nature by means of science, reason, progress and experimentation. Rousseau’s work is not aimed at defending the *ancien régime*. He believes in the revolution that is sweeping it away but is concerned at what it is creating, the new enemy, the ‘bourgeois’. He is a man who thinks only of himself and whose prime motivation is fear of his own death (Bloom 1991: 3–28). Rousseau’s model of the bourgeois is based upon the pre-revolutionary bourgeois he saw growing up around him in France but also on the English gentleman whose education is described in John Locke’s ([1693] 1989) *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*.

It is surprising that Rousseau has not been adopted as the educational thinker of the so-called ‘postmodern age’ or of ‘new age thinking’. *Émile* begins with the declaration: ‘Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man’ (Rousseau [1762] 1991: 37). Society, even living in small groups, corrupts man’s nature. It is to nature that we must turn to save us from disfiguring everything. Rousseau describes the child as a plant, and organic and growth metaphors abound. ‘Plants are shaped by cultivation, and men by education’ (p. 38).

Rousseau uses a wide definition of education to mean any change brought about after our birth. It is, therefore, threefold and comes from nature, men and things. It is only the education by men that we have entire control of so we must use it to ensure that education from nature is the dominant form. Nature is defined as a state in which our dispositions are uncorrupted by opinion (Rousseau [1762] 1991: 39). Rousseau enjoins mothers to ‘Observe nature and follow the path it maps out for you’ (p. 41). In thinking to correct or change that path we do more harm than good.

Man in his natural state is entirely for himself. Both Locke and Rousseau held this opinion. In Locke’s view the adult knows best and denies the child all his wants while giving reasons that are appropriate to the age of the child (Locke [1693] 1989: sections 39 and 44). The adult dominates and only looks for the man in the child. But Locke seeks to limit impositions and restrictions on freedom only to those that are absolutely necessary. Rousseau believes that if a child is educated by nature and things as described in the story of Émile’s education, he will come to accept restrictions as legitimate rather than necessary. He will then impose them on himself. This is the essence of the good citizen. Of course, adults are active in the education of the child but only to ensure that nature takes its course. The child or young person must find out for themself but their tutor arranges things so that certain results will follow.

In the natural order, all men are equal (Rousseau [1762] 1991: 41) so Rousseau considers only the education of the individual into man’s estate. Although he was a
primitivist to a certain extent, he wants men to live in society and not return to the condition of some mythical ‘noble savage’. He praises Plato’s Republic as ‘the most beautiful educational treatise ever written’ (p. 40). Yet he believes its vision of public education can no longer exist. His concerns are not with any particular educational institution or arrangement. He is setting out the methodology of a new form of education. In Rousseau’s work we see that education has a social aim. This is to produce the citizen who will voluntarily act in accordance with the civil or ‘general will’. They will do this in the same way that individuals in a state of nature act in their own self-interest (Perkinson 1980: 145). Pupils or students must learn from nature or things. The teacher must facilitate learning so that pupils or students learn for themselves.

### Task 1.13: Learning from nature

Is learning best undertaken by learning for oneself? How far is your own practice governed by concepts that might be compatible with Rousseau’s idea of not interfering directly in the educational process for fear of corrupting learning?

*Further reading:* the clearest statement of Rousseau’s philosophy is given in Books I–III of Émile. Book V which covers the ‘last act in the drama of youth’ might be of more interest to the teacher in PCE.

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**Dewey**

John Dewey (1859–1952): Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago from 1894. Major educational works: Democracy and Education (1916) and Experience and Education (1938).

‘If in our own time the distinction between education in the traditional sense and vocational training, as increasingly demanded by a technological society, has become somewhat blurred, this is in part due to the influence of Dewey’s work’ (Russell [1959] 1989: 296). In the four decades since Russell asserted this balanced judgement, Dewey’s work has remained a subject for fierce criticism and passionate praise. For example, journalist Melanie Phillips criticized Dewey’s emphasis on process over product (knowledge) and argued that his influence on education has been ‘malign, revolutionary and destructive’ (Phillips 1996: 210), while Professor Frank Coffield claims that Phillips has misunderstood Dewey and agrees with him that education is the ‘fundamental method of social progress’ and is about ‘the formation of proper social life’ (Coffield 1997).

Dewey’s writings encourage such different interpretations. They are written with a radical reforming zeal that often masks the kernel of what he is saying. For teachers in PCE the key element of interest in Dewey’s work is his concern with vocational education and with using this to make education more relevant to students. It is important to understand what Dewey actually said because he is the most influential and frequently quoted philosopher in the PCE field, and because his work is subject to
various interpretations. (It would also be useful before tackling the discussion of vocationalism in Section 1.4.)

In *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey warns against the separation in modern society between the capacities of the young and the concerns of the adult. Direct sharing in the pursuits of adults becomes increasingly difficult. Therefore teaching in formal institutions becomes necessary. This teaching is less personal and vital, and formal instruction ‘easily becomes remote and dead – abstract and bookish’ (Dewey [1916] 1966: 8).

The teaching of subjects is held to be ‘specialist’ teaching. The ‘technical philosopher’ could be ‘ill advised in his actions and judgement outside of his speciality’: ‘Isolation of subject matter from a social context is the chief obstruction in current practice to securing a general training of mind. Literature, art, religion, when thus disassociated, are just as narrowing as the technical things which the professional upholders of general education strenuously oppose’ (Dewey [1916] 1966: 67). One of the ways of overcoming this is to ensure that the child’s native experience is not undervalued and that ‘active occupations’ form the basis of all teaching. This is the nearest Dewey comes to being ‘child-centred’. What his injunction intends is obviously achieved by the introduction of subjects such as gardening, woodworking and cooking, but for mathematics and science: ‘Even for older students the social sciences would be less abstract and formal if they were dealt with less as sciences (less as formulated bodies of knowledge) and more in their direct subject-matter as that is found in the daily life of the social groups in which the student shares’ (Dewey [1916] 1966: 201).

Dewey criticizes the individualism of Rousseau and sees ‘natural development’ as an aim of education, but one only partially stated if it refers only to our primitive powers. He sees nurture not as corrupting but as the development of those natural powers ([1916] 1966: 111–18, 123). There is, however, a particularly American form of individualism in Dewey, who accepted the myth of the frontier as something that had elevated American society above the worst features of the development of European capitalism. In this sense, he looks back to a pre-industrial world in which there is a harmony between learning and adult life. This leaves him closer to Rousseau than he thinks. The difference is that he believes that industrialization has created the possibility for a truly democratic society which can be achieved through education.

Ryan is correct to point out, in opposition to Dewey’s cruder critics, that he was not arguing that ‘the point of industrial training was to produce a docile workforce adapted to the needs of capitalist employers’ (Ryan 1995: 177). Dewey thought that capitalism was at best a semi-ambulant corpse but rejected the revolutionary route (Ryan 1995: 178). The central chapter in Dewey’s book is Chapter 7, ‘The Democratic Conception in Education’ (Dewey [1916] 1966: 81–99). He sets out a vision for education in terms of an end to the separation into classes by ending the division between ‘mental’ and ‘manual’ labour. This is experienced as the division between those who receive a ‘liberal education’ and those who receive something poorer, or mere training for work. He envisages an education that reflects the democratic ideal. Democracy is a form of associated living, with numerous and varied points of contact with a plurality of social groups, which in itself will perpetuate democracy (Dewey
Education shares these ideals and is therefore essential to democratic society.

Some writers have held Dewey’s chapter on vocationalism to be the poorest in the book. It is, however, Dewey’s clearest attempt to spell out the implications of his earlier chapters. Dewey defines vocationalism as ‘such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person because of the consequences they accomplish, and also useful to his associates’ (Dewey [1916] 1966: 307). It is neither ‘narrowly practical’ nor ‘merely pecuniary’. A later summary adds a temporal requirement: ‘A vocation is any form of continuous activity which renders service to others and engages personal powers on behalf of the accomplishment of results’ (Dewey [1916] 1966: 319). There is a clear emphasis here on the utility of what is undertaken to ‘others’ or society. The definition is also so general it covers activities we would not normally call vocational. For example it includes academic study and scholarship as a vocation, as training for an academic ‘career’. But here the question of ‘utility’, especially to society, makes no sense and can only be destructive of the quest for knowledge by subjecting it to the requirement of producing results or being useful to society (Anderson 1980b: 139–40).

Dewey claims that ‘the only adequate training for occupations is in training through occupations’ (Dewey [1916] 1966: 310, original emphasis). He argues that industrial society has created the necessity and possibility for educational reorganization but ‘there is a danger that vocational education will be interpreted in theory and practice as trade education’ ([1916] 1966: 316). The only way of avoiding this is the methodological one of producing in schools ‘a projection of the type of society we should like to realise, and by forming minds in accord with it gradually modify the larger and more recalcitrant features of adult society’ ([1916] 1966: 317).

Dewey sees education as essential to the achievement of a democratic society. By reflecting that society in its organization it will ensure that democracy comes into being or continues to develop and change. He stresses the importance of the pupil’s or student’s experience and of socially relevant activities or ‘occupations’ in the classroom. Dewey recognizes the dangers in how people may take his suggestions and rejects narrow training for work as a definition of ‘vocational education’.

Task 1.14: Dewey: for or against?

Dewey sets education the project of building a democratic society. How far are you in sympathy with this aim? Consider how it differs from the aim of education for Socrates and Rousseau.

These three philosophies of education will appear in discussions of curriculum ideology in broad categories such as classical humanism, humanism and social reconstructionism (Chapter 7) and in learning theory (Chapter 3) when cognitive, humanistic and empirical theories are discussed (behaviourism is merely an example of the latter). When working through these discussions, relate them to the philosophical positions outlined here. Remember that they may not always be distinct.
1.4 The ‘triumph’ of vocationalism

KEY ISSUES

‘Vocational education’ is understood in a variety of ways.
According to one particular view, questions of value and value judgement are outside its sphere.
Many have sought to reconcile vocational and liberal education.
The essential elements of the new educational initiatives of the 1980s could be said to fit a special needs deficit model.
The potential of technology to transform lives is the subject of a wide range of views from those of a variety of political persuasions.

Task 1.15

Try to describe what you understand by ‘vocational education’. Review your statement when you have finished reading this section.

The aim of this section is to examine how ‘vocationalism’ has come to dominate thinking across the whole of PCE. It is related to the general themes we have discussed in the two previous sections: the attack upon ‘academic’ or subject-based knowledge and Dewey’s criticism of the arid and dry nature of formal education. It is our contention that vocationalism has triumphed in the sense that it dominates our thinking and that Tony Blair’s three priorities for Britain, ‘education, education, education’, could refer to an impoverished notion of education dominated by vocationalism.

Vocationalism is a term used to refer to various theories, ideological positions and some simplistic attitudes that have attempted to link the world of work to a greater or lesser degree with education. Such approaches often suggest that, as work is an important part of life, we should find a place for it in schools and colleges (Lewis 1997). But the variety of these theories and the unanalysed popular usage of terms can seem confusing or, worse still, simply unproblematic. The situation is so chronic that one set of academics has been led to declare that ‘No single characteristic defines this new vocationalism. It is marked by a variety of policies and programmes and diversity of action and actors. But it is guided, if not propelled, by a determination to establish closer and better interrelationships between the experience of both formative education and preparatory training and the working world’ (Skilbeck et al. 1994: 2).

A general trend we can identify at the outset is for vocationalist initiatives to be presented as part of a package of a supposedly radical rethinking of the aims of education, or providing the basis for reforms leading to a more relevant or modern, technologically based education. They often claim to be more democratic, offering a better education for the masses rather than a pale shadow of the elitist education offered to the better-off or to specific social groups. The terminology of the theorists
of vocationalism can be particularly confusing. For example, we come across one theorist arguing for a ‘critical vocationalism’ (Donald 1992). Intellectual acrobatics are required even to attempt to understand what this could possibly mean. On a more everyday level, we find teachers using the phrase ‘vocational education’ in relation to a variety of courses, which may have some educational element, or may simply be training courses. Either way, there is no doubt that the advocates of the priority of practice over knowledge have triumphed. Frequent references to the ‘vocational element in education’ are seen as unremarkable. It is, however, possible to argue for an education that is entirely theoretical and to see it as a duty to combat those who would promote an education that is in any way practical. This would be the traditional position of the liberal educator. However extreme this view may seem, it is coherent and deserves attention (Anderson 1980c: 157).

There does seem to be a consistent refusal by participants in debates about vocationalism to recognize important conceptual distinctions. The Kennedy Report, Learning Works (Kennedy 1997b), talks throughout in an undiscriminating way about ‘learning’. Kennedy makes no attempt to analyse what we mean by ‘learning’ in different contexts. Thus learning to use a lathe, to chop vegetables, learning citizenship, mathematics and ancient languages are given a spurious equality. The treatment of complex philosophical distinctions and debates as easily resolved or as semantic questions reaches its apogee in the introduction to the third Dearing Report (Dearing 1997). Here we find Dearing declaring with unmasked enthusiasm that the near future will see the ‘historic boundaries between vocational and academic education breaking down, with increasingly active partnerships between higher education institutions and the worlds of industry, commerce and public service’ (p. 8, emphasis added). Dearing writes as if the ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ divide was something totally unproblematic to be resolved through the mutual respect of the partners as they work together.

The recognition of an academic and vocational divide has been part of the debate about the nature of education for over 2000 years. Aristotle in the Politics notes that in his own day ‘nobody knows’ whether the young should be trained in studies that are useful ‘as a means of livelihood’ or to ‘promote virtue’ or in the ‘higher studies’ (discussed in Lester Smith 1957: 11). The point is not that nothing changes; this would be ahistorical, as ancient Greek society and Britain today bear no comparison. But at least it is apparent from Aristotle that the Greeks felt that there was a real and important problem here. Contemporary discussions are simply trivial and sanguine by comparison.

It is the intention in this section to provide an introduction to what should be a real debate by providing a critical guide to the discussions of the various types of vocationalism that have manifested themselves since James Callaghan (the Labour prime minister 1976–79) launched the ‘Great Debate’. We deliberately restrict our use of the label ‘new’ vocationalism because, if it has any meaning, it applies only to one very particular post-war period.
The way we think now

To understand the sense in which vocationalism is triumphant, it is worthwhile locating it within a more general intellectual malaise. This has been well described by writer and critic Richard Hoggart, who sees contemporary Britain as being swamped by a tidal wave of relativism, which he defines as ‘the obsessive avoidance of judgements of quality or moral judgement’ (Hoggart 1996: 3). One element of this dominant mood is the acceptance of vocationalism at all levels of the educational system. Arguments about improving the quality of life, or turning around Britain’s economic performance, are often supported by talk of the need for skills training, or of the promotion of some form of vocational education or training. This is apparently a ‘classless impulse’ (Hoggart 1996: 220), but, Hoggart argues, only to those who oppose the traditional notion of education being a good in itself, whatever its practical benefits. It does seem to be true that vocationalism, as a standpoint which avoids debate and discussion about important differences of value, is widespread. A glimpse of the extent of the obsession with the vocational is apparent from the following passage from the *Economist* (1996):

> On the face of it, the case for generous public support for training is strong. Unskilled people are much more likely to be out of work than skilled ones; if only their qualifications could be improved, they might find jobs more readily. Not only would they benefit, but so would the economy as a whole. A better-trained productive workforce would be a more productive one; so more training ought to mean not just lower unemployment but faster growth and higher living standards. Unions like training programmes because they can use them to push up wages. Academics like them because they increase demand for education. Parents like them because they give out-of-work, out-of-school youths something to do. Prophets of a postmodern society praise them as part of an ethic of lifelong learning. And employers don’t mind because the public pays the bill.

Everyone is in favour of training. A recent study showed that a massive 66 per cent of workers thought that education and training were the means of progressing their careers (Hudson et al. 1996). There is constant discussion in the media about a ‘skills gap’ (IRDAC 1990) to be filled by training. But the *Economist* simply refers to training for work rather than vocational education. This is sometimes referred to as ‘vocationalism’ in its old or traditional sense of training to do a job. The argument of the article is that the most successful training takes place in the workplace and is provided by employers, as opposed to training provided by the state or its quangos. This may be true but it is dynamic economies which are referred to to illustrate the argument. There is a chicken and egg question to be resolved here. Is the problem identified as a ‘skills gap’ a result of relative economic decline or its cause? Any skills gap which does exist must surely be resolved at the political or economic level and not by scapegoating the employed and unemployed as unskilled. It could, indeed, be seen as a ‘jobs gap’. In fact the debate about a ‘skills gap’ is one-sided, being largely promoted by employers’ organizations. When asked to specify skills needed, most employers provide answers in terms of moral or personal qualities that have little to do
with ‘skills’ in the sense that most people understand the term. We think of a skill in a traditional way as relating to, say, carpentry, engineering or IT. However, the skills needed at work are usually those that can be learned in a few weeks with minimal difficulty. The dynamic of industry is to reduce, diminish or replace such skills (Marx [1867] 1974: 407–8, 457–8; Korndörffer 1991: 222–3). Even in the case of IT, it is far from certain that we are at the dawn of a ‘new era’ or ‘knowledge age’ (Woudhuysen 1997). It is important to recognize that there is a debate here that is closely related to our assumptions about whether we face a ‘skills gap’ or a ‘jobs gap’.

**Task 1.16**

Looking at your own area of expertise, identify any ‘skills’ that are in short supply. Are the skills you identified technical, educational or personal? Could they be met within PCE?

Liberal education (early twentieth century)

There have been many attempts to analyse various forms of vocationalism, and most of these attempt to reconcile ‘vocational’ and ‘liberal’ education (e.g. Williams 1994: 97–8). In Britain, the traditional or ‘narrow view’ of vocationalism as ‘training for a job’ was mostly rejected by educational reformers. R.H. Tawney was perhaps the best-known writer whom we associate with this line of thinking (Tawney [1922] 1988). Not only conservatives or traditionalists but also most socialists and radicals sought a decent liberal education in traditional and modern subjects for everyone. Access to the whole of humanity’s cultural inheritance was the demand that was made. What was good enough for the sons of the masters was good enough for the workers. Vocational training was held to be entirely a matter for employers. This does not mean that individuals did not seek vocational training, but the traditional position was against vocationalism. This must be stressed as it is now almost forgotten, particularly by proponents of a ‘democratic’ education. According to this view, there is simply no connection between ‘education’ and ‘training’. It could be argued that work-related training does go on in schools and colleges, but this does not establish anything other than an organizational connection between the two.

Training for jobs (the 1960s)

In the 1960s, employers relied upon the state to provide training in technical colleges but the employer was responsible for the day release of young employees. The lack of system in this method of training led to its being called ‘stop gap’ or ‘gap filling’ by many critics (Hall 1994: 43–5), but whatever its faults it was clearly related to training for jobs. When Harold Wilson spoke to the 1962 Labour Party conference of forging a new Britain in the ‘white heat of the technological revolution’ there was no other conception in anyone’s mind but real training for real jobs. The main debates were about ‘upskilling’ the workforce. This is a reminder that talk of technological revolution is not new and in the 1960s the technological revolution put man on the moon.
(compare Ainley 1988: 143 who argues ‘technological change is developing exponentially’). We can consider vocationalism as training for jobs as the major form of training up to the mid-1970s.

Training without jobs (the 1970s)

In the 1970s, economic crisis and rising youth unemployment changed things. One clear consequence of James Callaghan’s ‘Great Debate’ was the systematic involvement of industry in the planning of the educational process. There were other elements too. The increasing role of the state in directing vocational training in a time of financial cutback has been well discussed (Benn and Fairley 1986; Finn 1987; Ainley 1988, 1990). The training on offer was still largely related to jobs. It is important to remember the general antagonism and resistance there was to the various adult and youth training initiatives. There were youth protests and opposition from the trade unions, trades councils and political groups. The main criticisms were of ‘slave labour’ schemes or the use of ‘cheap labour’ to replace existing jobs. Out of this grew an emphasis on pre-vocational and basic skills training. This transitional period is one in which the concept of ‘vocationalism’ starts to shift in meaning from ‘day release’ or ‘stop gap’ provision towards ‘pre-vocational provision’. We could date it as beginning in 1976 but its fullest flowering is in the period of the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) from 1983 to 1989. Most analyses focus on the increasing or changed form of state involvement with the training of young people (see Hickox 1995). While these discussions are important it is our argument that the curriculum developments proposed help us understand the long-term impact of these changes rather than simply seeing them as a matter of the state crudely forcing young people into years of slave labour.

The ‘new’ vocationalism (the 1980s)

Employers in this crisis situation were asking: why should we be training young workers who cannot benefit from work because of their attitudes, lack of basic skills or poor discipline? Although this attitude ran counter to the facts, it became the basis of the Manpower Services Commission’s (MSC) development of a range of training initiatives, culminating in the YTS, which were available to all unemployed young people. This pre-vocationalism is the basis of what came to be called the ‘new’ vocationalism. What was on offer was a curriculum derived from special needs programmes based on the sort of personal and social training necessary to prepare youngsters with learning difficulties for the world of work. The limitations of these pre-vocational courses and initiatives did not stop them being successful as a stage in the development of vocationalism.

YTS can be seen as a failure if judged by comparison with earlier vocational training in the narrow sense, and as a pre-vocational scheme. It provided employment for only two-thirds of the trainees who completed the courses and this employment was often short term. The only vocational element in these courses was an increasingly tenuous belief on the part of the providers that young people could get a job. However, there were wider forces influencing young people and their teachers. This was the decade in which the Further Education Unit (FEU) produced its influential
documents winning over the newer college lecturer with curriculum-based papers. Lower-level technical college courses and private training courses sprang up all over the country funded by the MSC. The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) gave educational developments and experiment a free rein. The labour market reality of the time was that there was no work in the traditional sense of a job for life. Employment was going to be intermittent and temporary, and life at college was better than unemployment. A traditional life pattern of the time was for young people to move from a YTS to employment, then on to a college course or evening class, then into a period of unemployment and than back into another, adult, training scheme. Many of those who worked in colleges or were real or potential trainees were totally sceptical about the value of these courses. But a lumpen scepticism is entirely passive: the pragmatic lessons of unemployment had been learned, and youth rebellion did not materialize. The unions and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) came back on-side to discuss training. A credit-led boom brought the yuppie into temporary being, and in this climate there was the expectation that you could make it and find a job but you were on your own.

The new vocationalism is often seen as a Thatcherite victory in creating an employer-dominated training scheme for young people. The early opposition to the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) and YTS faded away leaving only a few radical educationalists arguing for something better. However, many of those opposing YTS schemes did not see them as a betrayal of the ideal of a liberal education for all, but the failure to provide something different. These writers were influenced by Marx and Engels’ occasional comments on education (Marx [1867] 1974: 453–4, [1875] 1968: 329; Engels [1878] 1975: 378–82) and generally promote technological education. For example, Willis (1987) and Ainley (1990, 1993) argue that the working classes need to improve their skills for sale on the market and radical thinkers do them a disservice by not arguing for a form of vocational education that will meet their needs as a class. Willis (1987: xvii) puts this case well: ‘how is it, and is it, possible to reconcile the tensions between training as class reproduction and training as working-class interest more in the favour of the working class?’ Ainley (1993: 93) sees technological advance as the answer:

In a modernising economy, education and training must raise the skills of all workers from the bottom up . . . Education and training will then integrate rather than separate mental and manual labour . . . New technology provides the potential to enable all working people to become multiskilled and flexible in a true sense . . .

Precursors of these views include Harold Wilson’s populist technological revolution in the 1960s and the ‘post-Fordist’ utopian visions of the 1980s. Such arguments have been savagely attacked as being unrelated to the reality of contemporary capitalism (Roberts et al. 1994), as this level of training would simply make employment too expensive. With an eye on profits there is no possibility that employers or the state would promote such training and the result would be redundancy for the mass of workers who would be too expensive to employ (see Yaffe 1978: 12–13). The illusion lies in a belief in the power of technology to transform people’s lives rather than a
political movement doing so, which has been a popular view since the end of the cold war. But such views are not necessarily implied by a Marxist analysis as Brian Simon proved in his defence of liberal education in response to the ‘Great Debate’ (Simon 1985). The consequence of arguments about the possibility of a new industrial revolution which will benefit workers is a convergence of the views of the ‘left’ and of the ‘right’, represented by employers. There is therefore no real opposition to vocationalism, only opposition to its crudest forms.

Education without jobs (the 1990s)

The period from 1989 to the present can be seen as one of containment. The number of young people staying on in FE increased dramatically to 89 per cent of all 16-year-olds, and led Nick Tate, the head of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), to comment in the summer of 1997 that the effective school leaving age was now 18. With 30 per cent of all young people going on to HE and many into other training schemes, we might make the effective leaving age 21 or even higher. The mass expansion of FE and HE has few critics, and even they see some basis to be positive about aspects of the work of the new universities (Ainley 1994). This period of containment is also the period of the qualification explosion. Demand for NVQs, GNVQs, GCSEs, A levels, degrees, credit-bearing courses and in-service qualifications seems never ending. The expansion of qualifications available and the apparent improvement in their attainment by young people has been questioned, and one writer is notorious for calling the whole thing a sham (Phillips 1996). Certainly, qualifications are now required for jobs that were previously thought to be unskilled, such as classroom assistants. We need to ask if there is any element of vocationalism here. Perhaps only in the residual sense of ‘employability’ which was a theme that grew out of government papers and reports in the mid-1990s (DfEE 1995a) and is highlighted in the Report of the Commission on Social Justice (CSJ 1994: 175–6). Employability is divorced from vocational skills or even from pre-vocational skills, so why even refer to ‘employability’ as having to do with jobs at all? Why not just talk of ‘learning’ and ‘education’? This is certainly a popular move with politicians, and educationalists are also seeking a move away from vocationalism: ‘Serious attention now needs to be given to educating as opposed to training a majority of the population hitherto denied access to further and higher education’ (Avis et al. 1996: 180).

So, is vocationalism defeated? The answer is ‘no’. Mainstream education is dominated by the vocational themes of a work-related, often competence-based curriculum, the introduction of pre-vocational or personal and social development under the guise of ‘employability’ and above all by the supposed need to adapt to a life in a new ‘communication’ or ‘technological’ age. Education as a whole has become vocationalized in the sense that the connection between the worlds of work and education is seen as necessary rather than contingent. What this means is that, whereas people once thought that the knowledge gained in getting an education was not irrelevant to the workplace, now the sort of knowledge that is on offer seems to be only that which is relevant to work. Even to lecturers in vocational areas this must be seen as a complete debasement of knowledge. As mentioned above, the Dearing Report
(Dearing 1997) sets out exactly this model for the development of HE. Even if we call for a return to ‘educating’ rather than ‘training’, what is likely to be provided is not a liberal education but a poor vocationalized replacement. The same can be said of the Kennedy Report (Kennedy 1997b) with its promotion of LLL. What is being offered is an ‘education’ that amounts to learning up to NVQ Level 3 – a vocational standard, and one that is set very low. This has parallels with the ‘back to basics’ drives promoted by some ministers that make Britain sound like a Third World country. Standards are being set but set much lower than they were at the time of the Robbins Report (Robbins 1963). Vocationalism is triumphant but it appears disguised as education – ‘education’ of a debased kind.

There is a major difficulty with this new focus on education, although it is almost self-contradictory for educationalists, professionally and philosophically, to oppose ‘education’. There are also other difficulties in making education a political priority. Education is a personal or individual matter. But individual aspirations and achievements cannot be a replacement for the vision of a society actually going somewhere. Even the narrowly work-related vocationalism that Dewey objected to and the socially divisive ‘new vocationalism’ had some sort of economic or political vision behind them. The new individualized educational curriculum that begins with key skills initiatives, extends through Curriculum 2000 and may become a reality with the introduction of personal advisers and the new Matriculation Diploma may leave people isolated and socially disconnected (see Chapter 9 for an introduction to these developments). A PCE system made up of isolated individuals, like a society of isolated individuals, can easily become fractious and discontented. This will not be the sort of discontent predicted by some writers (Bloomer 1996; Harkin et al. 2001; Tomlinson 2001) but a much more personal affair based on individual rather than social conflict. What explains this state of affairs – which reminds us of Margaret Thatcher’s assertion that ‘there is no such thing as society only individuals and their families’ – is the unpredicted and huge expansion of service industries (see Poynter 2000).

Cultural capital and the ‘therapeutic turn’ in PCE

The key asset that individuals now have in the labour market is not their specific vocational (or even academic) knowledge and skills but what Bourdieu (1986) calls their ‘cultural capital’. Cultural capital takes three forms: ‘connected to individuals in their general educated character – accent, dispositions, learning, etc.; connected to objects – books, qualifications, machines, dictionaries etc.; and connected to institutions – places of learning, universities, libraries, etc.’ (Grenfell and James 1998: 21). Having cultural capital ensures success in education and at work – particularly in gaining access to employment. It was once thought that the more qualifications people had the more productive they would be (sometimes called an increase in human capital), but at a time of credential inflation when qualifications are universal (there are even those which recognize common sense or forms of unskilled work such as many forms of domestic or caring work), other factors come into play in the job market (compare Young 1998: 152). From the period of the economic recession of the late 1980s the situation was unclear as to what was the major factor at play (see Bills 1988), but now it is fairly clear that the crucial factor is ‘cultural capital’. It is the
cultural capital that you have that makes you ‘competent’ in the modern work environment and this is a new interpretation of ‘competence’. This sense of competence cannot be acquired in the way that NVQ competences can. It would be wrong to consider this as the ever present ‘networking’ or ‘it depends on who you are or know’ emphasized by cynics and theorists of ‘social capital’. It is something qualitatively different. If PCE is still to keep a nexus between the curriculum on offer and the new service work it will – consciously or unconsciously – have to adapt to develop cultural capital. This is already happening in what is called ‘emotion work’, the ‘Have a nice day!’ training for McDonald’s and call centres.

There has been a growing debate as to whether the new work requires a different workforce more orientated around ‘emotion work’ or whether ‘aesthetic labour’ requires a different sort of training that is shifting towards a concern with ‘emotional literacy’ and ‘emotional intelligence’ (Mortiboys 2005). The obsessive concern with young people’s self-esteem is well known and there is a growing concern with ‘emotional well-being’ and even ‘happiness’ as educational goals (Ecclestone and Hayes 2007). There are sociological explanations as to why this has happened. The argument is that there is a general loss of confidence in the possibility of human progress that has led to a downplaying of the intellectual in favour of the emotional (Furedi 2004; Hayes 2006). In PCE the humanistic aspect of training is now dominant but has taken on a specific aspect which ignores the normal content of humanistic approaches, a liberal education or real skills involving the training of judgement, whether or not in the distorted form of CBET, and concentrates instead on ways of approaching the inner emotional life (Hayes 2003a, b, c, 2004). This a contested view, and Hyland, for example, still argues that it is the commodified form of CBET that is the major threat to proper education and training and that therapeutic elements in PCET are marginal (Hyland 2005, 2006). The debate continues.

The illusion that this provision of cultural capital, in therapeutic forms or not, will be ‘education’ rather than a different sort of preparation for work is contestable. The abstract notion of ‘cultural capital’ adopted by policymakers and academics, often merely reflects the views of what government and employers think people need to be employable in a changing world (Hayes 2003b). Thinking of ‘education’ as merely a preparation for work is now an almost universal assumption, as is thinking that education is all about the acquisition of ‘skills’. This functional view of education restricts and limits students, denying them the opportunity to achieve their potential. The difficulty for all those interested in the direction of PCE is what sort of education to propose in its place. A return to subject-based teaching and training grounded in knowledge – education for its own sake – seems impossible to argue for, either pragmatically or (for some) philosophically (Ainley 1999; Waugh 2000). But what is the alternative?

**Task 1.17**

We have looked at vocationalism in several forms, as narrow training, as pre-vocational training, as being concerned with employability, and in a ‘back to basics’ or ‘educational’ manifestation. We have also seen how the contemporary obsession with ‘education,
education, education’ meets changing workplace needs. We have outlined our belief that this new curriculum does not unlock human potential but restricts it to the needs of the workplace. What role do you consider that PCE has in unlocking human potential and do you think that, if there is an increasingly therapeutic aspect to PCE, that this hinders or fosters student achievement?

Related new professional standards for teachers and trainers in the lifelong learning sector

**Domain A: professional values and practice**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING</th>
<th>PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in the lifelong learning sector know and understand:</td>
<td>Teachers in the lifelong learning sector:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>AK 2.1</strong> Ways in which learning has the potential to change lives.</td>
<td><strong>AP 2.1</strong> Use opportunities to highlight the potential for learning to positively transform lives and contribute to effective citizenship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AK 2.2</strong> Ways in which learning promotes the emotional, intellectual, social and economic well-being of individuals and the population as a whole.</td>
<td><strong>AP 2.2</strong> Encourage learners to recognize and reflect on ways in which learning can empower them as individuals and make a difference in their communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AK 4.1</strong> Principles, frameworks and theories which underpin good practice in learning and teaching.</td>
<td><strong>AP 4.1</strong> Use relevant theories of learning to support the development of practice in learning and teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AK 4.3</strong> Ways to reflect, evaluate and use research to develop own practice, and to share good practice with others.</td>
<td><strong>AP 4.3</strong> Share good practice with others and engage in continuing professional development through reflection, evaluation and the appropriate use of research.</td>
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### Domain C: specialist learning and teaching

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING</th>
<th>PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers in the lifelong learning sector know and understand:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teachers in the lifelong learning sector:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CK 1.2 Ways in which own specialism relates to the wider social, economic and environmental context.</td>
<td>CP 1.2 Provide opportunities for learners to understand how the specialist area relates to the wider social, economic and environmental context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CK 4.2 Potential transferable skills and employment opportunities relating to own specialist area.</td>
<td>CP 4.2 Work with learners to identify the transferable skills they are developing, and how these might relate to employment opportunities.</td>
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