

INTRODUCTION



If you inspected a copy of the previous edition of our book you would notice that this chapter had moved from being the last to the first. While this book is intended to be very practical in its approach we believe there are important reasons for the early introduction of rather more theoretical perspectives. The first is that research and thinking about learning is yielding insights into teaching which helps us construct practical advice on a firmer foundation than previously. The second reason is because of the fundamental challenge it provides to the more traditional views and stereotypes that prevail about students and learning in higher education.

Teachers have been primarily interested in what and how much students learn and elaborate assessment methods have been devised to measure these. But in the last quarter of the twentieth century a considerable body of evidence accumulated which suggested that we need to become much more concerned with how our students learn and the contextual forces that shape their learning. We need to appreciate that some of our students are having difficulties with their studies arising not just from their lack of application or psychosocial problems, but from specific ways in which they study and learn. We must also appreciate that many of their difficulties are directly attributable to the assumptions we make about them, and the way we teach, organize courses, and conduct assessments.