to do something of the kind myself. 'Full On Learning states the obvious in an engaging manner', perhaps. 'Has a striking internal design and employs annoyingly modish jargon', maybe... A most perplexing addition to the canon, it has the shape and feel of a coffee table book, not to mention a generous palette of full colour throughout; yet it covers the important subject that gathers all of us together in the pages of this very journal. With its ‘feelgood’ delivery, an amalgam of commonsense practicality and have-a-punt theorisation – this in turn coupled with an urgent restlessness not to remain in the same mental space for too long – the book is an earnest music-hall comedian, desperate to reach the end of his repertoire before being asked to vacate the stage.

I mean this seriously. There is something frantic about Full On Learning (as one interpretation of the title might suggest – of which more below). The subtitle is derived from a Chinese proverb which is quoted in the early pages: 'Tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand.' Using (generally) short paragraphs and sections, tables, illustrations and bons mots – using, in other words, any trick in the pedagogic book – the author whisks us through digital learning, collaboration, feedback and motivation; we explore her thoughts on emotional intelligence and the importance of creative thought, the prose frequently interrupted by questions to the audience or a chart (ensuring, of course, that the what is preached is practised: the book does indeed appeal to a variety of learning styles).

In several ways, Full On Learning is original and quirky – even funky. (The publisher’s work is not always to my taste, but it is never dull.) What must be stressed, however, is this: it is in some of the areas of more rampant stabs at originality that the book looks like it’s trying too hard. Let us return, for example, to the subject of jargon. Every one of the twelve chapters starts with the words 'Full On...' – ‘Full On Powerful Learners', 'Full On Creative Thinking'; there is even a 'Full On Introduction' for pity’s sake – and it is probably worth considering if you are someone who will think this amusing and resourceful, or someone (like me) who thinks it’s overcooked. (While we’re on the subject, what does ‘full on’ actually mean? – mean to you? A five-second search reveals a grab-bag of possible definitions: complete; holding nothing back; intense; relentless; having a strong or wild personality; audacious; there is even a reference to menstruation! While it might have meant any number of different things to the author, it might also have been nice to know what dictionary she used.)

Full On Learning: Involve Me and I’ll Understand
Zoe Elder
Crown House Publishing (2012)
Review by David Mathew

In a book in which many core messages are boiled down to snappy, though often meaningless, one-liners ('Unpack your own expertise' for example), it seems apt
Different issues about the language itself pertain. If you are able to get through a sentence like the following without sighing – 'teaching can be viewed as a punctuation mark in the steady flow of semi-conscious and unconscious thoughts that run through a learner’s mind' – then you might well be Zoe Elder’s ideal reader. Or perhaps you prefer to ditch the metaphysics and get to grips with the pragmatic. 'Knowledge is power and in order to build new things you need a foundation of old things, just as in Newton’s famous quote about 'standing on the shoulders of giants'.' Well, quite. Elder has certainly read around, as her numerous supporters fervently aver herein. Indeed, the book’s endpapers are a collection of rhapsodic, nay, nigh-on climactic plaudits, harvested from a wide range of sources (sadly, not 'Full On Praise': a missed opportunity, I felt). The problem is, sometimes, that in its efforts to be all things to all educators, we have a good deal of short cuts to navigate. For example, one section is headed 'IRT = EA (CA + IA)', where IRT stands for intellectual risk-taking, EA is emotional age, CA is chronological age and IA is intellectual age. The book is crammed as full as an egg, on occasion with concepts such as this: concepts that might have benefited from at least the courtesy of a bit less rushed exposition.