
This article is based on a verbal presentation given to the Quality of Childhood Group in the European Parliament. Notes taken during the presentation were formulated into the article below, which has been checked and approved by Professor Ferre Laevers.

The Experiential Education Project

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SUMMARY

When we talk about the Quality of Education we distinguish three elements:

- 1. The context in which the education takes place*
- 2. The output of the education (objectives, outcomes)*
- 3. The Process to bring us from (1) to (2).*

The Experiential Education Project has a consistent approach to enhance the Context. With regards to the Output Mr Laevers pleads for a paradigm shift: it is not important what the child learns, but how he or she uses what was learnt. Furthermore he advocates deep-level learning, including intuitive intelligence.

With regards to the Process Professor Laevers explains that before asking whether students have learned something, we should focus on their well-being and their level of involvement. They indicate, at the level of the process, if we can expect any outcome.

When we talk about the Quality of Education we distinguish three elements:

1. The **Context** in which the education takes place
2. The **Output** of the education (objectives, outcomes)
3. The **Process** to bring us from (1) to (2).

It is not just about making a few changes to the educational framework, but we will have to look at education, and the three components mentioned above, in a new way. We are talking about a paradigm shift.

1. What kind of context should we create?

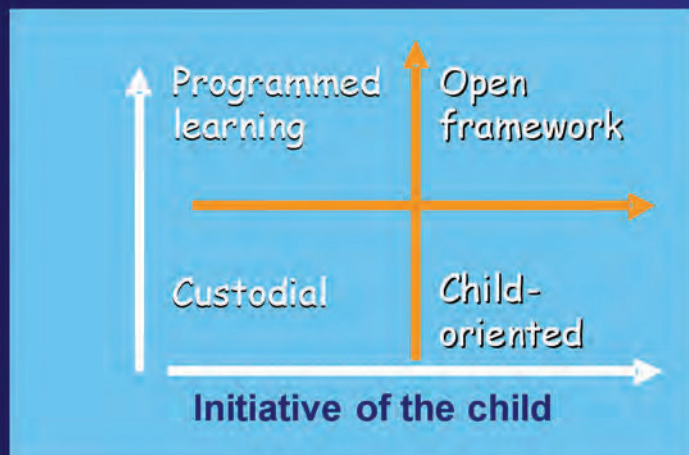
The basic qualities of the context should be:

- **Respect for the child.** This means the emancipation of the child. With this the child will also start to look at him/herself in a different way. This process develops in the same way as the emancipation of women in the 20th century.
- **A rich environment,** with many things to discover and lots of challenges. Some schools have such a poor environment. I dream of a tool which I can use to measure the richness

of an environment of the school in a similar way that you use a Geiger-counter.

- **An open framework approach** (see slide below – based on the HighScope Model). This is the educational programme of the future, where the educational process is the result of the interaction between the teacher and the student. Both the child and the teacher take a lot of initiative in a circular way. You don't know who is 'programming' who. You cannot even tell who is learning most.
- **Representation.** Part of the learning process is the process of having an impression, internalizing this impression, developing mental symbols of it and finally expressing it again. This is called the impression-expression cycle. Take the Reggio Emilia approach for children of 0 to 7 years old, where artists work with the children and where the children are encouraged to express themselves in the form of pieces of art. The famous book on the subject is appropriately entitled 'The hundred languages of children'. It is in the act of expression that the child really makes the subject his or her own and really creates a mental expression for himself. To say it another way: to express is to impress.
- **Communication, cooperative learning, inclusion, dialogue.** When children learn in a heterogeneous group all students learn more.
- **Observation.** Sufficient observation is part of the open-framework approach.

? An 'open framework' [High Scope]



2. What kind of output should we get?

A new paradigm is emerging within the educational field. This new paradigm consists of two new approaches to learning:

- competency based learning;
- deep-level learning.

Competency based learning is characterized by:

- Competences are life skills. In the dictionary: competency = the sufficiency of means for living;
 - The learning is not the point, what is important is how the learning is used.
- Integration of skills, insights, attitudes, practice;
- Bloom's taxonomy revisited: the old way: start with reproductive learning and finish with problem-solving and evaluation. The new practice: let learning take place at all levels all the time;
- The concept of implicit learning and 'stealth education'. A stealth fighter plane is a plane that cannot be seen on the radar. If we use this metaphor we suggest that a lot of learning, in and outside of school, is not spotted by the educational 'radar' and therefore not valued. An example: most will look down on 'computer games', but research shows that youngsters develop a number of skills through playing computer games, such as fine motor skills, making sense of a situation in an instant, identifying obstacles, acting without delay... not just in front of the screen but also in real life situations.

The concept of deep-level-learning is characterised by the following:

- A holistic approach;
 - far from a checklist of isolated skills
 - grasping the essence
 - speaks to the imagination and gives a sense of direction.
- Valuing intuitive intelligence;
 - to give an example: in kindergarten allow children to play with a tunnel of one meter in length, then they will learn intuitively what a meter is.

3. How to upgrade the educational system, so that we attain the desired outcomes

In the third part of this presentation I will focus on the process of moving from one phase to another.

The Quality of the Process depends on two areas:

- The well-being of the students and the teachers;
- The involvement of the students.

Wellbeing:

When children and adults:

- feel at ease;
- act spontaneously;
- are open to the world and accessible;
- express inner rest and relaxation;
- show vitality and self-confidence;
- are in touch with their feelings and emotions;
- enjoy life

we know that their mental health is secured.

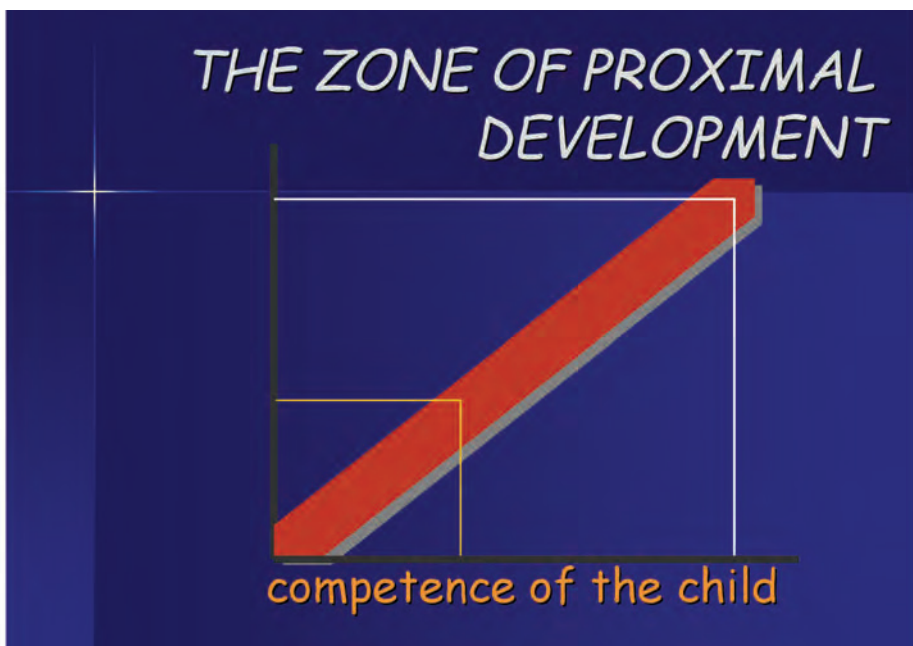
Involvement:

When children and adults are:

- concentrated and focused;
- interested, motivated, fascinated;
- mentally active;
- fully experiencing sensations and meanings;
- enjoying the satisfaction of the exploratory drive;
- operating at the very limits of their capabilities

we know that deep level learning is taking place.

The diagram below shows how involvement occurs in that small area where the difficulty of the task matches the capabilities of the learner and the latter feels challenged.



The Leuven Involvement Scale (from low to high) is a useful scale to be aware of:

1. no activity (lowest level of involvement)
2. interrupted activity
3. activity without intensity
4. activity with intense moments
5. continuous intense activity.

Monitoring wellbeing and involvement gives good results

The Experiential Education Project has developed several tools to assess levels of well-being and the involvement of children. One variant fits into a scanning procedure in which a sample of children of a class or school are observed for 2 minutes each and given a score. The other variant is used by practitioners to screen their children and express in a 5 point scale how they are doing in the setting – both in terms of well-being and involvement. The assessment is based on the observations over the last few weeks and repeated 3 times a year.

Observations regarding the monitoring:

- It contains key information to improve the quality;
 - It is equally a measure for the quality of the learning environment;
 - It provides immediate feedback and it is the shortest way to interventions
- It is a conclusive tool to detect risk of stagnation;
 - It tells who is (not) taking advantage of our efforts;
- The survey is universal:
 - It is not connected with any educational model or innovation;
 - It offers a common point of reference for the whole of the educational system.

Our aim is: the true emancipation of children

We are, in fact, talking about the emancipation of children. The process of the emancipation of children is the same as the process of the emancipation of women. When society started to perceive women in another way, the women started to perceive themselves differently and started to act differently. The same is now true for children.

To conclude with an appeal to the European Institutions:

Give Europe a Future:

- Install a process-oriented monitoring system:
 - use well-being and involvement as key-indicators;
 - quality improvement through immediate action;
 - from babies up to adults in professional training;
- Select key-targets for critical outcomes:
 - emotional health;
 - social competence;
 - self-organisation and entrepreneurship;

- intuitive intelligence and creativity;
- the basic attitudes of linkedness;
- Support the development of new instruments:
 - re: for the context, the process and the outcomes;
- Stimulate a specified kind of research:
 - bout good practice;
 - with a pre- and post test design;
- Help to create fair funding:
 - why is there an imbalance between the human and the positive sciences? If we really want to have an impact on improving our societies, greater research efforts are necessary in the human sciences;
 - regulations can be simplified without losing control;

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