

**HMIE EARLY YEARS  
GOOD PRACTICE CONFERENCE**

*Monday 3 December 2007*

**DYNAMIC LEARNING  
AND PRACTICE**

**CONFERENCE REPORT**

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## **Conference aims**

The aims of the conference were to

- ✓ reflect on how young children are enabled to become successful learners
  - ✓ focus on what constitutes effective early years practice
  - ✓ emphasise the importance of challenge of progression in learning for all children
  - ✓ reinforce the links between educational research and effective practice
- and
- ✓ provide opportunities for participants to discuss and exchange ideas informally
  - ✓ support networking by sharing good practice.

## **Background**

This is the third in a series of Early Years Good Practice conferences provided by HMIE. The purpose of these is to support early years practitioners from pre-school and the early years of primary school to share ideas and learn from one another about the practical aspects of managing the continuity of children's learning from pre-school provision into primary school. Staff from primary schools, nurseries and education authorities have delivered seminars at each conference. They have provided delegates with first hand information about good teaching practice.

The keynote address for this conference and for last year's was given Professor Dr Ferre Laevers from the University of Leuven in Belgium. His research into how children learn and how learning can be monitored and extended by the adults around them has been central to many developments within Scotland and in many other countries across the world. His enthusiastic commitment to the development of early years' services has been recognised and welcomed warmly by delegates.

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December 2007

**Graham Donaldson**  
**Her Majesty's Senior Chief Inspector**

**Slide 1**  
**Dynamic Learning and Practice**  
**MOVING ON!**

Good morning. I am delighted to be able to join you all here this morning. You may not be aware but the conference has been hugely oversubscribed and we have been unable to accept all of the applications to attend. The programme today has been built on the success of last year's conference, Dynamic Learning. At that conference Professor Laevers held the audience in thrall and I am extremely pleased that Ferre and his colleague Julia Moon are with us again today. Ferre's stimulating and informative input was warmly welcomed. Listeners found his research, his enthusiasm and his utter commitment to early years inspirational.

Today is again about professional development. The focus has moved on from last year to consider the issues which are central to teaching and learning in the early years of the primary school. Your presence here today, and the huge application for this conference is testament to the commitment by staff, at all levels, to the ongoing improvement of practice in the early years – both in pre-school and into the early years of primary school.

*Slide 2 - photographs of children not available on the website.*

We have all been aware for many years of the positive effects of high quality pre-school education. Almost all of Scotland's three to five year olds now attend some form of pre-school provision. Their experiences vary but in the main most children have good or very opportunities to develop as dynamic young learners – a very few have an excellent experience on which they can build their future learning. The skills and qualities of staff working with pre-school children are central to ensuring high quality learning experiences. The recent HMIE report, '*The Key Role of Staff in Providing Quality Pre-School Education*,' makes clear the importance of highly qualified early years staff and the role they play in developing young children as learners. There is now a very strong emphasis on providing a range of professional development courses many to degree level for staff who work in pre-school. In addition, there is an evolving process of teacher involvement in pre-school centres. Highly effective centres make good use of the skills and qualities of all staff and encourage each member of staff to have a role in the development of practice and in the leadership of the centre. In these centres 'leading the learning' is a role shared across staff teams and supported by high quality staff relationships, interactions and the professional leadership of the headteacher and of individuals within the centre.

What has been less apparent are the longer term effects of high quality pre-school provision. However, through inspection findings and by the outcomes of research the impact and centrality of high quality pre-school experiences has been re-enforced.

At a recent HMIE conference Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford from the University of London discussed the findings of the '*Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary 3-14 Project (EPPSE 3-14)*' undertaken by Iram and her colleagues. This was a large study involving over 3000 children in a variety of types of provision and from a range of English local authorities.

Iram and her team used a range of measures to evaluate children's progress over time and this aspect is particularly relevant to us today. The findings of the study identified quite clearly the continuing and very significant impact of the quality of nursery provision on children's learning and progress.

*Slide 3*

**Impact at age 10 of...**

**...less effective pre-school centres**

- attainment is no better than that of children who did not attend pre-school provision

**...effective pre-school centres**

- attainment continues to be influenced positively

*Source: EPPSE (3-14) Iram Siraj-Blatchford IOE, University of London*

Perhaps it is not surprising that attendance at a poorly performing nursery has little effect on the children's future learning. The corollary of this however, is that the long term effect of attendance at a very good or excellent nursery continues to have an impact on children's learning right on until the age of 10.

*Slide 4*

**Outcomes for children**

**Outcomes in reading and mathematics are significantly better for children who attended**

- quality pre-school provision
- effective primary schools.

**Larger effects are found for mathematics.**

*Source: EPPSE (3-14) Iram Siraj-Blatchford IOE, University of London*

Where children have attended poor quality nursery provision and then move on into a P1 classroom where teaching is less skilled these children are unlikely to succeed well in the longer term. In these classrooms, the approach may be more formal. The quality of interaction between the teacher and individual children may be poor. Children may be seated at their tables for lengthy periods of time writing or colouring in worksheets. The purpose of this activity may not be clear to the children – nor to many adults. Is colouring in really a key skill for children in P1, or could they be developing other more important skills?

*Slide 5*

***The child who has a better experience of learning at home, goes to an effective pre-school centre and then attends a very good primary school has a combination of 'protective' experiences that increase the chances of higher achievement and better social and behavioural outcomes.***

*Source: EPPSE (3-14) Iram Siraj-Blatchford IOE, University of London*

The combined effect of two positive experiences for children is crucial. That the effect, the 'protective' positive effect, of the quality of pre-school provision is sustained through to the age of 10 is one on which we should reflect carefully. Particularly, where those effects relate to cognitive outcomes like language and mathematics and very importantly to how children behave and learn to relate to one another and to adults. The expectations of everyone here today will be that all pre-school and primary children should have access to the highest quality educational provision. And you will be familiar with the descriptors of quality set out in the *'Journey to Excellence'*, in the *'Child at the Centre 2'*, and in a *'Curriculum for Excellence'*.

**Slides** - photographs of children not available on the website.

HMII do see very effective practice at P1 and P2 – but we do not see nearly enough. Inspectors observe staff employing practical and stimulating approaches to teaching and learning in early years primary classrooms. Children are hungry to learn. Teachers are keen to ensure that young children continue to be dynamic learners. They adopt innovative and active approaches to teaching which interest and enthuse the children who find learning enjoyable in its own right. Teachers and support staff interact effectively with children and ensure well-timed and focused class or group teaching. They provide activities which enable children to be independent and creative. They have achieved a balance in the range of activities they provide. Children are encouraged to be curious about what they are learning – and to feel that learning is relevant and meaningful. They are encouraged to develop a 'can do' attitude and to learn through activities which generate enthusiasm, interest and excitement.

The 3-5 curriculum provides a very strong basis for developing approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. It provides the foundation for developing children as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Primary staff should continue to build on its strengths and the innovative practice found in the best of nursery provision.

The outcomes for children should be balanced across attainment and achievement. Attainment is not an end in itself. Children should of course make progress as learners and in learning to learn. They should be challenged, interested and stimulated. Learning has to be rounded and meaningful. Learning should be consolidated. Knowledge and skills do have to be taught, but they should be developed and rehearsed in practical contexts. Learning has to have depth and meaning if it is to have any value at all.

The recent HMIE publication, *'Child at the Centre 2'*, aligns the evaluation of quality within the pre-school sector with that used in primary and secondary schools, and in children's services. This approach has been welcomed by education authorities and headteachers. The quality indicators can be used by staff in nursery settings and in primary schools. There is a stronger emphasis on the outcomes for children and given the findings of the *'Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary 3-14 Project (EPPSE 3-14)'* that is quite appropriate.

Headteachers and staff have a clearly defined and shared process for evaluating the quality of their provision across pre-school and into the primary school. They can focus, not just on basic transition arrangements, but on how best to develop and improve their practice in order to build on best nursery practice and ensure that children make effective progress in their learning. Partnerships with parents are crucial and all schools should ensure that parents are fully involved in developments and in planning change across nursery and the early primary stages.

The *Journey to Excellence* provides a professional development tool on which staff can reflect, discuss and use as practice evolves. The materials will be helpful in confirming interesting ideas, in supporting change and in initiating new ideas and approaches within

schools. Many schools are well on their way to being excellent schools. Our aim is to support others as they make the journey. The *Journey to Excellence* series is aimed at all staff. The materials are aspirational and inspirational, they are practical, theoretically sound and built on what we know to be effective practice. HMIE will build and extend the resources available to you over the coming months and years. The emphasis is on impact – what makes a difference to children's learning and progress.

*Slide*

**Early stages learning should...**

- **build on children's pre-school experiences**
- **challenge children to think and interact, to be involved and curious, and to explore and investigate**
- **enable children to become literate and numerate and lifelong learners.**

Overall, early education should build progressively, be challenging and satisfying, and establish key skills for future learning.

The message for all of us is clear. Good is not good enough. There are still improvements to be achieved. The challenge for primary schools is to extend and embed practice which is active, stimulating and responsive to children's needs at all stages of the school.

The Scottish Government's commitment to the early years is clear and the forthcoming Early Years Strategy will be key driver for change and improvement over the next few years. I know that the Minister for Children and Early Years, Adam Ingram, has a strong personal commitment and I am delighted to welcome him here, and to invite the Minister to address the conference.

## **Ministerial Address**

### **Adam Ingram, Scottish Government Minister for Children and Early Years**

Thank you Graham.

I am delighted to be here this morning to talk to you about the Government's approach to early years and about some of our specific policies on early education.

It can't have escaped your attention that early years is a key priority for this Government. Since coming to office in May we have placed early years at the forefront of our agenda and we have already begun to deliver on our manifesto commitments.

Most of you here will be aware that we have increased the entitlement to pre-school education from 412\_ to 475 hours. And we announced in the budget on 14 November that we will be increasing the hours of pre-school education to 570 a year from August 2010. That's a big investment and a clear signal of our commitment to pre-school education.

But our agenda stretches well beyond pre-school into every area where there are opportunities to improve children's lives in the early years. We know from the substantial body of research that the early years are key to building the sort of Scotland we want for the future. One where children are successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors

We have many strengths to build on in early years, but also a long way to go. Anyone who has looked at the Millennium Cohort Study data on gaps in development at age 3 can't help but have been struck by the inequalities that affect children in the first years of life. So while we have made a big commitment to pre-school, perhaps the bigger challenge we face is in reaching beyond pre-school into the deeper factors that affect outcomes for young children and ensuring vulnerable families receive the intensity of support they need.

We want to take a far-reaching and comprehensive look at these issues and will be developing an early years strategy over the coming year.

The strategy will:

- be long term,
- cover pre-birth to 8 years old, including pre-conception issues such as parenting education;
- cover the range of services that support young children and their families; and
- focus on a preventative approach

Four themes have emerged as being central to the strategy:

Firstly, we see building parenting and family capacity, particularly in the pre-birth and very early stages of a child's life as key to improving future outcomes.

Most of a child's basic needs in the early years are met by parents, carers, families, and their wider social networks. Children who live in families where parental capacity is high often go on to have better outcomes. Indeed, research tells us that the home learning environment is one of the biggest factors in educational outcomes for children.

We know that there is a group of parents who are not so well equipped to meet the needs of their children, either because their own parenting skills are not so well developed, or because of wider factors such as poverty, domestic violence, mental health problems, isolation and so on. I'm sure you see the effects of that every day – children arriving in pre-school whose

development is behind their peers already and who may also have a range of other problems. It's important that we start making an impact on the lives of those children in the pre-birth to 3 period, and that support for parents is sustained through the pre-school and school years.

The second theme is creating communities that provide a supportive environment for children and families.

The community has a significant role to play in supporting positive childhoods and the quality of experience for children that will help them build resilience. Many pre-school centres and primary schools already play an important role at the heart of their communities and there is plenty of scope to enhance that. But the bigger issue here is to try to restore some sense of collective responsibility for the wellbeing of young children. Challenges in Government don't come more difficult than that, but if we are to really make a difference we can't shy away from these sorts of issues.

The third theme we want to pursue through the strategy is delivering services that meet the needs of children and families in a holistic way.

The early years service landscape remains quite fragmented, with a range of health, social work, education and childcare services. Several of these services encompass public, private and voluntary sector provision, making the landscape even more complex. I want to look at a range of possible approaches, from children's centres to more effective use of networks and partnerships to try to deliver a seamless experience for children and families.

The final theme is building a workforce that can deliver high quality, integrated services. We are continuing the work to develop the skills and professionalism of that early years and childcare workforce. For example, I recently launched the Standard for Childhood Practice which sets out what is expected of manager or lead practitioner of an early years or childcare service. This is a key part of the drive to raise qualifications in the wider workforce.

And we are committed to supporting the role of nursery teachers in early education - because we believe that nursery teachers provide a positive influence on children's learning in pre-school education. HMIE's recent publication on the *Key Role of Staff in Providing Quality Pre-School Education* reported that overall the quality of children's experiences was of a higher standard in nursery schools and classes where traditionally teachers were employed.

The concordat agreed with CoSLA last month makes specific reference to ensuring that there is access to a teacher for every pre-school child as soon as possible. I am well aware that progress towards this goal will vary across local authorities. Some, such as West Lothian, are pretty much there already while others have much further to go. Authorities will need to look at the local situation, including new teachers needed to make progress towards class size reductions in P1 to P3; replacing teachers retiring from the profession; and the direction of school rolls. But we believe there is scope for significant progress and will be increasing the number of teachers in teacher training in order to do so

Let me turn for a few minutes more directly towards practice, which will be the main subject of the conference today. It is with some trepidation that I venture into this area, sandwiched as I am between Graham Donaldson and Professor Laevers.

Let me first of all say that I think the development of a Curriculum for Excellence provides great opportunities for improving practice and renewing our focus on delivering positive outcomes for children and young people. Building the Curriculum 2 has already started to lay strong foundations for early learning and reinforced what I suspect all of you already know – that active learning lies at the heart of successful practice for young children.

I expect to see a transformation in early primary to build on the successful practice that is established in pre-school and am aware that this is already happening in some areas, where experienced nursery teachers are now working in early primary to help bring their experience of active learning into the primary classroom.

One of the more challenging aspects for authorities will be ensuring this continuity of learning and progression across all types of early years providers. There is excellent practice evolving in many local authority nursery classes and schools where there is a close relationship between the nursery and the primary school. But we also need to make progression a reality for children in private and voluntary sector pre-school centres. Only by doing so can we ensure that all children have the opportunity they deserve to build the four capacities.

And let me stress the importance of a commitment to continuing professional development in improving practice and delivering Curriculum for Excellence. Your attendance here today is a signal of your personal commitment and the fact that this event was over-subscribed is a strong indication of the appetite for continuous improvement shared by early years educators. If we can develop that commitment at all levels of the workforce and in all sectors, we will be well placed for the future.

Returning to the strategy for a moment, one of the most important aspects of it will be the involvement of partners in its development. The new relationship with between central and local government is about developing policy in partnership and the early years strategy will be an opportunity to see this happen in practice. This will be a different and possibly challenging way of working. But if we want to make this a strategy that will last for the long term we need to approach it in an open and inclusive manner that harnesses the wide range of expertise that exists. That is why we need input from other key partners in developing our framework for early years. We will also want to hear from the people who deliver services at the front line – people who know from first hand experience what the challenges are in meeting the needs of children and their families, especially when those needs are complex and demanding.

Of course, this is not just about partnership with service providers. We should never forget that strategy development is aimed at improving the lives of children and their families and we will be developing processes that give them a voice within the strategy.

So we have a big task ahead of us but one that is critical if we are to provide a better experience of early years for Scotland's children and their families. And people like you will be key to making it happen. If there is one thing I want you to leave here today feeling, it is that you have the ability and the opportunity to improve the future of Scotland through your work, and that you have the support of Government in doing so.

I know that you have an interesting day ahead of you. People who have spoken to me about Professor Laevers describe him as “inspirational” and as one of the most expert figures in early years anywhere in the world. I am grateful to HMIE for bringing him back to Scotland and I hope that you enjoy his presentation. Most of all, I hope that it helps you reflect on how you can improve outcomes for children.

## **Deep-level-learning and the Experiential Approach in Early Childhood and Primary Education.**

Prof. Dr. Ferre Laevers

### **Introduction**

What constitutes ‘quality’ in care and education? From the point of view of the parent, the counsellor, the head teacher, the curriculum developer the question is very often answered by expressing expectations with regard to educational context and teachers’ actions: infrastructure and equipment, the content of activities, teaching methods, teacher style... From the point of view of policy and government – and sometimes of parents - there is a more direct reference to the expected outcomes of education. With regular assessments the system of care and education is, in a sense, ‘forced’ to get better results. In the middle of this stands the practitioner, living and working with children. Wanting the best for them. Accepting sensible guidelines and accepting at the same time the fact that education has to be effective. But how to combine all those things and get the two ends - context and outcome - together? The framework developed within the Experiential Education (EXE) project addresses this question and covers three categories or dimensions of quality: context, process and outcomes.

### **The experiential view on educational outcomes**

In the EXE-theoretical framework, a lot of attention is paid to the effects or outcomes of education. The concept of ‘deep level learning’ expresses the concern for a critical approach to educational evaluation. Central to this is the questioning of superficial learning, learning that does not affect the basic competencies of the child and which has little transfer to real life situations. In line with a constructivist tradition, we don’t see the process of development as a mere addition of discrete elements of knowledge or aptitudes to an existing repertoire. On the contrary: every performance depends on an underlying structure of fundamental schemes. These operate as basic programmes that regulate the way we process incoming stimuli and construct reality. We rely on them to interpret new situations and to act competently - or not. They determine which and how many dimensions of reality can be articulated in ones perception and cognition (Laevers, 1995 & 1998).

The ongoing research programme in which instruments are being developed to assess levels of development, covers different areas of development.

#### **Emotional health**

This dimension can be seen as a condition for the full realisation of a person’s potential. The Rogerian tradition of research, has contributed a great deal to its clarification through the concept of the ‘fully functioning person’. In practice ‘self-confidence’ and the quality labelled as ‘resilience’ represent interesting aspects of this fundamental goal.

## Curiosity and the exploratory drive

A lot of effort within the area of education is content based. That explains why, generally, the disposition of curiosity or, in a broader sense, the exploratory drive, doesn't get as much attention as it deserves. Investing in the preservation or even strengthening of the exploratory drive can be seen as most rewarding in so far as it guarantees lifelong learning. An exploratory attitude, defined by openness for, and alertness to the wide variety of stimuli that form our surroundings, makes a person accessible, lowers the threshold for getting into the state of 'arousal' that brings a person to the most intense forms of concentration and involvement. That person will never stop developing. The challenge for education is not only to keep this intrinsic source of motivation alive, but also to make it encompass all domains that belong to reality.

## Expression and communicative skills

Language receives a lot of attention in education. But what seems crucial here is the necessity to push the boundaries forward and redefine our goals. Because formal teaching tends to take competencies apart and to focus on separate elements, the full competency is not enhanced as much as it could be. In the area of (verbal) expression one can observe how an extensive vocabulary doesn't guarantee effective communication. Besides the social skill aspect - which we discuss further - communication depends on the capability to be intensely aware of felt senses and to use words or symbols that interact with these meanings in ways which make these 'felt senses' more defined and articulated. This is the core of any form of expression, artistic and other forms, as defined in Gendlin's brilliant analysis of the experiential process (Gendlin, 1964).

## Imagination and creativity

In the description of the process of expression, the role of imagination has already been mentioned: it is the disposition to (re)produce felt senses or meaning. It refers to the intensity with which meanings are sensed. A strong imagination, as such, makes the impact of a story more profound because one is able to sense the represented reality thoroughly. One is fully impressed. Creativity goes beyond this. It is defined as the 'disposition to produce many unique ideas appropriate to a simple problem requirement'. In further analysis the component of 'ideational fluency' is decisive: the easiness with which associations are made which link distant elements to one another. These combinations are original and at the same time purposeful. Associated with this disposition is the continuing tendency to look at things from different angles, to be flexible, to be humorous (as a way to 'play' with reality)... and to risk getting into conflict with ones surroundings, because new ideas can mean a threat to the existing order.

## The competence of self-organisation

Many of our case studies show us children having a lot of difficulties in living harmoniously with others and taking advantage of the environment offered by the adult. Sometimes emotional problems are the main cause, while in other cases the mismatch between the activities on offer and the child's interests or level of development could be identified as the key to the solution. Gradually a third factor caught our attention: the competence of self-organisation. We define it as 'the managerial capacity to organise ones life in a way that makes the best possible use of the available resources, in oneself (own competencies, limitations and strengths) and in ones human and physical environment. We discern four components: will-power or the capacity to be determined and commit oneself to something, the capability to make choices and to sort out what one really wants, the capability to reproduce scenario's for action and develop them further while the activity is going on and the capability to step back and reassess the situation in view of ones goals.

Observing children – and adults – makes it very obvious that the competence of self-organisation is far more than being disciplined and planned. In fact it is all about the ‘art of living’. The interesting thing about self-organisation is that it can make the difference between quality of life or its absence, to a certain extent in spite of ones talents and opportunities. It is about the use of these talents and opportunities: crossing the street to walk in the shadow on a hot summer day doesn’t cost anything, but leads to greater comfort.

Self-organisation combined with creativity gives us the powerful quality which any society badly needs to secure its future: entrepreneurship.

### Understanding of the world of objects and people

The core of the curriculum is about the acquisition of knowledge about both the world of objects and the world of people. Here the basic schemes determine which dimensions of reality are captured. Deep level learning leads to a kind of paradigm shift through which more of the complexities of the world (in whatever domain) can be experienced and become meaningful. In our reflection on the essence of the process of cognition a form of intelligence based on intuitive faculties, as opposed to the logical-mathematical intelligence, came to the foreground. We see intuition as the basis for real understanding of the world, while logical-mathematical intelligence can help to conceptualise what is perceived and to speed up the process of assimilation. Intuition is ‘the faculty to mentally represent reality, making use of ones imagination, by which meanings are (re)constructed, enabling one to get the ‘feel’ of the real thing.’ Intuition is not a pre-scientific level of cognition. It is indispensable for understanding the world around us. Consequently, the difference in competence between people, in any profession that requires a certain level of understanding, is in the end determined by the level of development of their intuitive insight. This is the case for physicists, medical doctors, biologists, geologists, engineers... but also in any craft where routine and technique must be transcended and interpretations have to be made. This also holds for the field of psycho-social cognition. Intuition is at the core of expertise in professions where dealing with people plays an important role, such as, child care, teaching, all kinds of therapies, human resources management, advertising and of course in all the sciences connected to these. But also in the pre- and non-professional context - in children and adults, in parents and persons and any form of leisure - intuition is part of the developing mind.

### Value education

Within the EXE-project the concept of ‘linkedness’ is the expression of a deep concern for the development of a positive orientation towards reality. It offers a point of reference for the whole of value education.

Linkedness with the eco-system in its entirety is essentially a religious concept, in the broadest sense of the word. Etymologically, ‘re-ligion’ (re-liare) means ‘linking again’. As “de-linquency” means “the lack of being linked”, the basic sense of ‘connectedness’ can be seen as the cornerstone of prevention of criminal behaviour or of any action that brings damage to things and people. One who feels connected with something would not act as a vandal.

When the concept is elaborated at the level of early childhood, primary and secondary education, children are helped to develop this attitude of linkedness with (1) themselves, (2) the other(s), (3) the material world, (4) society and (5) the ultimate unity of the entire eco-system.

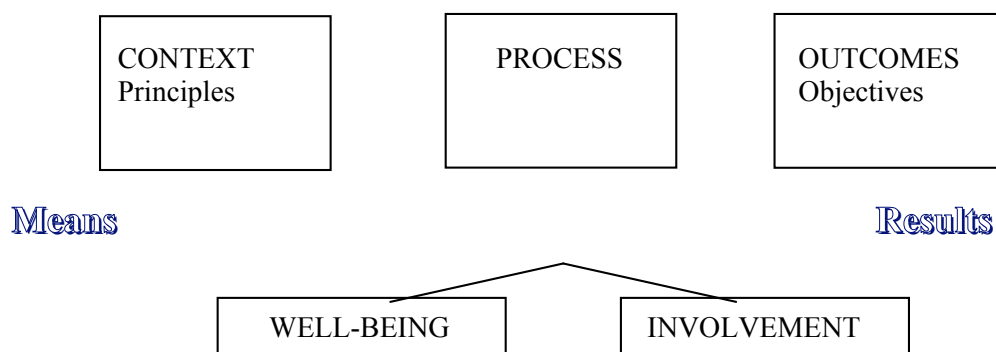
## What kind of educational context is needed?

This selection of ‘desirable goals’ represents a huge challenge for the whole of the educational system (from birth to lifelong learning). How can the development of these outcomes be supported in children (and in adults)?

Focusing on the process

The Experiential Education project’s most important contribution answers exactly this question, by identifying indicators for quality which are situated in the middle of the context-outcome framework. It points to the missing link: the concept that helps us to sense whether what we are doing (the context) is leading somewhere (the outcome)!

The basic insight within the EXE-theory is that the most economic and conclusive way to assess the quality of any educational setting (from the pre-school level to adult education) is to focus on two dimensions: the degree of ‘emotional well-being’ and the level of ‘involvement’.



When we want to know how each of the children is doing in a setting, we first have to explore the degree to which children feel at ease, act spontaneously, and show vitality and self-confidence. All this indicates that their emotional well-being is OK, and that their physical needs, the need for tenderness and affection, the need for safety and clarity, the need for social recognition, the need to feel competent and the need for meaning and moral value in life are satisfied. Interventions that secure the well-being of children make them stronger and keep them in touch with their feelings and emotions.

The concept of involvement refers to a dimension of human activity. Involvement is linked neither to specific types of behaviour nor to specific levels of development. Both the baby in the cradle playing with his voice and the adult trying to formulate a definition, both the (mentally) handicapped child and the gifted student, can share that quality. Csikszentmihayli (1979) speaks of “the state of flow”.

One of the most predominant characteristics of this flow state is concentration. An involved person narrows his attention to one limited circle. Involvement goes along with strong motivation, fascination and total implication: there is no distance between person and activity, no calculation of possible benefits. Furthermore there is an openness to (relevant) stimuli and the perceptual and cognitive functioning has an intensity which is lacking in other kinds of activity. The meanings of words and ideas are felt more strongly and deeply. Further analysis reveals a manifest feeling of satisfaction and a stream of energy felt through the body. People actively seek this ‘state of flow’. Young children usually find it in play.

Involvement is not, however, the state of arousal easily obtained by the entertainer. The crucial point is that the satisfaction that goes along with involvement stems from one source: the exploratory drive, the need to get a better grip on reality, the intrinsic interest in how

things and people are, the urge to experience and figure out. Finally, involvement only occurs in the small area in which the activity matches the capabilities of the person, that is in the 'zone of proximal development'.

One couldn't imagine any condition more favourable to real development. If we want deep level learning, we cannot do without involvement.

### Measuring involvement

However much involvement may seem to be a subjective property, it is indeed possible to assess the levels of involvement in children and adults in a reliable way. The "Leuven Involvement Scale" (LIS) has been developed for this purpose, encompassing seven variants for different settings, ranging from childcare to adult education. The LIS is a 5-point rating scale. At level 1, there is no activity. At level 5 there is total concentration and absolute implication. Any disturbance or interruption would be experienced as a frustrating rupture of a smoothly running activity.

Research with the Leuven Involvement Scale has shown that the levels of involvement within a setting tend to be more or less stable (Laevers, 1994). They are the result of the interactions between the context (including the way teachers handle their group) and the characteristics of the children. We can expect that the more competent the teacher, the higher the level of involvement can be, given a particularly composed group of children. We find indications for this in our own research, but also in the large scale Effective Early Learning project in the UK, where more than 12,000 adults learned to use the scale which has been used to observe more than 60,000 children at the pre-primary age level (Pascal & Bertram, 1995; Pascal et al., 1998).

### Raising the levels of well-being and involvement

The concepts of well-being and involvement are useful not only for research purposes, but at least as much for practitioners who want to improve the quality of their work.

Capitalising on a myriad of experiences by teachers in early childhood education, a body of expertise has been gathered and systematised in *The Ten Action Points*, an inventory of ten types of initiative that favour well-being and involvement (Laevers & Moons, 1997).

The action points (AP) cover a wide range of interventions. In AP1, 2 and 3 the organisation of the space and the provision of interesting materials and activities is at stake. With AP4, the teacher is invited to observe carefully how children interact with all that they encounter in their environment in order to identify interests that can be met by a more targeted offer of activities. It is on this track that open projects come to life. They gradually take shape building upon children's points of interest, indicated by their responses to a former offer of activity.

The creation of a rich environment doesn't stop with the provision of a wide variety of potentially interesting materials and activities. A decisive element in the occurrence of involvement is the way the adult supports the ongoing activities with stimulating interventions (AP5) which are associated with an effective adult style.

Using children's dynamics and their exploratory drive requires an open form of organisation that stimulates children to take the initiative (AP6). That is why in EXE-settings, children are free to choose between a wide range of activities (up to about 65 % of the available time). This point includes the setting of rules that guarantee a smoothly running class organisation and a maximum of freedom for every child (and not only for the most able or the most assertive). It takes months to get this far with a group of children. But the effort to implement

this open form is rewarded. Research indicates that - given a rich offer - the more children can choose their activities, the higher will be the level of their involvement.

In AP7 the field of social relations is addressed. The adult not only explores the relations between the children, but also tries to be aware of how she/he is experienced by children. Guidelines in this area encompass qualities already defined by Carl Rogers (empathy and authenticity). At the group level explicit attention is given to the creation of opportunities to share experiences and build a positive group climate.

In AP8 activities are generated that support the exploration of feelings, thoughts and values. In a sense it is a promotion of psychology as a field of competence, but of course at the level of young children. One of the materials supporting the development of social cognition, is the *Box Full of Feelings*. The series of open-ended activities linked to the set, helps children to develop emotional intelligence and social competence. The effect has been reported by Nanette Smith, who is finishing a dissertation on this subject, on a BBC programme for practitioners: "We've only used the *Box Full of Feelings* for seven weeks. Already we've seen a big, significant difference. (-) we can sense a general feeling of protectiveness, awareness, friendship and empathy in the children which wasn't there before." (Kog, Moons & Depondt, 1997).

For the primary education level and beyond, *five factors* have been identified as most influencing in realising well-being and involvement. For any lesson or part of the curriculum one can check (1) how the planned activity affects the class climate and the relations with and between the participants, (2) if the offer is challenging enough and not too easy or too difficult, (3) if the content can be enriched by more documentation, more lively brought information or concrete material, (4) if the organisation allows enough action and (5) how much opportunity is given to the participants to make personal choices.

In the process of implementation, the five factors evolve towards 5 basic work forms that can be considered as the building bricks of a model that offers enormous opportunities for "wellbeing" and "involvement". These work forms are: (1) "circle times" and "reunions", (2) contract-work, (3) project-work, (4) workshops and (5) activity on the basis of free initiative.

#### Children who need special attention

AP1 to 8 have a general character: they lay the foundations. The two remaining action points turn our attention to children needing special attention because they do not reach the levels of well-being and involvement that we strive for. In the first (AP9) we deal with behavioural and emotional problems: children who, through all kinds of circumstances, do not succeed in realising a satisfying interaction with their environment, who come under pressure and lose contact with their inner stream of experiences. On the basis of a large number of case-studies, an experiential strategy has been developed to help them. Interventions that have proved effective range from "giving positive attention and support" to "giving security by structuring time and space".

The last action point (AP10) is about children with special developmental needs. We define them as children who fail to demonstrate the quality of 'involvement' in one or more areas of competence. This means that their development is endangered and there is a real chance that they will not develop their potential.

#### An experiential teacher style

Teacher interventions can vary a lot, depending on the nature of activities or on the responses and initiatives of children. Nevertheless, we can discern individual patterns in the way teachers intervene in a wide variety of situations. The notion of 'style' is used to grasp this pattern.

The 'Adult Style Observation Schedule' (ASOS) is built around three dimensions: stimulation, sensitivity and giving autonomy (Laevers, Bogaerts & Moons, 1997).

Stimulating interventions are open impulses that engender a chain of actions in children and make the difference between low and high involvement. They include: suggesting activities to children who wander around; offering materials that fit in an ongoing activity; inviting children to communicate; confronting them with thought-provoking questions and giving them information that can capture their mind.

Sensitivity is evidenced in responses which demonstrate empathic understanding of the basic needs of the child, such as the need for security, for affection, for attention, for affirmation, for clarity and for emotional support.

Giving autonomy is not only realised in an open form of organisation but also has to be implemented at the level of interventions. It means: respecting children's sense of initiative by acknowledging their interests; giving them room for experimentation; letting them decide how an activity is performed and when a product is finished and implicating them in the setting of rules and the solution of conflicts.

Once we begin to look at the way adults interact with children we realise how powerful these dimensions are. The personality of the teacher is even more important than other dimensions of the context, such as the space, the materials and the activities on offer, when it comes to achieving high levels of well-being and involvement

### **The Process-Oriented Child Monitoring System**

To identify children who need special attention, both systematic observation and some kind of monitoring system are necessary. Although the traditional product-oriented systems have their value, especially for diagnostic purposes, they also have serious limitations. Totally in accordance with the EXE-framework, the Process-oriented Monitoring System (the POMS) focuses on the two major indicators of the quality of the educational process: well-being and involvement. These answer the essential question: how is each child doing? Are the efforts we make sufficient to secure emotional health and real development in all important areas and for each of the children? In a first step, children are screened, with a five-point scale for each of the dimensions. For children falling below level 4, teachers proceed with further observations and analysis. A periodic assessment (3 or 4 times a year) of these levels has proved both practicable and effective. In contrast to other systems, the POMS gives a sense of purpose: teachers get immediate feedback about the quality of their work and can take action without delay. The aim is to promote enjoyment and more intrinsic motivated action within the relevant fields of development (Laevers, 1997).

### **The agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Experiences accumulated in the EXE project support the conclusion that well-being and involvement are welcomed by teachers as most stimulating and helpful in improving the quality of their work. The concepts of well-being and involvement match the intuitions of many teachers and give them a scientifically-based confirmation of what they knew already: when we can get children into that 'flow state', development must and will take place within the area(s) addressed by the activity. In contrast to effect variables – the real outcomes of which are only seen in the longer run – process variables give immediate feedback about the quality of (planned) interventions and tell us, on the spot, something about their potential impact. Furthermore, putting forward involvement as a key indicator of quality, engenders a lot of positive energy and synergy: the enthusiastic responses of children, when the adult's efforts are successful, are very empowering and give the teacher deep satisfaction both at the professional and personal level. Finally, taking involvement as a point of reference in

professional development makes it possible to respect the actual level of functioning of the teacher and the setting.

When implementing experiential education one starts where one stands, with the room, the children, the material, the books, the methods and all the limitations linked to the actual situation. The curriculum and all developmental domains are part of this environment. Then a field of action is chosen focussing on areas or (groups of) children showing low levels of involvement in systematic observations. Within the area(s) chosen, initiatives are taken which have the potential to bring about an increase in well-being and/or involvement. This increase – however small it may be – is experienced as a success and drives one towards new initiatives.

That is what experiential education is about: exploiting and enhancing the energy in people and drawing them into a positive spiral which engenders deep level learning. Only in this way can we make schools more effective and strong enough to meet the challenge of education: the development of adults who are self-confident and mentally healthy, curious and exploratory, expressive and communicative, imaginative and creative, full of initiative, well-organised, with articulated intuitions about the social and physical world and with a feeling of being connected to the universe and all its creatures.

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## Biographical Note

Prof. Dr. Ferre LAEVERS is a member of the academic staff of the "Department of Pedagogical Sciences" at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. His main fields of teaching and research are early childhood and primary education and teacher training. He is initiator of the innovative project "Experiential Education", director of the "Centre for Experiential Education", co-founder and actual President of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA).

## ABSTRACT

In the conceptual framework of the project "Experiential Education" educational outcomes get a lot of attention. The concept of 'deep-level-learning' - based on a constructivist tradition - catches the essence of an alternative view on learning and development: real learning affects the deeper structures on which competencies and dispositions are based. This line of thought is made more tangible through an analysis of several domains: the understanding of the physical world, social competence, communicative skills, curiosity, intuition, imagination and creativity and self-management. They play a key role in the way persons function in school and in life. To develop them an educational context must be constructed that brings children into the highest levels of 'involvement': that is where deep-level-learning is taking place.

Key-words:

Experiential education	Educational outcomes	Instruments for observation
Intrinsic motivation	Creativity	Emotional well-being

## **PowerPoint Presentations**

Professor Laevers and his colleague Julia Moon provided two presentations each of approximately an hour and a quarter. Some of the slides contained video clips. These are not available on the website. The following pages combine both presentations as one.

To help readers follow the sequence of the presentation the slides are set out on the pages in the order shown below.

**Slide 1**

**Slide 2**

**Slide 3**

**Slide 4**

**Slide 5**

**Slide 6**

.....and so on across the subsequent pages.

# EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

## Quality at the level of Process, Outcome & Context

Ferre Laevers & Julia Moons  
Centre for Experiential Education  
University of Leuven - Belgium

# A

## Quality at the level of the process

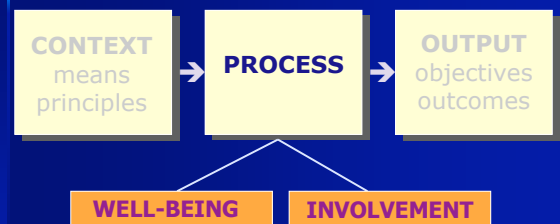
2

## The quality framework



3

## Quality at the level of the process



4

## *Well-being*

### When children...

- 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

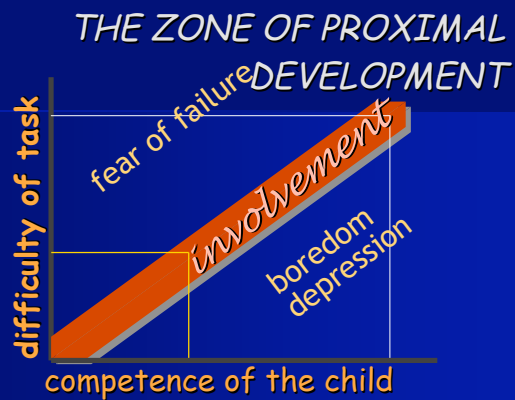
...we know that their mental health is  
secured

## *Involvement*

### When children are...

- concentrated and focussed
- 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

6



## Involvement

## When children are...

- concentrated and focussed
- 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 Leuven Involvement Scale

## 5 levels

- >1 No activity
- >2 Interrupted activity
- >3 Activity without intensity
- >4 Activity with intense moments
- >5 Continuous intense activity

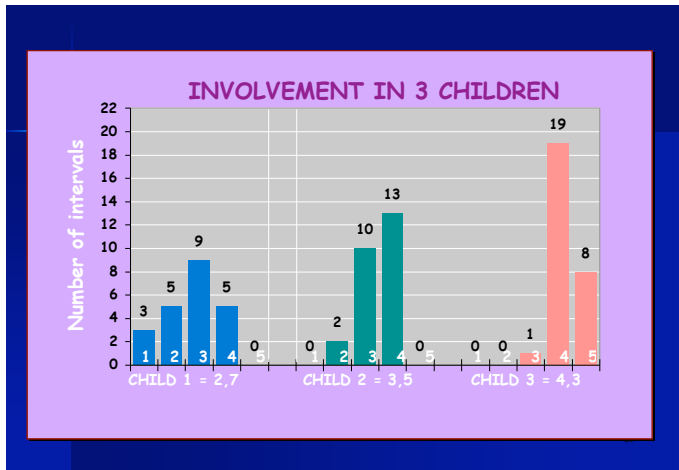
## The scale for in-service training

- >1 Very boring – I stayed because it was impossible to leave
- >3 I heard it all, but nothing really caught my attention
- >5 I'm impressed by fascinating thoughts that carry me away

## What can we do with well-being & involvement?

[illegible]

## SCANNING PROCEDURE FOR INVOLVEMENT



### Scanning 'involvement': results

	< 2.9	2.9-3.2	3.3-3.6	3.7-4.0	>4.0
School 1	1	2	3	2	0
School 2	1	2	4	2	0
School 3	1	0	7	3	0
School 4	2	8	2	2	1
School 5	1	0	5	3	0
School 6	1	1	2	5	0
<u>Total</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>1</u>

[distribution of 61 classes in primary school]

14

process-oriented Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings (Sics)

### OBSERVATION SCHEME

GROEP: De Beertgietjes (18-36 maand)		AANTAL KINDEREN: 14		AANTAL BEGELEIDERS: 2		DATUM: 08/11/2006		VOR: Gro10, Gro14,5			
NAAM KIND		OBSERVATIE		WELBEVINDEN BETROKKENHEID		NAAM KIND		OBSERVATIE		WELBEVINDEN/BETROKKENHEID	
1	Aster	Liesandra, telende, onderzocht fotoalbum, kijpende, etende maaltijd, grinnende afleidt		4	3	6	Kornel	Cip foto. Richt nietke. Richt "hallo", wijlt naar bij. Gevoel. strakke. Foto's bring		5	5
		Troet niet met. kijkt op. neemt Holje. Toedrukt, verouderd. Maak contact met bij. Sing naar Holje. Opgelovst		3	4	7	Fien	Cip met. openz. bukke. Kijft in ogen. Blandt. Ompakt. Hadvise. afleidt. Minder is overleed		3	2
3	Longek	Stavt. handet afleidt in bukke. Nieuwe maank. Gevoel. Stavt. Moeig spel		3	2	8	Seppe	Gevoelende. Stelt groenst uit. Mast as. Ancoet as. Richt in postje. Enzige. gevoelende buke		4	5
4	Bouwe	Near kake - versluy. Fantastisest met pijet as. frill. Lante. telende. Moeig observator niet op		5	5	9	Jim	Spel met bij. Teken opkijkt. dekt. Gevoel. Kijft op als anders bij foto. neemt. gijnakt. Oetpauze		4	3
5	Kato	Afleidende. Huidet Kijft in ogen. te kake. Huid bij - geen activiteit		1	1	10	Bart	Kwant machinist als wijlt op. poppepauze. Stavt in vante. Ander had wat bij. bij. geen. Moeig niet afgewen		2	1



## Results [1]

⇒ how much well-being?

Mean <b>3.61</b>	SCORE	Number of Children	%	% L M H
<b>Low</b>	1 1+ 2	82 56 368	1.02 0.70 4.59	<b>6.31</b>
<b>Mode- rate</b>	2+ 3 3+	404 1568 1535	5.04 19.57 19.16	<b>43.77</b>
<b>High</b>	4 4+ 5	2800 506 692	34.95 6.32 8.64	<b>49.91</b>



## What should we get at least?

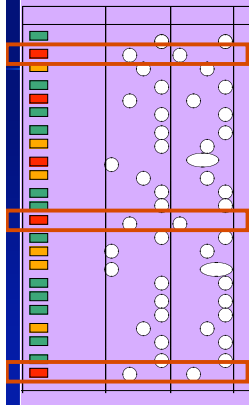
50 % of the learners	50 % of the learners
Score 3	Score 4
Mean score = <b>3.5</b>	

## Results [2]

⇒ how much involvement?

Mean <b>3.29</b>	SCORE	Number of Children	%	% L M H
<b>Low</b>	1 1+ 2	290 337 1016	3.62 4.21 12.69	<b>20.52</b>
<b>Mode- rate</b>	2+ 3 3+	464 1382 1343	5.80 17.25 16.78	<b>39.84</b>
<b>High</b>	4 4+ 5	2170 379 624	27.11 4.73 7.80	<b>39.64</b>





## PROCESS ORIENTED CHILD MONITORING SYSTEM [POMS]

EVOLUTION OF 5 CHILDREN:  
OCTOBER → FEBRUARY

October					February				
WELL-BEING	INVOLVEMENT	CODE	NAMES		CODE	WELL-BEING	INVOLVEMENT	CODE	
1	2		TOM		1	2	3	4	5
1	2		DAAN		1	2	3	4	5
1	2		FREDERIK		1	2	3	4	5
1	2		WARD		1	2	3	4	5
1	2		MIES		1	2	3	4	5

## The Process Oriented Child Monitoring System

### Practicability

- capitalises on 'stored' information
- easily trainable

### Range

- covering cognitive AND emotional level.

### Impact

- immediate feedback concerning possible interventions

### Validity

- conclusive assessment of risk of stagnation

21

## Process or product-oriented?

Name	Involvement	Competence	Comments
Bart	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	loves maths
Els	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	gives up easily
Jamal	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	afraid to make mistakes
Hans	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	finds maths boring
Daan	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	holds on to material

Excerpt from the "Process-oriented Monitoring System"  
Subject: mathematics in first grade of primary school

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## The status of the process variables

- A measure for the **POWER** of the learning environment
- Contain key information to improve quality
  - immediate feedback
  - the shortest way to interventions
  - tell who takes advantage of our efforts and who doesn't
- Stand above any educational model / innovation
- A common base for the entire educational system
  - why not install a follow up system from 0 to 18 yrs?

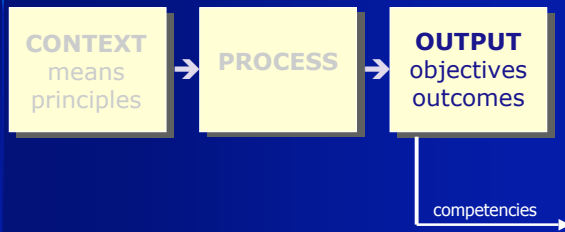
23

## B

Quality at the level of the output

24

## Quality at the level of the output



25

## EFFECTS objectives outcomes



- Emotional health / self-esteem ❖
- Exploratory drive ❖
- Competencies & life skills ❖
- The basic attitude of linkedness ❖

26

## The new paradigm: 'competency based learning'

- The output of education questioned
- Competencies are life-skills
  - ▣ not the learning is the point, but how to use it

27

## Tackling complex situations

*"Here is a parcel that has to be developed as a parking place for a supermarket. Design a layout for this section that allows a maximum of cars to be parked."*

28



How long is the hallway?

29

## The new paradigm: 'competency based learning'

- The output of education questioned
- Competences are life-skills
  - ▣ not the learning is the point, but how to use it
  - ▣ from reproductive learning to problem solving & evaluation
- The concept of 'implicit learning' and 'stealth education'

30

## Gross motor development

1

Shows excellent physical skills for his/her age, demonstrated in a broad range of situations where movement is required. It is a pleasure observing his/her movements in space: supple and graceful, purposeful and with efficacy, in an adjusted pace, rhythmical, readily reacting to changes and signals. Picks up new patterns of movement very easily.

*[Process-oriented child monitoring system]*

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## The concept of 'deep-level-learning'

### ■ An holistic approach

- ▣ far from a checklist of isolated skills
- ▣ grasping the essence
- ▣ covering all age levels
- ▣ speaks to the imagination
- ▣ gives a sense of direction

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## Developmental domains

- Gross motor development
- Fine motor development
- Expression through arts
- Expression through language
- Understanding the world of objects
  - Including technology
- Understanding the world of people
  - Including social competence
- Logical mathematical competence
- Self-organisation & entrepreneurship

33

## Fine motor development

2

Is very skilful in handling objects and tools: is able to perform complex operations fluently and with precision. Masters a broad range of manipulations. Has an excellent co-ordination of hand and fingers, detached from the rest of the body. Easily picks up new patterns of movement.

*[Process-oriented child monitoring system]*

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## Self-organisation & entrepreneurship

3

Is able to manage him/herself well: knows what (s)he wants, can set goals, can engage into action without delay and achieve a good result. Does not give up at the first obstacle and can persist. Can step back and work strategically. Is able to exploit various possibilities and adapt to changing circumstances. Is not ruled by the surroundings, but actively determines the group's course together with others.

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## Developmental domains

- Gross motor development
- Fine motor development
- Expression through visual arts
- Expression through language
- Understanding the world of objects
  - Including technology
- Understanding the world of people
  - Including social competence
- Logical mathematical competence
- Self-organisation & entrepreneurship

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## The concept of 'deep-level-learning'

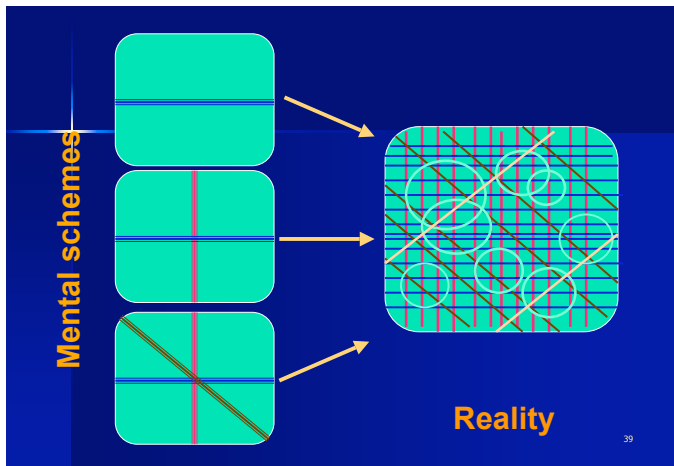
- An holistic approach
- Valuing the 'intuitive intelligence'
  - ▣ a test on floating & sinking
  - ▣ results on maths at the age of 13

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## The concept of 'deep-level-learning'

- An holistic approach
- Valuing the 'intuitive intelligence'
- Competence is about what one makes of the world (constructivism!)
  - ▣ intuitive understanding lays the foundation
  - ▣ abstract logical thought gives speed

38



39

## The key question

HOW CAN WE CHANGE THE PROGRAM  
INSTEAD OF ADDING NEW FILES AGAIN  
AND AGAIN?

40

## Implications for policy

- Help the practitioners to:
  - ▣ see the core of the key domains
  - ▣ identify the cognitive load of activities
  - ▣ see the talents in children

41



Clay

42

## Implications for policy

- Help the practitioners to:
  - ▣ see the core of the key domains
  - ▣ identify the cognitive load of activities
  - ▣ see the talents in children
- Give the educators feedback
  - ▣ measure where we are with regard to key competencies & dispositions

[with a sample of schools and without publication of league tables]

43

## EFFECTS objectives outcomes



- Emotional health / self-esteem ❖
- Exploratory drive ❖
- Competencies & life skills ❖
- The basic attitude of linkedness ❖

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## Publications

- ⇒ The Leuven Involvement Scale:  
Training Pack [Video + Manual 29 fragments]
- ⇒ Enhancing Well-being and involvement:  
The ten Action Points [100 slides + voice over]
- ⇒ A Box full of Feelings [play&learn-set]
- ⇒ Experiential Education at Work  
[Video of Julia's class + guide]
- ⇒ The Process-Oriented Child Monitoring  
System [Manual + Forms + Interventions]
- ⇒ Research on Experiential Education  
[Reader including 5 articles]

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# C

Quality at the level  
of the context

46

## Quality in education

**CONTEXT**  
means  
principles



ingredients of a powerful learning environment →

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**CONTEXT**  
means  
principles



**WELL-BEING**

**INVOLVEMENT**



- ❖ Ten Action Points
- ❖ Five Factors Enhancing Involvement
- ❖ Experiential Adult Style

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## A powerful learning environment

The OECD meeting on ECE  
[Stockholm 2003]

- ▣ High Scope [1962]
- ▣ Reggio Emilia [1970]
- ▣ Te Whaariki [1996]
- ▣ Experiential Education [1976]

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## Basic ingredients

- \_ Respect for the child

50

## An interaction

- Lk: "Do you stay for lunch today?"
- Ll: "No, only on Thursday and Monday."
- Lk: "Yes! You've said it a hundred times but I always forget it."
- Ll: "Miss, you are really a 'forget-miss'!"
- Lk: (laughs) "Yes, you're right!"

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## An interaction

- Ch.: "Miss, Hannah is messing around with the christmas tree!"
- T.: Grabs Hannah, lifts her and puts her back on the floor at the side of the room.

52

## An interaction (stimulation)

- Ch.: "I not brushed tooth."
- A.: "No, you didn't brush your teeth."
- Ch.: "The man from the tooth, says brush!"
- A.: "Yes, you're right, the dentist says that we have to brush our teeth!"

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## Reflections on 'respect'

- Not the same as 'sentimentality'
- A process of emancipation
  - Determined by 'images' of the other
  - ...and of oneself
- Goes along with loss of power
- And gain of quality in the relations

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## Basic ingredients

- \_ Respect of the child
- \_ Communication, a positive group climate

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## Group climate : level 5

- *The atmosphere is relaxed, cheerful, cosy*
- *Most of the children take pleasure in what they do*
- *Children and teacher have a lively and content expression on their faces*
- *Children dare to experiment, to give answers, to take initiative and to make mistakes*
- *Children are spontaneous: they ask questions, express what they feel and think*
- *There is a natural, unforced quietness when required*
- *Humor is never far away: children and adult have fun telling jokes or phantasizing*

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## Nanette Smith, on the BBC-series "Teaching Today":

"We've only used the **Box Full of Feelings** for seven weeks, already we've seen a big, significant difference. (-)  
It's certain, we can sense a general feeling of protectiveness, awareness, friendship and empathy in the children, which wasn't there before."

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# 1

## STORY TELLING

58

# 2

## ACTING OUT THE FEELINGS

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# 3

## THE MIRROR AND MASKS

60

7

PROVOKING  
FEELINGS

61

9

SORTING  
IN THE CASES

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10

SORTING  
ON WORKSHEETS

63

11

LET'S  
RUN FOR IT

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12

INTERPRETING  
ILLUSTRATIONS

65

16

LINKING WITH  
REAL EXPERIENCES

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# 18 - 20

COLOURING COPIES  
WRITING DOWN  
CHILDREN'S STORIES  
POSTING AND  
READING LETTERS

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# 21

FEELINGS IN  
PAINTINGS

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# 22

THE  
'FEELING-METER'

69

## Basic ingredients

- \_ Respect of the child
- \_ Communication, a positive group climate
- \_ A rich environment

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## *A rich environment: density!*

- How broad is the range of experiences?
  - ▣ From sensoric to abstract
  - ▣ From individual to social
  - ▣ From 'taking in' to 'creating'
- How much is still open to exploration?
  - ▣ Depth, surprise, adventure, serendipity

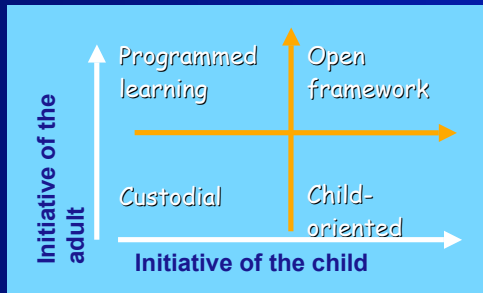
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## Basic ingredients

- \_ Respect of the child
- \_ Communication, a positive group climate
- \_ A rich environment
- \_ An open framework-approach

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## The 'open framework' approach



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## How to get it in place?

- A circular process
  - Who is programming who?
  - Who is learning most?
- Give room for child initiative

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## GIVE ROOM FOR CHILD INITIATIVE

- freedom to choose: what, when, how frequently...
- fit into daily routine [2/3 of the time]
- supported by flexible rules
- a learning process for child & adult

[ACTION POINT 6]

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## How to get it in place?

- A circular process
  - Who is programming who?
  - Who is learning most?
- Give room for child initiative and do not
- Offer activities that meet observed Interests [Action point 4]

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## OBSERVE CHILDREN & OFFER ACTIVITIES THAT MEET THEIR INTERESTS

- rich environment as starting point
- identify what is really meaningful
- find activities that match these interests
- let one activity grow out of the other
- have more than one project at the time

[ACTION POINT 4]

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## Contract work

A type of organisation in which for each pupil a set of tasks is compiled, which is formally drawn up in a contract letter. Within the week's schedule, the pupils dispose of a certain amount of time (*the contract work period*) during which they can implement the contract more or less *independently*.

The pupils themselves determine the *duration* and *order* of the various tasks.

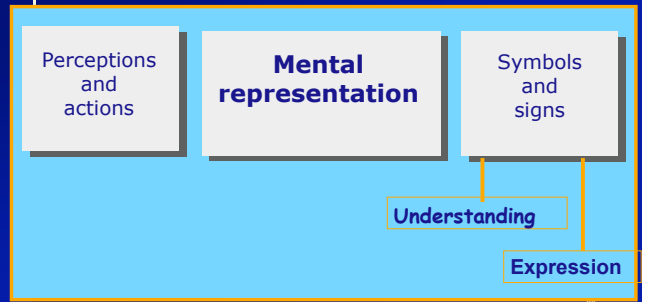
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## Basic ingredients

- \_ Respect of the child
- \_ Communication, a positive group climate
- \_ A rich environment
- \_ An open framework-approach
- \_ Representation: 'impression-expression' cycle

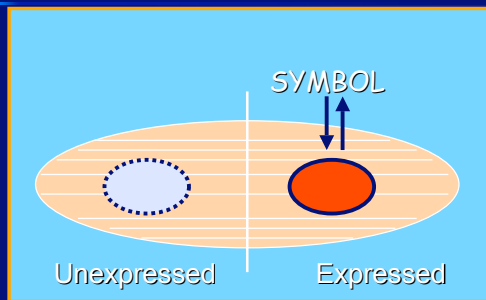
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## ■ The concept of representation



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## ■ To express is to impress (Gendlin)



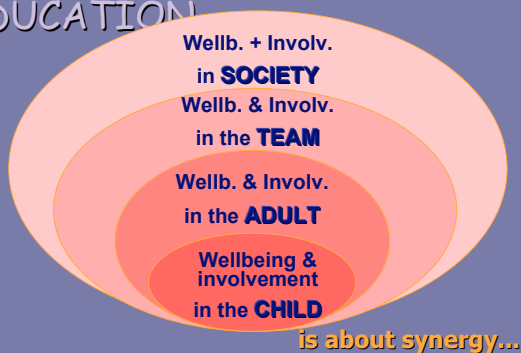
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## Basic ingredients

- \_ Respect of the child
- \_ Communication, a positive group climate
- \_ A rich environment
- \_ An open framework-approach
- \_ Representation: 'impression-expression' cycle
- \_ Observation, observation, observation...

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## EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION



## INTRODUCTION TO SEMINARS

Education in the early years is about encouraging children's curiosity and interest in the world around them. It is about giving children a say in what they are learning and how they will learn. Education is active, challenging and stimulating. It is about developing children's capacity for exploring, enquiring, solving problems, asking questions, discussing and explaining, ...



It is also about having fun, being independent, making friends, sharing and working with others, taking risks, recognising responsibilities, ...



The following summaries give examples of good practice.

## SEMINAR SUMMARIES

### **Supporting ‘leaders of learning’ in planning and monitoring high quality active learning in the early years.**

*Marie Kelly, Quality Improvement Officer, East Renfrewshire Council.*

*Lisa McDill, Quality Improvement Officer, East Renfrewshire Council.*

*Natalie Fitzsimmons, Acting Depute Head Teacher, Kirkhill Primary, Kirkhill*

*Lisa David, P1 Teacher, Kirkhill Primary, Kirkhill*

*Claire Robertson, Principal Teacher, Crookfur Primary, Crookfur*

[marie.kelly@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:marie.kelly@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

East Renfrewshire has developed an active approach to teaching and learning in the early years. The purpose is to emphasise a more child centred approach and to ensure better continuity in learning for all children. School staff have been well supported through a range of staff development initiatives. The aim of these initiatives is to build staff skills and confidence, and to share understanding.

Staff from two primary schools described their journey. In both schools, staff addressed first the layout of the classrooms and the organisation of resources to ensure better use of the available space and existing materials. Staff were aware that active learning had to be related to the curriculum and contextualised, the children and staff had to have ownership and a sense of relevance of the activities, children had to be able to re-visit their prior learning, and most importantly children's needs had to be met in full. Staff took into account the children's interests and requests, and included in this the use of the outdoor areas. They used their non-contact time to work in nursery classes and to discuss with one another how best to address continuity and progression in learning for all children. Staff used assessment to inform planning. They intervened as necessary in learning, engaged with children and made use of plenary sessions to help themselves and children assess progress. Children were encouraged to develop their skills in self and peer assessment. Teachers worked together to plan activity times and to review the approaches used. All adults, including parents and support assistants were trained in questioning techniques. Children's progress was monitored closely. The pace of learning was monitored and measured against previous achievements. Children were making as good, if not better, progress and learning was seen to be more secure. Plans are in place to review planning and on a cluster basis to share ideas and developments.

### **Nature Kindergartens in Fife.**

*Chris Miles, Adviser, Fife Council*

*Sandra Edwards, Headteacher, St Andrews Nursery School, St Andrews*

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For the past three years the number of pre-school providers in Fife taking children out into nature, mostly woods, has been steadily increasing, with over 30 providers currently participating. Fife has based its approach on that developed in Norway where children spend all of their time outside in forests, or in play areas and open spaces. Over time, staff in Fife have developed their interests and expertise in this area and in St Andrews Nursery the use of outdoors is well established.

Staff gained the enthusiastic support of parents before embarking on the initiative. Children's waterproof outdoor clothing was bought. Staff use a minibus to take groups of 12 children to an open area about four miles from the nursery. Children are able to develop their physical skills as they climb and balance, run and jump. They are also developing a range of personal and social skills as they share space and play and learn together. Imaginative play is very rich. Children are encouraged by staff to use all of their senses to observe nature, to

investigate it, and to discuss and ask questions about the world around them. They learn to enjoy being outside and are allowed to take risks. They observe clear rules about being safe in the countryside. Interests are always initiated by the children with a minimum of adult involvement. Play is purposeful and children learn to know and respect their environment. Staff collect observations and include photographs of children's outdoor experiences in their personal learning plans as they see children behaving in different ways when they are out in the countryside. Staff have encouraged the involvement of parents and there has been an increase in the involvement of fathers.

### **Active Learning in the Early Years.**

*Marie Crawford, Headteacher Blairmore Nursery School, Greenock, Inverclyde Council*

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*Elsa Hamilton, Headteacher, King's Oak Primary School, Greenock, Inverclyde Council*

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Staff in Blairmore Nursery School and King's Oak Primary School have worked closely with one another to provide robust, supportive transitions from nursery into P1. In particular, they have addressed how staff ensure continuity in children's learning experiences and encourage children to be actively involved in their own learning. The four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence have provided an opportunity to enhance further the approaches used by the schools.

Children in the nursery and in P1 are encouraged to be active, fully engaged and excited about their learning. Staff planning takes account of the needs of children and the context of their learning. Teachers share or use similar resources for example shaving foam was used in nursery for pattern making but in P1 for writing numbers and letters. As practice has evolved in both schools the headteachers with their staff considered and responded to the challenges for

- school managers and teachers as they adjusted their practice to meet children's needs more appropriately
- parents to understand and support what was happening as their child moved on into primary school
- staff in each sector to share practice and to understand, trust and respect each other's skills
- teachers to build more appropriately on children's previous learning
- continuity in how children learn
- the pace of children's progress and their achievements.

Staff have built effectively on their existing strengths at transition and are firmly committed to extending into the primary school the methods used in nursery. All staff have worked hard to ensure very good liaison, and clear and regular communication between the schools. Primary school staff improved further their existing very good practice and worked with parents to secure their support for a more active approach to teaching and learning in P1. Both headteachers advised parents about changes, invited them to be part of the initiative, ran workshops and kept them fully informed about their children's progress. Staff convinced parents that the development of literacy and numeracy skills in particular continued to be very important but these skills would be taught in a more active and dynamic way. Children would learn by 'seeing and doing' and not by completing worksheets or workbooks. The primary headteacher monitored attainment carefully and noted an increase in the number of children attaining Level A in P2. She also noted an improvement in pace of children's progress.

## **Active Learning in Orkney.**

*Tina Smith, Service Improvement Officer, Orkney Islands Council*

*Catherine Diamond, nursery teacher, Stromness Primary School, Stromness.*

*Dorothy Clark, Margaret Hay, P1 teachers, Papdale Primary School, Kirkwall*

*Bruce Pilkington, Headteacher, Stenness Community School, Stenness*

[tina.smith@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:tina.smith@orkney.gov.uk)

The team had collaborated on an 'Assessment is for Learning' project to develop active learning in Orkney and had been key players in three projects running during the academic session 2006-2007

- Personal Learning Planning – influenced by the High Scope approach
- A study visit to New Zealand – influenced by Te Whaariki
- Transition – influenced by the Dunrossness Primary School model, Shetland.

Catherine described how she had been influenced by the High Scope approach and how she had involved children in discussions about personal learning planning and in making choices. She illustrated her excellent practice through a series of photographs which showed how she organised the playroom and session, how children were involved in planning, how 'real' experiences were emphasised and how the role of the adult was central to facilitating children's learning by following their interests.

The P1 teachers, Margaret and Dorothy, described the impact of their study trip to New Zealand on the way they had progressed practice in their own school. They recognised that the Te Whaariki approach could not be implemented as such in Orkney, but by taking small steps, and with the support of the school's senior management team, they had provided better opportunities for experiential learning and emergent writing in their classrooms. This had then been extended into other curricular areas. They made the decision to delay formal programmes such as phonics and mathematics and provided time to ensure pupils were confident and ready to learn in relevant contexts. They and the headteacher monitored the progress and continuity of children's carefully. They gathered clear evidence to show that the quality of learning had been maintained and that pupils' learning was more secure. Staff, parents, the senior management team and of course the pupils themselves endorsed the effectiveness of this approach fully.

Bruce provided the headteacher's perspective. He described the opportunities and challenges he encountered as he supported early developments in his own school. He recognised the opportunity to break down the physical barrier between pre-school and P1 by opening up the access door. His role as headteacher was to lead and support staff by valuing the initiative and making space for it in the school's development plan.

Tina explained that for the session 2007-2008 the local authority aimed to identify the 'linkedness' between the three projects and provide joint staff development opportunities for pre-school and early years staff to share good practice and agree an Orkney-wide approach. This would culminate in a local resource, a DVD, to promote 'Active Learning in Orkney'.

## **Playing for Excellence!**

*Jacquie Clow, Service Manager, Perth and Kinross Council*

*Lorraine Slabbert, Early Years Support Officer, Perth and Kinross Council*

*Catriona Wood, Headteacher, Tulloch Primary School, Perth*

*Kerry Robb, DHT Acting Deputy Headteacher, Tulloch Primary School, Perth*

*Carol Lamond, P1 Class Teacher, Tulloch Primary School, Perth*

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Perth and Kinross have adopted a phased approach to the development of their Curriculum for Excellence Project, Play in Learning. Schools are encouraged to develop dynamic approaches to teaching and learning and to relate these closely to the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence.

Tulloch Primary School was in the first phase of the project. Staff have, for many years, promoted an active approach to learning at all stages of the school. The school has succeeded in maintaining high standards of attainment and behaviour over time by setting high staff and pupil expectations. Staff have established clear cross curricular links within the four capacities of a Curriculum for Excellence. They have made use of a range of teaching approaches including whole class lessons, small group work and individual activities for those who are in need of additional help to support or extend their learning. They have engaged pupils fully and motivated them through a variety of activities, including working as a team and deciding on roles, writing in context, using technology and being number detectives. Children have been encouraged to make choices in their learning, take responsibility and ownership, demonstrate leadership and influence the planning of next steps in their learning. Follow-up activities have been differentiated and are contextualised and relevant.

Teachers have collaborated closely with one another to plan children's learning activities and ensure interest, motivation and challenge. They have assessed progress, and the pace of progress, by monitoring children's involvement in their learning experiences. The headteacher holds regular meetings with staff to discuss the action they should take to develop each child's learning further. The quality of interaction between teachers and children is recognised by all staff as central to the development of effective learning. The management team monitor classroom interactions and children's progress closely.

### **Active Learning – making it happen!**

*Aileen Valenti, Quality Improvement Officer for Early Years, South Ayrshire Council*

*Davina Hose, Project Leader, Headteacher Minishant Primary School, Minishant*

*Bernadette McCrory, Headteacher, St John's Primary School, Ayr*

*Jessie Caldwell, Headteacher, Glenburn Primary School, Prestwick*

[aileen.valenti@south-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:aileen.valenti@south-ayrshire.gov.uk)

South Ayrshire has produced a video about active learning, as part of its Active Learning 3-18 Project. Staff in all sectors have been encouraged to review their approaches to teaching and learning to enable pupils to be more involved in, and to take greater responsibility for their own learning. The approaches developed in nursery provided exemplars of best practice and two primary headteachers explained the approaches they had adopted to support staff as their practice evolved. Both headteachers were clear that the management team had to 'buy in' to the initiative and that parents had to be kept well informed about what changes were being made and why these changes were necessary. Transition arrangements became an even more important factor in the process of change.

The headteachers gave class teachers time to discuss together how 'active' learning would be addressed in the classroom, how it would be resourced and how continuity in the children's learning experiences would be ensured. They relieved them of the burden of planning and encouraged teachers to take a more flexible approach and adapt the nursery planning format. Staff exchanges between the nursery class and P1 were a feature of the development. Teachers evaluated their practice regularly and made adjustments as and when necessary. Both headteachers monitored children's progress carefully and became increasingly aware that the children were more confident, making faster progress and that their learning was better grounded. Children were able to apply their learning in different contexts and were more secure in their responses. The next stage will be to move this active learning approach through the schools.

## **Let's Talk about Active Learning in Primary 1!**

*Lesley Gibb, Service Manager, Stirling Council*

*Carolann Morrow, Depute Headteacher, Allan's Primary School, Stirling*

*Nicola McCorkindale P1 teacher, Allan's Primary School, Stirling*

[gibbl@stirling.gov.uk](mailto:gibbl@stirling.gov.uk)

Staff in Allan's Primary School are working successfully to implement the council's framework to support continuity in learning for all children from nursery into P1. They have established a positive approach and built on the high quality learning experiences children enjoy in nursery. Education authority staff have provided clear advice and sound guidance for early stages teachers to ensure that pupils entering P1 benefit from high quality, continuous learning experiences.

Teachers in the early stages in Allan's Primary School reviewed, re-organised and planned the learning environment and the use of space carefully to ensure that all children in P1 and 2 were able to take part in well planned learning opportunities which motivated and challenged their learning. Funds were made available to supplement existing materials and equipment that built on children's prior skills and knowledge. Children demonstrated confidence and independence when planning and organising their learning. They were highly motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. Staff supported them effectively by interacting carefully with them, asking open questions and encouraging the children to think and solve problems. Children's progress was monitored carefully. Space for learning outside was more limited but staff were creative in their use of the available space. They promoted purposeful, energetic and active learning through use of a wide range of carefully selected materials. Staff made many of the new resources they used to support learning in both literacy and numeracy. The emphasis was on active learning and pupils spent minimal time on paper-based activities such as completing worksheets. Parents were kept well informed and were regularly involved in their child's learning, and in helping their child learn at home. They valued this approach and recognised the progress achieved by their children as they became more confident individuals and successful learners.

## **Just another step!**

*Liz Rose, Quality Improvement Officer, Falkirk Council*

*Janice Collins, Headteacher, Comely Park Primary School, Falkirk*

[liz.rose@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:liz.rose@falkirk.gov.uk)

Falkirk has addressed the early level of a Curriculum for Excellence by carrying forward into the primary school the nursery philosophy of active, child centred learning. The aim is to ensure an appropriate balance of teacher directed and teacher initiated learning, with child initiated learning and establish a model of active, purposeful learning in the primary school.

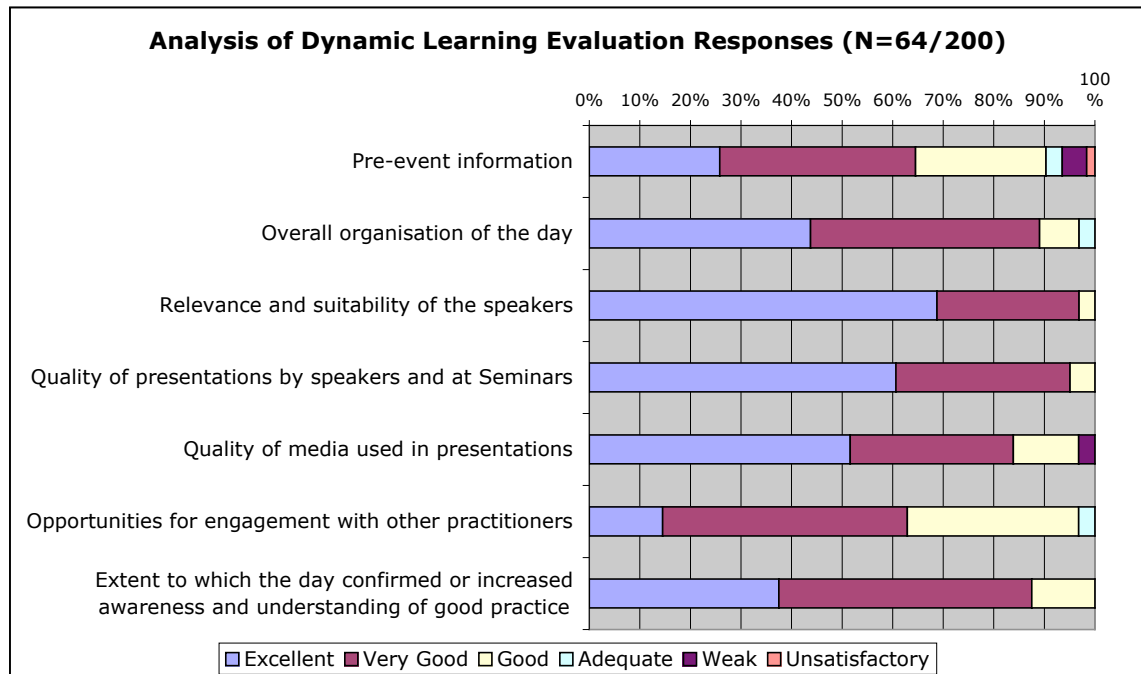
The headteacher together with her nursery and P1 staff have built very positively on the children's excellent experience of learning in their nursery class. They decided to use the open plan area and the three class bays of the P1 area as one large 'classroom' staffed by the three P1 class teachers and one support assistant. They invited the nursery children to design their new P1 area and ensured that some of the activity areas carried through from nursery were presented differently to the children.

The headteacher discussed with and agreed with her teachers how the best nursery practice could be extended into P1. There would be a three-stream P1. Each class bay was small as was the associated open area. It was decided that the three 'classes' would operate as one and that teachers would co-operate in planning and managing the learning of the 60 children. The nursery children the future P1 pupils, helped with suggestions and ideas about how the areas should be arranged. The headteacher was concerned to ensure that the level of challenge and the pace of children's learning and progress, and the previous high standards of attainment were maintained. She identified and began to monitor closely the achievements of a small group of children with different abilities and needs and will continue to do so as these children move through the school. The headteacher supported teachers in developing their skills of observing children as they played and learned, and in evaluating the appropriateness and quality of their learning and progress. The process of transition from nursery into P1 became an even more important feature of the school's approach.

Parents have been kept very well informed and their views have been sought throughout the process of transition and into P1. The headteacher and depute led workshops for parents who note that their children appear to be happier and have settled very quickly into P1. Parents have very high expectations. The headteacher and her staff will continue to monitor and evaluate children's progress and attainment, and the quality of the curriculum to ensure balance, breadth, depth, coherence and continuity.

## Conference evaluation

The format of the evaluation questionnaire follows that used by HMIE for all of its Good Practice Conferences.



December 2007