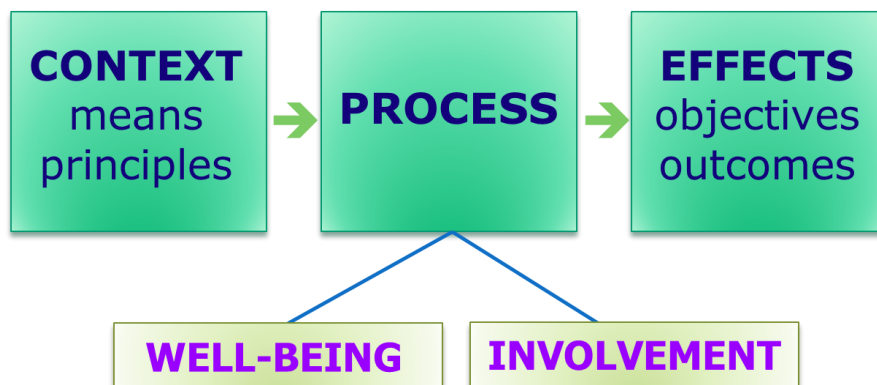


## The expertise on Experiential Education in a nutshell



### A framework for quality

Three categories of variables structure our approach to quality, with a particular attention for the process - what goes on in the learner while engaged in the learning environment in which we discern the content of the experience and the quality of it. The latter entails two indicators well-being (feeling o.k. in the setting) and involvement (intrinsically motivated, intense mental activity or engagement).

### The PROCESS

Observation of the content of the experience: rests on a qualitative methodology resulting in a description of the mental activity and identification of the 'cognitive loading' of activities (which areas of development have been addressed by the learner?)

Observation and measurement of the quality of the experience: the Leuven Well-being and Involvement Scales – both 5-point scales available in 6 versions: for babies & toddlers, kindergarten, primary, secondary, higher education and in-service training

Two variants of measurement techniques:

Scanning: on the spot assessment of WB or/and INV by an external observer during activities/lessons with consecutive observation of a sample of (ten) children based on 2 minutes intervals per child; the technique is used in research designs (e.g. intervention studies) or as part of a self-evaluation instruments for settings/schools.

Screening: for practitioners/teachers a variant of the scales has been developed to serve as a central part of the process oriented monitoring systems; in a group screening every child is given a score for both variables based on observations gathered over two or three weeks and expressing an overall estimation of how the child felt and how involved he/she was. A group screening is executed two or three times a year.

Instruments in which the screening technique is used:

The POMS [Process-oriented Monitoring System]: covering age levels from 0 to 6 (also in English).

LOOQIN<sup>KVS</sup>: a digitalized version of the POMS with a section for kindergarten and one for primary education [in Dutch, translation planned].

LOOQIN<sup>JOPSI</sup>: a digitalized instrument where teachers and students at the secondary level rate the levels of well-being, involvement and competence [in Dutch, translation planned].

MyPortrait: designed to communicate with parents on how their children is doing in the setting (also in English).

PSAI [Process SelfAssessment Instrument for students]: a digital tool and designed for the context of

<p>higher education and combining self-report by students and assessment of levels of well-being and involvement by teachers (also in English, now in a phase of re-programming). The procedure in which the <u>scanning technique</u> is illustrated by the SiCs – the Self-evaluation Instrument for the Care Sector – which is freely available (also in English) at <a href="http://www.kindengezin.be">www.kindengezin.be</a>.</p>
<p><b>The CONTEXT or LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</b></p>
<p>The conceptualization of the process-variables has led to the development of know-how on the <u>active ingredients</u> of the learning environment that determine the levels of well-being and involvement. This expertise rests on an extensive evidence base provided by practice and research.</p>
<p>A ‘framework of <u>factors determining involvement</u>’ has been developed for several levels of education. The framework...</p> <p>for Early Years care settings covers the (1) group climate, (2) richness of the environment, (3) room for initiative, (4) adult style, (5) organization (of time, space and means);</p> <p>for Early Years Kindergarten the factors are captured by the so-called ‘Ten Action Points’ – which start with the design of the space up to interventions for children with particular educational needs;</p> <p>for Primary and Secondary education considers seven factors: (1) group climate, (2) input of ‘the real thing’, (3) room for initiative, (4) adaptation to the level of development, (5) action, (6) cooperative learning and (7) expression – all this complemented by the factor Teacher Style.</p>
<p>Several of these variables are part of instruments developed for <u>research purposes</u>, but the Adult Style Observation Schedule (ASOS) has had most of the attention during the last decades. It focuses on the interactions between adult and children/students and rests on <u>3 dimensions</u>: (1) interventions that enhance involvement (stimulation), (2) interventions supporting well-being (being sensitive to the need for respect, warmth and attention, clarity, belonging, competence...) and (3) interventions that support the drive for autonomy. Assessment of style is based on observation episodes of 10 minutes in which each ‘critical incident’ relevant for one of the dimensions is rated on a 4 point empathy scale as a basis for an overall judgement on a 7 point scale (per dimension). Current research is upgrading the instrument and includes exploration of converging validity with the CLASS and other scales.</p>
<p><b>The OUTPUT</b></p>
<p>Raising levels of well-being and involvement is but a means to make education more effective. Where the first is seen as a necessary condition for the safeguarding of <u>mental health</u>, we can’t do without the second if we want <u>deep-level-learning</u> to occur. The conceptualization of this cognitive output of education is inspired by the constructivist paradigm, the notion of basic schemata and the actual concept of competency.</p>
<p><u>Four fundamental goals</u> are put forward to guide practice: (1) mental health or the ‘fully functioning person’, (2) exploratory drive, (3) competencies and life skills and (4) the basic attitude of linkedness (the ethical dimension).</p>
<p>The competencies and life skills have been articulated in <u>8 developmental domains</u>: (1 &amp; 2) Gross and fine motor skills, (3) Understanding of the physical world (including technology), (4) Understanding of the social world (including social competence), (5) Language, (6) Artistic expression, (7) logical/mathematical thinking and (8) self-organization and entrepreneurship. This framework provides the ‘spectacles’ to identify the cognitive loading of activities. This identification is considered one of the most important skills of an effective teacher as it allows to design a learning environments covering all important areas of the curriculum and to discover which domains are represented in children’s activities and which not.</p>
<p>The <u>insights</u> with regard to these developmental domains have been made accessible for practitioners through a series of publications in the ‘basic book’ on experiential education for care settings, for kindergarten and for primary education – publications that serve in teacher training programs in higher education. A more elaborate format is to be found in two curricula bearing the EXE-stamp: the Early Childhood pre grade-R core Curriculum (Free state of South-Africa) and the recent ‘Pedagogical Framework’ developed for the official care agency in Flanders (Kind &amp; Gezin).</p>

At the instrumental level a five point scale for each of the developmental domains has been made available for practitioners. As a consequence of the holistic approach only one (5-point) scale per domain has been construed covering all age levels – from babies to adults. These scales have been integrated in the monitoring systems POMS, LOOQIN<sup>KVS</sup> and MyPortrait. More elaborate versions of rating scales are available for the domain of ‘self-organization and entrepreneurship’. To support an approach of output that deviates from the reigning deficit model, the Talent Archipelago. The metaphor of a group of islands representing several areas of competence is used as the scene for exploration own talents and initiatives to unfold them.

For several domains, instruments for research of output have been designed. Pilot versions cover the variables of ‘exploratory drive and curiosity’, ‘communication’, ‘self-organisation and entrepreneurship’ and ‘understanding economy’ – for early years and primary education. Most of the formats have a constructivist design: children are confronted with complex and rich situations that elicit actions relevant for the targeted domains to allow an estimation of levels of development. Two more advanced instruments are available: (1) the SOCOM (social competence test) covering the age level from 4 to 7 year of age and based on 9 video clips of puppet scenes accompanied with a set of standardized questions and (2) the Eye for STEM-minitest, covering the age range from 10 to adulthood and based on a series of photographs taken from real scenes and items. These allow to test how people construe that piece of world or ‘what the viewer can make of it’ (the test is now in a stage of upgrading using the ItemResponseTheory).

### **Improvement of quality of practice**

Professional development of practitioners is guided by a vision on a adult/teacher profile resting on five pillars: (1) to be well in ones skin as a person, (2) openness to the world and exploratory drive, (3) the capacity to take the perspective of the learner, (4) self-organization and entrepreneurship and (5) pedagogical optimism (believing in the enormous potential of children). Three principles guide the set-up of training opportunities: getting the highest possible levels of involvement in the participants as overall criteria, introduction of concepts and instruments (spectacles) to observe and reflect and the sandwich-model (a circular process where sessions are intertwined with actions in the settings). Throughout all the initiatives for innovation the Process-oriented Monitoring System functions as the spinal cord. It allows to keep a view on the impact of interventions on the two process-indicators. The LOOQIN digital tools also entail a wealth of suggestions for interventions (with more than 350 items) that can be selected to improve levels of well-being and involvement both at the group and individual level.

### **Intervention studies**

Several studies at the level of early years (care and education), primary education and secondary education have explored relations between well-being and involvement and the characteristics of the learning environment. The Milton Keynes study is an intervention study showing how helping practitioners in the early years to use the process variables as a guide for innovative actions could raise levels of well-being and involvement significantly within less than one year. From a study which was part of a project on equal opportunities in Primary education, the pre- and post-test for language skills confirmed our hypothesis that a level of 3.5 as a mean score for involvement can be considered as minimal to have a sustainable impact on development (here: scores on language tests).