



Learning for Well-being Community Day 2018

REPORT FROM DISCUSSION GROUPS

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Introduction

This is an informal report, prepared by Luís Pinto (Learning for Well-being Foundation), capturing some of the key ideas emerging from the discussion groups which took place in the afternoon of the Learning for Well-being Community Day, on April 24th, 2018, in Brussels.

The purpose of the discussion groups was to offer participants a space to make sense of the experience of the Community Day thus far, to elicit their own reactions to the concept of “competent systems”, and to explore what collaboration can be set in place between sectors in order to contribute to such initiatives.

The discussions were facilitated in two rounds guided by framing questions. Groups in the first round were formed spontaneously, and conversations focused on exploring meaning, guided by the following questions:

- What insights have I personally gained from the two panels in the morning?
- What do they mean for me as a person and professional in the sector I am most familiar with?

Groups in the second discussion round were formed based on interest in finding synergies around one of the four areas of focus of the Learning for Well-being Foundation, each framed by open questions: *Transforming ourselves*; *Transforming relationships*; *Transforming society*; and *Expanding research*.

The key points were collected by the facilitators, annotated on flip-chart or by a volunteer participant, and brought together after the discussions.

Reflections on the Community Day

Below are some reflections emerging from the discussion groups based on the experience of the youth and adult panels, the presentation by the Well-being Project, and the overall process of the event thus far.

A few key words surfacing in the different groups and conversations were:

- Trust - at all levels, between all actors
- Authenticity - not wearing "masks" and bringing all aspects of oneself
- Participation - importance of involving all parties impacted

Panels

All discussion groups talked about the contrast in qualities and focus between the youth panel and the adult panel. Some of the descriptions referred to the youth panel being more from "from the heart", and the adult panel being more "from the head". Put in other words, the young people's panel offered an expertise based on lived personal experiences, while the adult panel focused on expertise acquired through professional roles.

Questions posed by moderators were generally appreciated in both panels, but it was mentioned in conversation how they shaped the focus of the conversation towards the differences brought up in the discussion groups. Some groups wondered about how much the created environment is responsible for encouraging authenticity and vulnerability in the way panelists participate in the experience. For example, the young people panel was presented with ages and place of residence, while the adult panel was presented with positions and organisations. Questions for the youth panel elicited personal experience and feelings, while the adult panel was asked for more analytical and conceptual responses.

In one of the groups it was mentioned that although young and adult panels came from different perspectives — "head" or "heart" — they both reached similar ideas about the importance of relationships, and trust. In fact, the word "trust" was constantly repeated throughout all discussion groups as a key element, to be present at different levels of a competent system, in order to support continuous development.

Some of the insights brought up by the discussions groups:

- Need to speak from young people's point of view. How to speak in the "language" of young people

- No “one way of learning” path for a child. They develop in different ways.
- Young people honoured what they expected from their teachers.
- Young people know what they want and need. Admirable level of insight and reasoning - they could be “teachers”
- Hopeful - creating the feeling that they can change things.
- Teachers need more freedom to change or personalise education.
- Teaching works when relationship with students is good.
- Easy to forget to listen: teachers forget to consult with their students; students forget that teachers are human.

Youth Panel

There was a general appreciation for the presence and the quality of the youth panel: “powerful, strong and clear” was mentioned by one participant. There was some reflection on the social diversity of the youth panel, whether it represented only a small picture of the entire continuum of youth. Participants noted the panelists were all women, attending schools with resources or part of alternative pedagogical movements, and possibly coming from well established families. Some participants missed other voices in the panel, and wondered whether the points raised by the panel would have been different should have been a different profile students.

Adult Panel

The contribution and complementarity of the participants in the adult panel was generally appreciated. For some in the discussion groups it made explicit the gap between initiative and reality. One of the groups highlighted it was important to remember that “education is always a political action”

For some participants it was difficult to grasp the message around “competent systems”, partly because they found it hard to derive meaning from the discourse (which was associated with being too specific to the “European bubble”) and partly because they would have needed more clarity in terms of defining competent systems.

Presentation on the Wellbeing Project

The key message of The Wellbeing Project - the importance of inner work, and how it impacts outer work - was brought up as a key insight by several groups. The whole question of “who helps the helper” and how important it is to be well in order to do well seemed to resonate with participants.

Other elements of the presentation that stayed with participants were the ripple effect of inner work explained in the video and the vision of well-being as a process — “a journey that never ends”.

Some remaining questions included a reflection on whether well-being might mean some form of enlightenment, and a curiosity about what concretely happens after after events. In other words, how concretely does well-being inspires well-doing?

Process

The Learning for Well-being inspired methodology came across as concrete, with direct application. Planning the Community Day did not come without reluctance in proposing holistic experiences such as the gong bath or embodiment practices. "Owning your intention" was described by some participants as a key ingredient that might influence how participants engage in less familiar experiences. In other words, participants mirror the confidence expressed by those proposing and leading such practices. They feel safer in trying something new when they experience the enjoyment of those who propose them.

The "gong nap" - as described by some of the participants - was highly appreciated, described as surprising, energising, and 'coming at the right moment'. One participant suggested it should be part of every event.

Some comments about the process included:

- Peaceful pacing, calmness, stillness
- A holistic experience - in the way things are presented, engaging different levels of experience
- Embedding the Learning for Well-being principles themselves; Foundation is actually practicing what it preaches
- Missing more visual support

Transforming Ourselves

What capacities must we develop personally to cultivate competent systems, for the well-being of children and those who support them?

There was a general agreement that transformation starts with oneself, and that it is important to increase self-knowledge and personal development in order to give back, while holding the belief that everyone can save the world.

"I have no other way than starting with myself" a participant said.

The group reflected on what might cause hesitation to engage in personal transformation, as a means to transform relationships and environments.

- Fear of being confronted with one's fears. Personal knowledge is tough work and represents a great commitment.
- In the past, people used to educate their children in similar ways, and roles - like the ones of parents and teachers - were more separate. Today roles are more nuanced. Parents and teachers are both expected to be involved in the whole development of a child.
- Many teachers find that they are burdened with a heavy curriculum and that little time is left for emotional, social and moral development. However, some participants in the group described an exception practiced in their own secondary school where teachers spend the first 3 weeks establishing a rapport with students. One of the ways they do that is by connecting their practice with their biographies, and showing themselves vulnerable.
- Personal development pushes you to go out of your comfort zone. It could be easier if we would trigger a movement in education for all who support children.

- Time and money — systems hurry to get children in the labour market. Personal development work is seen as an expensive activity.
- The question at stake might be a confusion concerning the purpose of education, which would then link the personal and the professional. Is education about acquiring and applying information, or is it about the formation of the whole person? If it's the latter than the teacher should model her or his own self-transformation.

Identifying the traits and capacities that might enable personal transformation, the participants in the group mentioned:

- Belief in the future and in the ability to develop
- Openness, to do something even if it might be scary. Do it because it is scary. You need to know and accept that you are flawed. The point is to figure out how you can be flawed differently.
- Honesty
- Courage, to face the responsibility with which you are dealt. Decisions based on fear are always wrong.
- Listening. Every conflict comes from not really listening, either to your body or someone's needs. Deep listening requires some form of self-criticism, that is why it's one of the hardest things to do. It also requires a sense of curiosity, to discover the other person. You can only really listen if you open your mind, otherwise you are just looking to confirm your opinion. Listening without assumptions is a very difficult exercise, since we measure others "with the length of our own arm". The difficulty is in shifting to the level of listening the other requires.
- Confidence, in the right measure. We should be confident not to change something because other don't like it in us, but too much confidence that closes us completely can be harmful.
- Reflecting, on oneself or a situation.
- Acceptance, of where you are, or your starting point.
- Empathy. Frank deWalle, a primatologist, describes empathy as the greatest factor of human resilience and the basis for solidarity. Therefore empathy should be taught, both in relation to oneself, as to others.

Exploring what potential action would represent greatest leverage in terms of supporting personal transformation, in the context of cultivating competent systems, participants in the group identified:

- Teacher training: Include personal transformation work including biographic reflection and self-observation. "If teacher can't shape themselves, they can't shape the world."
- Director training: train directors/principals in schools so they give institutional allowance for personal transformation work with teachers and pupils.
- Recruitment: Hire people with passion, searching for a like between personal motivation and the qualities required by the teaching profession
- Grading: grading should be done by yourself (self-evaluation) and by others (peer evaluation).
- Purpose: define the purpose of education, and realise that things can be different.
- Recognising difference: create awareness about the different ways of being in the world; to understand that we are fundamentally different. Like snowflakes, unique in our structure.
- Create safety: through confidentiality, love and care.

Transforming Relationships

What capacities must we develop to nurture the quality of relationships between all actors in a competent system?

Below is a list of capacities listed by the group in answer to the overarching question related to the topic of discussion:

- Curiosity and interest in the person you are building a relationship with; sharing who you are.
- Courage
- Capacity to reflect together
- Freedom for inner diversity. Appreciation and acceptance
- Defining roles get the best out of each other.
 - How do different roles affect the quality of different relationships?
- Your values underlie everything you do
- We are always human.
- Critical thinking
- Flexibility
- Open mindedness
- Commitment
- Co-construction
- Sustainability
- Authenticity
- Clarity
- Good communication
- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Empathy
- Acceptance, respect, honesty, love, integrity.

Some additional reflections included:

- It is important to look at the relationships with oneself, as much as the relationship with someone else. Different relationships, including the one with yourself, need different capacities. We should offer ourselves the quality of listening we want to offer others.
- Relationships risk being overprotective, when one allows fear to become an obstacle.

Transforming Societies

In the group, there was a shared sense that current structures and systems are not compatible with the characteristics of the society we live in today. We must focus on the evolution of the existing system, since it's not realistic to start a over. This can happen by bringing new layers to the current system.

The main focus of our systems should be in creating well-being for everyone. In the group it was suggested that well-being becomes a "Sustainable Development Goal" in itself.

There are no 'champions' for well-being. Many celebrities are known for the money they own, or other forms of social status, but few are associated with the idea of generating well-being, and even less when this is associated with children and young people.

The whole notion of “competent systems” should be defined in a political and social manner, involving children, parents, teachers and different representatives in society. Participation is key, since societal change always started with citizens. There is therefore a need for a “healthier” civil society.

Transforming societies towards competent systems requires research, and time. Some of the elements and actions that might support such direction were mentioned by the group:

- Create a common language that enables everyone in the system to communicate more effectively about well-being
- Bring ourselves fully to our interactions, including speaking about our feelings and emotions.
- Infuse trust and enthusiasm in our actions, and figure out how to inspire others
- Events should be aimed at connecting politicians and citizens, using approaches that connect heart and mind, such as dance or movement.

Expanding Research

Conversation in the group explored personal experiences on assessment, and when participants felt motivated, or rather discouraged, by assessment.

Discouraging experiences included assessment methods that did not take process into account, when there was an implicit grading and hierarchy, when evaluations were given by educators without discussion or involvement of the child.

Motivated experiences included collaborative methods like co-assessment and peer assessment, self-evaluation, and opportunity to improve after receiving feedback.

The collection of experiences highlighted the need to change adult and teacher mindset, and to bring “out-of-the-box” creativity to assessment practices, moving away from standardised assessment and giving all actors the necessary tools. Assessment is positive when it enables people to express themselves fully, rather than being “marked”.

Some of the practices and principles identified by the group included:

- Assessment based on seven levels or qualities, inspired by the chakra system.
- Make explicit the purpose of each assessment practice, and also the context in which it takes place (e.g. teachers, schools, process)
- Assessment should offer a short feedback loop during the process, not only at the end.
- Focus on intrinsic motivation of learners.
- Young people should be involved in the process, in collaboration with teachers, but also parents, that should participate in evaluation of schools.
- Improve the communication between children, teachers and parents - and also between teachers themselves. There are current communication difficulties between the different key stakeholders.
- Showing (and feeling comfortable with) vulnerability is key, but requires enough trust within the system.

Linking with the notion of competent systems, assessment was mentioned by the group at the first step towards improvement. Competent systems should therefore support a movement towards finding alternative ways to assess, which should be backed by a change in policy.

What must we measure and communicate, to support the development of competent systems:

- Always developing - growth and improvement
- Curiosity and respect for diversity
- Aspect of humility
- Fun

Conditions for competent systems:

- It's important to differentiate between competences of people and a competent system;
- important to make visible people's different expertise; it should not be that every organisation will go through the same developmental processes;
- Passion is important
- Making use of diversity
- Finding a universal open-ended process in which each person can find their own way - what resonates with them.
- Sustainable - individuals can find something that they can connect to
- A system that thrives needs unconditional acceptance. You must "create a tribe", in which people feel they belong.
- Working within a context and respect certain principles of well-being. People and the planet are the driving forces for awareness-based action.
- Can we develop observation skills that can inform us of the well-being of very young children?