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The Leuven Scales for Well-Being and Involvement

Information for EYFS Practitioners

This tool has been developed by a team based at the Research Centre for Experiential Education (Leuven University – Belgium) under the supervision of Dr. Ferre Laevers. The tool focuses on two central indicators of quality early years provision: children's 'well-being' and 'involvement'.

Well-Being

Well-being focuses on the extent to which pupils feel at ease, act spontaneously, show vitality and self-confidence. It is a crucial component of emotional intelligence and good mental health.

The Scale for Well Being:

Level

1

Extremely low

The child clearly shows signs of discomfort such as crying or screaming. They may look dejected, sad, frightened or angry. The child does not respond to the environment, avoids contact and is withdrawn. The child may behave aggressively, hurting him/herself or others.

2

Low

The posture, facial expression and actions indicate that the child does not feel at ease. However, the signals are less explicit than under level 1 or the sense of discomfort is not expressed the whole time.

3

Moderate

The child has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signs indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort.

4

High

The child shows obvious signs of satisfaction (as listed under level 5). However, these signals are not constantly present with the same intensity.

5

Extremely High

The child looks happy and cheerful, smiles, cries out with pleasure. They may be lively and full of energy. Actions can be spontaneous and expressive. The child may talk to him/herself, play with sounds, hum, sing. The child appears relaxed and does not show any signs of stress or tension. He /she is open and accessible to the environment. The child expresses self-confidence and self-assurance.

Involvement

involvement focuses on the extent to which pupils are operating to their full capabilities. In particular it refers to whether the child is focused, engaged and interested in various activities.

The Scale for Involvement:

Level

1

Activity is simple, repetitive and passive. The child seems absent and displays no energy. They may stare into space or look around to see what others are doing.

Extremely low

2

Frequently interrupted activity. The child will be engaged in the activity for some of the time they are observed, but there will be moments of non-activity when they will stare into space, or be distracted by what is going on around.

Low

3

Mainly continuous activity. The child is busy with the activity but at a fairly routine level and there are few signs of real involvement. They make some progress with what they are doing but don't show much energy and concentration and can be easily distracted.

Moderate

4

Continuous activity with intense moments. The child's activity has intense moments and at all times they seem involved. They are not easily distracted.

High

5

The child shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest involvement. They are concentrated, creative, energetic and persistent throughout nearly all the observed period.

Extremely High

Measuring Well-Being and Involvement

The evaluation process begins by assessing the levels of well-being and involvement using the scales outlined above. The procedure is simple and can be compared to 'scanning'. Practitioners need to observe pupils as a group or individually for a period of approximately two minutes, then give a score for wellbeing and/or involvement. It is thought that unless pupils are operating at 4 or 5, learning will be limited. However, it is natural for levels of well-being and involvement to fluctuate throughout the day and it is therefore unrealistic to expect children to operate at levels 4 or 5 at all times. It is also useful to observe how well practitioners tune in to the children's levels of well-being and involvement and that they respond to low levels sensitively. Even a low level of well-being or involvement can become a learning opportunity which can result in higher levels.

If there is a consistent low level of well-being and or involvement, it is likely a child's development will be threatened. The higher the levels of well-being and involvement that a setting can enable, the more they can add to the child's development. When there are high levels of well-being and involvement, deep level learning is taking place.

The initial observation is the starting point for further analysis concentrating on children with lower levels of well-being and / or involvement. This analysis should inform practitioners about the quality and suitability of their work and it should provide some sort of framework for intervention toward individual pupils.

Measuring a child's wellbeing and involvement can also empower and energise teachers and practitioners. If their efforts are seen to be leading to a high level of wellbeing and involvement in their pupils, then it is likely that this will serve as a great source of encouragement and result in a cycle of continual improvement.

Analysis and Implications for Practice

When looking for an explanation for the low and high scores you need to consider 3 kinds of influential forces:

- the approach;
- the child and its background;
- exceptional circumstances.

The Approach

Explanations for the observed levels of well-being and involvement can first be found in the approach or the context as it is shaped by the practitioners' decisions and actions. There are five important components:

1. The Offer

How 'rich' is the environment in which the children find themselves?

Take a closer look at:

- the infrastructure: the arrangement and division of the different rooms or spaces
- the available resources
- the activities that are offered in the course of the day

2. The Group Climate

In what degree do children feel at home in the setting and in the group?

Take a closer look at:

- the arrangement, the interior of the room, the overall impression of the space
- the efforts that are made to enhance positive relationships

Whether a child likes to be in a setting and feels comfortable there often depends on the atmosphere. This can vary, but most of the time there is a basic climate that characterises the setting or the group. If it is enabling, you notice this from positive interactions: touching and hugging each other, laughing, spontaneity, etc. The arrangement of the space can contribute a great deal to a positive climate. How cosy has the room been decorated? How do the colours affect the overall impression of the space? How does the division of the room and the furniture come across? Are there attractive, separated areas or is it one vast empty space? Does it look rather chaotic or just a bit too organised? Naturally, the atmosphere is also strongly affected by the relationships among the children themselves and between the practitioners and the children. You can consciously enhance a sense of belonging by creating pleasant and enjoyable moments with the group and by helping the children develop a positive relationship with each other and with the adults around.

3. Room for Initiative

How much freedom do the children have?

Take a closer look at:

- the organisational pattern: the opportunities you offer children to determine themselves with what they play, how long, how often and with whom
- the degree in which the children have a say in the plan of the day, the kind of activities that take place and the order in which they are offered

- the degree in which children receive responsibility in the practical course of the day
- the degree in which rules are explained and set in consultation with the children

Doing what you love to do gives a lot of satisfaction and is a condition for involvement. Children look for activities that are geared towards their interests and capabilities. In order to do this they need sufficient space to take initiative and follow their own impulses. Is making a puzzle obligatory or are there other options? Do you keep the children firmly in line or can they choose the resources that appeal to them? All this is of course only possible within boundaries and with clear rules and agreements. 'Room for initiative' also means that you actively involve children in the plan of the day and that you offer them responsibilities they can handle.

4. Organisation

Is the day organised efficiently and taking into account the needs of all children?

Take a closer look at:

- the plan of the day or the time schedule: provide a clear organisation with the necessary flexibility
- the division of tasks among the supervisors: ensure a maximal use of the available human resources
- ways of grouping: provide continuity and make the children feel secure

A whole day in a setting can seem long and chaotic for a child. A clear structure offers children something to hold on to. The content, duration and order of the different components of the day must be geared towards the child's age and individual needs. If there are several practitioners, a good division of tasks results in a flexible course of the day so that transitions can take place fluently, 'dead' moments are limited and supervision is secured. Also a more or less fixed composition of the groups provides clarity and enhances a sense of security.

5. The type of Guidance

How much empathy is there while interacting with the children?

- Do you intervene in a 'stimulating' way? You sense what a child is interested in and give opportunities for children to become more involved in their activities.
- Do you relate to children in a sensitive way? You are aware of children's feelings and respond adequately to their basic needs (the need for attention and affection, for clarity and affirmation, for understanding of their emotions).
- Do you offer children autonomy? You give children the space to manifest themselves, to follow their own interests, to experiment, to determine when something is 'finished', to participate in the making of agreements and solving conflicts. The effective practitioner notices what goes on in the child.

Other explanations for the assessed levels

Sometimes, the explanation for the high or low levels lies outside the approach. For example, a child can have a low level of involvement because it is their first day in the setting. There are also exceptional circumstances that can explain certain scores. For example, the first workday of a new practitioner can affect the children's level of well-being because they need some time to get acquainted with this new adult.