

## **LIFELONG LEARNING STARTS IN PRE-SCHOOL - A BRITISH APPROACH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The issue of “lifelong learning” should be considered as part of the educational process that begins formally in the first educational institutions in which individuals begin acquiring their knowledge about the world around them. If the first step of this journey brings a sense of success, surely you would more willingly make the second step.

For this reason it is important to provide an inspiring and encouraging environment in the early stages of school education to empower students to achieve their full educational potential and enable them to continue the process of “lifelong learning”. The achievement by individuals of their full potential is a key educational goal of the British National Curriculum. It states that students should be inspired to learn independently to be able to successfully continue “lifelong learning”. Teachers should be permanent learners and constantly update their skills, knowledge and teaching methods.

I’m going to discuss the issue of “lifelong learning” in the context of school education as a process that starts in pre-school and lasts a lifetime under three main headings:

- 1) determinants of learning and problem solving (using “Zippy’s Friends” a British preventive health care programme)
- 2) inspiring to learn (presenting the International Primary Curriculum and the Cambridge Primary Framework)
- 3) teachers’ professional development (presenting Guy Claxton’s and Dylan Wiliam’s theories on teaching, learning, coaching and mentoring in education).

### **KEY WORDS**

*education, Early Years foundation Stage Education, teacher, student, profes-*

*sional development, school, problem solving, learning determinants, curriculum.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays the concept of lifelong learning seems to be very popular worldwide and is included in the national policies of many countries. This may be considered as a direct consequence of a decision made at the Lisbon European Council meeting in March 2000. There government leaders “set the European Union a 10-year mission to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. To succeed in this mission, they decided that improvement in areas like competitiveness, employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development was required and lifelong learning was chosen to be the key strategy to deliver this. On 21 November 2001 The European Commission published the ‘Communication on Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality’ and in June 2002 the European Union Education Council adopted a Resolution on Lifelong Learning. This explains why the idea of lifelong learning has become the guiding principle for education and training policy in many European countries at the same time.

However it is important to remember that the concept of lifelong learning is much older and was implemented in British education policy long before the Lisbon European Council decision. The British Education Reform Act of 1988 played a key role in making lifelong learning a reality that starts in pre-school and provides the foundation for future learning even if the term “lifelong learning” was never specifically used in the Act.

## **DETERMINANTS OF LEARNING AND PROBLEM SOLVING**

The Act introduced the National Curriculum and divided the process of education into graduated stages. Each stage prepares for the next one but the Early Years Education Foundation Stage is considered as crucial for future success. Educational activities at this stage are focused on developing a love for learning. Teachers are supposed to inspire children to look for information and to explore the environment. Students should feel confident enough to discover new knowledge and to build their own opinions based on personal experience. Teachers are also supposed to observe

children to identify any problems that can slow down the learning process like speech impediments, hearing problems, physical disorders or any personal weaknesses.

Teachers are expected to cooperate with parents and specialists to provide specific help or to find solutions. This role is very important in order to allow students to build a solid foundation for lifelong learning. The sooner problems are identified and solved the better the learning results will be. This is why Personal, Social and Health Education is a very important element of Early Years Education in the UK. It can be delivered as an individual subject or part of others and its main aim is to equip children with the knowledge and skills necessary to be independent and confident personalities who are able to successfully and with confidence continue lifelong learning.

Personal, Social and Health Education can be delivered using many methods one of which is a mental health promotion programme called “Zippy’s Friends” currently running in primary schools and kindergartens in 27 countries including Poland and Lithuania.

**Tabela 1: Where is Zippy's Friends running?**

(<http://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/teachers/zippy-s-friends-teachers/where-is-zippy-s-friends-running-3.html>)

Asia	South America	Europe	Africa	North America
<u>China</u>	<u>Argentina</u>	<u>Belgium</u>	<u>Mauritius</u>	<u>Canada</u>
<u>India</u>	<u>Brazil</u>	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Morocco</u>	<u>USA</u>
<u>Singapore</u>	<u>Chile</u>	<u>England and</u>	<u>Reunion</u>	<u>Trinidad</u>
<u>Vietnam</u>	<u>Costa Rica</u>	<u>Wales</u>		<u>and Tobago</u>
	<u>El Salvador</u>	<u>Iceland</u>		
	<u>Mexico</u>	<u>Ireland</u>		
	<u>Panama</u>	<u>Lithuania</u>		
	<u>Peru</u>	<u>Netherlands</u>		
	<u>Uruguay</u>	<u>Norway</u>		
		<u>Poland</u>		
		<u>Russia</u>		
		<u>Slovakia</u>		

The idea to create the programme came from an organisation called Befrienders International (now Befrienders Worldwide) in 1996. It was providing a telephone call service for people who would like to talk about their problems. Most of the callers could not see any solution to whatever difficult situation they were in and many had suicidal tendencies. From their experiences in this area the organisation decided to create a program which could help young children develop coping skills, so that they would be better able to deal with crises at any stage in their lives. Thanks to sponsorship from the pharmaceutical company SmithKline Beecham (now GlaxoSmithKline or GSK) work began in 1997.

Befrienders International cooperated with a team of eminent academics and educational specialists. The first version of the programme was designed for European schools and was called Reaching Young Europe. In 1998-99 the programme was trialled in Denmark and the results showed the potential of the program but also exposed its weaknesses. Professor Brian Mishara from the University of Quebec in Montreal then got involved to revise and expand the programme. In 2001 the new version of the programme was tested in Denmark and Lithuania. It showed obvious improvements in children's coping and social skills and the benefits applied equally to boys and girls. To avoid linking the program with an organisation associated with suicide prevention, like Befrienders, a new charity organisation called Partnership for Children was created and the programme's name was changed to "Zippy's Friends". Since then its popularity has significantly increased year on year and will soon celebrate the 1 000 000<sup>th</sup> child participating in the program.

"Zippy's Friends" is based on 6 stories about a stick insect called Zippy and his group of friends who just started school. It contains 6 modules, (each consisting of 4 sessions):

- Feelings,
- Communication,
- Making and breaking relationships,
- Conflict resolution,
- Dealing with change and loss,
- We cope

They deal with issues like: friendship, social skills, loneliness, bullying, death, divorce and making a new start.

The program can be delivered by teachers who have had 12 hours training. Teachers are provided with a set of pictures for each story, a syllabus for sessions with detailed descriptions of activities, a booklet with important suggestions and necessary information about the program, a poster of Zippy and his friends, a poster with the rules to follow during sessions and a leaflet for parents containing basic information about the programme. During sessions children listen to the stories and are encouraged to find the best solution to described problems. Through games and drama activities they practise social skills like: making social contact, helping others, asking for help and expressing their own feelings. They discover the importance of talking and listening and are given support to build their own

self-confidence. Evaluation of the programme shows that those who have participated in the programme improved their social skills especially: cooperation, self control, assertiveness, empathy, dealing with problems and also reduced self-destructive behaviour. Many teachers who run the program, report that they not only noticed positive changes in their students but also in themselves. They very often admit that after they had been running the program they feel more confident and competent in dealing with problems.

As a starting point to encourage lifelong learning- “Zippy’s Friends” should be appreciated for its role in teaching very young students how to solve problems which can be barriers to learning. If these types of issues are ignored they may have consequences ranging from not participating in group learning, depression and possibly putting students off education and the schooling system. The programme provides the training in social skills that are crucial to developing a strong personality who is able to successfully participate in lifelong learning. What is very interesting is the fact that it has a positive effect not only on the students but also teachers delivering the programme.

## **INSPIRING TO LEARN**

Assuming a good foundation for lifelong learning is provided we now need to consider how to deliver the curriculum to make it attractive for children and inspires them to become lifelong learners.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 introduced the National Curriculum that standardised British schooling. It contains core and foundation subjects each having specific “attainment targets”, “programmes of study” and “assessment arrangements”. All state maintained schools are supposed to follow the National Curriculum and provide education that prepares “(...) pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life” (Education Reform Act 1988 c.40, 1(2)). Schools are expected to develop their own curricula that not only teach students the required subject knowledge but also help them to develop skills and understanding within each subject. This is not an easy task and many schools buy educational products that can be used at school. Two examples are:

- the International Primary Curriculum
- the Cambridge Primary Framework.

Both are based on the National Curriculum and written by teams of

professional specialists in education.

The International Primary Curriculum is provided by Fieldwork Education which was established in 1984 by two Head teachers, David Playfoot and Martin Skelton. Fieldwork Education is part of the 'World Class Learning Group' which owns and operates schools worldwide and provides extensive learning-focused school management services including professional training. Their service focuses on learning as the principle activity at school which is considered as a process related not only to students but also to teachers. Fieldwork Education provides a range of assessment and evaluation tools like: Assessment for Learning programmes and Looking for Learning. It created early years, primary and middle year's curricula. The International Primary Curriculum (IPC) for 3-11 year old children is now delivered in 1,600 schools in 92 countries around the world (<http://www.greatlearning.com/ipc>). Its contents are divided in to four sections by age group:

- Early Years: 3-5 years old
- Milepost 1: 5-7 years old
- Milepost 2: 7-9 years old
- Milepost 3: 9-12 years old

The IPC specifies learning goals for all subjects of the English National Curriculum but arranges them in a way that is accessible to an international audience and better supports personal learning. The core idea of the curriculum is the assumption that current education is a preparation for an unknown future. Children should be taught skills useful for lifelong learning instead of getting ready to do certain jobs which may not exist in the future. They should also have knowledge about different cultures as they are members of a global society. The curriculum is comprehensive, thematic and creative. Its topics are free from culture allocation so can be applied in any country and adopted to a specific school's ethos and their national context.

The content that should be taught at certain stages is organised around topics instead of subjects. For example the unit: "Flowers and Insects" for 5-7 year old children covers issues from 6 subjects: Science, Geography, Art, Music, Society, and International. It is intended to last about 7 weeks and contains different types of activities that are supposed to make each student feel like he is finding the information himself and discovering the knowledge so his learning is personal. In this way students are encouraged

to be active learners and their knowledge, skills and understanding are built upon according to their needs and abilities. The training in collecting data, observing the environment and operating on areas associated with different subjects at the same time helps to develop self-confidence and independent learning. Crossing the boundaries of subjects encourages free thinking and makes learning not only useful but also interesting.

The Cambridge Primary Framework is another example of implementing the National Curriculum internationally. It was developed by the 'University of Cambridge International Examinations' and is used in primary schools around the world. Its aim is to help schools develop learners who are confident, responsible, innovative and engaged. It provides the curriculum content (including the order of delivery) and theoretical and practical support for teachers including assessment materials.

Unlike the IPC, the Cambridge Primary Framework covers individual subjects like:

- English
- English as a Second Language
- Mathematics
- Science

Each subject is provided with a comprehensive set of learning objectives for each year of primary education, designed to engage learners in active and creative learning. It further divides the learning areas described in the National Curriculum for England. For example instead of the 3 content areas in English

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking and listening

it has five, because it adds:

- Phonics, spelling and vocabulary
- Grammar and punctuation

The main aim of the curriculum is to prepare pupils for a smooth transition to secondary school. Its assessment structure is designed to provide clear information about a student's progress. Cambridge Primary Checkpoint Tests give a Statement of Achievement with detailed feedback on students' strengths and weaknesses so both the teacher and student are aware of progress made and the teacher can plan teaching according to the

individual needs.

The programme adopts a wide range of resources to make the process of learning interesting and show students that their knowledge can be useful and can be a source of personal pride. It provides teaching materials such as:

- Teacher guides – these bring together schemes of work, sample lesson plans, planning and implementation guides
- Resource lists – these include resources endorsed by Cambridge, recommended by Cambridge and suggested by teachers
- Textbooks prepared by leading educational publishers (<http://www.cie.org.uk/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-primary/cambridge-primary/classroom-support/>).

The Cambridge Primary Framework does not only focus on students. It considers teachers as learners “seeking to build on and develop their knowledge and skills through a virtuous circle of reflection on practice – involving research, evaluation and adaptation. They support students to become independent and reflective learners.”(Cambridge International Examinations (2012), *Implementing the curriculum with Cambridge: A guide for school leaders*, p. 14) For teachers the Cambridge Primary Framework provides on-line courses, face-to-face training and professional development qualification opportunities.

But even the best resources will not inspire without the skills of a good teacher. That is why the support for teachers in professional development is so important.

## **TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The field of education is constantly changing not only because of updating the curriculum but also because new concepts are developed continually as we learn more about how people learn. Specialists in particular areas of educational research have made available lots of material to support teachers in their quest to become better at what they do.

Dylan Wiliam born in 1946 in north Wales is Emeritus Professor of Educational Assessment in the Institute of Education at the University of London which is a world leading centre for education and applied social science. Wiliam’s principal research focuses on the professional development of teachers. He promotes the idea that teacher learning communities

based in schools can be used to create effective systems of teacher professional development. He also encourages teachers to use students' assessment results for adapting teaching to better meet student needs (Wiliam, D. (2007) *Keeping learning on track: classroom assessment and the regulation of learning*. In F. K. Lester Jr (Ed.), *Second handbook of mathematics teaching and learning*, Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing).

As a mathematician with a PhD in psychometrics he has made extensive research in education and has arrived at the conclusion that the solution to improving the results of school teaching is not to reduce the number of students in the class but to raise the teachers' skill levels. He also shows that the correlation between a teacher's qualifications and teaching effectiveness is close to zero so instead of focusing on teacher training it is better to invest in developing teachers' coaching skills. This way learning can be a game in which everyone can be a winner. He suggests that it is important to make teachers see the reality of their classroom and change it into an inspiring environment where learning (not only teaching) is taking place.

In Peter Wilby's article: 'Teaching guru is optimistic about education' published in *The Guardian* (Wilby P. (2011), *The Guardian*, Teaching guru is optimistic about education, 18.01.2014) Wiliam is quoted as below.

"Take that most common of all classroom scenes: the teacher asks a question and children put their hands up. The answers, Wiliam points out, always come from the same pupils, and the teacher has no idea whether the others understand anything. "Hands up" should be banned. Instead, advises Wiliam, use lollipop sticks; write a child's name on each and pick at random the one to answer the question. Or tell all pupils to hold up answers on mini-whiteboards, which will give you a snapshot of how the whole class is doing. Or hand out green, amber and red paper cups, which children can hold up to show that they understand what you're telling them, find it difficult or haven't a clue what you're on about."

In the same article we can also read:

"We're addicted to grades," Wiliam says. "I've nothing against grades at the end of the school year. But telling students, after every piece of work, that they're at levels 5, 6 or whatever is bizarre, perverse. The national curriculum levels were meant to be descriptions of the totality of achievement over an entire key stage, not judgments on individual pieces of work." Assessment, he explains, should be part of a conversation with pupils that

helps teachers to decide where lessons should go next. It should be “assessment for learning” (AFL), not “assessment of learning”.

In this way of thinking, assessment is not the final point of teaching but a starting point for more learning - lifelong learning. In this situation both students and teachers are learners who work collaboratively. Teachers, instead of planning the routine of the classroom task should observe students’ responses to tasks and learn about their strengths, their weaknesses, their needs and lead their learning in an interesting and inspiring way. However, such skills cannot be just taught during Initial Teacher Training but they can be developed by teachers over time. According to Wiliam it requires specific personal attitudes, a readiness to learn and the ability to control a classroom. A key role in this process play school-based teacher learning communities.

Guy Claxton goes on to consider the whole school as a learning community and a field of learning for everyone. He uses the concept of ‘Learning Power’ to assist in changing schools.

The concept of Learning Power is understood as a set of psychological traits and skills that enable a person to learn effectively and succeed in learning challenges. In this concept, formal educational methods are replaced by those used in learning sports or musical instruments, or in mastering complex social situations. Coaching and leadership become the dominant approaches to school education. In Claxton’s opinion building the Learning Power of a school is a process of cultural change. It should be considered in terms of an evolution. It requires taking into consideration specific characteristic of the school and building an inquisitive and collaborative staff community with strong leadership at the top and leading personalities in other responsible positions of the school structure. School leaders should be open to ideas from staff and initiate conversations with staff members and parents. They should plan all initiatives carefully and inspire the school community to be involved in their implementation and checking the results of any changes. When the school community reaches the stage that ‘teachers become learners about their own teaching and pupils become their own teachers’ the school can expect a student’s best performance and teachers will:

- Notice and comment on student’s learning muscles.
- Focus ‘feedback’ on aspects of learnable power.
- Get students talking and writing about the “how” of learning.

- Model inquisitive and fallible learners.
- Display learning images and work in progress.
- Plan activities that deliberately stretch various learning muscles.
- Encourage extended, difficult learning projects.
- Involve learners as resources, teachers and co-designers.
- Look for links with the outside world

([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1itkF\\_YcSqI&list=PLCp3\\_brrD7x-qNE5Q99a2Wf3f\\_iLxbAzS1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1itkF_YcSqI&list=PLCp3_brrD7x-qNE5Q99a2Wf3f_iLxbAzS1)).

Generally they put all efforts into stretching students Learning Powers by avoiding critical comments on students work. They make students talk about their opinions and choices and share opinions. They encourage them to ask questions and independently look for answers. They encourage them to check their own answers for example by logical thinking, checking books, discussing with friends and asking the authority (teacher). Learning Powers teachers let students make their own decisions about their approach to the task and respect their will to do it independently or with the collaboration of friends or with the teacher. These teachers pay particular attention to giving lots of positive feedback before any criticism to help children build self-confidence as an active and lifelong learner.

In the UK teachers are expected to keep abreast of modern educational theories like those presented above in order that they have the choice to adopt these methods to improve teaching and learning. They are expected to be lifelong learners to be able to train their students for lifelong learning from their first day at school.

## **CONCLUSION**

The National Curriculum introduced by the Education Reform Act of 1988 revolutionized the British approach to teaching and learning. It turned British schools in to a field where lifelong learning begins, develops and continues. The better prepared the field the more successful learning that starts in pre-school and lasts the whole life.

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## **INTERNET**

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