

Blended learning experiences. Developments and inspirations

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A number of social developments are having a tremendous impact on our society and on the learning that takes place inside it. For example, our society is becoming a knowledge-based society and undergoing substantial economic, social and cultural changes. All these developments are having a significant effect on the type of knowledge desired, on learning and on teaching. As regards content, these changes relate particularly to a shift in desired learning outcomes: from academic knowledge to broader competencies. As regards educational levels, it is our society's aim to help more people gain basic-level qualifications; to raise educational levels; to produce more highly educated people; and to enable people to keep up to date with new developments.

To accommodate these new knowledge and learning needs, we need other learning arrangements to complement existing traditional school-based learning arrangements. These new arrangements need to connect school-based learning and non-school-based learning more firmly. This can be achieved by introducing elements of the outside learning environment into the school context or vice versa (interweaving the two kinds of learning experiences); by connecting elements of the school context and the out of school context; and/or by delivering school-based and/or non-school-based routes / arrangements in a carefully timed sequence.

It is against this background that this advisory report seeks to answer the following questions:

- Which combination types of school-based and non-school-based learning are desirable?
- How can these combinations be achieved?
- How does such a new learning model affect the roles of the learner and the teacher; the way in which learning is organised; and the role of the government?

In order to answer these questions, information has been gathered using three different methods.

- Individual interviews were held with 24 persons about their learning experiences. (Education Council, interview compilation *Living = Learning*). These interviews clearly show that learning occurs in a range of settings inside and outside the school and that the interviewees implicitly or explicitly assume responsibility for their own learning. Besides the learner's personal aspirations, teachers as well as others can stimulate interest and promote (or discourage) learning.
- An inventory was taken of 54 case studies of current and innovative initiatives inside and outside the school (Van Rooijen, Coscun, Van Iperen e.a., 2002). These case studies show that both within and outside the school alternatives are being sought for the traditional classroom-based learning model, for example through enhanced efforts to align the system more closely with youth culture; through the introduction of workplace learning into the classroom; through collaborations between the school and other bodies or through ICT.
- A review was undertaken of 13 scenario studies on learning (De Vijlder, 2002). The review shows that four value dimensions play an important role in developing our thinking about the future of our society and education system. Serious consideration should be given to the following issues:
 - the societal significance of education
 - the relation between respect for individuality and an institutional education model
 - the balance between public and private sector initiatives
 - the balance between counteracting and respecting differences between learners.

Taken together, these sources provide the following picture of current developments with regard to the learner and his/her learning process; the teacher; and the way in which learning is organised.

- There is a shift in focus from the acquisition of segregated knowledge and skills to the development of life-broad competencies. Also, learning is increasingly taking place in a variety of settings, and better use is being made of the learning thus acquired. Finally, there are simultaneous trends towards individuality and co-operation in the learning process (customised learning and collaborative learning). It is important to strike a balance between learner control and self-direction.
- Besides being a knowledge transmitter and instructor, the teacher is assuming a greater role as learning coach and active designer and organiser of learning activities. Also, (increasingly) other learner supporters are working alongside the school teachers, both within and outside the school.
- To some extent learners are developing and managing their own educational careers, in a more or less well-planned and well-structured manner. They are receiving (some) support from teachers and others.

The report builds on these developments by exploring ways of combining school-based learning and non-school-based learning. The Council formulates the following agenda items with regard to the learner; the teacher and other learner supporters; and the way in which learning is organised:

- The Council advocates the development of competency cards, which contain information about learning possibilities that learners may use to plan their learning routes. Secondly, the Council emphasises the need for further development of a range of tools that specify and record learning experiences acquired in educational establishments or elsewhere. These tools include portfolios, continuous assessment and the Recognition of Previously Acquired Competencies procedures. Thirdly, the Council argues that the current funding system should be adjusted so as to accommodate the expansion and increased flexibility of learning possibilities. This is why alternatives such as vouchers, learning accounts and the like should be looked at more closely.
- The Council advocates the (continued) development of a coherent competency structure encompassing the competencies required for teachers and other learner supporters, and for the development of a corresponding qualifications structure and programme structure.
- The Council advocates improved facilitation of learners, teachers and learner supporters, that is for increased flexibility in the management of learning processes (learning routes, class schedules, etc.); collaboration within interdisciplinary teams; and infrastructure adjustments.

The Council advises the Minister to promote and facilitate school-based and non-school-based learning through the introduction of a comprehensive development programme entitled *Blended Learning Experiences*. This programme, which aims to design the above-mentioned tools, will encompass current and new projects. Successful combinations of school-based and non-school-based learning components should be continued and expanded.

To ensure successful implementation of *Blended Learning Experiences*, the Council advises the Minister to continue the processes of educational deregulation and autonomy enhancement so as to create more space for different educational profiles. In addition, the Council recommends taking inventory of and abolishing other legal obstacles to new types of learning arrangements (for example, current examination and funding arrangements, and the vocational education pathway). Furthermore, the Council advises the Minister to promote the development work required for the above-mentioned agenda items. Finally, the Council advises the Minister to conduct research into the effects of different types of learning arrangements.