



Potential and Responsibility

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1. A quest

At times, looking into the future for an idea of what education can become seems to be a quest equal to that for the Holy Grail. With the difference, of course, that we are not just "looking for", but also trying to make things happen. We are tempted to assign the same metaphor – that of a quest – to the process of actively searching for learning. This is how we are beginning to see the future of education:

- People who are looking to discover what they want.
- People who stray away from the trodden path.
- People who learn from talking to those who have been along roads before.
- People who learn from experience.
- People who learn about themselves.

Is that too adventurous a metaphor for the future of Education?

Do we really think that learning to live in the world is a question of setting out on a quest....alone? We are not talking about tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, but about a real future and about the realization of potential of young people, who have a wealth of knowledge and opportunity, of which they can and should take advantage.

2. The real and the ideal

Though there are real advantages in being one among a class of learners, we believe that there should be more focus on youngsters of quite an early age (approximately 14) to be put individually in decision-making situations: where to look for information, who to turn to for help, how to create useful contacts. This is not what we have at the moment. However, seeing young people today become more and more expert in creating and joining online communities, we are convinced that the so-far unrecognized methods and processes of social learning should be consciously extended to what is still considered formal learning. Learning communities will in no way be abolished, but will multiply, as individuals, in their search for meaningful knowledge and relationships, establish a potentially endless network of connections.

Learning opportunities and resources can be better tailored to the individual, yet this in the last analysis is a part of the process that we are describing, where the individual participates in identifying and collaborating in potentially beneficial situations, rather than choosing from pre-selected and learning packages.

Now more than ever before we have the means to make substantial changes for a large number of young people in a learning environment. Coming into adolescence, they need to be guided through modular-based learning activities in order that they and their mentors be able in a couple of years to form an idea of which skills and knowledge pose few problems as regards ongoing development and which others require more attention to be fully functional. Realism tells us that it is counterproductive to have all learners go through every step of each learning path when some can achieve the required skills before others. The construction of a solid base for future learning differs from one person to another: different blocks (or modular-based competencies) can be laid at different times in different places of the foundation.

When we are able to recognize the true acquisition of fundamental learning skills as well as disciplinary knowledge, we should be ready to take into account what has already been learnt, and in the final phase of secondary education give credits for previous learning so that progress can be speeded up and diversified. Going towards maturity means receiving due credit for demonstrating a sense of responsibility towards one's learning needs as well as a more developed awareness of how to proceed. Advancing in your quest can hardly be done to your satisfaction with a personal squire preparing the road for every single step you take.

3. A shield, a lance and my trusty steed

Equipment, protection and the indispensable blend of motivation and sense of purpose. How else does the learner of the future need to be equipped? Will it be possible to simulate experience of the world in order to prepare young learners to learn from that experience? We will always be dealing with problems, people, planning and executing actions, reflecting on what we have done and what has been done to us. Seen in this light, experience can be enhanced and diversified through the use of information technologies. Competencies can be practised in the real world, and in real-time, even if the contexts may be those of games, educational problem-solving, collaborative planning and stock-taking,

Knowledge of oneself achieved through action and subsequent reflection should be at the same time protected and left open to grow. This is not the easiest of tasks. Yet it cannot be even tried if the person in question is not exposed to what the world may ask of him or her. The world we have already entered is further breaking down the walls of formal schooling to such an extent that external experiences are there to be dealt with in all moments of



a young person's growth and not simply set aside as something that will be faced later. This is where equipment comes into the picture. Computers can be used as mirrors, places to reflect. Write about yourself. Keep track of where you're going and what you're doing. Keep an online portfolio, *if you believe in it and you know what you are using it for*. And what are companions for, if not to be there – online, too – in a community of peers, who are sharing similar experiences and can offer the best and easiest to accept advice.

There is no child that does not want to learn. What is it that has transformed the word "learning" into a scare-word, if not a swear word? It is the lack of understanding about what learning can do, a belief that learning begins and ends in school or other formal institutions. To progress and have a sense of purpose, the young need an understanding of what learning can help them achieve. Learning is necessary to recognize what you want from the world and for yourself. It is the wanting that counts

4. The perilous bridge

Is there a bridge between the phase of education and the world of work? Do we still have to construct that bridge? How far can it extend on the one side and on the other? How can we make it trustworthy and not a cause for fear and uncertainty?

Without pushing the metaphor too far, we believe that the two phases - given that they will continue to exist – should merge much more, so that the fear of making a decision become less traumatic.

As it is, the bridge is rather rickety. It needs to be strengthened with solid contacts with workplaces as well as higher and further education establishments, which should really enter the school on a permanent basis, metaphorically if not physically, and not be just tagged on to give the appearance of preparation for the future.

Whatever changes may still occur in the coming years in the field of work, we are already in a position to say that, in order to make significant decisions about their future, young people have to begin making decisions at a much younger age. The step-by-step assumption of responsibilities should become a characteristic of a young person's life, whether it be in a formal learning situation or not. Situations demanding choices must be faced. Start earlier to get to know the world, look towards the future, set yourself objectives, accept assistance and advice. Learn to accept, but understand, set-backs. These are all part of that bridge.

5. Training Merlin (and the King)

There is place for teachers and school leaders in the ideal. Those may not, however, always remain the names by which we recognize them. Adults will continue to make decisions for the young: parents and teachers can and should collaborate more, supplying guidance and opportunities of experience of the world. Counsellors and guides have been respected roles throughout history, and not only for kings and knights out on a soul-saving quest. Both parents and educational professionals should fit in as one of the essential pieces of the mosaic of experience, not only for guidance but also for the provision of specific knowledge where asked for. One of the crucial points is that of involving parents much more. They need to become more than spectators and, as often happens, judges of outcomes. They should be called upon to contribute to the processes of learning, offering insights into the world outside school and helping to close the gap between the two.

The value of talking through problems has, we believe, been greatly undervalued in the process of learning. This is where listeners and well-informed guides come into the picture. And they do so in various phases of learning as the distinction between formal and informal learning disappears. As this distinction dies out, it is also possible that the role of a guide for formal instruction will also die out, giving way to professionals who can really assist in the delicate passage from youth to adulthood, from learning about life to learning how to live.

We need to talk about those who will make decisions regarding education. A modern-day enlightened monarch might be a good option. Enlightened is the key word, as is far-sighted. How difficult will it be for one brought up in one educational setting to pave the way for a revolution? Needless to say, it is not simply a question of technologies. Providing means is not the same thing as empowering action. Little can be done without the total involvement of educational decision-makers - together with other stake-holders - in the restructuring or de-structuring of schools. Involvement means getting to know the reality before planning for the ideal. Involvement means caring for the individual because this means caring for the whole. It means accepting a similar challenge as that which the future adult must face: understanding the need for change and learning how to govern that change.

7. Being virtuous

Where do you want to go? Why do you want to go there? What are you looking for? What do you need to be able to do what you desire?

Education is also about this. Learning in time. Looking into the future and searching, but accepting what the present can teach us.

So many qualities will be needed so that we feel satisfied with our choices. As long as we are given the opportunity to make these choices. An ideal situation, indeed. Yet, what else should the future of education be?

Courage and humility. Reflectiveness and readiness to action. Willingness to listen to and to advise.

We believe that these qualities have to be cultivated as part of a young person's education. These too are potential. These – and others – are qualities which will stimulate and accompany learning. They need space and freedom to grow, experience to test themselves against. Whatever competencies we might want to quote as



being necessary for a successful education, or at least one that prepares the young for adult life, little can be done if attention is not paid to these.