

## **The most human experience**

Emotional relationships, sense of belonging and inclusion,  
and entrepreneurial approach - 3D model of the Next Education

It's 2023. Occupied village in the east of Ukraine. A 15-year-old boy rashly climbs the highest hill. He is not trying to catch the signal to contact relatives or get any information about the current situation on the front line. This time he desperately tries to connect to a Zoom lesson at his school. Finally, he connects. The teacher is shocked and worried. Connecting to the Ukrainian class from Russia-occupied territories is extremely risky and could be life-threatening if he gets caught.

Why would he risk it? There is obviously no punishment for missing the class.

«This is the only connection with Ukraine I can have now. I need it, to feel like I am part of it. I just need it. To have something that connects me to my previous life and reminds me about myself».

Can you imagine any other class of animals (as we are mammals) that would risk so much not for the sake of their offspring or food, but for the sake of gaining knowledge among their peers? I am not a zoologist but I believe that it's not likely.

What is it about then? This story is about the powerful potential of education. That it can reveal the most human parts of us. It can help us understand what is important, and provide not only knowledge but also hope, a sense of belonging and resilience.

But we don't need to go through the exact same experience to realise that. We all live in a world of «black swans» – unpredictable events (Taleb, 2008). Wars, pandemics, economic instabilities, and so on. The «language» of these «swans» is change with an accent of uncertainty. And to navigate the dynamic and complex nature of the world, we need special skills to learn (and teach) and understandings to get and share.

We can see that the next generation is ready to learn (even in the worst of circumstances). But have we created a world that is ready to teach them? What the Next Education should look like to help people all over the world to realize their potential despite the circumstances around them? What do people need to learn to not only survive but also mentally flourish in such an unpredictable environment? What companies should do to equip their employees with the knowledge and skills crucial in a competitive and unpredictable environment? What modern education should provide and become a source of?

«Education is, fundamentally, a human experience – one that involves feelings as well as thoughts» (Kathleen M. Quinlan)

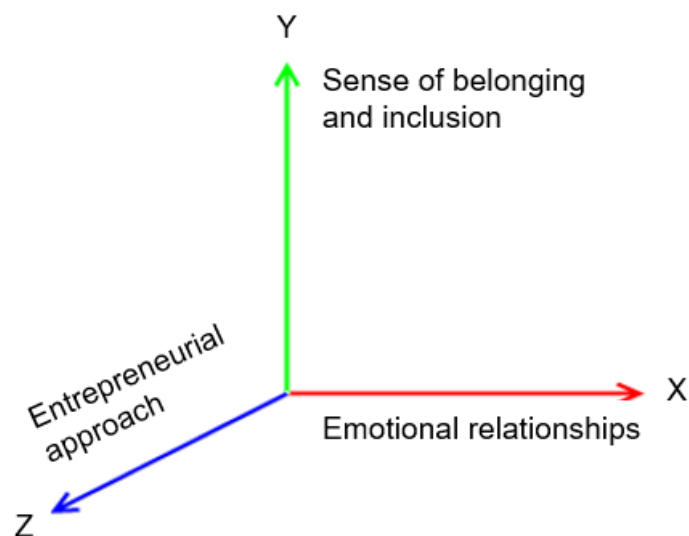
The «Thinking» part is familiar to us. Usually, we are aware of the importance of logic and evidence-based approach. But the “Feeling”, the emotional part of learning is unexamined and very often is left out of limelight.

«Although different disciplines and theorists conceptualize emotion differently, there is general agreement that *we cannot separate mind from body or feeling from thinking*. Emotions cannot be neatly packed away while people are engaging in ‘rational’ thinking or public life. *Feelings come into decision-making, problem-solving, learning and teaching*. They are a part of our social institutions, from media and politics to religion and education» (Quinlan, 2016).

Also, neurobiological research proves that emotions affect our learning. Immordino-Yang confirms that our ability to learn depends on our ability to feel emotions. For example, people with frontal lobe damage affecting their social and emotional behaviour (but not their IQ) struggle to develop new learning strategies (Immordino-Yang, 2015). Students thrive when emotions like interest and inspiration are engaged in the classroom, and when teachers acknowledge their emotional insights.

As Peter Drucker (presumably) said «When you hire a hand, it comes with a head and a heart attached». It doesn't matter whether we are talking about school, university, working environment or self-studies, a heart (emotions and the «Feeling» part) is always attached.

But how exactly this can be implemented in practice?  
After a deep dive into the topic, I suggest a 3D coordinate system for the holistic «Feeling» approach to the Next Education.



*3D coordinate system for the “Feeling” part of education*

Every educational experience we become part of (either by creating or participating) ideally should have all three dimensions to be rich and vast.

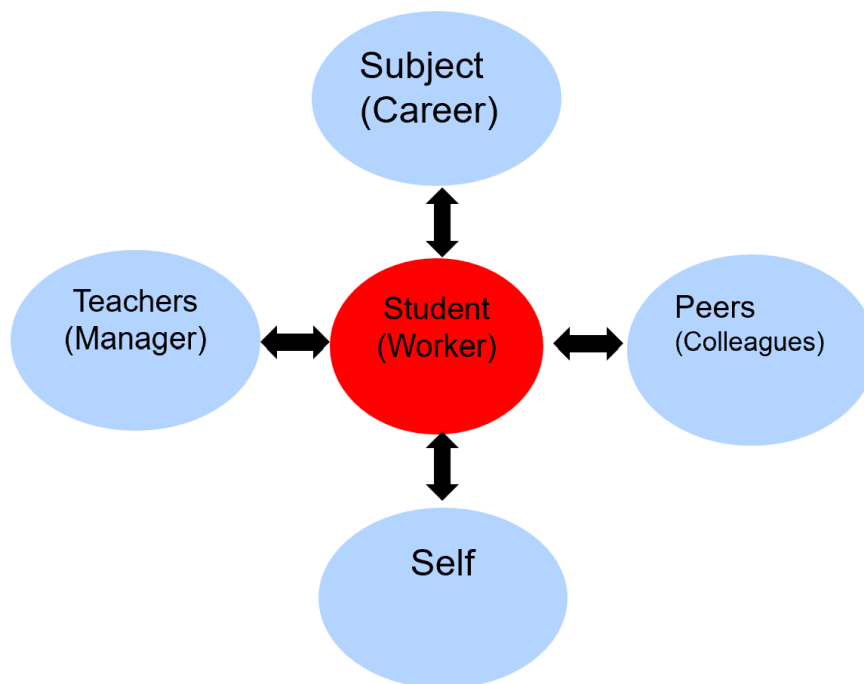
To engage with information, we need to be emotionally involved (X) feeling curiosity and interest. To stay involved and deepen the understanding by evolving with a learning community we should cultivate belonging and inclusion (Y). What makes a learning experience truly 3-dimensional is the understanding that it's a dynamic proactive entrepreneurial process of creating knowledge and sharing ideas (Z).

## EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS (X)

Let's start with the x axis and explore the dimension of emotional relationships in education.

*Remember the most engaging or transformative learning experience you had. It doesn't matter where or how you got it. You've probably been learning a lot of things, why did specifically this moment come to your mind? Because it was an emotional moment. Probably you felt enlightened, shocked, amused, maybe disappointed or triggered, but definitely emotionally involved.*

Education is much more than knowledge transfer. It's a comprehensive process that involves a lot of emotional connections. Kathleen Quinlan suggests the following *four key emotional relationships in learning and teaching in higher education*. It also can be used in an organizational environment (added in brackets).



*4 key emotional relationships in learning and teaching in higher education (and working environment) (Quinlan, 2016)*

Students have a relationship with their subject, with their teachers, with peers, and also with their own selves, as they develop and change their view of the world and their place in it. Characterizing these as emotional relationships emphasizes a human dimension of education that is often lost in an emphasis on thinking (Quinlan, 2016).

Every organization (university, student union, company, even family) has its own emotional rules. Clegg describes them as «affective structures» or «affective practices». It's important to consider as we become part of the organization and remain under its influence. Whether it is acceptable to cry in a class or during office hours or to resist unrealistic demands (from a supervisor or institutional policy) all

become part of the emotional rules. It shapes how we interpret situations, learn, express emotion, and feel (Clegg, 2013).

For example, there was even a special term «Duck Syndrome» at Stanford University. The term referred to the ability of ducks to glide smoothly across the lake as they paddle madly below the surface. That was representing students' need to pretend to be “effortlessly perfect” while dealing with a lot of issues because of the highly competitive and stressful university environment. The «Duck Syndrome» was born during an era of rising rates of anxiety, depression and suicide on campus (Cain, 2022).

To help students of any age we need to pay close attention to their emotional needs and teach them how to regulate emotions and build strong relationships within the education environment.

Students need skills to cope with stress, frustration, and anxiety, which are common in academic and professional settings. They can help people maintain focus, stay motivated, and persevere through challenges. Teachers can encourage that by creating a supportive environment, teaching mindfulness techniques, and providing resources for stress management.

## SENSE OF BELONGING AND INCLUSION (Y)

Another important dimension is belonging and inclusion. Weiner's theory emphasizes not only achievement goals of education (such as getting good grades) but also highlights social goals such as *a sense of belonging* (Weiner, 2007).

I would like to share an example of how belonging in the educational context can become a source of resilience. My friend runs a project for schoolchildren on maths learning. After the full-scale invasion, they stopped for a couple of weeks and then continued. The first class after the invasion gathered the biggest number of students in the 8 years of the project.

It was a session about maths. But all students got much more than that. Sense of stability (they could continue to learn even when the usual world was falling apart), resilience (they found the energy to attend and concentrate), and sense of belonging to the community of passionate learners and just people who may also be scared but continue to live and learn.

In less extreme circumstances belonging can be an outcome of the inclusive behaviour strategies. Institutions can foster belonging by promoting inclusive practices, celebrating diversity, and encouraging collaborative learning activities that help build strong, supportive communities. Even such practices as calling students by their name (and checking their correctness) can make a difference in the international environment.

A sense of belonging is crucial for students' engagement and success in education. It plays a role in whether students feel accepted, valued, and included in their educational community. When students feel they belong, they are more likely to

participate actively, take risks in their learning, and form deep relationships with peers and teachers.

## ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH (Z)

The third dimension that enhances one's education and learning experience is the entrepreneurial approach. It means viewing your education as a continuing process, approaching it proactively, and treating yourself as the CEO of your lifelong learning project, the leader of your educational enterprise.

How can one do that? Peter Drucker in his work "Managing Oneself" (Drucker, 2008) provides a list of essential questions that can help to build a self-awareness base for better managing yourself. I have adjusted these questions for learning goals that everyone can ask themselves (or their students) to encourage taking ownership of their learning journey.

**What are my learning strengths?** Do I have good memory or analytical skills? Maybe I am creative or can structure information. Think about your previous experience of learning and determine what was always the easiest part of the task for you.

**How do I perform?** The way we perform in education is influenced by our personalities, habits, and environment. Each person has a unique approach to learning. By recognizing, for example, when during the day you are more effective, and how you process information (for a person with ADHD it will be completely different than for a neurotypical), we can understand how to perform better academically. This self-awareness is crucial to avoid wasting time and gaining true interest and motivation to learn.

**What are my values?** How do they align with the values of the organization/institution I am joining?

Values are our compasses. Something we should be able to rely on during life's storms of uncertainty.

Sometimes there are «magnets» that emerge challenging our value compass and trying to influence the direction of our inner arrow.

This is important to consider especially at educational institutions as students are only at the beginning of figuring out themselves.

I was getting my bachelor's degree when the Maidan revolution started in 2014 in Ukraine. My university's management turned out to be partly pro-Russian, so it was forbidden to leave lectures to participate in the protests for democratic freedom and pro-European direction. So we just skipped our classes.

The understanding that educational institutions, providers and organizations always have their own values (whether officially established or not) would have helped me to make a better choice. I learnt my lesson. Now I understand the importance of knowing your values while making decisions about where to study or work, and from whom to learn.

To my mind, the Next Education shouldn't always tell what is correct and what is wrong but teach students to explore themselves and critically analyze information. That would help people to be proactive and not to rely on others' compasses or to easily get tricked by magnets.

In essence, the Next Education should be a dynamic, inclusive, and emotionally comprehensive system of relationships and knowledge. I believe the important mission of it is to teach how to emotionally navigate through the challenges of the unknown. By embracing all parts of the 3D model (emotional relationships, sense of belonging and inclusion, and entrepreneurial approach), we can create an enriching environment for one of the most important parts of the Next Education - the evolution of connections between people and their ideas.

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