



The Leiden Approach passes its pioneering stage

Field of Education Leiden joins forces for a wider education of talent

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Leiden and educational innovation go hand in hand. This is not surprising, considering that Leiden opened the doors of the very first university of The Netherlands to talented students as early as 1575. So Leiden is all about talent development. Almost 4.5 centuries onwards, a new leap in the evolution of talent fostering is taken. A little more than 3 years ago, the City of Leiden and various parties involved in education joined forces in 'De Leidse Aanpak' (The Leiden Approach). This network's aim is to discover and foster all talents, great and small, of all children and youth – aged 0 to 24 – in the city. What exactly does this approach entail? What has already been achieved, and what is needed to increase the impact of this evolution?

In 2015, a project group started out joining all the different parties involved in talent development into the Leiden Approach, at the initiative of the City of Leiden. Direct cause for this was a network meeting on suitable education for gifted children who underachieved, organized by the municipality. Another problem that was brought up at that occasion was that talent, in its broader sense, is not sufficiently encouraged and rewarded. We are not just talking about the exceptional talent of more

*From gifted
to included*



Henri Lenferink
Mayor of Leiden

'When some parents addressed me about the issue of underachievement in gifted children, my first thoughts were that these children are exactly the ones we did not need to be concerned about. "They will make it," I used to think. But this is far from the truth. Many of these children get stuck in the course of their secondary school education, studies or careers. And this appears to apply to many other children and youth at different levels. The fact that they get stuck is not just bad for them, but it is also a loss to our society. So Talent Education is now a shared task for the municipality and the complete range of education. Leiden is a city of knowledge which 'has it all', from preschool to higher education. But someone has to bring the whole chain together. Being a very involved municipality, we took on this role, resulting in the broad and inclusive *Leidse Aanpak* (the Leiden Approach).'

than averagely gifted children, but also, about the less obvious talents of all children. This is caused by, among other things, a lack of time within the curriculum and a lack of skills and tools on the part of the professionals. Research plainly demonstrates that for 20% of all pupils and students, current education – at any level – is not sufficiently suited to prevent underachieving. Talents stay under the radar. The basic idea behind the Leiden Approach is that such ‘hidden’ talents will surface when a common approach and different ways of working are developed.

Growing network, growing impact

By now, the network of the Leiden Approach already comprises more than 50 partners, who have all committed to its objectives, by means of a covenant. Among the partners are preschools, day-care centres, primary schools, secondary schools, the Leiden University of Applied Science and Leiden University. Other active participants are the City of Leiden, expert centres, and various welfare, umbrella, and cultural organizations and institutions. The parties involved are proud of the results achieved within the Leiden Approach and the related European collaboration project ‘Erasmus Plus Talent Education.’ This pride relates to the network built, the cooperation and the actual projects and products. At the same time, they feel the need to keep on refining this new vision on talent development and distribute it further across educational institutes in Leiden. This is to happen under the banner of **The Leiden Approach 2.0.**, an even broader project group of representatives from various partners at the centre of this web.

How do we actually define talent?

Before we dive into the Leiden Approach, let’s explore the notion of talent a little further. With respect to talent, we have traditionally been inclined to look at pupils with excellent results in one or more areas. Bound by this way of thinking, the less conspicuous talents of other

From training and connection to a strategic approach



Lineke van Tricht

*Project Manager
The Leiden Approach*

‘The initial phase had the character of pioneering. Even without a covenant and financing, we succeeded in organizing an educational programme with the material and networks we had within the first year. After the first year, my role changed from content expert to linker and broker. To further shape the network, a lot of personal contact with the partners was, and still is, necessary. The fact that roughly 300 people participated in the “Focus on Talent” conference of 6 June last, clearly demonstrates that we have been doing well so far. My work for the Leiden Approach 2.0 will be of a more strategic nature. Issues are how we can integrate Annemieke Mol Lous’ Talent Model into our approach and our education, and how we may effectively tap new sources. I have been granted this freedom since a strong network is already in place, with a new project team which is closely involved in education and brings in a lot of expertise.’

children have not come into focus. The starting point of the Talent Model used by the Leiden Approach (Luk Dewulf/[Annemieke Mol Lous](#)) is: everybody has got talent, but unless it is noticed and used, it will not flourish. The paradigm now shifts from the question 'Who are the talents?' to 'What talents does this particular child have?' This specifically involves a wider range of human qualities, such as having a sense of humour, being a loving person or being good at focussing. In education, one could say that this entails a change from a 'struggle' to overcome weaknesses to a clear focus on such talents.

***Talent flourishes =
talent + behaviour
+ context + meaning***

The Leiden Approach is connecting and inspiring the field

The Talent Model serves as a starting point for the Leiden Approach's mission: early identification of potential talent, and challenging it directly in order to let it flourish. To accomplish this, we need to work together across the whole field of education, exchange expert knowledge and reinforce existing knowledge. Professionals involved in education play a key role here. The Leiden Approach supports, connects and inspires

Being noticed as a basis for development



Annemieke Mol Lous
*Lector Suitable Education Leiden
University of Applied Studies*

'In inclusive education, the focus is still too much on the 'Defects model'. Everyone participates, and if anything is wrong with you, we will make sure this is remedied somehow. In the Talent Model on the other hand, we specifically look for a child's strengths and qualities. I will give an example. Parents will often tell a shy child to shake hands with everyone, whereas its talent lies in thoughtful consideration of its surroundings and people. Noticing this talent and nurturing it is the basis for further development. It affects motivation in a positive way. As this is a rather new vision on education, its effect has not been researched extensively yet. We have already noticed its effectiveness in practice however. For instance, students of the Teacher Education Training who were mentored on the basis of their talents showed less procrastination. '

them to start out with talent development right away. This is enabled by sharing existing and newly developed information and products with everyone by means of 'deleidseaanpak.nl'. **When questions arise** in the field, the Leiden Approach initiates professional development and enrichment of knowledge and methods, and brings parties together where necessary. A good example of this is the link between museums and schools. The museums asked to be more involved in research projects, which coincided with schools asking for more possibilities and support for high school pupils' research projects.

Regard for all levels of education and transfer

Naturally, every level of education knows its specific fields of attention. Consider for instance the abilities needed to recognize advanced **intellectual development in toddlers**, and regard for **metacognitive skills** – learning how think, act and learn – of primary school pupils. Or consider practical differentiation – 'clever' teaching at different levels in class – in secondary schools, and a special trajectory for gifted students at Leiden University.

Next to the developments and **cooperation** within the separate levels, attention for the **tie-up** of the consecutive levels is essential. This takes getting to know each other, and each other's education, starting with preschool, day-care centres and the first two grades of primary school. Pedagogical staff and preschool teachers pay each other working visits in order to increase the quality of preschool and early school education, in order to ease the tie-up with primary education.

continued on page 8 >>>

Meetup071 brings knowledge and contacts



Ilja Verolme

*Mathematics Teacher at
Stedelijk Gymnasium Leiden*

'When I heard about the existence of Meetup010, I thought: 'This is what we need in Leiden, too;' these informal sessions where teachers are in charge of their own continued education. I discussed the idea with the people from the Leiden Approach, and they liked it immediately. They help us organizing, they act as moderators and we can use their extensive network. For me, the benefit of the meetup lies in the discussions among colleagues from different schools and at different levels. There is so much we can learn from each other. Some subjects we have already taken on are ownership by the pupil, the growth mind-set and a hot topic like formative assessment. What does it bring? Lots of useful knowledge and contacts.'

**Marijne Sammels
Marcel Veenman
Marieke Peters
Anneke van Houten**

next pages >>>

Recognizing advanced intellectual development in toddlers



Marijne Sammels

Special Education Services Leiden

'For three years now, we have been offering our pedagogical staff a course in recognizing advanced intellectual development in toddlers, and dealing with it. Attention was already being paid to toddlers who were lagging behind, but not sufficiently to toddlers with a head start. Our aim was to teach them, in 10 sessions over the course of a year, to recognize these children too, and to offer them more challenges. At every meeting, we discuss one theme, and we hand out materials on the subject, such as a signalling tool, a list of characteristics for meetings with parents and special activities. The participants start off with their practice right away, with the knowledge and materials gathered from the course. The final meeting is about the transfer of knowledge to their colleagues. We train the participants to become experts as well as ambassadors. Participants keep on meeting and actively sharing knowledge long after the course is over.'

Holy Grail in educational research into metacognition



Marcel Veenman

*Institute for
Metacognition Research*

'One of the reasons for underachieving is that smart pupils tend to be weak in metacognition. They have no awareness of, or insight into their own learning process. In order to investigate if and how this can be improved, I organized training in metacognition for teachers and pupils of primary schools in Leiden and Slovenia within Erasmus Plus Talent Education. Following this, these teachers trained their pupils for a full three months' period. Beforehand, the pupils' metacognition was measured by means of a computer assignment. Another measurement followed after training. The pupils showed a significant improvement in metacognition compared to the control group. The effect was even greater in the Czech Republic, where training went on for ten months. The most striking aspect was that the pupils were trained in arithmetic and reading, but tested in Biology, which shows they did not just pick up a trick. They really changed their metacognitive behaviour across different assignments. Transfer of learning took place, which is the 'Holy Grail' in educational research.'

Hidden past inspires potential pupils of preparatory vocational education



Marieke Peters

Education Officer
Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

'Here at the *Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* [National Museum of Antiquities], we wanted to better adjust our offer of out-of-school learning to preparatory vocational education. Through the Leiden Approach, we came into contact with the Da Vinci College in Leiden and the Wellant vmbo Oegstgeest. Conversations with teachers of both schools led to the development of the pilot 'Hidden Past.' In the school's visual arts course, pupils were asked to think about a civilization that has not yet been discovered. They did a photo assignment at our museum to look for inspiration for the appearance of their self-imagined civilization. This gave creative pupils the opportunity to show their qualities and develop them further. We now intend to devise a pre-preparatory programme as well, so primary school pupils can see that their talents will also be given space in preparatory vocational education.

Challenging and breaking down the barrier of limiting convictions



Anneke van Houten

Teacher of extracurricular classes
Bernardusschool
Zoeterwoude Rijndijk

'My extracurricular classes are intended for children who are doing very well in school, but need a bigger challenge, as well as for children who fail because they need a different way of thinking. By using appealing themes, they are enabled to make their own choices about the way they learn. Some children immediately tackle an assignment; others need a plan of action first. They can find out which way of learning suits them best. Working on the themes, they need to think creatively and cooperate, and reach a certain level of frustration as well, just to find out there are things they cannot do right away. That is the very moment where you can spot whether they are able to take a risk, or dare asking for help. This way we hope to avoid their getting stuck in secondary education because they are convinced that they have to get everything right the first time or that they cannot ask questions because they are supposed to be smart.'

Another example is the professional learning community 'Talent Education for primary and secondary education.' In this community, professionals from primary and secondary schools jointly devise teaching methods for the development of skills such as self-awareness and self-control, and dealing with others. Such skills are needed in secondary education. A lot of knowledge and experience is available from the networks of secondary and higher education specifically for the **tie-up between secondary and higher education**. The Leiden University of Applied Science and the Leiden Approach jointly brought two pre-higher vocational training projects together.

Horizontally, vertically as well as internationally

The ideas of the Leiden Approach, its networks and knowledge already made available also inspired **other cities** to take up Talent Education. Thus, the Leiden Approach came to play a pivotal role in the European collaboration project Erasmus Plus Talent Education. A total of 18 partners of the Leiden Approach and preschools, primary and secondary schools in Pilsen and Brno in the Czech Republic, and Ljubljana in Slovenia, have been working together intensively over the past three years. Both countries struggle with **educational challenges pretty much the same** as we have in our country. The participants of this project focused on improving the reach of their lessons by innovative teaching methods, skills of the professionals and the cooperation in and around the field of education. Professionals and pupils paid each other visits in an **exchange programme centred on a theme**.

continued on page 10 >>>

Widening and Deepening



Annebeth Simonsz

*Education coordination
Pre-University College,
Leiden University*

'At our Pre-University, we offer pupils from the final two grades of pre-university secondary education a two-year course in which they learn to assume a scientific attitude. This is achieved by learning about research, and doing research themselves, which gives widening as well as deepening. We offer our motivated and talented students Talent Education at the Honours College, and we have the Leiden Leadership Programme. According to our students, these programmes help them to develop a critical attitude and assist in their personal development. When you look at underachieving, this is an area of development for us; in particular, in tracking down its causes. Being a University, we ultimately offer expertise on Talent Education to the whole field of education. This is the field in which we intend to strengthen the sharing of knowledge in the following years, together with the Leiden Approach.'

**Phil Rhebergen
Ivana Bartošová
Jana Šopejstalová**
next pages >>>

Great achievements in international cooperation



Phil Rhebergen
Programme Manager
Erasmus Plus

'All partner cities have become much more aware of the importance of challenging children and youth in order to discover their talents. They now have the necessary tools in the form of the practical methods we developed. Of course we stumble on differences as well. Dutch teachers for instance are much more accustomed to entrepreneurship in teaching, which enables them to adapt their lessons more easily. In the Czech Republic, teachers have great respect for the curriculum, and their task-oriented view is noticeable in their classes. Slovenian teachers generally pay great attention to the pedagogical quality of the lessons. So there is a lot to be learned from each other. With the Leiden Approach we are already moving towards a chain-centred approach. Partner cities have only just begun. It is only a matter of time. For successful Talent Education cannot do without cooperation in the field.'

We need everybody for Talent Education



Ivana Bartošová
Deputy Governor Pilsen

'For their Talent Education, the youth of Pilsen are primarily dependent on informal education in separate schools for music, arts, drama, dance and sports. We support these schools because we strongly believe in stimulating talents. This support has overly been on a preliminary basis until now. To safeguard the effect of Erasmus Plus Talent Education, we want to integrate it into the system. This implies that we need the teachers of formal education to discover and foster talents. A special training centre is already in place. From now on, we plan to have our in train-the-trainer-sessions for teachers there, too. And finally, we will go for the strengthening of the exchange of information between the different levels of education.'

Motivation takes on an important role in Talent Education

The role of motivation in Talent Education deserves special mention. Within the Leiden Approach, first steps have been taken in recent years in the field of motivation management, by [courses for school leaders and teachers](#) among other things. These are based on clinical psychologist Menno Mennes' (Leiden University) recent ideas about motivation. He captured motivation in an accessible model of a subconscious 'inner dialogue'. This cyclic model consists of eight stages someone goes through, from a desire, or idea, to its actual execution. Three stages of 'coping' are of importance here. In short, somewhere halfway the execution of the plan, a person checks the original idea against reality. If all went well, there is no problem, and motivation ultimately increases. If there were setbacks however, there are different ways of coping with this; he or she can work harder, adapt, or reject, the original idea, or blame the bad result on someone else. The trick is to recognize the kind of coping behaviour and deal with it accordingly. In connection with discovering and developing talent, this could mean the difference between keeping on going and bailing out. There is a reason that 'motivation as an engine for talent development' is one of the focus areas for the coming years. An important part of this is the train-the-trainer-sessions, which enable the teachers to initiate their colleagues into Mennes' Motivation Model.

What has been achieved in three years of the Leiden Approach?

In summary, the total yield of the past years is that the network has grown significantly, Talent Education was put on the map, and professionals involved in education work and create together - in a 'talented' way. On top of that, Erasmus Plus Talent Education worked as a driving wheel. In this project, participants developed four practical toolkits

Design Thinking teaches children so much more than reading and writing



Jana Šopejstalová

*Primary school teacher
ZŠ a MŠ Holoubkov, Pilsen*

'Before I started with this project in 2015, I had no experience with Design Thinking, a solution-oriented way of thinking which puts people first. I applied what I had learned during my visits to The Netherlands and Slovenia in my class during the project days. I still use some of the Design Thinking principles nowadays. You can actually see children learn to communicate, think critically and consider their own decisions and those of their classmates. At the same time, they learn to respect the opinions of their classmates. Moreover, they enjoy the space they are given to start discovering for themselves. I am convinced that this method fits the education curriculum in the Czech Republic like a glove. The results? Pupils learn the core competences that are essential pillars of education already at an early stage.'

Annick Dezitter

next page >>>

with the following themes: 'Challenging young children with advanced intellectual development', 'Design Thinking', 'Practical Differentiation' and 'Metacognitive Skills'. These toolkits contain methods, step-by-step plans, teaching materials and manuals. Professionals can use them to develop or reinforce the necessary skills, and apply them directly in their classes. For the Leiden Approach, this implies that the offer package is extended. All toolkits will be further developed over the next years.

The faith governors and professionals have in the Leiden Approach, is reflected in the **experiences of pupils** who were involved in it during recent years. Many pupils who participated in the aforementioned international exchange programme reported that the projects really gave them new insight. For instance, **participants of the Design Thinking project** indicated that the space they were given to find solutions by themselves considerably increased their motivation and learning ability. It has also boosted other skills, from thinking outside of the box to cooperation, and from dealing with children who have a different view of the world, to giving effective feedback.

What has become clear over the past three years is that a lot of water has to pass under the bridges of the Rhine before these new insights and teaching methods will be fully integrated into schools. Both teachers and pupils have to take an active role in it. Pupils have to find the motivation to get themselves started and underway, and the teacher serves as a guiderail and helpdesk on this road and as a motivator and inspiration.

continued on page 13 >>>

Experiencing what motivation can do



Annick Dezitter

*Headmaster
Da Vinci College Kagerstraat*

'During the Motivation Management training for school governors, Menno Mennes linked his scientific theory to the practice of teaching. We learned how to extract a teacher or pupil's motivation and ambition by having a conversation. In order to make motivation less of an abstract notion, we had to make an 'objet d'art' from different materials. This made us aware of our own motivations and the way we 'start up.' At the last day of training, the participants learned how to conduct an interview about aims, ambitions and experiences with regards to work by means of a step-by-step plan. The current situation as well as the ideal one is considered. How could this ideal situation motivate a person? After that, we learned how potential obstacles on the way from the current to the ideal situation could be overcome. This could also strengthen motivation.'

**Sven Nederpel
Sébastien Hajek**

next page >>>

Learned to work together and to keep going



Sven Nederpel (11)

Former pupil Extracurricular class
Bernardusschool
Zoeterwoude Rijndijk

'At some point, I was transferred from fourth grade, where I was bored, to fifth grade. Within two months, they let me join the extra-curricular class as well. The main thing I learned there was to work together. I was never eager to work together before, I did not like it. Now, I actually like it. In the extracurricular class, a lot of attention is paid to the highest point of the pyramid, which goes from memorizing to creating. For instance, we had to answer questions in the language of the inhabitants of Planet Munduz, write Chinese characters and program in Scratch. I was very annoyed when I could not do it at first. Luckily, I have learned to keep on going, and I find this helps me enormously in regular classes. I am ready for higher secondary education at the Marecollege.'

Space and inspiration to start independently



Sébastien Hajek (15)

Gymnázium Lud'ka Pika, Pilsen

'I participated in the Design Thinking project in the exchange programme and I valued the knowledge contained in it. It opens up your vision when looking for possible solutions to problems. You are forced to think outside of the box for a minute. My skills in the field of cooperation and communication have certainly been improved by the project. If you were to ask me if we should implement Design Thinking in our education system, my answer would be a whole-hearted 'yes'. I do realize many things would have change for this though, perhaps even revolutionary. Pupils need to be given the space to start off working independently. This helps them master any subject better and more easily. The roles of the teacher and the surroundings shift to being motivating and inspiring. But for this to work, pupils also have to cooperate with the school the teachers and the environment.'

Building on fertile grounds with the Leiden Approach 2.0

As is inherent to any pioneering stage, not all went equally well. On the basis of all that was learned, the next four years the Leiden Approach 2.0 intends to focus on three main themes. Apart from the aforementioned motivation as a driving force for Talent Education, these are: made-to-measure education for talents, and transition & tie-over. Another aim is to enrich the network with secondary vocational schools and companies. The thought behind this is to **generate more impact by involving more professionals**, who can jointly reach all those pupils and students it is all about. We have an enormous potential in Leiden with over 10,000 people working in education for the benefit of almost **64,000 children and youth** getting their education in this town. Add this to Leiden's educational-DNA, and Leiden owes it to itself to offer youth a future in which all talents will yield optimal results.

Reinforcing Focus on Talent together



Marton de Pinth
*Managing Director
PROOLeiden*

'In primary education we place the building blocks for Talent Education – together with the parents. This calls for connecting teachers and schools, so we can learn from each other, with each other, and gain inspiration together from new insights and expertise. Teachers also have to provide adequate classes for 25 pupils every day though. It really helps when the Leiden Approach facilitates the process of meeting and learning. I have seen for myself how participants of the project group acted as 'boundary crossers' in this process and broke down many barriers. That was exactly what was needed to generate the right movement during the pioneering stage. The Leiden Approach can continue to build on this foundation with a renewed focus on professionals who can further develop and safeguard the added value of the ideas. Our joint Focus on Talent can be further strengthened in the coming years.'

Paul Dirkse
next page >>>



Further information

For Further information on the Leiden Approach and contact, we would like to refer you to deleidseaanpak.nl. The toolkits mentioned in the article can be found at talenteducation.eu/nl/toolkitforteachers.

The Leiden Approach will be a well-known brand in four years' time



Paul Dirkse

Vice Mayor, responsible for education, Municipality of Leiden

'The aim of the Leiden Approach is to detect, treasure and nurture talent in the city, and to initiate a broad cooperation of all parties involved in the city's field of knowledge and education. This impacts the quality of the professionals enormously, and therefore, also the opportunities a child or youth gets to fully develop. It also fits in seamlessly with our policy on educational opportunities. Boundaries can be crossed to realize our ideal of 'equal opportunities for everyone.' I fully expect that the Leiden Approach's network will spread much further in the next few years. As far as I am concerned, in four years the Leiden Approach will be a well-established brand in the Leiden scene of knowledge and culture. All parties involved – from parents to schools and from teachers to pupils – will know and notice the various elements this brand has to offer them.'

