



Learning in Times of Crisis

EoL – developed for Caritas Switzerland



© Salem, Hosam (Caritas Switzerland)

# Essence of Learning – Learning support in crisis contexts

A practical approach to education in emergencies

# Essence of Learning – at a glance:

## **Initial situation: children in need**

Wars, flight, natural disasters, displacement, bitter poverty or exclusion. Unfortunately, we encounter the pictures in the news programmes every day. What is not addressed is the situation of the children who are exposed to such situations. If they are given attention, it is in the sense that basic care must be guaranteed. However, a basic need usually remains completely outside: The child's urge to learn!

## **Learning difficulties are the result**

Children who grow up in the crisis situations described above and/or suffer from toxic stress almost always have learning difficulties. Their school biographies often show gaps, they suffer from learning blockades and have partially closed their senses completely. In many cases, school systems and teaching staff are unable to cope with the situation and overburden the children excessively by adhering strictly to the curricula.

## **The solution: education in emergencies**

If one puts oneself in the position of these children, then it becomes clear that only a child-centered, emergency-pedagogical approach can provide relief. If these children are not helped purposefully, entire generations will be lost.

## **Essence of Learning paves the way for children to “normal” learning**

In view of this initial situation, Essence of Learning (EoL) has been developed. The aim was to enable teachers - even under adverse circumstances - to teach children with learning difficulties how to enjoy learning again, to solve their learning blockades, so that they can finally follow the regular school routine strengthened and self-actively.

## **The “pillars” of Essence of Learning:**

### **Learning flow, learning pathway and weekly topic**

The EoL approach is always oriented towards the natural development of the child and also takes into account the associated social and cognitive abilities, which can be assigned to the respective age group. In this way, it is possible to define quite precisely what demands can be made on a child under “normal” conditions at a certain age – in terms of linguistic and mathematical abilities. In EoL, this natural development is called learning flow, which is divided into learning flow steps.

If a child is given the necessary freedom, it always follows the natural learning pathway when learning. This describes how a child opens up a new thing or task until he or she can finally overlook it and has really fully grasped it.

If, as the child progresses in the learning flow, he or she is given the opportunity to link the learning contents with one another, to establish a connection to reality and to his or her own world of experience again and again, these will also be anchored in his or her memory. In EoL programmes, care is always taken to ensure that this all-connecting “red ribbon” is present. The weekly topic offers points of contact for the children's linguistic, mathematical and creative activities.

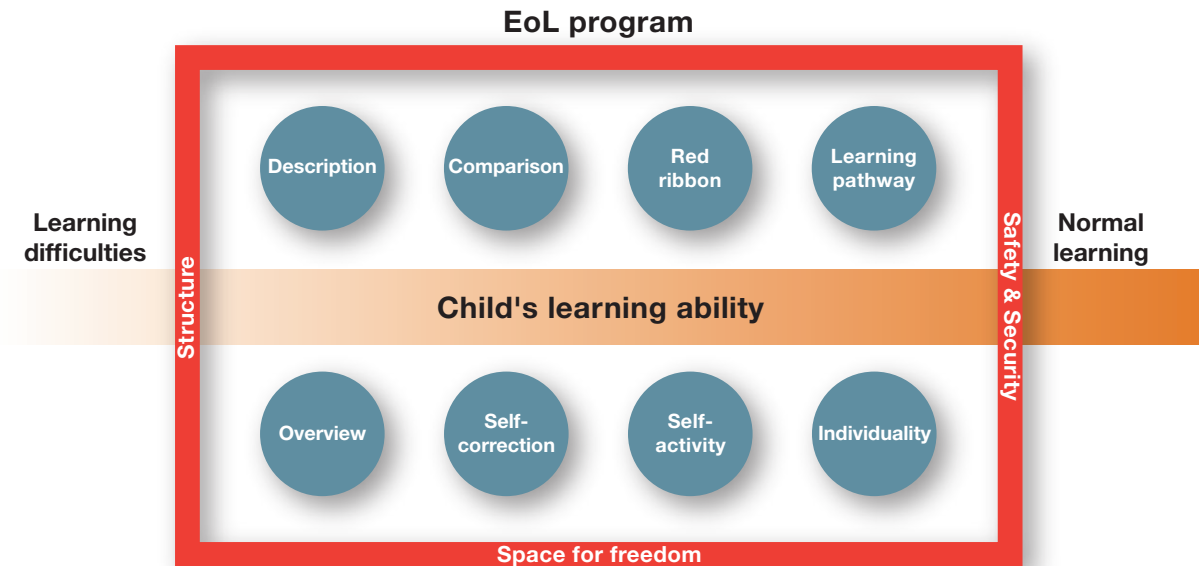
## **How does EoL work?**

If children are no longer able to learn according to their age, are thrown back into an earlier stage or are even completely blocked due to toxic stress or trauma, EoL offers support. EoL provides them with a structured safe framework within which they can find their way back to self-active and age-appropriate learning with the help of EoL-specific methodological-didactic tools, which always address the children according to their stage of development.

## **Repetition of learning steps**

EoL enables a child who has thus dropped out of the natural learning flow to a state that does not correspond to his or her age to re-enter the world by repeating the learning steps. This always happens depending on the age of the child and the degree of traumatising. Learning aids are used, which are often produced by the children themselves with the simplest means. They give the child security and it can compile itself a learning goal playfully. In this way a task is mastered with joy, the child has a sense of achievement and is looking forward to the next steps.

Free play and free drawing take up a large space – especially in early childhood education. In this way, the child can experience freedom that has often never been experienced before and go through the natural development of play, which it later adapts to learning. Even with the youngest, care is always taken to ensure that the red ribbon is there and that the stories and initial learning content can be linked together. Everything is thematically connected, which the children recognize when presented to them according to their age.



### These methodical-didactic tools are mandatory in EoL programs:

- **The description:**  
It is described and not explained. In the description, children find their own «inner images» of what they hear. The description is pictorial and age-appropriate.
- **The comparison:**  
Care is taken to ensure that children are able to establish connections through comparisons and thus draw conclusions appropriate to their age.
- **The red ribbon:**  
The perfect example for the theme “red ribbon” is the weekly topic. It links all learning content and can even provide the framework for any game.
- **The learning pathway:**  
The natural learning pathway – the way a child develops learning.
- **The ability to overlook the situation:**  
The children are brought in their natural learning pathway to internalize what they have learned in such a way that they have an overview at the end. When a child is able to explain something to another child, he or she first individualizes a topic and can then oversee it.
- **The possibility of self-correction:**  
In EoL programs, the children are not corrected and measured if possible. They are given the space and freedom to correct themselves actively.
- **The possibility of self-activity:**  
EoL promotes the development of a child’s self-activity in all areas. What a child works for itself is internalized in a completely different way and promotes the formation of resilience – because this can only be built up through self-activity.
- **Promotion of individual expression:**  
Within a structured framework that also includes rules, the children experience a freedom that has a positive effect on their creativity. They express themselves with different means, strengthen their “inner images”, which has a positive effect on all learning flows.

### What makes EoL unique?

A unique feature of EoL is that it can also be applied under difficult conditions. It mainly uses multifunctional recycled and natural materials, which are available practically everywhere. EoL cannot replace regular classes, it is a complementary approach that can be designed according to requirements, accompanying classes or integrated. EoL programs are suitable for all age groups – from early childhood education to primary school. The training of EoL educators takes the form of a four-day practical basic training and two further in-depth training courses “reflection on practice”. Teachers can bring different requirements with them – a specific vocational qualification is not absolutely necessary, especially for early childhood education, because further vocational training is process-oriented and is accompanied by mentors. With the help of an understandable didactic methodology, child-centred learning can be made possible in a resource-conserving manner. Quality assurance takes place at various levels with defined instruments. EoL’s holistic, competence-oriented educational approach integrates and practically implements the requirements of psychosocial support and social-emotional learning and thus fulfills the standards defined by the “International Network for Education in Emergencies” (INEE).

### EoL – a track record:

In the course of the development of EoL, more than 30,000 children in sometimes very different contexts and across all age groups have been accompanied on their learning pathway. Not only the teachers, but also the parents have contributed enormously to the success with their enthusiasm and wealth of ideas regarding the materials. With the “Practical Guide”, the “Training Guidelines” and the extended materials, EoL can now be further scaled and adapted to different contexts. Thus a good basis was created to support many more children on their learning pathway – even though they have to make their everyday experiences in crisis areas and with often difficult mental experiences.

For further information please contact:

**Learning in Times of Crises**

Beatrice Rutishauser Ramm  
Schönmattstrasse 17  
4054 Basel (Switzerland)

Tel. +41 78 791 31 67  
Skype: brutishauser  
[beatrice.rutishauser@bluewin.ch](mailto:beatrice.rutishauser@bluewin.ch)