



SYMPOSIUM

A dialogue on core qualities and practices needed in education
Driebergen, 8th & 9th February 2017

*I experienced the Unfolding as
'a safe haven for unsafe learning'*

Reflection of Hester IJsseling

Looking back on the UEF/NIVOZ conference *Unfolding human potential*, I feel grateful to have been among such a wonderful group of people with a shared desire to bring the pedagogical dimension back to the forefront of the discourse on education.

The video's showing educational practices from all over Europe, and the interviews with the protagonists, engendered fruitful dialogues at the round tables. At the tables, we asked each other not so much about ideas and positions, but rather about narratives. Stories from our respective educational practices, that we could exchange thoughts about, trying to find words to express our experience. As Linda O'Toole said, sometimes we use the same word while meaning different things, other times we talk about the same thing using different words. But that was fine. It made us think about the language we use to talk about education.

It was not always easy to seduce people at the table to seriously investigate the meanings of the words that were used. People emphasizing philosophical issues with concepts like 'authenticity' and showing your 'true self', met with some resistance of others less inclined to bother much with such 'semantic discussions'. But as Michael Fielding rightfully said: 'The language we use to name what we value is important.' I particularly liked the way Michael Fielding suggested we use the word 'authorship' instead of 'ownership'. It goes so well with the importance of vocabulary and the telling of stories or narratives, in order to find our own language to talk about education.

In the dialogue that followed, on the kind of education research we need to further the cause of pedagogy, I rather missed the importance of narratives and researching lived experience. I would have liked to hear teachers doing research, and researchers from universities of applied sciences besides the two academics on the podium, however nice their presentations were. I think education needs research as activism, als Arjen Wals called it, and it should be conducted close to the classroom floor.

As we discussed at our table, the problem with academic education research is that too many teachers seem to be too much in awe of hard science and big data, and they seem to look to academics for certainties, graspable stuff, boxes to tick, and evidence based, effective procedures. I was glad to hear Colleen McLaughlin argue for dissonance, and to hear Tone Saevi argue for a certain kind of humility with regard to the otherness of a child, seeing a child as partly hidden from you.

Because, as I would say as a teacher/philosopher, what a teacher needs is not certainty, but rather, negative capability, to use a concept of Keats, the poet: that is, *"when one is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"*. As Colleen McLaughlin said, we should create spaces in schools where teachers feel respected, safe and valued, and where they can find ways to talk to each other about their lived experience, without needing to fear some kind of assessment.

I experienced the Unfolding conference as such a space: 'a safe haven for unsafe learning'. And I thank you.

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