

## Table conversations

### Chapter 1: The (true) nature of teacher-student interaction

By Jasja van den Brink

*If you clear away the stones on the path, your children don't have to trip over them.*

~ Old Native American proverb ~

**Inspired by several talks and two practice-based videos, we embarked on a conversation about the (true) nature of teacher-student interaction. The leading question was: *How do we perceive children's well-being as they grow up and take responsibility, and what qualities of interaction are important to guide the development of children?***

One of the first reactions stated it was important to be open to your students, because it is in this relation that teaching can take place. Someone else added that this is the basis of education: *being* instead of *performance*. We should shift our gaze off the nowadays focus on 'competence', to the 'ethos' of teaching. At school, we are the ones who introduce children into the world. And what is it that we're showing them? What we think or who we are?

On the other hand, being too open can be a pitfall. A balance in what you tell children/students about your life or about what's bothering you should be attained. It's important teachers know themselves to a certain extent: Who am I in this world today? Teachers have to be authentic.

While most of us were nodding at this statement, one of our table guests stated that in philosophy, being authentic is not seen as desirable. As you can also be an 'authentic murderer'. Hmm, that was a spoiler. Or maybe an invitation to invent new words which include a notion about *being*, which is inspired by love or by hate. If the *Inuit* are good at having so many words for snow, we must be able to invent some new words for desirable being and behaviour, I guess. Or will this only increase duality? Not sure what the result will be.

We merely agreed on being in connection with yourself, so you can connect with pupils from this core. That's a great goal to strive for, but at this moment a lot of pupils are disappointed in their relationship with their teachers: in the end they are alone with their problems. And that's not something we can blame the teachers for, most of them are doing their best in our nowadays system and are stretching their capacities. But schools can't save the world all by themselves without support from society. Which is us, in a way, as Krisnamurti (see quote below) so eloquently states.

You have to be grown-up yourself, but not all adults are grown-up. Some keep tripping over the stones of their youth and blaming the path for it. They could also choose to take responsibility by cleaning up the path. So you can have a stable relationship to yourself and others. Or, as Gert Biesta says: *You have to be able to make a distinction between what you desire and what is desirable. You have to be able not to be in the center of your own attention. You have to be able to really listen to what the pupils have to say and to connect with their world and their story. Maybe that differs from your model of the world. This makes it possible for pupils to trust the teacher, so they can express themselves without the fear of being judged, a 'safe space'.*

But how can we ask this of teachers, when the space they are acting in is mostly not a safe space at all. Maybe that can't be measured, but it can be sensed. Nowadays I'm visiting some schools because my daughter has to decide which secondary school she will attend next year. We walk into a school, look at each other and say: Yes! Or no. And after that we are using the time left walking around looking for things to confirm and/or deny this feeling, so we can translate our feelings to acceptable arguments. Not one of the parents I speak to - and maybe I'm speaking to the wrong ones - is searching the internet for school results first and bases their choice on these findings.

We end this first dialogue of the day with a discussion about the goal of education. Hannah Ahrendt is quoted: *Teaching is introducing children into the world*. So we have to enable the child to develop him- or herself. Not only the cognitive part, but as a whole. And when a child, just like a flower, doesn't bloom, we have to adjust the surroundings, not the child. So it can blossom just as it is. Because that's what it came here for.

*What you are, the world is.*

*And without your transformation,*

*there can be no transformation of the world.*

J. Krisnamurti