

Table conversations

Chapter 2: The (true) nature of teacher education

By Jasja van den Brink

I always like to be out of my comfort-zone.

That's why I'm a teacher: You never know what happens!

Marta Zorilla Ferrer, Escola Marina, Barcelona

Pedagogy as an art-form

The second dialogue of day one was centered around the question: *What does it ask from professionals in education to guide our children's development within educational institutions and how should they prepare professionally for this? How do they perceive their responsibility?*

The first response was teachers should inspire their children to love learning. Teachers can teach by example. You must be able to be vulnerable, to be at ease with chaos. And that's easier said than done, because in our fear-based system we are taught to control everything. As a teacher you try to keep balance between chaos and structure; maybe pedagogy should be perceived as an art-form! Art is always a bit messy and chaotic. It involves thinking out of the box, creativity and courage. Teachers nowadays – generally speaking - tend to respect rules too much. The solution simply can't be to dismiss all rules. I think it's an asset to know and understand the rules well. And then it is up to you to decide - moment to moment - to keep, bend or break them.

How should we stimulate this 'artistic' mindset?

We should not only teach teachers contents and theory, but also how to work in projects instead of subjects. And how to maintain their personal growth, e.g. reflection or meditation. To lead by example. The teachers task is to guide students, they can't control the outcomes. In doing so, your classroom has to be a safe haven for unsafe learning. This includes embracing uncertainty, maybe only by remembering that '*Chaos is the word we have invented for an order which we do not understand*' (Henry Miller, American author) and using the power of narratives.

Because teaching is always full of, and maybe defined by, real-life dilemmas. Dilemmas like: *I don't want to exclude people, but I also want myself to be able to survive in this classroom.* Or, from a stance point of a 17-year old: *I want to be myself. And I want to be part of the group.* If you just stick to the book, you won't find the right answer. You have to make contact with the people and the situations to know what is necessary at that moment. Sometimes a good start is just to admit you don't know what to do or say.

Through this process 'togetherness' can be developed in classrooms, so teachers and pupils can feel safer with each other. Nowadays it's not so easy to feel safe in schools. The strong accent of our system on performance has created frightened people, who rather choose to safely follow the method than to do what they feel is necessary. In the two school-videos we saw that creating a new paradigm takes courage (stems from the Latin word '*cor*' which means *heart*) supported by a strong

vision. If we want to change the educational system, we have to make *mastery-teaching* possible. To give teachers and children the time, space and freedom to experiment, to find their own path and their own method. Where failure is only an invitation to fail better next time. Not something to avoid at all costs. Because in doing so, we take away the response-ability from children (and adults) for their own learning process.

It's like replacing the stone tiles in the playgrounds for rubber tiles, as was done several years ago. The idea was to make play more safe. The result was more accidents. Why? *'Because the best way to cause chaos is to arrange everything'* (Karel Boullart, Belgian philosopher). Now playing was considered safe, children -and parents didn't feel the responsibility to be careful while playing. Children learn by experience, not by keeping them away from dangers. Sometimes you learn fire is hot by burning yourself. Or finding the way by getting lost. That makes life more of an adventure than a guided tour.

To end this article, I will refer to Gert Biesta¹, who says it is significant that education nowadays is shaped by the jargon of survival - perform, adapt - and that we must hack it to tell a different story, a story about what makes life meaningful. Education is not only shaping by what it conveys, but also by the process itself, he says, referring to the two creation stories in the Bible: one presents a God who brings something out of nothing, the other assumes a world that was already there.

The story that has become dominant is of creation as production: The students come in, we put things in, and then measure what comes out again.

This is producing learning outcomes with the idea of creation as total control, theologian John Caputo says. This is a God who does not want his creation to mature. Paradise is full of booby traps and God tests man constantly. If you translate this to Pedagogy, it is an education that cannot digest that children who are able to make and learn from their own 'mistakes' eventually become more mature in life. The other story of creation assumes a God who creates by giving attention to what is good already. By confirming the good, you bring it to life. This involves a risk, because you don't know what the outcome will be: The beautiful risk of education.

¹ The beautiful risk of education