

Table conversations

Chapter 3: The (true) nature of pedagogical leadership and school development

By Annonay Andersson

Participants:

Detlef Hardorp - European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education

Anne Jan van den Dool – MijnID.nu

Marianne Rongen – Primary school Wittering.nl

John Rizzo - Consultant / Education Entrepreneur, Brussel

Dorothee Krekelberg - HAN University of Applied Sciences, Nijmegen-Arnhem

Hester IJsseling - Primary School De Kleine Reus, Amsterdam

Corina van Doodewaard - CALO - Windesheim University of Applied Sciences

Saskia de Bruijne - De Kleine Wereld Rotterdam

Hester: What struck you, what stuck with you?

John: When a school leader comes to me [with questions on...], he doesn't realise I'm going to ask him to change. That's very difficult for everyone, to change that 'psychology'. In the first video for example, when Tom Brocks goes to the students to say hello, he *should* do the same thing with teachers, greeting them. They would then proceed to do the same thing with students.

Detlef: What struck me, was not talking about leadership, but showing it. Putting the child in the centre, that's what they all did. It's not usual, not normal. Two things can make that difficult: standard assessment system and the inspection. Although Annette did it very cleverly when it came to the inspection by inviting them to be there two days.

My questions that arose are: What can we do to actually put the child in the centre from the beginning to the end? Changing the assessment system, I reckon. Leadership of the educational system, that might be the bigger question.

Anne Jan: It might appear that it's all about the head teacher, but it [leadership] is all around in the whole school. It is a relational aspect, not so much something I have inside me as a head teacher.

Marianne: What struck me in the videos is that the principles are personal and they take their narratives in the school. The last one [Dominique] took the parents into account too. I think that when a child comes to school, it brings it's whole being into school: it's background. A leader also needs to know a lot about his colleagues too. As they do about the kids.

Dorothee: I try to listen from the heart when watching the clips, so what touched me most was when the kids [at Laterna Magica] saw what the surprise was. And the girl who was telling about how she cared for the pigs, how you should be responsible in that task. That was the result giving children

autonomy and responsibility. And the story about the inspectors [told by Annette van Valkengoed]; really asking them questions, that touched me too. It is all about respect for the autonomy of the soul.

Corina: A little Dutch poem by Bart Moeyaert pops up in my mind. Its about courage, the multi-layered aspect of courage. *Bestaan kan iedereen, er zijn vraagt moed / we all exist, but it takes courage to be present.* It inspires me. I have several associations: cherishing your doubts, daring to change and fostering big dreams. It takes courage to do it, but they were rewarded for it.

Saskia: The story of Dominique is very encouraging. I'm at the start of a similar process. I know the inspection will come at some point; the outside world is gazing at us and I feel like they're waiting for us to fail. I believe in what I'm doing. It was very good to see that spirit. I have a long way to go still. About leadership: I believe in awakening the leader in your colleagues. That's what I'm trying to do in my school. That's more important than me being a leader.

Hester: Its strange that in the clips the line goes directly from the leader to the pupils, but it's less about the teachers and the leader. For me, what's important is to create a space where it is awoken; a sense of freedom and responsibility in children. In order to do that, you have to feel free and responsible yourself. You have to have a headmaster who facilitates that. I find it interesting what

John said about saying hi to the colleagues.

Hester: Who wants to ask a question?

John: Every principle asks me this, when I start working with them [in the role of consultant]: 'My teachers rarely implement innovations that we propose, how would you make it happen ?' Often I feel that change is limited to the accessory things such as revamping the playground: it does not require teachers to change.

Anne Jan: It's the same thing as when teachers ask how to give ownership to their pupils.
John: I believe that it is linked to how they think about pupils.

Saskia: What is your answer when the principle asks you this?

John: I have no silver bullet. I would like to hear from you.

Marianne: these questions trigger me a lot. I believe in boundaries, autonomy and imagination. But also in competences, which are not mentioned in the clips.

Hester: I would wonder to what end, to what aim? Ask them: what do you want; what drives you to work in education?

Saskia: That is exactly the question I posed to my team when I just started. They were very tired, negative. I sat down and really listened to what they said. All their complaints were real. I asked them what they really wanted. Then we met Luc Stevens, that was lucky. I could take responsibility, and the team too. They are so different now, even though they are still the same people. I take responsibility, and they are free to be the teacher they want to be. They're so positive now, more than me now.

Hester: I learned that you have to start with something you can do, even if it's very small. That should be the question. *You have to have a point at the horizon, but also sweep the tiles on your floor.*

Dorothee: First you have to address the pain and then you can make a change. How did you make the change to start this school? What is your narrative?

Saskia: I ran away after 6 months of working as a teacher. I thought it wasn't for me. But I always came back to children. When I was 34 I went back to school and became a primary teacher. I felt things could be different, but didn't know how. One of my headmasters saw something in me and said I should be a principle. I didn't see that in myself yet, but I did take the chance and tried. I can't write my whole story yet.

Dorothee: What I hear is, that you found the knowledge.

Anne Jan: You also had the courage to keep going.

Detlef: And you took initiative too.

Hester: It makes me think of what Hannah Ahrendts says; *to become the author of your own life, you need to take initiative, but you don't know how it is going to be taken up.* You need others to take up your initiative. Its something between people. You need to be given leadership.

Anne Jan: I don't think initiative is a necessity for leadership in general. Leadership is about sharing and in that way creating room for autonomy. That doesn't need to be change or a planned scheme. It's also about trust.

Hester: Could you paraphrase that?

Detlef: He turns it around: making room for others to take initiative.

Anne Jan: It is a very mechanical way of looking at leadership; as if one person is completely responsible. It is something that exists between people. It doesn't have to be in the constrict that someone has already thought about an end.

Hester: I think initiative can be understood in different ways.

Corina: What troubles me is the word leadership, maybe it should be *collective autonomy*. If we say every teacher should be a leader; that doesn't cover it. There should be diversity. I can endure this responsibility. If we can agree on the task that we are sharing...

Dorothee: Do you have and example of what you're saying?

Corina: When I was in the beginning stages of my teaching; I worked at a sports centre. I had a free space there for kids who weren't very sporty. That was a safe place for them. I was also a teacher at a school at the time, and followed the rules that applied there. Every student was obliged to take a shower after PE, but I was against that. But at the same time I didn't feel that I had to change the rule. I finally drew a line between the two practices I worked in and felt I could apply the same freedom in the school I worked in. I learned from the political leader Wouter Bos: *never make tough decisions alone.*