

Table conversations

Chapter 4: About educational research, towards a new scientific ethos.

*Research is to see what everybody else has seen,
and to think what nobody else has thought.*
- Albert Szent-Gyorgyi (Hungarian Scientist)

The last discussion-topic of the symposium was: What can research 'bring' to education? And is everything desired in educating our children for their future measurable?

We started off with someone's statement that the way research is done nowadays, leads to alienating. We collect data, and 4 or 5 years later we produce an unreadable article. It is unfair to expect teachers to get the knowledge via osmosis. If we do research, we have to give teachers the training and rapport to implement the new ideas. It's not enough to only inform the director of outcomes, we have to spin this around. And it simply takes time, to really understand the core of what is being researched.

One of my messmates gave the example of some extensive research he had done on play and its benefits. He was very enthusiastic about the outcomes, but the way these outcomes were translated to the schools was the biggest disappointment in his career: The whole experiment was summarized to: Play is good. And to stimulate this, a 'Play-agenda' was handed out to the teachers that year. '*Just don't look*', his brother advised him.

So, what outcomes are desirable? What knowledge does really help teachers in their day-to day-practice? The reductive view, the numbers, are outcomes we don't want. E.g. PISA results are used in really crooked ways; to diagnose reality and prove a correlation that doesn't exist. But what do we want? Teachers and schools are in need of research that can measure the soft skills. In the very near future, people are believed to have three jobs. They have to know how to get up when they get knocked down by life. How can we improve or activate those skills?

Maybe one way to find out, and to stay away from 'quick-fixes', is to use longitudinal studies. But how can we translate the outcomes of a 30-year study to the school-practice which also has evolved in these 30 years? Besides that, the kids will have changed too, so the drill might not work anymore. And maybe some things are not meant to be generalised. Could it be that what we do in schools is so special, so specific, so personal, that research will destroy it?

It was argued it would be ideal if the teacher was the researcher too. That we should accommodate schools – in time, knowledge and space - to be some sort of laboratory. But we must take into account there is an ethical side to this also. You can't deprive one group of certain teachings or knowledge for the sake of research. Someone else stated this also has to do with how you define 'research'. I think so too. And when I contemplate about this a little longer, I think that good teachers are doing research all the time. They are constantly trying to work out the best way to teach their pupils, to find out how their mind works.

Systematic self-reflection could help to be more aware of the processes which appear in the classroom. A teacher once told me: 'The pupils instructions are on the leaflet, which are to be found

inside.' It's a teacher's job to be curious about this leaflet, and to experiment with new ways of acting/being to find out what works best. This is not an exercise that is confined to the student and the teacher alone. The other pupils and teachers in the class and school are equally involved in this process. And yes, to evoke this process, extra time, knowledge and space is needed. To create a safe space, where teacher and pupil can unfold their highest potential.

*You must understand the whole of life, not just one little part of it.
That is why you must read, that is why you must look at the skies,
that is why you must sing and dance, and write poems
and suffer and understand,
for all that is life.*

- Jiddu Krishnamurti