



## SYMPOSIUM

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

*What do we mean by 'seeing' the pupil?  
That is not an easy question to answer.*

### Reflection by Lisette Bastiaansen

NIVOZ asked me to reflect on the Unfolding human potential symposium, which I am very willing to do. But a lot of things already have been said and put down for further discussion, which made me decide to zoom in on the existing reflections, in order to contribute my part in continuing the dialogue.

Reading all the posted reflections I was struck most by [the reflection of Thieu Besselink](#). His personal story, in which he talks about the fact that he was not willing to read or write in sixth grade, followed by a visionary 'intervention' of the involved teacher, touched me. In my opinion real education is what happens in practice, trying to grasp 'it' by real examples therefore seems to be the most optimal road for further exploration. What a beautiful story Thieu told us, what a daredevil the involved teacher must have been! And, most of all: what a beautiful, almost mindful way of exploring the case, without immediately labelling it as a 'problem'. Talking about 'unfolding potential', this seems like a true case of patient unfolding and forming at the same time.

The story reminded me of a little educational hick-up that took place in my own life when I was ten years old. What was the case? After doing the Cito-tests that had to give insight in the educational route I was able to take after primary school, the teacher concluded that the only possible road for me was entering the domestic science school (I think in current education it is comparable with preparatory vocational education at the lowest level). 'She really can't deal with any higher level of education', the teacher argued. 'She's too playful, doesn't pay attention to what we are trying to teach her, and just wants to have fun'. True, I was doing all kind of 'useless' things in class, not having too much attention for the teacher, at least, so it seemed. I for instance taught myself to write in reverse at high speed, experienced myself in finger whistling, practiced click-clack songs and so on. At that time nobody wondered *why* I was not paying attention, and *whether* it was true that I was not paying attention. Luckily my father intervened. He reasoned that my absence of attention

did not have to do with a lack of intelligence, but with a lack of challenge, and that it probably would be best to send me to a school with all levels of secondary education, in order to find out whether he or the teacher 'saw' me clearly. It took some effort, but finally they gave me the benefit of the doubt. Soon became clear that my father had had a more appropriate vision. I almost immediately ascended to the academic track of secondary school (VWO) and finished it without any problem whatsoever. I still now and then wonder what would have become of me, when they had sent me to the domestic science school.

What is the lesson that can be drawn from these two examples?

For me the lesson is that it is terribly important to 'truly see' the pupil. But what do we mean by 'seeing' the pupil? That is not an easy question to answer. For me it at least implies that you, the teacher, are 'attentively involved' with the pupils' *present* – in order to be able to 'see' clearly what his needs and longings in the 'here and now' are. But it also means that you - at the same time - have an attentiveness for the pupils' *future* – by seeing who is not yet there, but might emerge in the 'there and then'. This combined way of 'seeing' is easier said than done, because it does not only require dare devilled teachers, it also requires different forms of attentiveness and the ability to use the right form at the right time.

First of all it requires what Nel Noddings would call 'engrossment': the willingness to try to truly and deeply receive who the child in front of you is, and what his needs are. This kind of engrossment is characterized by being sensitive to signals, a certain kind of vulnerability and by unprejudiced reactions, all of them shaped by the willingness to let go of your own personal perspective, and by – as Gert Biesta would say – the willingness and capability to let go of your own 'immature longings'. At the same time seeing the pupil requires the attentiveness to see whom 'might become', which requires capabilities as 'trust without knowing' (Biesta), a sense of the enormous possibilities the world offers and the willingness to walk unknown routes together.

Returning to the requested reflection on the symposium I would like to propose to deepen our dialogue on what it means to 'see' the pupil, before starting 'unfolding' him or her, looking at questions as: which qualities are needed, where should our attention go to and what role does our own personal biography play in this process of seeing?

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