JAN BRANSEN

# HOMO EDUCANDUS

## WHY OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM IS BROKEN AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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**Homo Educandus: Why Our School System Is Broken and What We Can Do About It**

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# PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

Early in 2019, I entered the world of education as a relative outsider with a strong message. Upon publication of the Dutch edition of this book, Radboud University gave a press release entitled 'The current education system is truly bankrupt'. Although I do not literally defend this statement in the book, I immediately embraced the premise and have since positioned myself as both the representative of the joint creditors of the current school system and the liquidator who is trying to restart it using only the healthy parts.

In the first twenty-five years of my career I was a philosopher of mind and action, dealing with issues of self-knowledge, autonomy, authenticity, personal identity and practical rationality. I developed a vision of edifying reflection, in other words the ability of human beings to relate to their own acting, thinking and being in a way that is intrinsically focused on growth, development and improvement. This vision led to an exploration of the relationship between science and common sense, published in Dutch in 2013, and translated in 2017 as *Don't Be Fooled. A Philosophy of Common Sense*.[1] In this book, I argue that science cannot simply be seen as an enhancement of our common sense. After all, one crucial dimension of our common sense concerns the quality of our mutual positioning. I argue that this quality cannot be adequately represented from a perspective based on the distinction between a human being seen as a knowing subject and a human being seen as a known object. My position is a form of pragmatism: primarily, people are actors, beings who *do* something, who interact socially. If we believe that in our actions we are partly or sometimes knowing subjects and partly or sometimes known objects, we are simply misleading ourselves twice. We are 'minded agents', all the way down, beings for whom events are experiences because we participate in them as agents. Besides being minded, we are also passionately engaged. We are social beings and in my work this has led to the focus on love as a competence that is at least as important to human existence as cognition.

My account of the relationship between science and common sense, in which I emphasise edification, led quite naturally to a vision on education. This vision was greatly influenced by the changes I had been experiencing over the past 20 years in the student population that I was working with at university. I hasten to add that the students and most teachers are not at all to blame for these changes. It is the system that doesn't work anymore and it is basically our mindset that prevents a thorough revision of our educational practice. Our mindset not only perpetuates the distortion of our education – our teaching, learning and developing – but also exacerbates it year after year. In this book, I analyse and criticise the workings of this mindset, of our mainstream contemporary educational ideas. Moreover, I propose an improved mindset as a substitute – a mindset that does justice to our fundamental need for belonging and permanent development – and I show which changes in our educational system are suitable to this improved mindset.

This book is emphatically not a scholarly text. I do not aim to make an original contribution to the academic philosophy of education. In the text, I barely enter into a discussion with existing scholarship. I have a different goal. I see there is an important task for academic philosophers, namely to become actively involved in educational practice. This suits my pragmatic approach, or, to borrow a quotation from Marx: as philosophers, we should do more than merely interpret the world in various ways; we should actually change it. That is why in this book I *do* enter into a discussion with anyone who holds everyday views on education: parents, teachers, pupils, students, tutors, principals, educational administrators, educational advisors, politicians. Of course, this group also includes educational researchers, educational scientists and educational philosophers, but not as interlocutors within independent academic specialisms. Certainly not. Such specialisms have existed in isolation for far too long. It is high time we change the tone, and no longer conduct the discussion within the boundaries of an academic discipline, but rather do so in the workplace, in other words in real life. After all, this is where we can find those implicit notions about learning, developing, teach-

ing and testing, about certificates, learning trajectories, knowledge transfer and student monitoring systems, about reading comprehension, scheduling, learning goals and effective instruction. And it is where we can find the people who do the work: teachers, parents, lecturers, and, most importantly, students.

As this book has been written for this everyday audience, it contains hardly any footnotes. As stated above, the book is not an introduction to an academic field but rather an incentive to think carefully, thoroughly and critically about the mainstream contemporary educational ideas that have become so familiar to us. I have included few references in this book, but this does not mean that I claim originality for my ideas. Similar ideas have been around for centuries and the time seems right for some of these ideas to claim centre stage. Whether or not the view developed here is actually mine is not something I am particularly interested in. Words belong to us all, and understanding is always a co-creation, the result of multiple 'minded agents' who understand one another. This certainly also applies, often quite literally, to this book: I will repeatedly be asking you, as my reader, for help and advice, for understanding, for accepting co-responsibility for the ideas that I am trying to develop. If you cannot follow my way of thinking, if you cannot understand my voice, then in fact I literally have not communicated anything, then my words are just dead letters on paper – or, perhaps more likely, merely dots on a screen. I would, of course, appreciate it if you were to refer to this book when you quote from it; still, I would prefer it if you internalised these ideas so much so that you could recount them yourself, in your own words. Then these ideas will have really become your ideas, and the great thing about ideas is that I will not lose anything if you own them. Ideas multiply for free.

I hope that this book will be a catalyst, giving words to an undercurrent of resistance that has been present in many of us for a long time. I hope that thanks to the words in this book, the feeling of discontent, the feeling that the current school system is not good for us, will gain in strength and direction in such a way that many of us will take

action. I hope that in this way this book will contribute to a transition that is already in the air. The zeitgeist – admittedly, a somewhat weird concept – seems ready for it.

One final word about the translation. Also in English, this book is and remains fundamentally a Dutch book, and this will sometimes be noticeable. But in its new language, at certain moments it is also no longer a Dutch book. After all, a translation always brings along the culture of the new language. In several places, the translators have given my ideas a place in the British context. Of course English is the *lingua franca* of modern science and of our contemporary knowledge economies, and in this sense also the language of the citizens of the world. Nevertheless, when discussing such an everyday phenomenon as education and our educational system, it is impossible to speak in English without constantly relying on connotations of and associations with concrete, local educational practices. Occasionally, this meant an extensive quest for the translators, Fulco Teunissen and Kate Kirwin of *Twelvetrees Translations*. As far as I am concerned, they have solved this conundrum successfully.

# INTRODUCTION: EDUCATION IS A HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

## OUR PLAYING FIELD

This book is about us, about human beings. As a result, it is about younger people and older people, children and adults, and about the different generations who will be needing each other for a long, long time. After all, this is how it works for us, specimens of what Linnaeus named *Homo sapiens*. For centuries, philosophers have not recognised this generational interdependency. When they were philosophising about human beings, they usually turned their thoughts immediately and exclusively to adults. An adult, however, has been around for a while, and much of what happens during the process of developing into an adult is crucial for what it means to be human. Of course, it does not mean that you should conclude that children are slowly developing into human beings. They are slowly becoming adults, but they have been human all the time – as a child, as a young person and later as an adult or as an elderly person. Human existence is an existence *in time*, a long and continuing process of change.

The fascinating thing about human existence is that we relate ourselves to this process of change. We meddle with it. We have ideas about ourselves, about what a human being is, and about what being human is. Such ideas matter, and in all sorts of ways they play a role in this permanent process of change. These ideas matter when we criticise each other's behaviour, when we influence each other, imitate each other, impersonate, correct, instruct, or punish each other. And they do not only matter in these everyday forms of human interaction. They have also taken another shape, a much more permanent, institutional shape. Our ideas about ourselves, about what it means to be a human being, have become firmly embedded in the crucial institution in which younger and older people deal with each other: *education*. That is why this book – even if it were only about human beings –

is inevitably also about our educational system, about the school buildings, the curricula, the teachers, the pupils and the diplomas.

Of course, you already know that this is a book about our educational system: this is what it says on the cover, in the title, in the brochure, in promotion texts and in other references that you had seen even before you laid hands on this copy and started reading. Nevertheless, I think it is important to stress that to me this is first and foremost a book *about us*, about people. This is the perspective from which I consider our educational system in this book. What made us decide to create the system that we now have? Why did we divide human existence into two parts: one part in which, as young people, we are mainly supposed to learn, and a second part in which, as adults, we are mainly supposed to be productive?

I will ask many questions to gain insight into the ideas about human existence that we have based our school system on. I will argue that some of these ideas are flawed. Such ideas thwart our efforts and misshape us rather than help us shape our humanity.

Incidentally, my critical analysis of our current school system will not end on a sad note. It will do so if you stop after reading Part I, but I certainly hope you do not. If you only have time for half a book, I would advise you to read the uplifting second part. This is where I design my ideal educational system, a coherent package of forms of education that will be beneficial to humanity. This second part is speculative, as I anticipate what I think should be the meaning of the concept of *human education*. I reckon that I could progress quite some way with this, but of course I cannot do it all by myself. So I hope that my design appeals to you and that you are willing to develop, promote and realise it together with me. If you do not feel like doing so after reading Part II, you might want to go back to Part I. In this critical part, I analyse all that is wrong with our current school system, to instil you with sufficient courage to take on the challenge of my proposal. Simply because you feel you must, because you agree with me that our children should be shaped rather than misshaped. You will need this awareness to appreciate my proposal. Hence the

structure of this book and my hope that you will have sufficient stamina to read both parts. Part I puts you firmly with both feet on the ground, in order to provide you with enough motivation to jump into Part II. In this introductory chapter, I outline the playing field in which we find ourselves: education as an anthropological fact.

## HOMO EDUCANDUS

There is something peculiar about *Homo sapiens*. Try and look at us as a biologist would do, as a scientist who is interested in the different life forms on Earth. You will soon come across something striking, an anthropological truth with two, or even four, different aspects.

On the face of it, we can conclude that there is no other species whose offspring are so utterly helpless for such a long period of time. Just consider how quickly young birds, kittens or lambs can stand up on their own, and become independent. Then compare this to our young people, who nowadays remain dependent on their parents until they are well into their twenties. A closer look shows us that, conversely, there is no species whose adults are so totally committed to their offspring for such a long time as human adults are. These situations complement one another. If you depend on your parents for a long time, then they must love you very much to be willing and able to take care of you for this length of time. Caring, selfless parental love is the correlative of prolonged helplessness, and it is necessary for survival. This correlative also puts children's helplessness in a different light. These children are not only helpless, at the mercy of their parents' willingness to provide loving care; undeniably, children also excel in reciprocating loyalty and trust. They have little choice. Children need to focus strongly on their attachment to their parents. They need to have blind faith, or they will not survive. These first two aspects of our natural existence are thus two sides of love: on the part of the children there is a great capacity for attachment, and on the part of the parents there is an equally great capacity for care.

The years of mutual involvement of two different generations do not only become apparent in the love between these generations, but also in the development of our abilities. The unparalleled long period of dependency gives children an ideal opportunity to learn an awful lot from their parents. And not just from their parents, but from the complete adult context in which they grow up. The significance of this opportunity can hardly be overestimated. Here we can see the third and the fourth aspect of the anthropological fact that young human beings remain dependent on their parents for such a long time. Children are very eager to learn things; they are true learning animals. And here, too, there is an adult counterpart: the older generation has an unparalleled enthusiasm for educating. Adults are always busy encouraging, supporting, facilitating – and often even enforcing – their children's learning. Sometimes this is a matter of endearing, hardly controllable automatic responses. Consider the high-pitched, exaggerated expressive voice which adults use to talk to babies, thus helping the baby in its language development.[2] Or consider how adults open their mouths when a spoon approaches the baby's mouth, in order to suggest imitation. However, adults are – equally obviously and uncontrollably – always involved in schooling their children, instructing them, methodically and systematically influencing, controlling, indoctrinating, correcting, punishing and rewarding their children's behaviour. Just as it is normal for the younger generation to learn, so is it normal for the older generation to teach.

*Homo sapiens* is the name Linnaeus gave to our species in 1758. In those days, it was a matter of course that people considered only adult specimens of a species, and thus it is understandable that Linnaeus chose the word *sapiens* – 'wise' in Latin – to characterise our most essential characteristic. But if we take into account that people 'live in time', that they are and always will be developing, that they are therefore always involved in their own development and in their own learning and teaching, and also that they remain young for a very long time, then it might be better to call ourselves *Homo educandus*: the educatable human being.[3] This species may not be wise,

or not yet wise, but is always trying to become wiser. This book is about *Homo educandus* – and in particular about the social setting in which they have to live their life in Western Europe.

*Homo educandus* has gone through an enormous evolution, which is no longer simply a question of biology – at least not if we see biology as exclusively focusing on the life processes we share with animals and plants, and if we try to isolate these processes from the influence of language, religion, history, art, science, culture and education. This evolution has guided us into the twenty-first century and is now letting us grow up in a country with thousands of school buildings. Nowhere can we identify *Homo educandus* better than in these school buildings: loyal young people who are learning and dedicated older people who are teaching.

## THE SCHOOL BUILDING: SHACK OR SPACE?

There are many thousands of school buildings in Western Europe: large, small, accessible, closed, boring, surprising, integrated, isolated, and so on. Many schools, and in all shapes and sizes. But despite all the obvious differences, there is also something that all these buildings have in common: they represent the institutionalisation of *Homo educandus*. They show us the walls within which our existence is shaped in accordance with today's wishes.

Institutionalisation is a good thing. It simplifies and streamlines our lives to an enormous extent, and as Arnold Gehlen put it so articulately, it creates a nest built in nature.[4] Thanks to institutionalisation, none of us needs to start from the beginning. We no longer need to invent human existence by ourselves, but we find it in all kinds of ways that are practicable and above all *liveable*. But these ways also have something compelling, and this, unfortunately, is the downside.

The two sides of institutionalisation can be observed in the school building, in the practice space that this can be, but also in the rehearsal shack that it might become.[5] The school building can be a wonderful space to practise, a protected area where we can experi-

ment and try out life to our heart's content. The school building can offer us this educational space in which we are encouraged, invited and welcomed to participate. In this space, we are protected from the consequences that our impulsive, childish, primitive, ill-considered and investigative behaviour might have had if we had immediately been left to our own devices. Musicians also need a practice space: a domain where they can explore melodies, rhythms and arrangements without any limits, without an audience, a space where they can try out things and where the outcome really does not matter yet.

As a writer, I am familiar with such a space. The text that you are reading now has been formulated, rewritten, cut and pasted, moved and removed, time and again. All this time, I was alone, I was my own reader, the only reader, as writing is mainly reading, tasting words, trying out phrases, deleting and starting over again. You are reading this now – the final text – but you have no idea how many words and phrases have stood here before, or how I stared at the screen in my own office, was in doubt, got into the flow of writing, only to look back later and return to that paragraph and make it vanish into thin air with a click of the mouse. As a writer, I need that practice space, so that without an audience, with only my own, well-meaning but also critical judgment, I can shape the text that has become this book. Musicians have try-outs before they go on tour. I do something similar by submitting my manuscript to my first readers.[6]

A school building is just such a practice space, a protected, educational space where we can try out what it is like to be a human being, where we can practise our writing and maths, our reading, our singing and drawing, using all the skills that are on offer to help us lead our lives as human beings. We do this without an audience, not in a public space, not in the street. We do this under the guidance of an encouraging, well-meaning, honest and critically constructive teacher, who demonstrates to us time and again how things are done, and who does not have an axe to grind with us, but who teaches us. This is the beautiful, enriching, *formative* power of

institutions: they help us develop our existence in such a way that it can be a flourishing, healthy, happy, *human* existence.

But there is also the downside that I mentioned earlier: institutions can be oppressive. The school building can become a stifling rehearsal shack, a stuffy place where our spontaneity is disciplined, where we lack oxygen and in the end we only long for space, for escape, for an exit. After all, there is no innovation in a rehearsal room: there is only rehearsing, rehearsing and more rehearsing. This is where we revise for exams, in a mind-numbing atmosphere.

Such a mind-numbing climate is not inevitable, of course. Musicians need their rehearsal rooms: once they are on stage with an audience, they need to have songs to play, which they have rehearsed, which they know backwards, which they can perform in harmony with their band members. This takes a lot of rehearsing, a lot of hard work, and rehearsal after rehearsal. If the songs are beautiful, if it is music to your heart, then you will also be able to feel the inspiration in the rehearsal room, you will be able to get into the flow and become part of the playing. I remember that when I used to play football, we sometimes played better and more gracefully during the training matches than during the 'real' events. But I also remember and recognise the suffocating, mind-numbing side of other rehearsal rooms, where you were only allowed to do exactly what you are supposed to do and where a critical, inquisitive attitude was frowned upon. I recognise the disciplinary compulsion emanating from institutions, the ridiculous mantras that need to be repeated.

Part I of this book deals with this suffocating side of our school system. To me, this book tells a classic emancipatory story: the institution which we have formed and reinforced together is hemming us in. This institution does not deliver what it promises. Shaping has turned into *mis*shaping. The school building has become a rehearsal shack, in the bad meaning of the word. It is high time to reclaim our practice space, to regain it and to re-create it.

# ROLE EXPLORATION

In order to be able to claim the school building as a practice space again, we need ideas about what such a space should look like and about what we should and would like to practise there. A fundamental idea about this comes from John Dewey.[7] I would like to use what Dewey calls *dramatic rehearsal* – or *role exploration* – as the fundamental idea to characterise the essence of the school building as a practice space. In discussing this concept, I will use two other ideas from Dewey: intelligence, in the sense of the ability to deal successfully with ambiguities, and democracy, as a joint, investigative way of living.

To introduce the idea of role exploration, I use – like Dewey – Darwin's naturalism as a departure point. As living beings, we are dealing with an environment that regularly challenges us because it is ambiguous in all sorts of ways. We can find ambiguities anywhere: vague, empty spaces in our experience. Under a shrub you see a black shadow moving and you wonder whether it is a blackbird or a rat. The clouds are turning grey and you wonder whether it is going to rain or not. Someone is approaching you on a narrow pavement, and you wonder whether they will pass you on the right or on the left.

What do we do in situations like this? Dewey says that this is when we use our intelligence, that we imagine a space between stimulus and response in which we can explore different scenarios. We try to gain insight into the consequences of these different scenarios and try to find out whether we can discover clues in the current scenario that point towards a particular outcome. If it is a rat, it will scurry along the ground, it will not be able to fly away and there will be a long, thin, round tail for you to see. If the oncoming person intends to pass you on your left, then they will veer slightly to the left at an appropriate distance to make room for you. This is how we use our intelligence to anticipate how the scenario will unfold in each case. In this sense, intelligence is the ability to explore the future, to antici-

pate what will happen so that we will be able to respond better and more quickly when that future occurs.

Role exploration is a variation of this use of our intelligence. Role exploration is imagining the course of a *social* scenario, a scenario in which there are several people who all have a certain role which they can play in a certain way. The example of the man approaching you on the pavement is one of these social scenarios. It is a very simple scenario in which there are only a few possible alternatives. In the two obvious, normal outcomes the man will either pass you on the left or on the right, and depending on the route he chooses, you choose the other side.

However, in this scenario you need to take a third outcome into account. After all, you might also bump into each other because neither of you is paying attention to the other, or because one of you intentionally tries to collide with the other. And similar to this third alternative, there might also be an unexpected fourth outcome, in which you clumsily and embarrassingly 'dance' in front of each other for a while, because you keep choosing the same side to pass.

In role exploration, you imagine these four possible outcomes. You explore the emotions that can occur in these outcomes, you try to articulate the values that are expressed in these emotions, and then you determine an action plan. You cannot carry out that action plan completely on your own. After all, it is a social scenario, in which several actors play a role. Sometimes, for example in the scenario of the person approaching you on the narrow pavement, there is little opportunity for communication and mutual finetuning. You will then alone, in your mind, play out these alternative scenarios, no doubt just like the oncoming person is doing. You are both intelligent and you will have to come up with an action plan in which you take that communicative limitation into account. If you really want to avoid that embarrassing fourth outcome, you might come up with an action plan in which at a great distance you start making exaggerated courteous gestures indicating that you are making room for the other person.

When it comes to coordination and fine-tuning, people are brilliant. On the one hand, we can clearly observe this in the formation of institutions, of culture, of entrenched common habits. People keep to the left. This is what they do as soon as they enter the public road, on foot, by bike and by car. This is a habit that everyone internalises in their early days and then you never have to think about it anymore, except of course when you are on the continent. Coordination problems often have several solutions. Passing on the right works just as well as passing on the left, but you need to organise it collectively. And this is where Dewey's third idea comes into play: democracy as a joint, investigative way of living.

The idea is as follows. When on their own, people can imagine alternative scenarios to determine what could happen in a certain situation and what would be the best course of action to take. This is what intelligence looks like if we confine ourselves to individual specimens of *Homo sapiens*. But people do not live alone, people live in a shared world, for many years, with older and younger people together. People are specimens of *Homo educandus*. Fundamentally, people live in a language community, with the words they have learned to describe their lives. And, as we saw above, as an independent individual working on your own you cannot proceed very far in developing an intelligent action plan for social scenarios. After all, in social scenarios, you work *together*. You can only build a railway line or have a fun evening in the pub if you can react constructively, if you inform each other about your intentions, if you discuss how to approach certain tasks and align each other's plans and interests. This communicative alignment is crucial for a successful society. People need to live successfully together on a daily basis and in every possible situation, which is why they really have to invest permanently in communicative coordination. This is what people learn to do throughout their lives. Above all, they have to do it continuously, just as they have to learn continuously. That is what living together requires in every new situation.

This is why we have school buildings. Such a school building is a physical, social, protective, educational space in which people can develop and act out role explorations. It is the space between stimulus and response that intelligent people use to explore different scenarios to determine which approach works best. The power of our intelligence is that we can imagine these scenarios, that we can discuss them, so that we can pre-determine the value of anticipated consequences, before these consequences actually occur. We imagine the future, try it out, explore it in our plans. We do so, every person for themselves, permanently, in our own minds. And in the educational space of a school building, we can run these kinds of explorations together, in the public, social space of our language.

We do this using words and actions. Think of a home economics class. Think of a woodworking class. Think of a sum that you calculate and an essay that you write. Bake a pizza together in your home economics class, not to actually serve it up in a restaurant, not even to actually eat it, but to learn how to cook, and to learn how to bake a pizza. It is all right if it is a disaster, precisely because you are trying something out. It is a role exploration. It is about the baking, not about the food itself.

The idea of a practice space provides an interesting and important dual perspective, a duplication that we all know in the form of the received wisdom that winning is not the point of playing a game. Pedagogically, this is a rather complex and ambiguous idea. Because you cannot learn to play the game well if you, in the delineated context of the game, do not care about winning. So if you are playing, it is most definitely about winning. As a child, I realised that early on, and in my fanaticism I could get terribly annoyed with older people who were so eager to stress in their behaviour that they really were not interested in winning, but only in the good atmosphere of a games night. “Don’t play then!”, I used to shout at them. I knew full well that it was about the game, that it was only a game, that the atmosphere was the thing that was really important. *But for that exact reason it* was *about winning!*

The educational significance of this duplication is crucial if we wish to understand to what extent a school building should be a practice space rather than a rehearsal shack. It is a duplication that comes with role exploration, a duplication that all human beings, young and old, must master. This duplication requires that we learn to pay attention to *playing* a role. You need to be able to assume a role, but that also means being able to distance yourself from that role. You need to realise that this role is a role that you can play, that you can perform. This also means that you do not automatically equate yourself with your role, and that this role has not been bestowed on you from on high.

This dual perspective is something people need to learn to develop. That means on the one hand that you need to learn to take an internal perspective. From this perspective it is all about winning, about a tasty pizza, a well-made dovetail joint, a correct invoice, an appealing text. But on the other hand you also need to learn to take an external perspective. From that perspective it is about the game, about developing your cooking skills, your carpentry skills, your maths skills and your writing skills. Both learners *and* teachers need to develop this dual perspective.

For younger people, there are great dynamics involved in developing this dual perspective. As a small child on an Italian campsite, you might look with great admiration at the incredible skills of the wild-haired pizza baker. He can even throw the dough in the air! Quick as a flash, he spreads the tomato sauce and the other ingredients over the pizza base. At the same time, he stokes the oven, opens the oven door, slides the pizza into the oven with a long-handled pizza shovel and takes it out again using the same shovel. Just a little bit of oil and a pinch of oregano… and you think, wow, I could never learn how to do that. Actually, you do not even think this, on that campsite, at that young age. It is unthinkable that you would ever be able to assume the role of pizza baker. Your perspective is purely external. You would not know where to start.

But not much later, it may just happen that someone at school organises a cooking event and that you initially struggle with the mushrooms, and just moments later you are crumbling the cheese over the pizza with a little more bravado and at night you start dreaming of a pizzeria in which you are the chef. This is also how it goes with maths and writing and how it went when learning to ride a bike. At first you had no idea how to get onto the bike saddle, but later it is difficult to imagine that you once actually had to learn to do this.

To become better at writing, maths and cooking, you need the distance from the internal perspective once more: your perspective is no longer that of the newcomer who still has to master the role, but you can now reflect on the role that you fulfil, on the internal perspective that you have now taken. You can take on this role now, but of course there is still much to improve in how you play it. Look at it from a distance, double your perspective. How do *you* play this role? You win some games, but if you pay more attention to how to play the game, you might win more games. That is how you learn. And that is how you learn *on your own*. In the practice space.

A school building that is a good practice space is somewhere where this duplication of perspective is encouraged, where it is not only about *fulfilling* a role, but always also about *playing* that role. This is exactly the crux of Dewey's role exploration as the heart of our education. Role exploration prevents the school building from becoming a rehearsal shack. Role exploration is, after all, a question of social interaction, and it also immediately refers to the role of pupil and teacher. These roles are also played, and are explored time and again. That is what I was referring to earlier when I wrote that people have not been bestowed a role by higher powers, and that this role does not naturally fall into place. A child is not by nature what the educational system takes a pupil to be, nor is an adult by nature what we think a teacher should be. In the school as a practice space, it is not a consequence of the child's nature that they perform the social function of 'pupil' seriously. They must also learn to *play* that role, learn to relate to it, explore how they actually learn.

The same goes for the adult, the teacher: it is not a consequence of their nature that they perform the social function of 'teacher' seriously. Even if they feel they are a teacher through and through, if teaching is in their blood, they will still realise that 'teacher' is a role that they must play, one which they have to explore and learn. A teacher who cannot *play* their role is a teacher who locks themselves up in the rehearsal shack: they cannot help but simply repeat their lessons time and again, instead of learning from them and elaborating on them. If it is up to Dewey, you would not find such teachers in our school buildings. In school buildings our human existence should take shape and this calls for continuous role exploration, and thus for a practice space. That is exactly why Dewey considers democracy a way of living rather than a form of government.

In a democracy, people talk, deliberate, listen, take up positions, reconsider, listen again, explore, articulate, and that is it, actually. In this process, *each of us* has an equal voice: each of us can always talk to someone else about who *we* think that we are. That is rather problematic and undetermined. After all, we are only human. Some of us – and perhaps many of us – have a voice that is not heard, which is not heard by some – or by many – perhaps because we do not know how to make our voices heard or because others do not know how to listen to them. That is a permanent learning process, for all of us. Think of peasants, slaves, women, homosexuals, transgenders, the deaf, the autistic, unmotivated pupils, confused people, animals, future generations – the list continues. There will always be new voices that we are not used to hearing, which can be made audible, and which must be made audible.

For Dewey this is democracy: a joint, investigative way of living which is taking shape, and can be practised, in our school buildings – in the practice spaces where children grow up and in which everyone is human, loyal and caring, learning and teaching.

# AN INTERGENERATIONAL EXPERIMENT

The times were bleak already, before the corona crisis hit us all. It had been a long time since we heard people say that the end was nigh. Cosmically, it already seemed we only had a few seconds left, but the coronavirus pandemic both deepened the catastrophe and showed us glimmers of a new world. Still, even in the post-corona era we are about to make our climate unliveable, are about to be overcome by hyper-intelligent algorithms, a nuclear winter is staring us in the face, our democracy has been eroded, there is a disastrously wide income gap, farmland has been virtually exhausted, fossil energy has all but run out. And everything is wrong in our school system, too.

We have survived the pandemic, and we might even have learned important lessons, but, still, we could easily lose heart. Being disheartened, however, does not suit people, especially people in education – those incorrigible do-gooders. We do not become gloomy about news that does not tell us anything new. We adapt quickly, even to a lockdown. Human existence is an experiment. We know that all too well. And experiments may fail. We might become extinct. And that might even be better for the earth and for the universe, if you believe the pessimists. But for us personally, of course, that would not be better: that is beyond our imagination. We see a new challenge in every setback. We have no choice – it is a question of our zest for life, of our zest for learning, of our sense of reality.

*Homo educandus* is continually being developed, several generations at a time, both young and old. *Homo educandus* meddles in their own existence, tries out their ideas, tries out their visions on humanity, looks for the human scale. They do this in education, in that joint, investigative life form that is a human endeavour. We are a human endeavour. We do our best. That is a beautiful, ambiguous phrase: *our best*. All kinds of perspectives are hiding in that phrase, all kinds of attempts to do justice to the human scale. Attempts by me and by you, by older and younger people. My best may not be the best for

you. If I know that, then it may not be so good for me either. My best for today may not be the best for tomorrow. The older generation's best may not be the best for the younger generation. And vice versa. But we do our best.

In this book I aim to take this realisation to the level of a critical reflection on our educational system, because it is not good enough. We can do better, within our limits, in our time. In our education we can do more justice to the human dimension, create more space – practice space – for our humanity. So let us try that, together. It is worth it. It is a fascinating intergenerational experiment. We cannot do much else, can we? We are doing our best.

# PART I

# WHY OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM IS BROKEN

# CHAPTER 1. STUDY FIRST, LIVE YOUR LIFE LATER?

## THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

Remember your first day of school? Finally you are five, finally you are allowed to join in, finally the great adventure has really started. In our lives, the first day of school is a watershed. It has been talked about for ages and you have been seriously prepped for it. There are reading books, taster days, and the final countdown to the big day. There are also quite a few essentials that you will need on that first day at school and that you have already started buying with your mum or dad. You have your very own school uniform, your schoolbag, a PE kit and trainers. You have already tried out the route to school. You are thoroughly prepared for this day and so are your parents. It is a big thing! From now on everything is going to be different. There you are with your new classmates, saying goodbye to your mum or your dad as if it were forever. And now, you are going to do *everything* yourself.

Was that how it was? I honestly do not remember any of it. The intensity of that first day of school is mainly the effect of the stories we tell about it. For most children, very little changes. Even once you are at school, you will be at home most hours of the week, or with your family or friends. And before you started school, you may well have been going to childcare for years.

Still, these stories do their work and fascinatingly enough, they do have an influence on us. They create the space in which we understand – or think we understand – our lives. These stories become truths because we use them as a hook on which to hang our memories. They get under our skin as a mentality, a worldview or a background which is both tacit and self-evident, against which our experiences stand out and take on meaning.

There is another day that is a turning point in your life: the last day of school. This day is a crucial moment for young people. Finally, real life is about to begin. You can almost feel the accumulated tension, the liberation, but also the anxiety. Precisely because of the interminably stretched-out learning trajectory: first the last day of primary school, then the last day of secondary school, then the last day of tertiary education. It is like a never-ending hill, like the ones that you once climbed somewhere on holiday. One of those hills where you kept thinking that you had reached the top, but then there turned out to be yet another top, somewhat further away. The optical illusion was extremely frustrating at times, but now, finally, here it is. The real top. The last day of your school career. Now life is finally going to begin! Such liberation. Such responsibility. Such apprehension.

I do not know which emotions prevailed or will prevail for you. But in the current story of our human existence, the last day of school is really a moment of great existential significance. Therefore it is obvious that there will be powerful emotions involved. I do not begrudge anyone such deeply human emotions. This is why I can appreciate the phenomenon of the last day of school and admire the enormous build-up of tension that we achieve in our current school system. But even so, I think it is a misleading idea, an idea that distorts our human existence. In our lives there should be no last day of school: no radical clean break halfway through our lives, no dichotomy with all the learning in the first half and all the living in the second half.

Thus I arrive at the premise that I wish to defend in this chapter: in our human existence younger and older people are permanently involved in each other's lives, which is precisely why our existence should not be divided into two periods. We live and learn throughout the whole of our lives. All of us. That is why there is no place in our lives for a last day of school, as such a day suggests that there is an end to learning and then there is a beginning of life. Both suggestions are false: learning never stops and life already began a long time ago.

# LIFE DOES NOT WAIT FOR LEARNING

Our current school system – and therefore, in fact, our understanding of education – is based on an incoherent idea, namely the idea that learning precedes living, that learning is a full-time job for the young and living is a full-time job for the old. The clean break suggested by the last day of school tries to con us into believing in a reality that is unnatural, particularly for young people, children, pupils. In this way their full-time occupation amounts to waiting for life. It requires them to go to school, to learn to listen to the teacher and to learn to do assignments. They have to learn how to learn. That is their role. They are pupils. They must develop along thought-out lines using carefully developed methods, under the watchful eye of a teacher. This teacher is attentive, impassioned and committed to the future of these children; she instructs, monitors and tests them. There are learning plans, curricula, learning areas, subjects, fixed time slots, year groups, ability-based groups, forms and classrooms and a place for every child. These are the central contours of a system in which pupils become familiar with their job: learn now, live later.

The obvious mundanity of the walk to school obscures how unnatural your task as a pupil actually is. It all seems so normal – the school building with the pegs for your coat, the place to say goodbye to your parents, the playground, the bike shed, the teachers, the headmaster, the reading books, parent volunteers, school nurses, enrichment days, school trips, extracurricular activities. You do not know any better. At least, we – you and I, Western Europeans in the twenty-first century – do not know any better. People go to school. On Tuesdays and Fridays you must not forget your PE kit, on Wednesday the other teacher is there, sometimes there are birthday celebrations and at play time you can eat and drink and, if you have finished a task, you can collect a new one, as long as you are not noisy. If there is anything you do not understand, you must first ask another child from your group.

It is completely obvious to all children in Western Europe between the ages of five and sixteen that they are pupils, that most of their lives take place at school, that they must learn things and that the adults around them decide what they have to learn. It is the tacit self-evidence of this fact that I want to highlight as something fascinating, astounding and remarkable. It is so very normal, but that is what makes it so remarkable. And I do not mean compared to countries like Liberia, Sudan, Afghanistan and Niger, where there are still many children who do not go to school, or compared to different time periods like the Middle Ages or prehistoric times, when there were hardly any or no schools at all. Nor am I interested here in the differences between one school and the next. My focus is purely on the seemingly perfectly normal, completely natural fact that as a young person you go to school at least until you are 16, and about the related, completely self-evident realisation that you need to learn a great deal before you will be able to participate in society. Young people are human beings who are given tasks and must carry them out, who are passive and obedient and who know that it is other people, not themselves, who take the initiative: teachers and other adults.

This self-evidence has three disastrous effects on young people's ability to live their lives. First, there is the effect on young people's motivation. Then there is the effect on their appreciation of what they do at school. And finally, there is the effect on their self-understanding: they are creatures who have yet to learn to live their lives as human beings. This needs a more in-depth discussion.

## Motivation

Today's instruction technology provides educational components designed with the help of measurable final qualifications, which can be developed into achievable learning goals, efficient work forms and effective test forms. Educational components can be connected modularly as small steps in endless sets, and pupils do not have to do anything other than enter the course at the beginning so that they can leave education with the appropriate certificates at the end. In

between, there are countless small achievements ranging from praise, stickers, stamps, sufficient grades, end-of-term reports, end-of-class reports, transition reports, school choices, surveys, tests, key stage exams, and so on.

There are also a wide range of external rewards, and there are also a wide range of stimulating, challenging and inspiring assignments. And the result is as expected: nothing, really nothing remains of the learning passion the child felt when she first started school. Her intrinsic motivation has been impeccably disciplined. The child has become a pupil. She knows her role. She lives her life passively, waiting, reactive and obedient.

## Appreciation

The instrumental vision of education focuses on learning gains. In this vision, education is basically a means necessary to achieve certain results. Thus, the value of education is a derivative of the value of the learning goal. If the goal is worthwhile, then education is worth it. At least, as long as it makes a positive contribution to achieving this goal. If it does not make this contribution, if it is not an effective means of achieving the goal, then education is in principle worthless. After all, education is actually a means to an end and not the end itself. The aim is that the pupil learns something, that there are learning benefits, that the pupil acquires knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences that he did not have when he started in education. It is these gains that make education valuable.

However, this instrumental view of the value of education deprives it of its intrinsic value. I will return to this in Chapter 5. You may well be inclined to state that indeed, education has no intrinsic value at all. After all, education is for learning, and if that learning yield could be realised in a better way, then the other way would obviously be preferable and the education, having now been replaced, would indeed be quite worthless. Thus, education is regarded as a necessary evil at best, and this is the message that the pupil internalises at school. He must learn to live his life as a human being. That is what

it is all about. And since there is no alternative, he has to go to school first. It may be unfortunate, but this is just the way it is. Fortunately, school is only temporary. You just need to go through it to get your life started. Human existence in today's complex and global society is simply too difficult to begin without a basic qualification.

## Self-understanding

When a child goes to school for the first time, she feels that she is growing up. From now on she can really participate. However, once she has identified herself with the role of pupil, once she is aware of the fact that she must *learn* to live her life as a human being, that she cannot do this yet, and that this is why she must carry out the tasks given to her by the teacher, then something crucial has happened to her self-understanding. At first, she knew she was human in the same implicit and tacitly self-evident way in which a dog knows that it has a separate status within the family. In this way the child always knew that she was part of the group. She was a human being. Now that she is at school, she is still a human being, but in the social order that the child gets to know at school, this does not really matter anymore. What matters is that she is not yet able to live life as a human being, at least she *thinks* she cannot do this yet. After all, she still has to go to school, she still has lots to learn: she is really not yet ready to enter society.

And this is where the schoolchild is wrong: she is already part of society, she has been living her life as a human being since birth. But we have divided our lives into two acts and the first act is set at school; thus, we deprive children of a perspective on their social position. In doing so, we create a gap between life as a pupil and life as a human being, and this gap seems to become deeper and wider the longer the child is at school. Throughout their school years they sees adults who apparently can do something, something that they cannot do and which becomes increasingly less clear to them, precisely because they are constantly given new assignments and their passive and reactive dependence is constantly reinforced. How will they ever learn to take a stand, after so many years of obedience?

The effects of the years of confinement at school are caused by our current school system. And the system even encourages these effects, as it befits an institution. Young people are strongly discouraged from leaving education too soon. A person's qualifications should be as high as possible as early as possible. Good key stage exams are a prerequisite. These are followed by GCSEs, and then either vocational education or A-levels and university. We should all try to reach our highest potential.

It will be more difficult but, if you are clever and willing enough, it is advisable to follow a master's after your bachelor's degree. The brightest students can stay in education even longer and try to get a PhD position. And then, even though this is still often a paid job, you still do not quite qualify as a mature human being, as nowadays PhD researchers are usually called PhD *students*.

If you manage to stay in education until your PhD is finished, you are in for a rude awakening, because after obtaining your doctoral degree, you will be fired. For a few people, there may be a postdoc position available, but the chances are that as a postdoc, you will notice that you have actually stayed within the walls of our school system for too long. Your expiry date seems to have passed. You will be going *down* the career ladder, and somewhere in the labour market you with a PhD might be pushing out someone with 'only' a master's degree, who himself might have pushed out someone with 'only' a degree from a university of applied science, who in turn may well have pushed out someone with 'only' a vocational degree. We have made a mess of it, with all these types of higher education. A diploma has become only a competitive advantage. We have wrongly told our children that the longer they stay at school, and the higher their degree, the more likely they will be to make it in the world of adults.

However, something else is needed in that world. And at school, too. After all, the world of adults and the world of children do not neatly follow one another. A division into two acts does not work for human existence. Our existence, after all, is characterised by years of intergenerational mutual dependence, both cognitive and emotional.

Children want to learn, just as parents want to teach. And children feel the need to remain attached to parents, just as parents also remain devoted to their children. You should not tear those two apart. That is why we have to do something completely different at school. In fact, school is a unique place, where old and young are eminently involved with each other. It can be something really beautiful, but a lot has to change for this to become the case.

Fortunately, much can be changed. And this would not even be very difficult at all. It is a matter of a change in mentality, of clearer thinking, of learning to think not only with your head, but also with your hands and your heart. So let's get started.

## THE DRAMATURGICAL MODEL

In this book I will often make use of the dramaturgical model of human interaction.[8] In this model, human behaviour is likened to what happens on stage in a theatre.

Five concepts are central to this model: 'scenario, 'role', 'script', 'character' and 'actor'. This model holds that when people do something, we can always say that it takes place in a scenario, in a successive series of events, which include actions. Such a scenario unfolds over time. One thing happens after another. In a scenario, all parties involved have a role that entails entitlements and obligations. When you have a role, there are things that you *can* do and things that you *must* do. For example, a teacher is allowed to give his pupils assignments, he can and must give instruction and he must pay attention to his pupils. Presumably, he may not sit in class with his shirt off and nor may he strike or bully his pupils.

What should happen in a scenario is described in the script. Sometimes this script is quite minimal, but it can also be very detailed. In some schools, the script for the school camp is a hefty tome with little room for improvisation (for example, it explicitly states that the teacher should not walk around without his shirt on, that there must be an orienteering activity on Wednesday, and that there must be

cake for the final party) whereas in other schools this is much more loosely organised. The script also always slightly changes as the scenario unfolds. Although roles are sometimes very precisely defined, it is always necessary that both the person playing the role and his counterparts interpret the role. If a teacher shows up in his classroom without his shirt on, the pupils will have to respond to it, even if this is not explicitly mentioned in the script. They may ignore the whole thing, call for the headmaster, start to laugh loudly or take off their own t-shirts. Their response will have to be improvised and they will continue to play their own role as best they can. In such unusual scenarios, it is often not easy to understand why people act as they do.

However, many scenarios unfold naturally. After a few weeks in a new class, everyone knows how things work, and that is probably how they will continue to work. In addition, if the script is minimal, the roles will be more blurred and the actors will need to use their improvisational and fine-tuning talents much more. No teacher is the same, and the same counts for pupils. It is important to note that a role is a question of obligations and entitlements, of being obligated and being allowed. These obligations and entitlements are often not explicitly described, but they can nevertheless be very compelling, as they implicitly determine the expectations of all those involved. As a result, a role may be vague, but a certain actor can still only play it in one way.

This is because an actor who plays a role always creates a character, which does not mean that the actor can be equated with that character, but he cannot simply be separated from that character either. For example, a teacher who always wears a smart shirt to school, but almost always a t-shirt at home, becomes a character who always wears a smart shirt at school. Of course, as an actor, the teacher can distance himself from this character and may realise that the role of teacher does not oblige him to wear a smart shirt. Still, it is quite possible that the actor has become so fused with this character that it will really not feel natural to him if he does not wear a smart shirt in

front of his pupils. Of course, this is also related to the expectations his pupils have of him.

The most interesting aspect of the dramaturgical model of social interaction is that it clearly shows the dynamics and problems of self-awareness. In this model, people are always seen as a dynamic combination of character and actor. Someone is never only an actor, although everyone can retreat into being mostly an actor. Similarly, you are never only a character: no matter how much you let other people run your life for you, and no matter how eagerly you try to meet their expectations, it is always *your* interpretation of their expectations, in other words your interpretation of your role. That is your role, whichever way you look at it. And precisely because that *is* your role, it means that you *are not* simply the character. You are a combination: any attempt to be completely yourself, or any attempt to be only the actor, is nothing but an attempt to play the role of actor well. The more you do this, the more you transform yourself into this character.

And this is fine. This is not fake. It is exactly what makes people naturally artificial, as Helmuth Plessner calls it.[9] According to Plessner, you could also say it the other way around: we are always natural, in an artificial way. The dramaturgical model of social interaction exposes exactly the area of tension where the question of how to live your life becomes meaningful and acquires its dual character. Because the question you ask is what role you should play. And the answer is obvious: your own role, the role you have always played. But how do you play that role? How do you know what that role requires from you in a new situation? How do you relate to the character you are? And how to the actor who plays your role?

These are questions that can be existentially overwhelming at any time in your life. Who am I? What should I do? At the same time, these are much more than just personal, existential questions. After all, the role you play, the role you have always played, has been determined and tinged by the culture, the society, the mother tongue, the fatherland and the family into which you were born. Your role –

which is truly, deeply existentially yours – is also determined thoroughly by the context in which your life began, long before you started asking questions about this role, and long before you started wondering how you relate to both the actor and the character you are, at the same time. This context is the setting about which we usually do not speak, the background that we tacitly presuppose. This background is shaped by what we think is normal.

## NORMAL

One of the most intriguing words in our language is the word 'normal'. It is a fantastic word for a philosopher like me. It is a useful word to make clear that it is worth asking questions about what is taken for granted. After all, the word 'normal' is mostly used to brush away questions about how, what and why we do certain things. Not so long ago, there was an altercation in the Dutch Parliament between an MP and the Prime Minister, in which the MP snapped at the Prime Minister, saying "Act normally!" The Prime Minister immediately retorted "No, it is *you* who needs to act normally!" What was being said here? What were these politicians talking about?

At the time, both men used the word 'normal' in both a prescriptive and a descriptive manner. Both blamed each other for not doing what their script was telling them to do. Remarkably, they both said not only exactly the same thing but also the complete opposite! This is one of the phenomenal roles that the word 'normal' plays in our language. It can play that role, because it is an intrinsically ambiguous word: the word has two different meanings that often seem to be hidden. Let me explain.

On the one hand, 'normal' means to us 'what we are used to', and on the other hand 'what should be done'. Both meanings can diverge widely, but they can also amount to exactly the same thing. For children – or more generally, for newcomers – it can be incredibly difficult to discover the difference between the two. Just imagine that you are lying in your cot. Your life has just begun, and you have no

idea yet what might happen to you, or what is about to happen. When you cry, your mum or dad shows up to comfort you, give you a clean nappy, or feed you: whatever it is you need. When you have had enough to drink, they hold you upright, press you warmly against their shoulder, and lovingly pat your back. "Brrr," you go, gently. You burp softly, and your mum says "Well done!" It is a recurring sequence of events, which you soon get used to.

And there are many more of these sequences. You will recognise more and more of these patterns and become familiar with the rhythm of repetition in your life. In all this repetition, your expectations are constantly being reinforced in which the two meanings of 'normal' go hand in hand. What you are used to is how it is supposed to be. And how it is supposed to be is what you are used to. Every single time. After being fed, you burp and your mother says "Well done". This is the way it goes. This is the way it should go. This is what you are used to. This is normal.

Of course, this is not limited to such trifles as a burp after feeding. Expectations are crucial forces that permeate our entire existence. You may remember eating lunch at a friend's house for the first time and noticing that they said grace before dinner, or always used serviettes, or ate their tea while watching tv, sitting on the settee. Everyone has such experiences. These are the earliest discoveries that show that what you are used to and how things should be done are not necessarily the same thing.

One of the conclusions that you may draw from these experiences is that it is impossible to distinguish between the two meanings of the word 'normal': different people are used to doing things in different ways, but there is not always one correct way in which something should be done. There are no universal rules for eating, even though Jewish people think you should eat kosher meals, Hindus believe it is not right to eat beef, Muslims that it is not right to eat pork, and vegans that it is not right to eat any animal products at all. These people call these eating rules 'prescripts', but in the end, they are no more than their own habits. They simply make the mistake of

thinking that their expectations have a greater value than they actually have, so they falsely claim that certain things should be done in the way they are used to doing them.

This is indeed a mistake. You do not have to use a serviette at every meal just because you have become used to doing so. There is a difference between a habit and a prescript. Still, that does not lead to the much more radical conclusion that there is nothing at all that is 'right' to do. I like to believe that a great deal of relativism is possible when we talk about our eating habits, and the same goes for all kinds of other habits, which cannot simply be construed as prescripts that others also have to abide by.

However, this does not mean that all the rules that are taken for granted in our existence are in fact no more than habits. We also have rules that express what we think is right or wrong. For example, we have rules against such terrible things as rape, child abuse or murder. And against tax evasion, drink driving or forgery. In the non-legal domain there are also regulations that we would like to defend as expressions of what is right rather than simply of how we are used to doing things, such as keeping your promise, making an effort to understand someone else, or helping someone who has fallen. Of course, these are not mandatory, but they are what you expect, and rightly so, something that you think you are *entitled* to expect, or even *should* expect, something that the other person *should* do, and not simply because you are used to it. This is also true if you are not used to it, for example if you grew up with parents who seriously neglected you. Consequently you had no positive expectations about your teacher at school, but even then you would still be convinced that the teacher should be respectful, cordial and caring towards you. We do not simply think that this is the right thing because we are used to it ourselves. We just think that this is the way people should behave. Full stop. Because it is the right thing to do. We think this is *normal*, in an *evaluative* sense.

'Normal' is a powerful word, but also a debatable word, a word that always raises questions because it is a word that we mainly use to

sweep aside difficult questions. Act normally! The double meaning, habit and prescript, speaks volumes about human existence. We are normative creatures *as well as* creatures of habit. We live our lives in the way we are used to, and for us that means that we do not just live our lives, but that we do so always in the light of ideas about how we think we *should* live them. We interfere with how our lives develop. This is what makes human existence so interesting, so much open to debate. Sparrows, deer and wolves simply live their lives in the immediacy of what happens. Sparrows simply do what sparrows do, just as wolves do what wolves do. They do not do anything else: they have no choice. When people do what people do, it always implies the presence of ideas about what we are supposed to do. These ideas are guided by what we are used to doing, but they also raise that equally inevitable and difficult question: is it right to do what we are used to doing?

This question is central to human existence. And therefore the question should be central to education because in education, we interfere in each other's lives. In education, we tell each other how things should be done, and usually this means adults telling children how they themselves are used to doing things.

## HABITS

Habits play a major role in our existence. Habits are structured patterns of reaction; cognitive scientists call them 'learned perception-action couplings'. I will continue to call them habits in this book, but first I would like to elaborate on them a little, so that we understand better what habits do to us and what we can do with habits. This is important for the way we think about education, as habits also play a major role in our education, both when we enter education and when we leave. And certainly in between these moments, when we carry out and undergo education.

You could argue that habits consist of two components: a receptive component that directs our perception and an executive component

that directs our behaviour. These two components are closely linked, and they constitute a perception-action coupling. There are some fitting terms for those two components: 'expectations' for the receptive component and 'dispositions' for the executive component. If you have a certain habit, it means that you are facing events with certain expectations and that you have dispositions to react to these events in a certain way. Let's consider the following two examples: using filler words and putting dirty cups immediately in the dishwasher. Filler words are of course used all over the place, but there is always a pattern in their use. These days I hear waitresses in restaurants use the word 'Great!' a lot. Of course not literally all the time, and not every sentence they utter starts with this word, but for some it has become the standard response to an order. This is their habit. If they expect an order and the expectation is met, then immediately there is the corresponding disposition: 'Great!' A similar response occurs when you put dirty cups immediately in the dishwasher. You expect the cups on the worktop to be dirty and if that expectation turns out to be met, then immediately there is the corresponding disposition: you put the cups in the dishwasher. This is your habit.

Both components, expectations and dispositions, help us to respond appropriately to what happens in the scenarios in which our lives take place. These components work exceptionally fast, so fast that it may sound somewhat misleading to say that they help us to respond appropriately. They *are* our own appropriate response. Your habit of putting dirty cups in the dishwasher straightaway does not help you to respond appropriately to dirty cups on the worktop: it *is* your appropriate response, your way of doing things. That is why it is so important to develop good habits. Because just as 'normal', 'appropriate' is also an ambiguous word. Sometimes a reaction is only appropriate because everyone is used to it. We think it is normal. However, such an 'appropriate' response can also cause a bad habit to persist. For example, people often say that 'big boys don't cry', and hordes of boys have grown up with this precept at the back of their minds. However, in times of great sadness, for example if someone

close to a boy dies, it would be unhelpful and counterproductive if he was unable or unwilling to show his emotions.

Education is the environment in which young people develop their habits, and therefore it is important to pay serious attention to habit formation. Education has a simple task to fulfil: to make sure that our young people develop only good habits. But what are good habits? This is a difficult question that many people prefer to avoid thinking about. But it is also an equivocal question, and as a philosopher I like such questions, as they allow me to create some order so that it becomes easier to tackle these questions. That is why I wish to highlight the important distinction between three fundamentally different types of habits: causal, normative and functional habits.[10]

What these three types of habits have in common is that they lead us through scenarios, that they systematically and successfully – usually – help us through our days, from morning to night, anticipating what is to come, reacting to what is happening, learning from what has happened. However, the three types are fundamentally different in the nature of the relationships that they build on, the nature of the scenarios in which they play a larger or a smaller role and, above all, the nature of the responsibility with which they burden us. This certainly sounds rather abstract, which is why I will expand on it here.

## Causality

Causal habits build on cause-and-effect relationships. They show us insight into such relationships. Such habits help us in the systematic and successful handling of objects – material, physical things, such as building blocks in a playpen, the food on our plate, the cutlery in our hands, the stairs that we climb, and the door that we open.

Causal habits develop in great sophistication and in immense complexity. They are always solidly embedded in our bodies. Learning to stack building blocks is a matter of linking the right expectations regarding the effect of gravity on those blocks to the right dispositions. You have to learn how to estimate what these blocks will do

when you do something with them. This is largely a matter of hand-eye coordination.

The interesting thing about these kinds of causal habits is that they represent our causal knowledge. On the one hand, they do so in practical terms – as skills, as embodied regularities, as a matter of know-how. Causal habits allow us, as embodied beings, to successfully navigate a physical environment.

On the other hand, these causal habits represent in a rather abstract way our understanding of causal relationships, of underlying, mechanical laws. We show this understanding not only by learning to use the words 'cause' and 'effect', but also by looking at a sequence of events in a certain way. Think of a Laurel and Hardy film: long before it happens, you can see what is going to go wrong. Or think of a ball sport, like bowling, when you see how the ball is rolling towards the skittles before it reaches them. But it may also be much more complex, for example if you have been invited to help set up the dominoes for Domino Day, and you need to predict how the dominoes will fall, or if you are a researcher who sets up experiments to test a hypothesis. Causal habits are in a way always thinking habits, habits that help you to reason.

Causal habits help you to take a physical position in a scenario. Thanks to your causal habits, you know what to expect from objects and what to do with them, at least if your understanding of the underlying causal relationships is correct.

It is fascinating that here, where we are simply dealing with things practically, the need for abstract and theoretical knowledge pops up. This knowledge manifests itself in our thinking habits, which need to be correct. You need to know that the large blocks tend to fall if you put them on the smaller ones, just as you need to know how dominoes knock each other over if you want to be invited back to Domino Day next year. You will have to learn to anticipate, learn to pick up the relevant signals and learn to produce the right responses. If objects do not behave in the way you expect them to, you need to

adjust your expectations, and thus your habits. After all, the objects cannot do anything about it: they just move the way they move. They are stuck in causal patterns, in cause-and-effect relationships. This is why you are the one who is responsible: you will need to get to know these relationships so that you can improve your handling of objects. If you put the dirty cups in the dishwasher, you have to put them in upside down if you want them to come out clean. But if they are full of cold coffee when they are on the worktop, you will have to empty them first, otherwise there will be a mess. Coffee will simply splash out if you turn a full cup over. The coffee will not try to stay in the cup until it is in the dishwasher. It is your responsibility to ensure that the whole operation goes well. You are responsible for your understanding of cause and effect here. If your causal expectations are not met, you need to change your thinking habits.

### Normativity

Normative habits are of a completely different nature. Normative habits build on a different type of relationship, one characterised by what I call entitlements and obligations. Normative habits provide us with knowledge and insight into normative relationships. These habits help us to deal with other people systematically and successfully, with people who have expectations of us and who have certain dispositions themselves. Think of your parents, who were over the moon when you learned to crawl or talk. Think of the baker who gave you a biscuit but also expected you to say 'thank you', or of your grandparents' neighbours, who expected you to be silent, because "children should be seen, not heard". Normative habits also develop in great sophistication and immense complexity. And what stands out in these examples is that our normative habits are always intertwined with the normative habits of other people.

This is a crucial insight. There is a fundamental distinction between the causal and the normative domain. Good habits are developed in the causal domain by adjusting our behaviour to the events that occur in our environment. For example, you have no choice but to adjust to what happens to cold coffee in dirty cups if you turn them

upside down. However, this is different in the normative domain. In order to develop good habits in the normative domain, you will have to make sure that your habits and those of others are aligned. By the way, this is definitely not the same as adjusting. Objects can only be the way they are, which is why *you* need to adjust your behaviour. However, other people can change their behaviour, just as you can change yours.

The following two chapters will show the importance of this difference in education. But first I need to expand a little on this difference.

Obligations and entitlements are real, but in a different way than causes and effects. They only occur in scenarios at the same time, as two sides of the same coin – the coin of cooperation. They exist only if people attribute and acknowledge them simultaneously and mutually in their dealings with each other. They only occur in scenarios where people have aligned normative habits.

For example, as a child you needed to learn to sit still at the dentist and open your mouth. How did you manage? This slowly but surely happened in a series of scenarios in which the dentist and your parents played the leading roles and managed to work together because their normative habits were aligned. These habits gave the dentist the entitlement to hold your parents accountable for their obligation to assist you, while at the same time this meant that your parents were entitled to hold the dentist accountable for his obligation to be friendly, serviceable and sensitive. The aligned normative habits of you and your parents also played a role. Your parents were entitled to hold you accountable for your obligation to sit still, while at the same time you were entitled to hold your parents accountable for their obligation to take care of your well-being.

By the way, these fine words and cumbersome formulations do not matter so much. People go through these kinds of scenarios dozens of times a day, exceedingly quickly and for the most part non-verbally. The dentist only needs to raise his eyebrow a little to make sure your parents comfort you. And all you need to do is make your

lip tremble and your parents will start frowning at the dentist. How on earth did your parents manage, stuck in the middle? Respect!

Normative habits play an important role in our concrete, explicit interaction with other people. Normative habits are also thinking habits. They play a role in our observation of how people behave towards each other and what they believe they are and are not allowed to do. Normative thinking habits represent our understanding of normative relationships in a rather abstract way. We demonstrate this understanding by using the words 'must' and 'may', and by appreciating or rejecting other people's behaviour. For example, I can understand it when children swear and why I think that parents should not smack their children. You, on the other hand, may disagree, and you may be annoyed by check-out assistants who ask about special offers, club cards and your receipt. My parents appreciate it if a man holds the door open for a woman, and some people feel uncomfortable when two boys kiss each other passionately in public, and so on.

Normative habits help you as a person to adopt a position in a scenario with other people because they allow you to anticipate how others will behave. Still, they also help you to choose and give a response because they allow you to anticipate how you will be expected to behave towards these people. In this way, normative habits help you gain experience in dealing with other people, in going through social scenarios, so that you can further develop your own normative habits.

However, responsibility for normative habits is something that you always take together. Fundamentally, normative habits are common accomplishments. At first, as a child, other people will give you only a few responsibilities. They do not expect you to have highly developed normative habits. As a result, they will attribute all kinds of entitlements to themselves, and this means that you will have just as many extra obligations. This is why your mother may still tell you to say 'thank you' to the baker, even when you already know to do so. But gradually your area of action as a responsible person will

increase, you will be given more entitlements and you will be able to impose obligations on others. Thus you learn to anticipate better, understand better how things should be, understand better what you can expect from other people.

### Functionality

Finally, there are functional habits, which build on means-and-ends relationships. These play an important role in our everyday understanding of what it means to live, to be a living, acting human being, to get things done, to devise plans and to carry them out, to make the world our oyster. Functional habits help us to deal with technology, to develop technology ourselves as well as to develop tools, instruments and devices. These habits help us to understand functional relationships – the door handle with which you open a door, the table at which you eat, and the bike on which you cycle to your friend's house.

Functional habits can also develop in great sophistication and immense complexity. This is mainly a matter of developing actorship, of getting a grip on the way scenarios pan out. It is a matter of successfully gaining control: not only control over your muscles, but also control over the course of events, over the way you use instruments and tools. This is different with objects than with people: objects become manageable for you and people become trustworthy for you. You learn to stack dirty cups in the dishwasher and you also learn, for example, that if you say 'thank you' immediately and of your own accord, the baker may give you a larger biscuit the next time you visit his shop. In all sorts of ways, functional habits form the connections between things that are regarded as ends and things that are regarded as means. In doing so, these habits use both causal and normative patterns in varying ways.

Functional habits permeate our lives, both in what we do and in what we think. We see functional relationships everywhere and we make use of these relationships. Functional habits clearly manifest themselves as thinking habits. They help us play our role in a scenario, use

things as tools or as material, deal with people as associates or opponents, friend or foe, companion or competitor.

Functional habits allow us to see objects and people as resources, because they allow us to anticipate what can be achieved with the help of materials, tools and fellow human beings. Thus, functional habits help us gain experience, as actors, as people who get things done. This does not start in a grand manner. For example, when you were a baby, it took you months to roll over, before you learned to use your hands to grab things, your legs to walk, your voice to ask others to do things for you. But gradually your functional habits improved, gradually you learned how to use resources and how to achieve your goals: you learned to build functional relationships, to fit a lid on a box, to build an electrical circuit, to use a recipe to bake a delicious quiche, to make a plan for a trip around the world, to draw a map of a museum, to write the software for a new cryptocurrency, and so on. Life is one huge process of working with and on your habits.

## LIVING IS LEARNING AND LEARNING IS LIVING

Learning is developing habits, reviewing and changing existing habits, and reinforcing confirmed habits. That is basically it. All the knowledge you have, all the skills and competences you have acquired, the vision you have developed, your commitment, your independence, your sense of responsibility – all of these are a matter of causal, normative and functional habits, from anticipating what will happen in scenarios to being able to respond adequately.

In this, functional habits play an interesting, complex and ambiguous role. They represent both your reasoning and your capacity to act. They build on causal relationships as well as on normative relationships. On the one hand, you can get something done because of your knowledge of materials and mechanics, your well-informed causal habits, your knowledge of the function of instruments, tools, buttons, switches and gears – both in the mechanical world of bicycles, doors

and bowling balls and in the digital world of drop-down menus, buttons, mouse clicks and scrolls. On the other hand, you can also get something done by understanding people, because you know how to talk to them, know how to ask them something, know how to come to an agreement with them. Here, too, knowledge of the different functions comes in handy. You understand the function of the baker, of the bicycle repairman and of the teacher. In social interaction, knowledge of someone's function does not have a causal basis, but a normative one. You understand these functions because you have well-informed normative habits. For people, a function is a role, a position that they have, which entails obligations and entitlements that have been described in more or less detailed scripts and that always require interpretation, improvisation and mutual alignment.

This is what the dramaturgical model of human interaction is all about. Social interaction is fundamentally dynamic, not only in its system but also in its building blocks. What is crucial is that people are mutually involved. You do not have a role on your own. You do not get others to do things because you know their role, but because you can play your own role well. Social interaction is fundamentally a common undertaking. No one can get anything done on their own. Actions are co-creations.

In summary, we can draw the conclusion that human life is in fact fundamentally a matter of learning: of developing, transforming and empowering functional habits, habits to do this or that, and habits to think this or that. A human being who is living is a human being who is learning. This is closely related to the fundamental challenge for all that lives, namely to maintain itself in an environment. We see this in nature as the struggle for survival, which is a matter of eat or be eaten, a matter of metabolism, in a continuous reciprocity, the cycle of life. In a dynamic environment, this requires a permanent concern for one's own boundaries, as well as constant awareness of the optimal form in which one can exist.

This awareness of our form gives human existence an extra dimension. It is not only about eating or being eaten, not only about survival,

not only about what Hannah Arendt calls the reproduction of specimens of humankind.[11] It is also about formation. After all, we shape not only ourselves, but also each other and our society. This is not a static form, but a matter of optimal reaction, of the optimal organisation of our habits – the functional, the causal and the normative habits. That is basically all. That is life, and that is learning. We people, specimens of *Homo educandus*, do our learning just as we do our living: fundamentally in collaboration with other generations.

# CHAPTER 2. TAKING TESTS OR GAINING KNOWLEDGE?

## TICKING OFF INTERMEDIATE TESTS

For years I have been amazed by my children's study habits. Their tendency to revise for a test by answering a whole stack of sample questions seemed like a dubious way of doing things. To me, sample questions seemed to be no more than random and momentary, and I could not imagine that my children would obtain an overview of the curriculum in this way. They, on the other hand, knew that there was no need for such an overview: all they needed was a pass for that one test. The bigger picture did not matter.

Two years ago, my surprise grew considerably: following my supervisor's advice, I 'treated myself' – his words – to an English Proficiency course. Unsuspectingly, I started the course, only to conclude in bewilderment during the first meeting that the teacher was going to teach the course in the same vein as it was described in the textbook, namely as 'a course that prepares for the four parts of the Cambridge Proficiency in English (CPE) exam'. I was amazed to find that also at this level, education turned out to consist of preparatory exercises for taking an exam that consisted of four distinct assignments. It turned out to be an exciting course with a wonderful teacher, and I passed the exam, so what is wrong with that? This is what I want to look into in this chapter. I will defend the premise that the current practice of testing in education distorts our idea of what knowledge *is* and of what we can *do* with knowledge. I will argue that this is closely related to the enormous difference between the clinical practice of testing and the full, rich practice of everyday life.

I am concerned about the fragmentation of the content learned that distorts our understanding of the relationship between the information offered and the ability to take an informed perspective. I

have come up with a clear metaphor for how I regard passing intermediate tests.

Imagine that you park your car on the edge of an unknown city and have a look at the city map that is displayed there. Think of a major city: Manchester or Bristol, something like that. As you look on the map, you notice that the red dot is missing, the crucial red dot with the message 'You are here'. Bad luck! Now it is going to be much harder to find your way.

But something else is wrong: *you have not decided where you are going!* You could go and visit your elderly aunt, who you have not seen in a long time, but you are not quite sure whether she still lives in this city. You vaguely remember that she was living in a 'lane', not a 'road' or a 'street'. Or was she? And you feel that there might be a letter 'd' in the address, and also an 'o' or two. Was it Woodend Lane?

Well, there you are then. You have achieved a pass mark for a correct map of Manchester. But you have no idea where you are on the map. And no idea where Aunt Dorothy lives, and whether she still lives in this city at all. And are you indeed on the outskirts of Manchester, or is this Bristol? And were you actually wanting to visit Aunt Dorothy?

You tick off your intermediate tests: passed another one. And once you have passed them all, you have finished: you have passed your course. If you have passed all the courses, you graduate. And once you have obtained all the diplomas, you have really finished. Then you can end the education phase of your life and real life can finally begin. Do not ask how real life works. You should know how it works now that you have ticked off everything, now that you have collected all the educational bits and study programme pieces. After all, these bits and pieces fit together like a big jigsaw puzzle, or at least that is the idea. However, a jigsaw puzzle provides you with a complete picture at the end, while your collection of sufficient grades is more like a picture album or a stamp book. Collection complete: an atlas full of city maps. You have finished. You can leave education, hopefully with the highest possible degree. What you can do with your degree? This

is what you need to find out in the labour market. In a fragmented intermediate testing culture, the priority is not on integrating the knowledge gained. And this is something that we find acceptable because it is the same in secondary school: teachers teach their own self-contained subjects.

This complements a second trend of fragmentation, one that follows the ill-considered idea that nowadays you can find all the information you need on the internet. Of course, we all benefit from websites that offer information in a structured way. But it is precisely on such websites that you can see that central coherence has become a matter of having a good menu. The menu structure now dominates the way people access information, but this is a distortion of how we need information in our daily environment. An environment in which people can function in an informed way does not have a menu structure. At least, not the *natural* contexts, the contexts that are not designed for reproducing information. The context of education is a peculiar one, because it is designed for offering stand-alone chunks of information in isolation and for reproducing these chunks in isolation. Thus, the educational context distorts our idea of knowledge and truth. At least, this is what I will try to make a case for in this chapter.

## KNOWING THAT AND KNOWING HOW

This chapter may be read as a basic introduction to epistemology for people in education. Unfortunately, such an introduction is missing from regular teacher training courses, which is quite strange, because we call our society a knowledge society, and education is working towards the cognitive development of the next generation. Trainee teachers are taught developmental psychology, but in education the understanding of the nature and status of knowledge leaves much to be desired. This is not a complaint about individual teachers, but a complaint about the system as a whole. This lack of understanding can be found mainly in the presuppositions that

appear to be taken for granted, judging from the structure of the current school system.

At the heart of this introduction, we find the key role given to the seemingly obvious distinction between two ways of knowing: 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. You may be tempted to think that 'knowing that' is a pretty passive state, hardly a verb. Someone who knows a particular thing *has* knowledge. 'Knowing that' is *being* in a certain state, rather than *doing* something. If you know a particular thing, you have knowledge, and thus you have the opportunity to do all kinds of things you would not be able to do if you did not know that particular thing. But having knowledge is not an activity in itself. If you are able to do something, this is apparently *caused by* and *occurs after* knowing that particular thing.

The false and misleading idea that knowledge is not something that you do can be found all over in the world of education. From the age of four, children are taught by teachers educated at Initial Teacher Training programmes. These teachers have had to deal with a precisely defined knowledge base which they have made their own. The committee who has drawn up this widely legitimised knowledge base characterises its work as follows:

> *Does a good teacher need to know a great deal? Certainly, a great deal. But this knowledge is not the most important aspect of this rewarding profession. Knowledge is only a precondition, a foundation on which the most important parts can be built. But this committee does not deal with these important parts. We only deal with the knowledge base (...).*[12]

As a teacher, if this is your idea of what knowledge is, then of course this idea naturally and silently gets under your students' skin: they, like you, start to associate knowledge with facts, such as their parents' date of birth, the capital of Scotland, the breeding season for blackbirds, the six wives of Henry VIII and Pythagoras' theorem. If

you consider knowledge in this way, as 'knowing that', it makes sense to talk about knowledge transfer and knowledge utilisation. This is why we see this language everywhere in our knowledge society. Several British universities now have a 'Knowledge Transfer Office' that helps researchers make knowledge suitable and available to third parties. It is as if it is about the missing information that a processor needs to extract from memory in order to continue the programme it is running.[13]

But the distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' is completely misleading. Of course there are facts and information without which you cannot do certain things. For example something as basic as ringing your grandfather if you do not have his number: it is not possible. You simply cannot perform even that basic action if you do not have the right knowledge.

But have a good look at this example. If you are unable to ring your grandfather *only because you do not have his number*, there are a great number of other things that need to be in place first. Look at your own know how in this scenario: you need to be able to ring, recognise numbers, know how phoning is a way to speak to your grandpa, know that your grandpa exists, and know what may be wrong and what you can do if you do have the number but cannot get him on the phone (he may not be at home, the line may be busy, he may not hear the phone, something may be wrong with the provider, the battery of your mobile may be dead, and so on).

It is nonsensical to think that there is a basis consisting of 'knowing that': facts, information or data. Data only come at the end of this list, and below I will show why. Knowledge is not composed of facts and information. Knowledge is basically a matter of 'knowing how'. It is an *activity* undertaken by a creature that knows how to successfully deal with his environment. If I put you in Jaipur and gave you a cell phone, including the manual, all written in Devanagari, and then gave you your grandfather's phone number in that same script, you would soon discover how little use the relevant data are.

# DATA

'Data' is the new magic word, a word that has now been made king by politicians, scientists and businessmen. Data need to be processed and for this, intelligence is needed, perhaps even more than people are able to provide. An important task for education is to sharpen children's intelligence in such a way that they can handle all these data. This is because there are data galore: so much, and so abstract, that the word is already often used as an uncountable noun, like 'sugar' and 'water'.

The idea of the abundance of data arose from the encounter between computer science and biology.[14] The world has always been seen as an infinite reservoir of data, data up for grabs in the Amazon as well as in the depths of the Pacific Ocean, in the Black Forest as well as in the African savannah, on the Isle of Wight and in Cumbria as well as in the slums of Mumbai and Mexico City. Everywhere, all organisms have to deal with an environment that can be considered an endlessly dynamic mountain of data. The environment had never been considered a collection of data before, but ever since the introduction of computers that process bytes, ones and zeros that they receive as input, which they structure, store and edit, and use to produce output – ever since then, the idea has taken hold that organisms are data-processing systems. This idea implies that a great amount of data has indeed always been available everywhere, and that we have always done nothing more than just collect data that we then process into information and which we use to build our knowledge. Collecting data, processing it into information and shaping it into knowledge is what every living organism does constantly. That is what life is. And that is what learning is. At least if you believe that we are information-processing organisms.

Many organisms have limited cognitive abilities, which means that there are only few data with which they can do something meaningful. The knowledge they acquire is therefore limited, incomplete and one-sided. This is usually good enough for such organisms, as they

live in their own environment and do not need more knowledge than is available to them in that environment. But people have much more advanced cognitive powers, and even metacognitive powers, which make our knowledge thorough and comprehensive. As a result, we can manage in any environment.

But if you are convinced that there is a hierarchy of organisms that are to a lesser or greater extent able to do something meaningful with all the available data, then you may also draw the conclusion that the artificially intelligent robots that are on their way will be able to rise above us and will be able to do much more with that astounding, immense stream of data that makes up reality. We may be quite intelligent – perhaps not every individual, but on average, and certainly the most brilliant among us – but nevertheless our cognitive abilities also have their limitations. We have only a limited number of senses, have a limited rationality and in all sorts of ways we are easily distracted, fatigued, unfocused, emotionally unhinged, and so on. Therefore it makes sense that artificial intelligent systems will be able to outwit us when it comes to data processing.

But this leads to the question whether intelligence *is* in fact a matter of data processing? There is something odd about the idea of the world as a huge database. After all, data are not substances, they are not matter. Data are given, but if we take that literally, given data do not just refer to states of affairs that are in themselves just what they are. Data are indeed *given*, are always somehow provided to a certain organism in a certain way. A datum is always taken as a given that somehow means something to that organism. Considered thus, there is no such thing as completely neutral data. In fact, there are no data at all, at least not just like that, not 'out there', in reality.

We understand this intuitively when we think of the question that became famous thanks to an article by Thomas Nagel.[15] What is it like to be a bat? What is it like for a bat to experience things, to be part of its environment and to interact with it? The data that the bat uses are radically different from the data that we use. The data that a flying insect gives to a bat – to put it this way – is data *we* never

obtain from that same insect. The same insect provides us with entirely different data.

If you let this view sink in, you will have to try to avoid the next obvious fallacy, namely that the flying insect carries loads of data which it distributes generously to organisms in its environment. The bat picks up the echolocation data and we pick up the visual and the auditory data. If you look at it this way, you can indeed imagine a smart robot that is able to register all the data from the insect, both the data that the bat picks up and the data we notice, and also all kinds of data that are missed both by the bat and by us.

However, this is a false interpretation, which is realised quickly enough when you consider that echolocation data are not distributed by insects at all, but are produced by the bat itself. The bat calls and squeaks at ultrasonic frequencies and then catches its own sounds with its large ears. In the data that the bat produces itself, it detects traces of the insects that it wants to eat. The bat is not interested in data but in insects: it is part of the food chain and it prefers eating to being eaten.

In that respect, the bat may not actually produce any data at all. It produces ultrasonic sound that helps it to make a representation of its surroundings, and this representation helps it to find food and to avoid obstacles. Of course it is quite bizarre to think that an obstacle – such as a chimney on a roof – would be emitting echolocation data all the time. Of course it is not. A chimney simply *is* on the roof. It does not produce data. It reflects light and it reflects sound. That is all. The bat picks up the ultrasonic sound which is produced by itself and which bounces back from the chimney. The captured sound could be called data. For the bat, it is rich in information as it contains traces of its surroundings that allow the bat to find its way and its food.

We pick up traces, too. All kinds of traces: sometimes perceptual and sometimes conceptual. These traces help us make a representation of our environment, a representation that helps us, that makes it possible for us to live in this environment. Many of these traces are

produced by ourselves and are also captured by ourselves – just like the bat. However, our traces are mostly linguistic. Just look at your own environment, right now, at this moment. Look at the words you have been capturing for some time now while you are reading. Have you seen them, these words? Have you read them, sound by sound, like a schoolchild in year three? Or did you look straight through those words, were you thinking about the bat that I introduced to you, the bat producing ultrasonic sound, catching an insect and narrowly avoiding a chimney? How incredible is that! Have a look around you. Can you see the bat? Of course not. And it is only now that I am emphatically talking about them that you are looking closely at these words, these letters, these odd black shapes on the paper. Are these data? Is that how it works? Do you collect and process these data to make this story come to life? Is that the order in which things happen?

Data, including so-called *raw* data, cannot simply be found. Data do not occur in the wild. They have to be produced, with the help of instruments: questionnaires, microphones, binoculars, thermometers, tachographs, reaction tests, apps, and so on. The data we use, as humans, are quite fundamentally linguistic in nature: they are words and sentences. Our data are always intimately connected to what we can do with them, which is basically a matter of telling stories. Our data always say something about us. This also applies to the information that is produced based on data and also to the knowledge that is produced based on that information. All three contain traces of us, people that talk and write, people that produce linguistic data, linguistic information and linguistic knowledge. And all three also contain traces of the environment in which we live.[16]

We introduce our children to our kind of data by teaching them to use letters and digits. These letters and digits may come alive to our children because our children have long been used to the world and to our stories about the world, and so they recognise the 'traces' that can be made visible with these letters and digits. Getting to know the world does not start with collecting data. Data can be gleaned from

the world when you start interpreting it, if you express it in letters and in digits. But clearly you must not think that from these data you can obtain the information that the world has put into the data, nor that you can use this information to construct your knowledge of the world. This knowledge is already there. You needed that knowledge to be able to find your way in written texts.

However, this does mean that you are gaining access to an incredibly rich source of knowledge and insight when you learn how to read and do maths. This may be an immensely rich source, but it should not be confused with the world itself, the world as we see it. The source that we are given access to when we learn to read books and do sums is the source of the stories that people tell each other, and have done since the time we started talking on the African savannah long ago. And in these stories you can find traces of the world, the world as we see it.

## KNOWLEDGE

If the government is to be believed, we live in a knowledge society, although interestingly enough more recent documents use the term 'information society'. Muddling up 'knowledge' and 'information' is a pretty trivial offence for policy makers, for the wider public and for our children. However, philosophers are less indifferent. Knowledge really differs from information, for example because information can be inaccurate or misleading whereas knowledge cannot. If you think that you know something, and if you think you can regard this as knowledge, and it turns out to be untrue, then it was not knowledge at all.

This difference may be clarified with the help of the ancient Greek concepts of *doxa* and *epistèmè*. *Doxa* is something you simply know, or think you know, but that you have never researched critically because it has never been the subject of a disagreement. For example, you have memorised that 3x7=21 or that the French word *boulanger* means 'baker'. That is just the way it is. At least, no one has ever disputed it,

and you have just accepted it as true because your teacher or your study book gave you this information. You know it, you consider it to be true, you consider it a piece of knowledge, but you simply accepted it without thinking. It is a *doxa*, which literally means 'an opinion'.

But if your opinion is disputed and you have been on a fact-finding mission and concluded that it is indeed true, then the status of such a chunk of knowledge really changes. It is no longer something that you unthinkingly took to be true, but now it is something that you know to be true. This is what the ancient Greeks called *epistèmè*. And they thought it was unwise, and even reprehensible, if you did not do your best to examine every opinion, every *doxa*, so that it could be promoted to something that you know, to knowledge, to *epistèmè*.

Today, however, it has become completely impossible for each of us to critically examine all opinions that we hold, or in other words to critically examine the epistemic status of all the information we have access to. There is just far too much specialist information around. We are unable to determine the reliability of most of this information ourselves. We simply have to accept it.

For example, I have a look on the Internet to see whether there are ticks on the moors. I have heard that ticks tend to drop from trees and if this is true, I can safely walk on the Yorkshire moors because there are virtually no trees there. I can consult several websites. Some will seem more reliable than others, and I will presumably hold true the information that I find on these websites. Sometimes I know, or I think I know, which website is the most reliable, but my reasons for believing the information given on that website still do not make the belief that I form much more than an opinion. It is not knowledge. It is not something I know, and I am enough of a philosopher to realise this. That is why I can only *believe* that there are ticks on moorland if I read it on a website that I consider reliable. And even though this is only an opinion for the strict philosopher that I am, I take it seriously enough and I check myself well after my walk on the Yorkshire moors.

It is important to note that the word 'knowledge' is usually used in two different ways. On the one hand 'knowledge' refers to the *content*, to that which someone knows; on the other hand, the word 'knowledge' refers to the *state* in which someone is when they know something that makes it possible for them to do something.

Taken as content, 'knowledge' refers to the represented truth, the facts, that which is the case, regardless of who knows it. If it is knowledge that ticks also occur on moorland, then this applies to anyone who takes note of it. Knowledge is independent of who has it. If it is knowledge, it is something that can be known.

Although knowledge is thus fundamentally independent of who has the knowledge, at the same time it remains something that is only knowledge *as long as it is known*, as long as it exists in the hands (or the head, or even the heart) of someone who knows something. That is where knowledge differs from information. Information, whether it is true or not, can reside in a book or on a computer's hard drive, or can be encoded in a bit-string located somewhere in cyberspace. Such information is not knowledge. The book knows nothing and neither does the computer's hard drive. This information is only knowledge if someone acknowledges it as such, in other words if someone considers it and uses it as knowledge. This is the second meaning of the word 'knowledge', in which knowledge is not a piece of correct information, but rather a state of a 'knowing subject', a state of someone who knows something and who, as a result, can *do* something in his environment. This involves all sorts of complex problems, but this is the kind of knowledge that philosophers and others mean when they talk about 'embodied cognition'. Knowledge is a state of an organism that *knows* how to deal with its environment successfully.

It is important for education to realise not only that these two meanings of knowledge are intimately linked, but above all that the second meaning is crucial and fundamental. Children are *knowing subjects*: they can do things because they know things. They are not notebooks

in which you can store knowledge, but living beings that are in a certain state because they can deal with knowledge content.

Children can be made sensitive to the distinction between *doxa* and *epistèmè*. In order to help develop children's knowledge, we will have to encourage them to learn to deal with the difference between just an opinion and a critically researched claim to truth. There is no point in simply offering children information. We need to familiarise them with disagreements and contrasting claims to truth. Children are *knowing subjects*, and this means that we should encourage them to be critical thinkers: beings who may have good reasons to keep digging deeper and to keep asking questions. On the other hand, it also means that we have to encourage them to be successful actors: beings who know what to do in the scenarios in which they find themselves. Such beings have good reason to rely on what they know, even though they realise this is nothing more than a sufficiently substantiated opinion.

Knowledge is not a matter of data. Nor is knowledge a matter of information, not even of correct information. Knowledge is not a matter of facts learned by rote. Knowledge is fundamentally the state that someone is in, someone who is informed and who can do something with information. In this sense, knowledge is fundamentally a skill. ‘Knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ are two intimately interwoven phrases. 'Knowing that' displays itself in knowing how to deal with claims to truth.

## TRUTH

Claims to truth usually do not matter when it comes to trivial facts. Grammatical, mathematical or topographical facts are usually simply taken at face value and memorised without anyone finding it worthwhile to emphasise – or dispute – that these are truths. But when one child punches or bullies another, when two children are fighting, when someone breaks something or encourages someone else to behave cruelly, then the truth suddenly does matter. Then

finding out what is true becomes important, and we have to look for the truth; in other words, we have to search for a decisive underpinning of the various opposing claims to truth.

This is characteristic of the scenarios which deal with the truth: there is a disagreement, and the people involved feel strongly about this disagreement. This also applies to the objectifiable truth pursued by scientists at university, the truth about global warming, about the causes of incurable diseases, about the origin of life, about the limits of artificial intelligence and about the effects of population growth. However, we usually imagine these truths as indisputable facts, absolute facts, things that are simply the case. And this is a pity, as it plays havoc with our cognitive development. This is a third issue – in addition to the issues of data and knowledge – about which I will fight the idea that 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' can be separated. For this, I would like to have a look at the differences and similarities in the following two examples of claims to truth:

1. *Scott says it was Dave who started the fight.*
2. *13 mg of anaesthetic are needed to sedate baby Luna prior to her surgery on gastric outlet obstruction.*

The first one is quite a situation for you as a teacher! And of course Dave says that it was Scott who started it. You will try to figure out what happened fairly and squarely, but I can also imagine that you might use the simple rule of thumb that it always takes two to tango. You know them well, Scott and Dave, so you know soon enough whether this is a brief falling-out between two friends, or if there is more to it, for example significant, severe bullying that may lead to permanent psychological damage. As a teacher, you have to be alert because you know that all sorts of problems can remain undetected. Of course you can ask them both what happened, but as things go in cases like these, in the end it will be one boy's word against the other's. There are truths that are incompatible, and one boy's story may well be more painful for both than the other boy's story. This

means that you will have to start searching, genuinely searching, for how these boys can continue to be part of your class and how you will be able to help them get along again.

It remains to be seen whether, in such a scenario, it is wise to look for the most neutral, objective and correct description of what actually happened. If there are several irreconcilable truths, a successful unfolding of the scenario may ultimately have more to do with solidarity than with objectivity.[17] In this regard, it is interesting and relevant to refer to the truth and reconciliation commissions in Chile and in South Africa, which ostensibly searched for the truth but which both mainly worked towards reconciliation.[18] It proved impossible to provide a decisive foundation for the various truth claims. The truth existed only in the plural, as truths, and it appeared that the search for the truth could only and actually should only be about getting a stagnant scenario going again. We should be wary of taking a too shallow perspective here. Reconciliation is different from 'let's forget about it'. Of course, a scenario cannot unfold successfully if it immediately leads you into the next conflict. A final word must have a long-term value, and it should create room for a new beginning, a sustainable and successful continuation, the genuine resolution of the dispute.

And what about the second case, baby Luna? In what way might there be disagreement about a claim to truth in her case? Let us have a look at the following scenarios. There may be no problem at all. Baby Luna was operated on using 13 mg of anaesthetic and everything went well. What a relief! It may now seem to have been confirmed that 13 mg was the right dose, but it is actually much more important that it really does not matter at all. Nobody will be interested in this claim to truth. Luna is recovering: that is all that matters.

However, things may also go wrong – it is possible that baby Luna will tragically die during the operation. As a consequence, it will be necessary to determine how much anaesthetic had actually been administered. The circumstances will have to be investigated. Someone

may have overlooked something that could explain the baby's death. If this negligence led to a miscalculation of the dose of anaesthetic required, then there is no longer disagreement about the truth: 13 mg was wrong. However, if the negligence was unrelated to the dosage of anaesthetic prescribed and would have led to baby Luna's death anyway, then a disagreement about the truth is irrelevant. The tragedy remains, of course, and perhaps the medical disciplinary board will have to give a ruling. The ruling will not deal with the truth about the anaesthetic, but hopefully it will contribute to a reconciliation.

However, real disagreement about the truth is indeed possible in baby Luna's case. This would probably be something like a scientific debate, with experts bombarding each other with arguments. What does the truth look like in such a case? What can we do in such a scenario with truth finding and with legitimising claims to truth? Does the truth even exist in such a scenario? I am inclined to answer 'both yes and no', but that means that the question is unclear, no matter how simple and unambiguous it may seem. Outside any scenario in which a *claim to truth* can be meaningful, it is quite unclear whether 'truth' is a meaningful concept at all. The truth is not the same as reality, because truth is a characteristic of assertions, of *how* we should talk about reality, in order to be able to talk about reality at all.

So the answer then becomes 'no, there is no truth', because the anaesthesiologists can only talk about the right dose of anaesthetic in a scenario whose properties cannot all be questioned at the same time. For example, they will have to presuppose that they have at least the same understanding of 'quantity' in order to have a disagreement about the truth. The question then arises how much they actually mean by 13 mg. Do they mean 13.0 mg or any value between 12.5 and 13.5 mg? Of course they can also argue about this, but that is still not a dispute about the truth, but only about their instruments and their language. They can only agree on exactly how many milligrams they mean if they agree on the instrument by which they can

correctly determine that amount. Let us assume that their scales are unable to determine decimal values. Is it then actually possible for them to disagree on whether it should be exactly 13.0 mg or a value between 12.5 and 13.5 mg? This at first seems fundamentally impossible. But if you accept this conclusion, what will change if a technician comes along who develops a device that can measure tenths of milligrams?

Will there then be room for new differences of opinion? Probably, you may say now, but what does this mean for the truth in the original scenario? In retrospect, should we have decided that the truth was not knowable after all? Was it ambiguous? Was there no truth at the time because in principle the anaesthesiologists could not have conflicting opinions about the decimal values in that scenario? This is the train of thought that leads us to the inevitability of the answer 'no, there is no truth'. We can no longer seriously defend the premise that the truth is there in the scenario in which there are scales that accurately measure up to one decimal point. Because why only one, not two, five, or even twenty-nine decimal points? And this fundamental unknowability only relates to one variable, and there are a great many variables. It is quite possible that you may need a different amount of anaesthetic if it is a full moon, or if the hospital is more than one thousand metres above sea level, or if the mother ate too many chillies during pregnancy.

No doubt this sounds silly, but the ostentatiousness of the silliness is not about the nature of reality, but about the nature of what is conceivable from our perspective. There are an endless number of examples in the history of the sciences. Before the discovery of bacteria, for example, it was completely ridiculous to think that there could be a relationship between puerperal fever and a doctor's unwashed hands.

We know better now. There is most certainly a relationship between puerperal fever and a doctor's unwashed hands. We would simply have been wrong if, before the discovery of bacteria, we had considered this suggestion to be ridiculous. But we could not have known

this at the time, just as we may not know now that there is a relationship between the number of chillies you eat during pregnancy and the dose of anaesthetic needed for your baby later. The fact that we know better now, and perhaps will in the future too, suggests an affirmative answer to the question of whether the truth actually exists in scenarios in which scientists argue, so 'yes, the truth does exist.'

This is the correct answer as soon as we accept that a claim to truth can only be made in a particular scenario. Within the limits of a scenario, we can indeed search for the truth, and a decisive difference can be made between a claim to truth that does contribute to the successful unfolding of the scenario and a claim to truth that does not contribute to such a success. In a scenario the search for the truth is always about agreeing as sincerely and critically as possible as to how we will be able to proceed successfully. The question about the successful unfolding of a scenario is a complex question that addresses all aspects relating to the legitimacy of a claim to truth.

A striking aspect of embedding the search for truth in concrete scenarios can be found in an idea that lingers on in the world of medical science. This is the idea that truth claims in medicine have a half-life of about six years.[19] In other words, after about six years, half of all medical knowledge has become obsolete. Unfortunately, no one knows in advance which half this will be.

Of course, this is nothing more than an idea, and it is not so clear in which scenario this idea could be considered a legitimate claim to truth. What we need to learn from this is that the demand for truth is always embedded in a context that is evaluatively significant, a context which fundamentally revolves around something of value that is at stake.

This leads to a final conclusion. Statements about the context, the scenario in which we find ourselves when we investigate the legitimacy of a claim to truth, cannot claim the truth themselves. After all, statements about *the* truth can only be true *in* a particular scenario. Therefore they cannot at the same time relate to that scenario without

describing themselves as merely a questionable claim to truth. Such a claim to truth may be important and should perhaps be taken seriously, but should not be regarded as *the* truth about the scenario in which it attempts to be a legitimate claim to truth.

This has interesting consequences for the place of science in the legitimisation of claims to truth. Science may well have the last word on anything and everything, but science cannot claim that any scenario in which people can live together *is* a scenario in which science has the final word. It may claim that this is the way it *should be*, but it cannot claim that this is the way it *is*, that this is simply *the* truth.[20]

## SCIENCE

There was a time when scientists made such impressive achievements that their image as discoverers of truths was indisputable. In those days, scientists resembled explorers who, like brave sailors, boarded an ingeniously designed ship to sail distant waters in search of unknown shores. Originally they had to take serious risks: after all, no one knew for certain that the earth was round. They might have been sailing their ship straight into an empty abyss, over the edge of the flat earth, and might disappear into a void for all time.

Those days are over. There is so much that we do know now. The earth is round, the coasts have all been mapped, all countries have been identified and are inhabited. Scientists work at large, stable universities, monitored by critical regulators and funded by demanding governments. Only metaphorically do they still set sail to distant waters, at limited personal risk.[21] They still produce atlases, as it were, not describing unknown shores but instead unfathomable brain processes, unknown chemical reactions, undetectable black holes, unpredictable mental disorders and unimaginably complex mechanisms. They are mapping more and more details, producing libraries full of knowledge, and they know increasingly better how to achieve this. Such amazingly sophisticated and sensitive observation techniques have already been developed, such impressive laboratories

have been set up and such powerful supercomputers have been built that we are making progress at a phenomenal speed in recounting both the smallest details and the greatest complexities.

Science seems to have become a fill-in exercise. Science no longer seems to be a matter of the adventurous exploration of the unknown, not a question of research, but a question of knowing. Nowadays, science requires a different mentality than that of the adventurer of yore. The archetypal explorer with all his questions now seems to have made way for the administrator, who manages the library in which all these atlases are located and who has the final answer to each question. Of course, there are still some empty tomes on the shelf in which the very last maps will be published. But that is only a matter of time. Soon we will know everything.

The shift from adventurer to administrator is telling, and it underlines the steady disappearance of the inquisitive attitude from the field of education and science.[22] Let that idea sink in for a bit. On the one hand, there is the image of the scientist as a tireless adventurer who goes out fumbling in the dark. Driven, curious, somewhat eccentric, and as daring as she is brave. She has a hunch, no more than a hunch, about which she boldly dares to speculate. Under the spell of this assumption, she hubristically ignores every risk and shows unstoppable eagerness. She is not interested in playing it safe, but is resolutely determined, willing to go to extremes and give up everything.

Now let us compare this to the other image: the image of the scientist as a reliable authority who uses his flawless instruments with some success. Efficient, purposeful, a tad reserved, but clearly someone who has made a career and gained a formidable international reputation. This scientist is an expert; he is clearly sure of himself, is disciplined and has everything completely under control. His expertise is a matter of course for him. He knows what he knows, and he is well aware that the people he converses with will have to acknowledge his superiority. They need him. And he flourishes, buoyed up by the prestige that his laboratory has acquired over the years. You can ask

him anything. He knows what he knows, and he can smoothly transform your question into a question that can be answered in his lab. Before you realise it, you believe that you indeed really wanted to know exactly what he can find out for you.

This scientific administrator is prospering in a world where the idea persists that knowledge means having the answers, or, in more cautious language, that knowledge means having methodologically sound, guaranteed access to the answers. But how does such an administrator act in open, public scenarios where the claims to truth are not limited to what can be found in a methodologically sound way? After all, this is the reality of our everyday existence as 'subjects of knowledge', as informed creatures, as people who can do something with information that we know is true.

Societal debates such as those on global warming, vaccination policies or strategies to end the corona lockdown can be used to clarify the complicated role of science and fact-finding. How should we hold the conversation about, for instance, the corona lockdown exit strategies? Of course, it is not only medical epidemiologists, immunologists or virologists who will need to be heard, as the conversation is not only about isolated claims to truth regarding the medical facts of the matter. The scenario is a very different one. How can we manage to regard ourselves as a single community, in which we can all agree to support a single shared exit strategy? It is this scenario that we find ourselves in, and it is a scenario in which a substantial number of people tend to be sceptical of the medical message. These medical experts need support, not only from specialists in the field of persuasive communication but obviously also from economists, psychologists, historians, social anthropologists, ethicists and philosophers. No doubt still more specialists will be needed, but if you bring in more specialists, the number of lay people will grow exponentially because every specialist is himself actually also a lay person in an ever-expanding field.

It is therefore misleading to think that this is a conversation that can be held among scientists only. And if you want to defend the statement that it should at least be held among academics, then the relevant question

rightly arises as to why you would limit yourself to academics. After all, there is the risk that this will lead to appointing a privileged elite while it is unclear why their scientific status would make that privilege legitimate. Certainly, their status is linked to a specific hyperspecialism, but in all other fields these people are simply lay people, just like all the people who have not had an academic education. There are certainly good reasons why in trial by jury, the jury must be composed of a fair reflection of the population.

But if you were to have this conversation about an appropriate corona lockdown exit strategy with a fair reflection of the population, you will no doubt find that a truth commission looking for solidarity and reconciliation, such as in Chile and South Africa, would be much more useful than a group of scientists who exclusively define the search for truth as determining an objective truth in a methodologically sound way.

I am not saying that the objective truth does not matter. However, this truth is part of the problem, even in the case where every sensible, thinking person can come to only one conclusion about the best exit strategy. The main problem then becomes how we can convince the naïve people who are not willing to concede.

Three brief remarks. Firstly, of course, it does not help if we call the opponents of the most plausible exit strategy 'naïve'. Secondly, it does not help if we try to seize the power in situations like these. In that respect, the maxim 'knowledge is power' is certainly unhelpful in thinking about human cognition. Thirdly, we must be aware that in scenarios of truth finding, it is always only about the last word in a local sense – within the boundaries of a particular scenario. This word cannot be the last word in an absolute sense, but must always be pragmatically situated in this particular scenario. We must try to ensure that the scenario unfolds successfully. And in this scenario there may be multiple truths; it may be your word against mine. Not in an absolute sense and not in an inevitable sense, but within the boundaries of the scenario. There are people among us, for instance, who cannot bring themselves to agree on using a corona tracking

app. But if using such an app were part of the most plausible exit strategy, then we cannot simply shut those people out. We need to reconcile with them. And this works both ways. This calls for a truth commission, which may have the character of a reconciliation commission. Like the teacher who has to convince Scott and Dave to return to his class peacefully.

## CRITICAL THINKING

We have been on a long journey: we have explored a number of things that beckon on the horizon in education with its current emphasis on cognitive development: data, knowledge, truth, science. We have explored them in their everyday relevance, in the role they play in the daily lives of the creatures who we are, beings equipped by nature with an enormous cognitive ability who have managed to make this their speciality. And I have argued that our cognitive ability is primarily a skill, the ability to successfully implement concrete scenarios with the help of legitimised truth claims. Knowing that is a matter of knowing how, and this has great significance for our education, even if we define it as narrowly as most of us are still accustomed to at the moment.

Cognitive development is a matter of developing the skill to distinguish *doxa* from *epistèmè*. It is a question of learning to think critically, learning to look not only at the bigger picture, but also at the pragmatic boundaries of the concrete scenario in which the search for truth is relevant and important. For a long time, science was the perfect example of what that critical thinking should look like. Science was about conducting research, about trying to reduce our ignorance in a structured and experimental way. This also required permanent reflection on our tools, our conceptual apparatus, our research design and the methodological soundness of the steps that we thought we could and should take. It was a matter of learning to ask the right questions and to keep asking them.

However, the enormous growth of knowledge that we owe to the success of modern science has changed the relationship between critical thinking and science, especially in public opinion. The latter is an important addition. The lay story about science is crucial. This story circulates in education. And the story loses sight of the dynamic between the quality of the answers given and the quality of the questions asked – a dynamic which is still there for nearly every academic. In the static story, cognitive development is confused with the increase in the number of answers. In fact, these answers do not matter when it comes to learning to distinguish *doxa* from *epistèmè*.

Knowledge is not a question of power, but of understanding. Knowledge is not a question of being able to give the final answer, but a matter of being able to legitimise claims to truth – on every platform, in every scenario. This calls for the development of our language skills, for what the ancient Greeks called dialectics and rhetoric. For our cognitive development, we especially need the development of our language ability. Fundamentally, this is a common ability: the language is *ours*, not mine or yours alone. Claims to truth are made among people. They must be formulated but must also be understood, substantiated and questioned. Legitimising claims to truth is a common merit, and sometimes it is more a matter of solidarity and reconciliation than of objectifiable truth.

Exactly in this context, you will be able to understand why I believe that teaching is not a question of a transfer of knowledge. Knowledge cannot be transferred. A Knowledge Transfer Office is a sham. But of course I would not like you to accept this from me at face value, here and now. I would like you to question me, to critically read not only this chapter, but also the next one. And I hope that you will understand me then. Because I cannot do this alone. If you do not understand me, my words have been of no value. And if you do not believe me, read the next chapter, as it is about teaching and therefore about collaboration, cooperation beyond power, between teacher and student.

# CHAPTER 3. EDUCATION: FOR YOU OR WITH YOU?

## POWER

Power clearly plays a role in a class. If your teacher tells you to take out your exercise book and open it on page 42, this is what you have to do. The teacher can reprimand you, ask you for your answer, send you out of the classroom and give you an insufficient grade whenever he chooses. However, pupils also have power. They can torment their teacher, get under his skin, refuse to be quiet or refuse to answer him. But power also plays a role at different levels in a class, and this leads to the question that you may have seen coming miles away: what actually *is* power? There is a pretty simple and clear definition, but this leads to interesting problems in the details.

Power is the ability to force another person – without giving any reason – to do something that he would not have done if that force had not been applied. A fox has power over a rabbit if he can force the rabbit to give in and let itself be devoured. Perhaps a somewhat flippant example, but in this case it is all about pure physical power. Note that the rabbit also has power, as it can run off and force the fox to run after it. We know from nature documentaries that the rabbit's power may fall short, but you may also have seen footage of an emaciated fox who no longer has the stamina to hunt a rabbit and consequently gives up, slouching off humiliated.

The above example involves an interesting aspect that makes power and the exercise of power more complex. After all, the rabbit only has the power to force the fox to run after it under the premise that the fox wishes to overpower the rabbit. Without such a desire, the rabbit has no power. It can run as much as it likes, but it cannot force the fox to run after it if the fox does not want to. The reverse is also true. We know this from crime films: gangsters lose control of a

victim if the victim completely gives up the will to survive: "You can shoot me if you like, but I'm not telling you who ratted on you."

If you want someone to do something that she is not inclined to do without giving her a good reason, you have to influence her will. After all, power is about getting someone to *do* something. It does not make sense to say that someone is in your power if you have just knocked her out and you are carrying her over your shoulder like a sack of potatoes. You do have power over someone when you have her on a leash like a dog and you can make her walk wherever you want. She will have to do the walking herself. If she does not want to walk, if she lies down on the floor and you have to drag her along, it is not you who has power over her, but she who has power over you. Then you could be considered a pushover who has allowed themselves to be messed about.

The exercise of power is about interaction between people who each have their own will. In a way, these people's wills are conflicting. Moreover, these wills are internally divided; at least, the will of the person undergoing power will have to involve multiple desires that are never nicely and obviously coherent.

That is a pretty normal situation. Your desires are usually in a messy configuration: insufficiently thought through, usually not very systematic or coherent, but rather vague snapshots that happen to be present in a certain scenario. Of course you have your long- and short-term desires, you have well-considered desires, deep desires that you embrace wholeheartedly, but you also have impulsive desires that are important to you in the here and now. For example, you may want to send a WhatsApp message or perhaps take a few bites of an apple, but you certainly do not want to open your exercise book on page 42. But neither do you want to be sent out, or to argue with your teacher, or to get an insufficient grade, and you certainly do not want to get into trouble with your parents again. At the moment, that WhatsApp message seems to be the most important thing in the world, although you also have to check your diary because it's football practice tonight and you are going to stack shelves at the

supermarket at five, and you are not sure whether you told your mother you would mend your bike this afternoon. In this motivational muddle, your teacher breaks in, with all his power. He pits your desires against each other and forces you to rethink your priorities so he can do what he wants. *What a show of power*. Page 42. Oh, all right then.

Above, I mentioned a number of times that the exercise of power takes place without giving reasons. This is crucial. It is not the reasons that force the other person to rethink his priorities, but purely your intervention, your use of power, your coercion to make the other person do what you want. It is important to realise that this procedure cannot be reasonably justified, that there are no reasons for the intervention that the other person could understand as reasons with sufficient validity.

I will now go back to the crime film to expand on this. The criminal has come after you and your life now seems to be hopeless. You are hanging outside a window on the thirty-first floor of a Chicago skyscraper. The villain has his foot on your hand and is putting his weight on it. He wants you to give him the name of the person who betrayed him, but you guess that you will die anyway, even if you were to give him the name he wants. The criminal himself has not much choice either, but he believes that he is completely in control of the situation. He offers you a clear choice: spill the beans or die.

The suggestion is that you will be able to make a reasonable deliberation, in view of your deep, fundamental, authentic desires. He sincerely wants you to get your priorities right so that you can make a well-argued, correct decision. Unfortunately for him, he looks a bit too vicious when he says this; otherwise, you might have thought that he was like a school mentor who wanted you to reflect on what you intend to do with the rest of your life.

The suggestion of a well-considered deliberation of the relevant reasons is evidently perverse in this situation. We are talking here about pure power. There is no single good reason for you to tell the villain

who it was that betrayed him. On the other hand, he clearly has obvious and understandable reasons to want to hear from you who betrayed him. There is a clear conflict of interests: you have your reasons and he has his. But for you, his reasons are neither compelling nor legitimate. That is the way life sometimes can be. And this is why the villain resorts to using power. He has no reasons at all that might convince you to give him the name that he wants so badly.

In this way, the villain's power is different from the power your teacher exercises when he does not want to explain to you why you need to open your exercise book on page 42. Of course your teacher has his reasons. He has prepared his lesson, he knows what he wants to do, and he thinks that this will benefit his pupils. He just does not feel like starting a debate about his reasons, as he feels that this would be a waste of energy. This is why he exercises his power, but he knows that his power is built on authority. He really understands the situation and he is sure that if he were to start a candid conversation with you and if you were genuinely open to all the good arguments that could be introduced in such a scenario, that you would agree with him about the best decision that you could take at that moment, which would be for you to be quiet and open your book on page 42.

## IN THE CLASS

Sometimes a teacher does not feel like starting a debate about the reasons for her behaviour. At such moments, she can fall back on her formal position and force her pupils to do what she says. She has that power. However, her power is limited, even within the walls of the classroom, and this is related to the following three issues.

First of all, she is dealing with pupils. She has to influence their will. If that does not work, she will be nowhere, like the man trying to drag another man on a leash across a room. Secondly, she is dealing with tasks and aims about which she has no real say. Her classroom may seem like a kingdom in which she is the only one with power,

but this is all an illusion. School managers, politicians and parents play a major role in determining the goals that the teacher will have to achieve in her class. Quite a job![23] Thirdly, she is dealing with the underlying, incoherent idea that teaching is something that teachers do and that as a result of this teaching pupils learn what they need to learn.

This equivocal idea is what my argumentation is aimed at in this chapter. It is one of the five presuppositions that misshape education, and that I have been discussing in the first part of this book.

I can imagine that teachers want to radically shut out the world, so that they can create a safe and stimulating environment in which they can be alone with their pupils and can have a wonderful lesson together with them. I can imagine that such a lesson is experienced by all concerned as what education is really all about, as what makes it worthwhile, as the reason for doing it. I can imagine that such a class could be compared to a womb, that bountiful biotope offering full protection to the foetus. A womb creates, maintains and guarantees a stable and optimal living climate for the foetus. Only one thing is important in the womb: *growth*. The womb does everything to make this growth take place as undisturbedly as possible. It is an ideal environment for a foetus: on the one hand the womb provides everything necessary for optimal growth and on the other hand it shuts everything out that might disturb this growth. It is a fitting metaphor for an educational environment, suitable for what I call 'the standard story' in this chapter.

However, I can also imagine that the wider context in which we find classes nowadays evokes a completely different metaphor. I am thinking of closely-packed throngs of children jostling and shouting around two boys who are locking horns.

Usually it is vague and unclear why such a fight starts, but it nearly always rapidly develops its own dynamic. Encouraged by bystanders, the two boys become entangled in a bitter and painful fight. It is difficult to see much if you are somewhere in the outer ring.

Stretching your neck, you try to see who the boys are. You can hear the heated and excited cheering and yelling that spurs the boys on, and to see a little bit more you push and shove yourself further to the front, so that the space for the fighting boys becomes even smaller and more cramped.

Of course this is not a pretty picture, but it is a metaphor of how a class can be embedded in a stifling, economically demanding and poorly organised environment. Just like the womb keeps out everything that is bad for growth and brings in things that are good for growth, so the cheering bystanders bring in things that might intensify the scuffle and keep out everything that might end it.

Both metaphors tell us something about the task that we see for all the adults who are involved in education but who do not play a concrete role in what takes place in the classroom, which seems to be the essence of education. In this essence there is only room for one teacher and a class full of pupils. Surrounding the classroom there are many different adults: caretakers, team leaders, headmasters, educational managers, parent councils, teaching unions, school attendance officers, education inspectors, teacher trainers, educational researchers, educationalists, educational advisors, city councillors, civil servants, politicians, MPs, educational specialists, more civil servants, ministers, parents, reporters, communication experts, neuroscientists, talk show hosts, and all kinds of other know-alls – including of course philosophers. There are so many of them that a thick impregnable layer of entitlements and obligations has formed around the classroom which you would like to regard as a comfortable and beneficial wall of a womb, but that too often feels like an aggressive throng of bystanders that are cheering on two fighters.

I like neither of these metaphors, as neither helps elucidate the true character of the relationships in the classroom. Both seem to accept unquestioningly that everything in education is done at the service of what happens in the classroom, the shielded space in which there are only two clearly defined roles: the role of teacher and the role of pupil. But it is particularly these two roles and their relationship that

should be critically examined, as the standard story of this relationship is equivocal. It muddles up authority and power, it makes it impossible to distinguish between the two, and thus it obscures the teacher's responsibility, sparking frustration, which is unfortunately a good breeding ground for anger and fear.

This standard story shows that educating is a verb that unites two kinds of roles: an active and a passive role. The teacher is active: he is the one who carries out the education. The pupils are passive: they are the ones who undergo the education. I can imagine that you would like to correct me here straightaway, by remarking that pupils are of course also active. After all, they are learning. And I agree. But if you think that this means that these are two complementary activities that together form education – teaching teachers and learning pupils – I am afraid I cannot agree with you. Human interaction cannot be divided in that way. At least, this is what I am arguing in this chapter.

## VEERING TO THE RIGHT OR…?

One of the most wondrous questions about human interaction deals with the degree to which an action can be ascribed to one actor. Let me expand on that by means of the example that I also used in the introduction.

Suppose you are in Madrid, walking on a narrow pavement. On your right, traffic is rushing past you, and on your left there is a fence behind which you can hear builders working. Someone is coming towards you. You slowly approach each other, and it is clear that you will have to make room for your counterpart unless you want to bump into him. Are you going to pass him on the left or on the right? This is what the other person will also be thinking. And, of course, you are in Madrid, where people keep to the right. Neither of you will ask yourselves this question explicitly or consciously; instead you will decide implicitly, automatically, in a split second. It is highly likely that you will use each other's body language when you make

that decision. You will both interpret the signals that you pick up from the other to determine whether it is best to pass on the left or on the right. All this happens intuitively and very fast, and usually it works out fine. You pass each other effortlessly and both of you continue on your way.

But sometimes things go wrong in communication, leading to a pointless dance in front of each other, with both of you moving rhythmically from left to right. Just too late every time to correctly predict the other person's behaviour, every time anticipating incorrectly, there you are, wrong-footing one another, quite literally. Rather embarrassing…

This is a typical example of a coordination problem. Together, you make perfectly clear that even such a purely coincidental meeting, in which the people involved wish no more than to continue on their way, is dramatically and profoundly a matter of co-creation. On that Spanish pavement, together with the oncoming stranger, you create a collective agent, a 'we', who can successfully cooperate as one complex, acting creature. Both of you could, on behalf of each other and on behalf of yourself, make the following statement: we are trying to pass each other.

However short-lived, exactly at that moment and on that Spanish pavement, the two of you are a 'we', a collective subject, connected in executing a complex action whose parts cannot exist in isolation. Without the other person's actions, your actions cannot be what they are. And however short-lived, in this mutual connection your actorship resembles the two trees in my street that were planted too close together thirty or forty years ago. If you were to cut one of these trees down, the other tree would look really strange, with all its branches on one side because there is no room on the other side, as that is where the other tree is. This other tree does not look like a successful, mature, independent tree either. Nevertheless, together they look beautiful, intimately linked both in summer and in winter. It is only in spring and autumn that I sometimes see some irregularities, because one tree is in leaf earlier than the other. And every

autumn I forget again whether the tree that loses its leaves first is also the one that was in leaf first.

Let's go back for a moment to what is happening there on the pavement in Madrid. Let's zoom in on your own behaviour. Try to imagine what your behaviour looks like to somebody who is looking only at you, for example somebody who is writing a report on your behaviour and who has been told to concentrate fully on what you do. It will be a somewhat peculiar report if this person takes his assignment literally. After all, why are you behaving so strangely? Why are you doing such a bizarre dance on the narrow pavement?

This does not mean that your behaviour is strange and incomprehensible in itself. It is more about the reporter who does not know what to look for, who is unsure where the boundaries are between what you are doing and what your counterpart is doing. Your action has already started before you even noticed, for example by veering just a tiny bit to the left. Or perhaps it was only what the oncoming person seemed to notice in your behaviour. Or it was you who thought that the oncoming person was veering slightly to the right. And then the actions – even your behaviour – will melt into one because you do not only interpret your counterpart's behaviour, but you also immediately see his behaviour as a response to and thus an interpretation of your own behaviour. Apparently, he thinks that you will be going to the left. Then it is better to do so, in order to prevent a collision. In this way you continue your action as the action that your counterpart thinks – judging from his response – that you have already started. And at the same time, all these thoughts and decisions are also taking place on the other side. Your counterpart also discovers as a result of your response which action he had apparently already started before he was aware of it. And your counterpart also immediately anticipates what you are going to do, by using your interpretation of his behaviour as a guiding principle in completing his action. If both interpretations are contrary, you become entangled in that embarrassing and clumsy dance, and for longer than either of you would want.

This intertwining is characteristic of every social interaction. Your behaviour is intrinsically a co-creation. On your own, you would *not be able* to perform the actions that you perform together. Your behaviour is the result of (1) your interpretation of (2) your counterpart's interpretation of (3) the action that you started and (4) the action that you are trying to complete. And the same is true of his behaviour. Every interaction is full of different interpretations – even ones as short-lived, anonymous and trivial as passing somebody on a pavement.

Every interaction is a co-creation in which none of the people concerned can be held responsible individually for their part in the action. It is impossible to identify that isolated part. And if you were to try that, if you were to try to discuss only *your* share, whatever you consider it to be, you would still be actually discussing a deeply flawed object, like the tree with all its leaves on one side, an incomprehensible and ridiculous spectacle. Like a tug of war with only one team.

The presupposition is that it is the teacher who educates, and the teacher *alone*. This idea leads to a vision in which education is indeed a flawed object, an incomprehensible and ridiculous spectacle, a tug of war with only one team.

You may think, but what about our own responsibility for what we do? And if you are a teacher you may well hope that I am not going to claim that your pupils are co-responsible for the education that you give them. *But watch out*: if you wish to deny that your pupils are co-responsible, it is also impossible to claim that you are co-responsible for what your pupils learn.

## RESPONSIBILITY

In all major European languages the word 'response' is the stem of the word 'responsibility'. And rightly so, also conceptually. They who carry responsibility account for their response.

Living in a hyper-individualised world, it may be difficult for us to evaluate the two implications of the relationship between the words 'response' and 'responsibility'. The first implication is related to the fact that a response never occurs at the beginning of a sequence. No scenario *starts* with a response. Even if we admit, which seems understandable and correct, that the limits of scenarios are relative, then for a good description, explanation or justification of a certain action it is still crucial that we do not regard this action as the opening of a scenario. The pupil who unexpectedly walks into a classroom during a lesson may seem to be opening a new scenario, but in order to understand what he is doing there, it is important to consider the pupil's behaviour as a response – a response to a situation of which we do not yet have a complete picture.

In other words, actions are not the beginning. Even your first sentence at the beginning of a lesson is a response to something, and more than simply the opening of a scenario. Responsibility always requires envisioning a wider, more expansive context. In our behaviour we are always busy responding, giving a response to a response to a response – and so on.

The second implication involves attributing meaning. A response is something other than a mechanical reaction. Your lower leg jerking up, *that* is a reaction – a reaction to the doctor's reflex hammer hitting the tendon below your patella. But a response is something else. A response is a clarification and an interpretation. A response gives a description to what is happening, brings what is happening into the normative world of language and meaning.

A good example is having a row. Obviously, rows develop fast, too fast to realise with sufficient clarity who is taking responsibility for what or who should be attributed responsibility for what. And this is what people make use of when they are arguing. It works as follows.

You say something to your partner that is subtly ambiguous, for example that she always looks after herself so well. In an argumentative atmosphere, there is a more than average chance that your

partner will interpret this negatively: “So you think I'm selfish?” This gives you the opportunity to pretend to be as innocent as a lamb: “Now what makes you say that? That is not what I’m saying at all. That is only *your* interpretation.” In this way, your partner has now been made responsible for her interpretation of the situation. And that is exactly where the responsibility should be: in the *interpretation* of each other’s behaviour, in the *clarification* of the scenario in which you find yourselves, in the *interpretation* of what you are doing together, as a collective agent. Responsibility is not about your behaviour, not about your isolated part in the common, coordinated action that you perform as a ‘we’. Responsibility is about your interpretation of what the two of you are doing. After all, it is this interpretation that, from your perspective, strings together the answers that you give each other.

Suppose that as a pupil you are getting your book unhurriedly out of your bag, or that you give your teacher a disparaging look that seems to say, “What makes you think that we were on page 42?” Or you might ask him, “Which book do you mean?” as he stated in the previous lesson that today you would be working with the smartboard and so you have left your exercise book at home of course! How will your teacher react? For which interpretation of your behaviour will he take responsibility? And what interpretation of your interaction will he lay at your feet? For which answer does he think you will have to take responsibility?

It is a central and integral part of every concrete interaction that we determine each other’s responsibilities by specifying each other's interpretations of what is happening in a scenario. What you and your teacher are creating is a continuous dynamic exchange of interpretations. These interpretations are ahead of you, they show in the spontaneity of your expressions, your voices, your gestures. This happens in every gesture, every word, every action, and it happens fast, dynamically, reciprocally, like on the pavement in Madrid. Your teacher will ignore your expression, will let out a deep sigh because

you failed to bring your exercise book, and will then get to work, ask somebody else a question or write something on the board.

The lesson has started, and your teacher is playing his role. Just like you are. This role does not exist in isolation, it unfolds in a setting that can be rather compelling, based on a script that can substantially limit any freedom, and in interaction with others who continuously demand your cooperation. This is how the branches grow on trees that are too close together, and that are looking for space to grow. In this complex interplay, for each of us there is the space to take our responsibility, and to be given this responsibility. A teacher who starts their lesson is responding to the colleagues in their department, who have chosen to use a particular course book. This choice was a response to the school management, who will hold the department firmly responsible for the results that the pupils get in their final exams. The school management is responding to the parents, who want their children to realise their full potential. And the pupil who has not brought his exercise book is responding to his parents, who want him to get to school on time.

In this scenario, nobody is individually, exclusively responsible for a clearly delimited part of the actions that take place. All these actions are interconnected, they are interwoven, they constitute a complex web, a series of events; just like the branches of trees that are too close together. In this scenario everyone can be held accountable for their interpretation of what they are doing together.

These interpretations form a second, guiding layer of meaning, which makes a type of coordination possible that is impossible to realise by using power. This is the function of meaning, of interpreting, of holding each other accountable for behaviour, of asking for and giving reasons for the things you do and the things you do not do. This is the purpose of the complex practice in which people achieve their humanity, by taking responsibility for the interpretation of what they do together. If you answer the question why you do what you do, you are truly trying to go beyond power, by trying to enable the co-creation of actions, by forming a ‘we’. This is it exactly. You do

not take responsibility so that you are individually held accountable, but so that you can achieve something together.

## WE EDUCATE OURSELVES

Cooperation is an amazing, fascinating and valuable phenomenon. It can take on many different shapes and forms. If you walk together then you walk the same route at the same pace, and you look at one another and take each other into account. Each person's behaviour then appears to be more or less the same. In a football team, things are different: one person is the goalkeeper, another a defender or a forward player. Roles can be even more distinct; for example, when I painted my house together with some friends, we all did something different: one person did the taping, another friend did the less precise work with a roller, a third person painted the window sills, and I was in charge of coffee and sandwiches.

If you want to work together, it is not at all necessary to do exactly the same things. But if you work together, you will have to be able to count on each other, you will have to have the same end-and-means relationships in mind, you will have to know each other's plans and combine these so that you can carry out the bigger plan together. To work together, you need to have normative expectations of each other, and you need to be able to align these expectations. This means that you have to listen to each other, to each other's reasons for doing something, and this requires that all concerned are willing to attribute *authority* to the other. To work together, you need to be beyond power, you need to trust each other with tasks, and accept that the other person will have good reasons to carry out the task in his own way. You do not need to know or understand these reasons, although you are of course entitled to ask for these reasons, just as you are obliged to give your own reasons if somebody asks you.

What does this mean for education, for what happens in the classroom? In a classroom, there is of course cooperation between the teacher and his pupils. This implies that they attribute authority to

one another, that together they are beyond using power, that each of them continuously takes responsibility for his interpretation of what they are doing together. But what *are* they doing together? Is education like painting a house, in which everybody has a discrete, clearly separate task, and only in the final result does it become clear that all these tasks together have led to a house that they painted together? Or is education more like a tug of war, in which no single party can do anything sensible unless the other party takes part in a coordinated effort?

In the standard story there are two roles available in the class, and each role comes with its own task. These tasks are defined with the help of clearly distinguishable verbs: the pupils learn and the teacher teaches. At first sight, this sounds straightforward enough: two separate tasks. It is not at all like a tug of war in which each party does exactly the same but in opposite directions.

But learning and teaching are not *that* different, or as easily separated as the tasks required for painting a house. Painting can be done in discrete steps, one after the other, one by one. For example, a person can only paint the window frames after the sanding and taping have been done. After each job an intermediate result has been attained, even though there has not been any actual cooperation as not everybody has carried out their own part yet.

It is tempting to think that in education these sorts of intermediate results can also be attained, that something has already happened, even though the whole job has not been finished yet. But that is misleading. Because in education full cooperation is required for every intermediate result. You cannot start by only teaching, and then think or hope that the pupils will later do their part, too. In this way educating is more like a tug of war than like painting a house together.

In a way it is similar to a football player passing the ball to a fellow player. This is an interesting phrase, passing the ball. It can be regarded as a verb that refers to an independent task of one person:

someone has possession of the ball and then kicks it to a team player. You then say that this player passes it to the other player. But if the other football player is not paying attention and appears not to be interested in the ball, you may wonder whether the first player has passed the ball at all. He kicked the ball – that is a task that can be done on its own – but has he really passed the ball? It seems that for passing a ball there needs to be real cooperation with someone who receives the ball. You can kick a ball towards a bird or a lamppost, but you cannot pass the ball to a bird or a lamppost. Passing is not the same as kicking. You can kick a ball on your own: this is an independent task, but you cannot pass the ball on your own. You can only use this phrase if more than one person is involved. *We* pass the ball.

Our current school system is an institution that misleads us by using the word 'educating' in an ambiguous sense. Perhaps there is no choice, because the system wants to employ teachers and not pupils. The teachers are given a job and a salary that corresponds to their task description. The teachers need to do something, need to *be able* to do something, for which they can individually be held accountable. Of course you cannot hold these teachers individually responsible for a task that they are unable to carry out on their own. Perhaps this is how it has come to this. Perhaps we followed this debatable thought process to arrive at the idea that teachers can do something that they can do *by themselves*: educating, teaching. Of course pupils are also involved, but they have a different task: they learn. Teachers teach. They teach pupils. And without a doubt they do so wholeheartedly, in fully committed ways. They do it *for* the pupils, for their own good. But they do not teach *with* the pupils. At best they teach the pupils in the sense of using them as an object or a tool, like you might use a brush, paint and a canvas to create a painting.

I suspect there is another presupposition behind the equivocal idea that teachers can teach pupils independently and on their own, a supposition that has dominated our western civilization since the Enlightenment. Ever since, we have imagined ourselves to be autonomous, independent spirits who can arrive at the right insights and

who choose to perform the correct actions based solely on their own judgment. Each instance of cooperation between such individuals is grounded in their enlightened self-interest. We can combine forces if each of us realises that this will benefit us all. This atomistic view has been fostered by the rational choice theory that still dominates our economic thinking. Considered thus, we are not a real collective, not an intrinsically collective agent, but only an aggregate, the sum of a number of individuals.

But we are not just distinct individuals. The boundaries between what I do and what happens to me because somebody else does something are vague, dynamic, and fluid. We act together. *We educate ourselves*: older people and younger people together and in connection. Each of us is active and passive in every interaction. Educating is intrinsically a relational activity, an interactivity, a matter of cooperation, a co-creation of a collective agent, of teacher and pupils together. Teachers cannot do it on their own. The more we expect that of them, or the more they expects that of themselves, the greater their frustration will be and the greater their anger or fear.

This is something that teachers should not allow to happen to themselves. They should not want to educate on their own, just as they should not accept the task of stimulating the intrinsic motivation of their pupils. This becomes immediately clear when you think about your own romantic relationship. Of course it would not work if you were forced to stimulate your partner's intrinsic motivation to do something with you. Cooperating is also surrendering – crucially and intrinsically. You cannot cooperate on your own. Nor can you educate on your own.

I would like to end this chapter on a positive note. The gist of this chapter is not that I want to take something away from the teacher, that I want to take away his opportunity to do something on his own, to be important to his pupils on his own. Teachers are crucial for good education, and we can think of many fictional examples, such as Mr Chips in *Goodbye Mr Chips*, Miss Jean Brodie in *The Prime of Miss Brodie* and John Keating, the character played by Robin Williams in *Dead Poets*

*Society*. All I intend to do is remind teachers that they do not have to do it on their own.

This is a fact that can sometimes be forgotten by impassioned, committed and responsible teachers when in the heat of the moment the external pressure becomes too high. I know. I have been there. I remember feeling caught out once, when a colleague attended my lesson as part of some sort of peer coaching project. "That was quite good," he said. "Inspirational lesson. But," he added ominously, "the wrong person's back was sweating." Ouch, that hurt, because I was still rather warm and my shirt was sticking to my back. But how could I do it differently? I felt that my task was only becoming heavier. What more could I do than I was already doing?

The paradoxical and simple answer is easily overlooked. The force of habit is too strong. You do not need to do more, but actually less. Because you are not alone. In this chapter I have given you a classroom full of partners: your pupils. They will join in. Educating should be done together.

# CHAPTER 4. GETTING A DEGREE OR BECOMING WHO YOU REALLY ARE?

## PARTY TIME!

The conversation was slowly becoming more pleasant, although the conclusion was inevitable: this student had committed fraud for the second time running and, as a consequence, he was going to be expelled from the university. He was aware of this himself, which is why he had planned to visit the Student Affairs Office for deregistration immediately after our talk. He was going to work full-time at the shipbuilding company where he was already working part-time. The job fitted him like a glove, his boss had said. And now he had finally found the courage to take the leap. The courage to be a carpenter, to work with wood. With his hands.

He had chosen a highly unusual route for this, and it was my task to kick him while he was down. After all, I was the chairman of the exam committee for Behavioural Sciences. The route I had taken was also difficult to explain: as a philosopher I now found myself among psychologists and educationalists. Somebody was needed to chair the exam committee, and this person turned out to be me, and thus I became responsible for having strict talks with students who had committed fraud, like this student.

During an exam he had secretly asked another student for information. She was sitting next to him, with one empty space between the two, just as the rules stipulate. He had surreptitiously given her a piece of scrap paper, asking her for the answer to question 14. She had written her answer on the paper and handed it back. Later he had realised that the scrap paper had to be handed in too, and so that it was likely that his fraud would be discovered. (I hardly dare write this down, but these are the procedures that we use at university so that adult students obtain their degree in a lawful manner.) The student had succeeded in tearing off the incriminating scrap of paper

and had put it in his trouser pocket – without the invigilator noticing. When he walked away, he left the rest of the paper behind. This is what his accomplice then had to hand in, and the invigilator – who had become more alert now – immediately noticed that part of the scrap paper was missing. That was how the truth came out, as the accomplice owned up to everything, confessing in tears that she felt used. Such childish things still happen at university.

But then the story becomes even more absurd. When I talked to the student that morning to hear his side of the story, he confirmed that this was exactly what had happened, and he kept stressing that deep down inside he may well have been wanting to get caught. After all, there were only sixteen students in the exam room. It must have been quite difficult for the invigilator to miss what was going on. But she was not playing too much attention, so he thought that he might just get away with it. This was weighing heavily on his conscience. The exam was a resit, his third that week. It was the second study programme that he had entered: psychology. He had no intrinsic interest in psychology at all. Initially, he had studied medicine, but then he had switched.

He struck me as lethargic and miserable, and I kept asking him questions. Why had he stopped his medical studies? He told me he had failed his first year. Both his parents were doctors: his father worked at a hospital and his mother was a GP. They didn't understand how it was possible for him to keep failing his exams, and he hadn't been able to tell them why. Instead he had started discussing psychology, told his parents about the similarity between medicine and psychology – which also had a clinical component, or so he'd heard. And then what he had hoped for had happened. His parents had accepted his story and had thought, as had he apparently, that psychology might be more suitable for him. In the end he might even be able to choose a specialisation that would help him end up working in a hospital after all.

It was a strange story, and because he saw that I was listening, he kept elaborating. He wanted to share what had happened. It was all

rather sad. He had failed his first year in medicine because he had been caught cheating during an exam there, too. He had been caught and as a consequence wasn't allowed to retake the test. Of course he hadn't been able to tell his parents about this.

And now history was repeating itself. He wasn't sure what he would tell his parents, but he knew he would not be telling them about the cheating. But it didn't matter, it really didn't matter anymore. He didn't want to go on studying anyway, even though this meant no academic title and no university degree for him. He was going to work at the shipbuilding yard. And I could see the colour returning to his face as he started to tell me about sanding and varnishing the interior of a yacht. The repetitive movement of the sanding and later the repetitive strokes with a paint brush, layer after layer. So relaxing, just great. And the smell of the varnish! He gave me such an intense description that I could almost smell it myself. *What on earth was this guy doing at university anyway?*

I asked him how he had felt when he had passed his A-levels. He showed the same ambivalence. A wonderful, long summer. Day after day at the shipbuilding yard. Fantastic! But there had also been the looming prospect of his medical studies. Of course, he had been happy that he had got in. After all, that was what it had all been about, all the hard work he had done in order to achieve high grades at school. All to obtain a place. And his parents had been very proud of him. But he hadn't been looking forward to it. I asked him whether he was looking forward to ending his university career because he had committed fraud for a second time. Did he realise that this meant that he would now be expelled from university? And truly, when I said this, a smile appeared on his face – a somewhat weak smile of course. But it was clear that he was seeing his future opening up in front of him, perhaps for the very first time.

# MOTIVATION

People have their own motives, their own internal mainspring. This is true of pupils and teachers, parents and children, managers and staff members, researchers and politicians. In fact, it is true of every person, of every organism – even though it is not easy to define exactly what is meant by 'internal' and by 'mainspring'. A fork and an acorn do not have an internal mainspring, and neither does a bowling ball rolling towards the pins; at most, we can say that these things have external motives in their environment. But daisies, cockroaches, squirrels and giraffes certainly have internal mainsprings, and so do chess computers, cars and care robots. In all these cases, a mainspring means something that is rather literally related to the original meaning of the word: a metal spring that can be compressed and thus produces energy, like in an old-fashioned watch that needs to be wound up. In these cases, internal means that pressure can be put on the mechanism *inside* the organism or machine, just like the spring in a watch.

So how about *people's* mainsprings? The dramaturgical model of human interaction sees our motives in terms of the entitlements and obligations that we attribute to one another and to ourselves when we are playing a role. But how can such relational components be internal mainsprings? Here, the development of habits plays an important role. Habits consist of expectations and dispositions that undoubtedly settle in our nervous system, thus forming a neurophysiological reality.

But this is not the whole story. Habits are not only internal in a literal, spatial, neurophysiological way. They are also internal in a dramaturgical way. Expectations and dispositions are always also internal to our role. They are part of the role that we play in scenarios, a role that is intrinsically social, that is co-determined and co-created by our fellow actors, by the script and by the setting.

Let's imagine a boy who always sits in the same place at the dining table at home. If his little sister unexpectedly sits down on his chair,

he will be indignant and immediately put her straight: "This is my chair, your chair is over *there*!" If we analyse such a correction dramaturgically, it seems that the boy has implicitly identified with his role, with the social position that gives him entitlements but also obligations. When setting the table, he clearly takes this into account: he makes sure that he doesn't put the chipped plate where he is sitting, and he teases his sister by putting her knife and fork the wrong way around.

Why does he do this? This is typically a question about human motivation. Why do boys tease their little sisters? Why do children always put themselves first? Why would a student choose the wrong degree course twice before realising how much he likes shipbuilding? Why is it so difficult for teachers to motivate their pupils, even to such an extent that some start looking for jobs outside education? These are only some of the many questions that can be asked about human motivation. And the dramaturgical model helps us ask these questions, using *role conflict* and *role distance*, two crucial concepts in this model. Let's have a closer look at three examples.

> *Anna is 8 years old. She is in Year 3, doing sums. She has already finished three rows. As she is looking at the first sum on the fourth row, she immediately sees what the correct answer should be. Then she hears a soft thud: something has dropped onto the floor beside her. It is Samira's eraser. Anna looks at Samira, tries to attract her attention, and nearly starts leaning over to nudge Samira. Then she checks herself, looks at her teacher, who is talking to Robin, and looks at the first sum on the fourth row again. No one hears her quietly sigh to herself.*
>
> *Bradley is on his way home. The intense relief that he was feeling on the train just now has given way to a dark and sombre state of mind. He really should tell his parents now that he has quit university.*

*Tomorrow he is starting work at Jason Wrigley Shipbuilding, as a carpenter. Great! But how is he going to tell his parents? He has no idea.*

*Chloe is in a massive rush to get her phone out. She has just passed her driving test. She is shaking with excitement. This has got to go on Insta right now! She might get as many as 200 likes. Awesome.*

Why do Anna, Bradley and Chloe behave like this? What drives them? You don't have to be a scientist to answer that question. Actually, if you were a scientist, for example a behavioural or neuroscientist, you would see the enormous challenge here: the serious limitation of your instruments compared with the incredible level of detail needed in the experiments to move forward only half an inch towards analysing these people's mainsprings in all of their contextual complexity. This kind of personal, individual behaviour can still not be explained scientifically.

However, if you are not a scientist, you can gain some ground without too much hassle. Anna is bored, and this is why her attention can easily be distracted by a small unexpected incident like an eraser falling on the floor. But in the silent classroom, where everybody should be concentrating quietly, Anna cannot just stop doing her sums. This is why she simply continues. You can imagine the situation well, and if you have ever been bored at some time during a job that was too easy for you, you will know exactly how Anna feels. Bradley's story is also understandable, especially as I was discussing him earlier. And even though some older readers may not be aware of what *Insta* is, everybody will understand that Chloe is a happy bunny. She now has a driving licence and is allowed to drive all on her own. *How cool is that?*

Does the dramaturgical model of human interaction add something to our everyday understanding of Anna's, Bradley's and Chloe's behaviour? It does, and not only by systematising our motives. The model provides insight specifically into motivational ambivalence,

and it offers a clear framework for the contextuality of behaviour, for the social and normative dimensions, and for the relationship between motivation and ambition. I will briefly expand on these aspects.

Anna's role is that of a Year 3 pupil who is busy doing sums. We can imagine that Anna initially plays her role with fervour, as she is challenged by the sums in her exercise book. These sums appeal to her in her role as a Year 3 pupil. When Anna does sums, she knows which exercise book to get and which sums to do. To her the exercise book and sums are *affordances*, as philosophers like to call them. An *affordance* is an offer, a chance or a possibility that a certain environment has in store for a certain organism. For a child, an empty can of coke on the street may be something to kick, but that may not be what it represents to a posh lady.[24] To a goat, a lettuce might be a tasty snack, but to a wolf it isn't. We could say that a chair might make us the 'offer' to sit on it, and similarly the rows in Anna's exercise book make her the 'offer' to do sums, because of Anna's role in this scenario.

If Anna is working contentedly – if she is playing her role well – some of her fellow pupils may leave the classroom without her noticing. If her teacher had asked for everybody's attention, Anna would no doubt have reacted, just as we always notice when we think we hear our own name. If we hear our name somewhere in the background, we can hear that 'offer'. This becomes ingrained in the first years of our lives.

The falling eraser is of course also an *affordance* to Anna, especially if the sums have lost their attraction. The eraser is an 'offer' to escape her role and to take on a different role, the role of an exploring child or a helpful classmate. At the exact moment that Anna sees the eraser fall, she feels the attraction of two or three different roles, and of the conflicting obligations and entitlements belonging to these roles. What should she do?

Anna is in two minds: confused, ambivalent. She experiences a *role conflict*. She can move in two different directions: will she remain loyal to the role of 'good pupil in Year 3' or will she allow herself the role of 'exploring child'? Even if she doesn't look at her teacher, she will be able to realise the normative load of her dilemma, as an exploring child is also a distracted pupil, a dreamer, a child who might potentially disturb the lesson, whereas a pupil doing sums is a good pupil who knows how things are supposed to be.

It is easy to imagine that she may even have considered a third role for herself: the role of 'helpful classmate'. This role would help her keep her dignity as a good pupil, but also give her the chance to be distracted from the sums that are no longer interesting to her. Perhaps this is what Anna felt when she looked at her teacher. You may think that it would be too hard for her to play this third role successfully. After all, it is only an eraser. Her teacher would probably think that she was simply playing the role of a pupil who is too easily distracted, so it might be better to return to the sums. Anna knows what her entitlements are. And her obligations.

In Chloe's case there is no role conflict: she is completely immersed in her success. She has just been playing her role as a driving test student, and she has passed her test. Now there is a new role for her, the role of somebody with a driving licence. Of course there are first some formalities that need to be dealt with: filling in forms, having her passport photo taken, and dealing with civil servants who are only too familiar with their own roles. And then, of course, waiting for the licence to arrive. But first she has that euphoric role to play, provided by social media: every positive experience can be cast out as a net to haul in confirmation and recognition. *OMG – I passed the test!* This needs to be posted on Instagram as soon as possible. That's how it is done nowadays.

And how about Bradley? Bradley is deeply torn. In his case there is not so much a *role conflict;* it is more that he is facing a considerable *role distance*. He knows the different roles that he is playing: former student, fraudster, shipbuilder. He knows his entitlements and his

obligations, and he has accepted these. The role of son is also on that list, and even though he has implicitly made clear to me that as a son he is also becoming an adult, and that he is going to defend his interpretation of the script to his parents, it is obvious that this will involve a huge effort.

There is no real doubt about his entitlements and obligations, at least not on *his* side, not if he is the only one responsible for the script and for the successful unfolding of future scenarios. But he is not the only one. In his conversation with me he felt that he was being given the opportunity to distance himself from the role of student, and to experience this role distance with maximum clarity. He was no longer a student. In fact, immediately after our conversation he went and deregistered.

But now he will have to face his parents, who have read – and written – a completely different script of their son's life. But they feel that *their son*, who takes part in their script, in their normative expectations, *this* son, that isn't *him* at all. The question that paralyses Bradley, that tears him up inside, is the following: how do you play the role of 'the son of two doctors who has messed up two degree courses and now wants to be a carpenter'? And how can you play this role with dignity, *authentically*, because you feel it is the only way to be yourself?

Role distance may be the kindest term for the tragedy that Bradley needs to overcome. There is a great chance that some cracks will form in the relationship between Bradley and his parents, and a wide rift might develop between them. It will become clear that there are two scripts, and none of the people involved will be able to play their role adequately in the other party's script. Bradley's parents may wonder in bewilderment: "How can our son, in whom we have invested so much, throw away his chance of a good life?" In turn, Bradley may wonder how he, given who he is, will ever be able to live the life of *their son*.

We can only hope that time will heal all wounds. And I feel lucky that I am not a novelist, so that I can leave it up to you as a reader to imagine the conversations between Bradley and his parents. I am only interested in taking a first step towards exploring the role that the dramaturgical model can play in outlining the problems of human motivation and the deforming role played by university degrees.

## BEING ABLE TO BE YOURSELF

If you ask parents what they want for their child, their answer will undoubtedly consist of the well-known cliché that all they want is for their child to be happy. But what constitutes happiness? Well, they will have their own views on that. It is likely that they will not be at all aware of how much of themselves they project onto the image they have of a happy life for their child. In addition, all too often they will project not only much of themselves, but also much of the current culture, which tacitly and self-evidently means that the highest possible qualification is a necessary condition to have even a small *chance* of happiness. Moreover, almost all of today's parents have made a conscious decision to have children, and to have a conveniently small number of children; therefore it is easy to understand that parents have the time and the opportunity to make wonderful and successful projects of their children. Their children *need* to be happy. And this requires education, if only because of that qualification – it should be possible that this education is used as a means to an end, and almost as an anonymous and impersonal tool that should be freely available on the market.

If you dig deeper, parents might admit that they would also like their child to *become* themselves, to *be* themselves and to *remain* themselves; still, there is also a strong possibility that they will find this mostly vague, quasi-profound philosophising. I don't think they are necessarily wrong about this, although at the same time I also believe – and so probably do these parents if you ask them pointedly – that it is much more important for people to be themselves than to be happy.

But how do you do this? How do you become, be and remain yourself? I will argue in this chapter that the dramaturgical model of human interaction can really help us understand this question. You are yourself when you play *your own role*. What role is this? The answer to this question is as profound and meaningful as it is trivial: any role you can play with acceptance and conviction. In other words, any role that is in line with your intrinsic motivation.

This can be explained in different ways. My explanation is based on a well-known trinity of concepts: competence, autonomy and belonging,[25] and these three are necessary if you want to play a role with acceptance and conviction. First of all, you need to actually be able to *play a role*. The concept of competence can help us analyse this fundamental ability. Secondly, you need to play that role *yourself*. To aid our understanding of this, I use the concept of autonomy. And thirdly, you need to play your part *among others*. This can be analysed well using the concept of belonging.

In the following three sections, I will explore more closely what it means to be a person in this sense, someone who participates in our *praxis*, our intergenerational interaction, someone who can live his life in concrete scenarios by playing his own role.

## COMPETENCE

People differ in what they can do, and also in what they can learn. Moreover, they differ in what they *wish* they could learn and thus also in the capability of what they will be able to learn. My apologies for all the modal verbs. I will provide an example to clarify.

Back in the day when I was a university student, I used to go running. Sometimes I went on my own, sometimes with a friend and, for a number of years, also with a running club. Every once in a while we would run official races, or we would organise a race between ourselves. Ten kilometres was my limit: at least, after that distance I lost the will to run. If I'd *had to* continue running, if there'd been a wolf chasing me, or if I was going to have to stop studying philosophy or

if my girlfriend would have broken up with me if I had stopped running after ten kilometres – all right, in such cases I could have run longer and further. But there are limits. And I could feel these limits pretty well when I was running. If I had trained more, I could probably have pushed it to 15 kilometres, perhaps even to a half marathon, but why would I? And what could be the point of running even more than 21 kms? A long time ago, Pheidippides (incidentally also the name of our running club) had a good reason for running the 42,195 metres from Marathon to Athens, but he paid for it with his life. I didn't feel that I had to be able to do this. I didn't want to learn to run a marathon. And thus, there came a point about which I can and must say that I did not have the capability to be able to learn to run that far.

Human capabilities, the things we could learn to do, are in principle beyond exact definition. I cannot program software, at least not now, but I could learn to do it, which means that *potentially* I can do it; it is one of my capabilities that still needs to be developed. And that goes for anything and everything, for example crossbow shooting, integral calculus, speaking Swahili, writing in Devanagari, and playing the accordion. But although I could learn all of these, there are undeniably limits to the extent to which I will eventually be able to realise these capabilities. And the fascinating thing is that these limits are, somewhere, on some level, *part of our will*. If, as part of our will, we run into these limits, then we *cannot* do something simply because we don't *want* to do it, because we cannot want to do it and we don't want to be able to do it.

These limits are not fixed of course. Moreover, they cannot be empirically fixed, at least not in any usual sense of the word. But they are there, the limits of our resolve. They are there for each of us: limits that are to do with the determination of our own will, with what *we ourselves* can and cannot want to be able to do. As the American philosopher Harry Frankfurt puts it: what is unthinkable to us.[26] Still, even in the unthinkable we can surprise ourselves. And even astound ourselves. War veterans know all about that. They sometimes carry

atrocities with them that have distorted their resolve in such a way that *nothing* is unthinkable – as a result they have hardly managed to maintain a coherent will and seem to have lost all ability to play a role.

At the beginning of our lives, however, there is so much capability, so much learning spirit, so much fervent desire to be able to do things. An almost limitless ability to turn over onto your stomach, to sit up, to stack blocks, to crawl, to stand, to walk, to feed yourself, to talk, to put your own clothes on, to tie your own shoelaces, to read, to write, to count, to tell the time. A child's learning spirit can be conceptualised as a desire to play certain roles: the role of sitter, walker, runner, eating companion, of a child who is already so big that they can feed themselves. As a parent you will sometimes have to turn a blind eye and accept that you may find spaghetti sauce all over the place. You will realise that the child's performance should actually be disqualified, as it is so far off the mark that it can hardly be called eating. This also requires the parent to learn to play a new role, namely that of a retreating parent, still at the very beginning of a permanent, dynamic detachment process that will take more than two decades; after which, at some point in the future, the roles will reverse – so even then these roles are still unceasingly dynamic.

The child's desire to be able to do things, to be competent, is indeed a desire to play a role. In any scenario in which children find themselves, they will want to be able to play a role, they will want to meet the expectations that come with that particular role. The normative nature that regulates our competences is undeniable. Whether it's about crawling, eating, talking or getting dressed, mastering the skill, having the competence is a matter of wanting to meet a standard. Of course, this also involves body control, habit-forming, and pattern-forming in the nervous system. But what is decisive in the development of these habits is the desire to participate, the desire to comply with the entitlements and obligations that are part of learning to play a role correctly.

Just look at a child learning to speak. It is quite possible that a toddler is not able to control his mouth well enough to produce the

difference between ‘doh’ and ‘dog’, but even then the toddler will know exactly what he *wanted* to say, what fits the script, or what he is now adding to the script. He is pointing at the dog. And even if it sounds like ‘doh’, you know what he means, and you are obliged to react with surprise, “Wow, how clever of you to say that, lovey! Great! Isn’t she a lovely dog, darling!”

Later, much later, if he can still only produce a forceful ‘doh’ when he means dog, you will sometimes correct him, give him more critical feedback, use your entitlement not to understand him if he does not perform the role of speaker well enough. But you welcome his first word wholeheartedly, uncritically and full of admiration, even if it is ‘dog’ rather than ‘Daddy’ or ‘Mummy’.

Wanting to play a role means wanting to be able to comply with the rules that define the role, even if these rules are vague and ambiguous. Wanting to be able to play a role means wanting to gain access to the normative domain, the domain of normative expectations, of obligations and entitlements. In order to be an acting person, a human being living a human life, you have to be able to participate in the normative domain, enter scenarios, read scripts, improvise additions to scripts, appeal to people‘s obligations, acknowledge their entitlements – and conversely, of course, be accountable for your obligations and take the room that your entitlements give you. Being able to play a role in the complex social domain is what competence means.

But what role? Of course, you tacitly and self-evidently start the role that has been allotted to you within your family. You learn to speak English, have tea at five, go to the panto at Christmas, play cricket, learn to swim and love animals. Before you know it, you are a schoolchild, and you are already deeply familiar with the habits that your environment has tried to ingrain in you. You have even discovered that not all habits are set in stone, but that things are usually supposed to happen the way you have now got used to.

And after a number of years, it is time to go to secondary school. For the first time you really feel the pressure of the many social roles that are available to you. Which role is yours? Which role can you identify with in such a way that you will be able to learn to play it as if it were your role, which will then *make it your role?* And which is *why* it will be your role.

Once this choice is at stake, we would do well to realise that competence is well-founded in our will, that it is about choosing a role that we *want* to play. Even though I have the capability to run more than ten kilometres (especially if there's a wolf chasing me), the ten-kilometre limit after which I start losing my motivation, after which my own will gets in the way of my capability, that is the limit that determines my competence. Competence is a basic dimension of my existence as an acting person: being able to participate in the social domain where people play roles. That is all. After that, it is about our will.

Unfortunately, in our current school system little attention is paid to developing our will. The system focuses on qualifications, and we have made this a narrow cognitive affair. We have even made it measurable: measurable on a one-dimensional scale from low to high. Poor children! They need to find their own role among the many roles that place such great demands on their ability to take a Key Stage test. It is not about their role anymore. It is about their qualifications, which have to be as high as possible.

## AUTONOMY

*Let me!* is childspeak for *let me do it myself*. That is what it is all about from very early on. Just look at contrary toddlers, the terrible twos, who have just discovered that they can do things themselves. From now on, they want to do everything themselves, all the time. Autonomy is a dominant value in our liberal society: the respect for autonomy and a desire for autonomy. It dominates our adult lives, even at difficult moments, when we might have avoided a burnout by relying

on others or when we wish to avoid making the difficult decision – forced upon us by our GP – about whether to have an operation or not. Given the priority that is clearly attributed to our need for autonomy, it is a miracle that our children do not revolt *en masse* and instead suffer their years in school in silence. After all, *let me do it myself* is not usually part of how school works.

What do I mean by autonomy? What does it mean to do something yourself? Here too, the dramaturgical model of human interaction can be of help, as it makes clear that if you do something yourself, you *yourself* will be playing a role. This requires a good understanding of, firstly, the relationship between character and actor, secondly, the role distance and thirdly, the function of the director.

Let me explain this using my own experience from many years ago. A job agency offered me a job as the Easter Bunny in a large shopping centre. I arrived early, before the shops opened, and was presented with an Easter Bunny costume at Marks & Spencer's. Someone from the shopkeepers' association helped me put it on and when I was ready to go out, I mentioned that this was my first time as the Easter Bunny and that I was uncertain whether it was going to be a success. "Of course it is," the woman said, "and you'll find out when you are walking around among the shoppers. You don't have to act at all. The kids will be playing you. The suit does it all for you."

She was right. I was not needed at all. At least, I was just needed as filling material. Someone had to do it. Someone had to wear the suit, but from then on it was the outfit that did everything. The character played itself. Any person could have done it. All I had to do was go along with the flow of children and their parents, of excited children who looked at me with radiant eyes and astonished euphoria, and who played their part so naturally and with such complete abandon that I had no choice but to fully immerse myself in their game. The character took over, like a daemon in ancient Greek drama.

For many years, I returned to the shopping centre to play the Easter Bunny. And what was there that first time became a more obvious

aspect of my experience over the years: there is a distinction between actor and character. I played the part in my own way, being my kind of Easter Bunny. When a child eats spaghetti by herself for the first time, she sees the role of spaghetti eater as a role she is now taking on and is now going to perform. Clearly, in due course, the child no longer thinks about how to do it and can gobble down plates of spaghetti without giving it another thought, in the same way as she can run, read, do sums and play football. But if you wish to play a role in the sense that it is significant enough to call it autonomous, this will require a certain role distance, a distance that then has to be bridged by yourself.

This role distance stands out, it self-inflates as it were, as soon as you do something for the first time – when you take on a role that you have seen others playing, but which has not been your role so far. For example learning to ride a bicycle, performing in the nativity play, finding your way in a foreign city for the first time, or asking someone you fancy out on a date.

Role distance, the recognition that you as an actor are realising a character, is crucial to our sense of autonomy. It is also characteristic of our appreciation for and our satisfaction in experiencing our own autonomy. This internal divide is a main theme in all the philosophical work written about autonomy.[27] The original Greek meaning of the word, 'only adhering to the laws that you impose on yourself', also shows this internal duplication. Imposing laws on yourself and then adhering to them is emphatically a *normative* matter; a matter related to obligations and entitlements, which, beyond the causal effectiveness of habits, makes it clear that your habits must be deliberately perceived as prescriptions. You are not just doing something because you're so used to it, but because you're convinced that you're supposed to be doing it. And that is the way it should be, simply because *you* are endorsing it.

This explicit self-relationship is clearly reflected in the dramaturgical model. Because I have a role, I become an actor who enacts a character. That is not to say that in real life I am only an actor, nor

merely a character. I am both, at once. According to the dramaturgical model, being who I am always implies *becoming* who I am, making myself real. As a human being, I am – to use Deep Purple's phrase – 'a child in time'. I live in the dynamics of scenarios, enacting the character that is becoming me, even though I never simply coincide with the character I enact. In these scenarios, I hold myself and others to the obligations and entitlements that belong to my role, and I do so by improvising and contributing to the script that regulates our interaction.

In this improvisation, there is also the function of director, which is inevitably forced upon us by internal duplication. If I am both a character and an actor, if I have to live with that duplication, I am going to have to contribute to the script, and I will have to play the part *my* way. This means that I have to give directions to myself as a director, just like I give directions to other people by the way I behave: I give clues that can help them understand what my expectations of them are. We give these instructions all the time, in words and in body language. Just think about someone who is walking towards you on a narrow pavement. And notice it in yourself when you are walking towards him on that same pavement. You give each other signals about whether you'll be veering to the left or to the right. These signals are a kind of meta-commentary, a director's indication for how you, as an actor, should position yourself, as a character, right there on that pavement, but also in every other scenario in which you play your role. You yourself, in your own way.

We see this in the behaviour of Anna, Bradley and Chloe, in which it is more or less clear how autonomous they really are. Is Anna giving in to external pressure if she settles into her role as Year 3 pupil? Or is she wholeheartedly identifying with that role? Does Chloe even know that she is playing a role, the role of Instagrammer, of 'adolescent trying to look her best on social media'? Would she embrace that role if she were aware of it? And would she then be authentically autonomous, or would that just mean that she was encapsulated even more; would that just be one extra layer of indoctrination?

These questions make it clear that autonomy is a contested concept that still preoccupies philosophers. There is nothing wrong with this. Human existence is sometimes as great a mystery as *thinking* about human existence. Clarity is only achieved after much hard work and many misgivings, and it is always limited to a certain context. That is the lesson that Bradley will learn. He has no option but to become autonomous. The roles he has played so far – student, fraudster, shipbuilder, son – have positioned him in the current scenario and they are now heartlessly abandoning him, leaving him with a huge challenge. He must do it *himself* now, he must now play his own role himself. But how?

Autonomously. That's how. The only possible answer. Of course, that doesn't give Bradley much to go on. But there isn't much to go on, not for someone at such a breaking point in his life, who finds himself in a scenario in which he has to perform what Robert Kane calls 'a self-forming action'.[28]

Still, that doesn't mean that Bradley is all on his own. You never are, as a human being. Even if you play your own role, if you play your own role *yourself*, then this is still a role that you are playing among others. You attribute obligations and entitlements not only to yourself, but also always to others, just like they attribute obligations and entitlements to you in their dealings with you. You play roles, including your own, together with others.

## BELONGING

In our current participatory society, few things are as poorly understood as belonging. Thus, we are all victims of the Enlightenment, that wondrous modern ideology that promises us absolute independence – rational self-rule based on enlightened self-interest – but which also has us locked up in an anonymous, impersonal and alienating bureaucracy.

I am going to leave the fancy words above for what they are: fancy words that are the background setting to a much smaller story. This

story is big enough, by the way. It is about our current school system and how we distort our children, to whom we offer a degree but who we do not teach how to play their own role in life.

At first everything seems fine. Most five-year-olds like going to school. They want to learn. They want to be grown up. They see a role for themselves that they can take on, the role of pupil. And once they become pupils, they quickly also become one with this role. It is the only role that seems to be available to young people in our society. In education young people have virtually no opportunity to practise playing a role other than the role of pupil.

Of course I am painting a somewhat distorted picture here, as there is certainly ample attention for professional profiles in vocational education. Nevertheless, upward pressure is shockingly high in education and it is accompanied by the exclusion of concrete role models. When you're a child, you are still allowed to want to be a fireman, pilot, singer or teacher when you grow up. But once you have spent a number of years in the school curriculum, you become familiar with the idea that it is not about examples, not about role models, not about concrete professions, but about your general knowledge – or actually the height of your cognitive stage – and about obtaining your qualifications, which are in fact mainly an admission ticket to a higher level of education. That is what it is. The only thing you become good at is playing the role of pupil and at every level there is more education to welcome you with open arms so that you can become even better at that role.

The higher you get, the clearer it is made to you that it is your general, abstract and theoretical competence that counts, and that a concrete profession is a downward trajectory. The effect is that young people enter the labour market far too late and thus find out far too late that they have to start learning all over again. The older you are when you enter the labour market, the longer you have been in education, the higher your qualification, the more you will experience the distance between your education and the labour market as a role

distance. Because there's only one thing you can do: play the role of pupil. And that is exactly what the labour market is not looking for.

Why are we doing this to our young people? Why are we sending them nowhere with a degree? Why does education not do anything with the dramaturgical model of human interaction? Where are the role models, why is there no practice with dramaturgical interaction, where is the confrontation with role distance, where is the experience of duplication that we are an actor who realises a character, and who teaches us to function as a director?

Education is missing out on enormous opportunities. It has interpreted belonging as a fundamental basic need. After all, people want to be part of something. People long for valuable relationships with others. But if you interpret this psychologically, you are also making it an individual matter, a need that exists in each of us, but which nevertheless exists as an individual matter, a need you have. *You*. And of course all other people, too. But the beginning and the end is you. You seem to feel the need to belong. Formulated thus, it feels pretty lonely. Thus, this misleading interpretation of belonging completely leaves you to your own devices. If you want to fit in, you're going to have to get a degree. Because that degree opens up the way to social participation. But you're going to have to do it yourself. You. Completely on your own!

How is it possible that such an important concept is so misunderstood? From a philosophical perspective, a few culprits can be pinpointed in the Western history of ideas,[29] but much more interesting – and much more constructive – is a plea for introducing the dramaturgical model of human interaction into education. Because in this model, belonging is a deeply mundane fact. After all, a role is essentially, fundamentally, a co-production. No one plays a role on their own. It is not possible to play a role on your own. If you play a role, you also have antagonists, fellow people, who all have their own role to play. All these roles are partly determined – intrinsically, substantially, fundamentally – by all the other players involved. Roles are played together. Roles are defined by the obligations and entitlements

that people attribute to each other and to themselves – obligations and entitlements that develop dynamically, *in* the scenario, by allowing everyone to co-write the script spontaneously and with improvisation.

A dramaturgical understanding of education can offer both pupils and teachers wonderful opportunities to work from their motivation. But then you will have to have the confidence to discuss who wants to play which role. Children are really good at this, as they are experienced at it. Whether in the real world it is about who is who when playing house, or in the digital world it is about who builds, spots, or pushes in the computer game *Fortnite*: children are good at taking on roles and dividing these among themselves. Education fails to use this skill sufficiently, and perhaps this is mostly due to the teacher's unwillingness, or inability, to take on a different role than that of teacher.

There is a great deal at stake here. I agree with everyone who says that the teacher's quality is crucial to the quality of education. But then it has to be clear to the teacher that teaching is not about transferring knowledge. Such a misinterpretation distorts the idea of knowledge, as I showed in Chapter 2, and it distorts the idea of teaching, as I showed in Chapter 3. Good teachers realise that 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' implicitly belong together, and that they are teaching *together with* their pupils; in other words, that as an older person, they are shaping the joint intergenerational interaction together with young people. In doing so, everyone is learning, in many different ways. This will be elaborated on in Chapter 8.

## IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

Learning to play your own role always takes place at a certain place and in a certain context. It doesn't have much to do with a deeply introspective investigation into your personal, authentic motivation. Your own role is a role that has been put at your disposal by the community that you are a part of; the challenge in your life is to learn to

embrace that role. For centuries, this was a matter of heritage and tradition, from father to son, mother to daughter. If you were the miller's son, you would be a miller; if you were the mayor's son, you would become mayor; and if you were the son of a farmhand, then you would be a farmhand. This is how things went and you just had to make sure that you came through the identification process in one piece; and, in fact, this is how it still works for royalty. The choices were often even more limited for girls. They became the 'wife of …', and if they didn't find a husband, their destiny was a life as a spinster or a nun.

The Enlightenment introduced us to the possibility of liberating ourselves from the suffocating bonds of our socio-economic origins. Many people have succeeded in shaking off these shackles. Although this is clearly excellent progress, there is also a downside. Meritocracy mercilessly reminds us of the opportunities in the labour market that fit our rather narrowly defined cognitive abilities. However, this doesn't work out so well for people with a cognitive impairment, or for people who don't have the self-discipline to conform to the role of pupil for 18 years. Nevertheless, the emancipatory scope that the Enlightenment offers us is potentially enormous; especially for anyone who has challenged the *role distance* that is crucial for learning to play our own roles. I am optimistic enough to believe that everyone will at some point fall into the abyss that our role distance has in store for us, and will then learn that getting up again can start immediately. But in this, education plays a seriously unhealthy role.

Children are forced far too early into making the choice that we present to them as if it were an existential choice. We tell children that there are decisive now-or-never and all-or-nothing choices to be made at different moments in their school career. What type of school will they go to? Grammar or comprehensive? When considering which direction they want to take at the end of school, then suitable secondary school choices must be made throughout early and mid-teen years in order to be able to enter the desired following type of education.

How dare we impose this madness on such young people? I apologise for using this word, but it is what I think: this *is* madness! At a time when children still have little idea of their competences and of their autonomy, as adults we force our children to interpret their connection to the community in which they are growing up as a choice for a long-term educational pathway that will give them the desired qualifications at the end. At least, if they work hard for it, so that we also make it clear to our children that if they do not turn out fine socially, then it is their own fault.

If this is the meritocratic image of 'brotherhood' – which is what 'belonging' has been called since the French Revolution – then we should not be surprised that the number of young people with a burnout has been increasing rapidly. It may be tough and disappointing to find yourself in a profession that your father and your grandfather already practised, but it is at least equally difficult and lamentable if, as a young teenager, you have to bridge the role distance between your still completely underdeveloped will and an abstract position in the labour market that requires a qualification that is as high as possible.

There is a different way. In fact, we also do it radically differently in an equally important area of human existence. When it comes to love and intimate relationships, there is no parent in the Western world who would actually encourage his teenage son or daughter to look around and then carefully choose a partner for life. People don't find their life partners at 14. Rarely do they find them before they are 25 years old; moreover, people who claim that life partners do not exist at all, or are at least very rare, may very well be right. On average, nowadays we go through several long-term relationships in our lives. These bring us great joy and, of course, also a great deal of pain and sadness. No one seems to believe that we should do things very differently. Love hurts, and heartache is apparently part of life. It makes us stronger. That is what we say, and it is true.

But why don't we apply the same idea to education? Why do we think education is about obtaining the highest possible qualification? Why

do we think we can develop our identity by learning to embrace an educational pathway that is supposed to ultimately lead us to a degree? Is it our degree that we think about when we think about our identity? Is a degree a final destination or merely a starting point, an opening, after which everything else will develop further?

Learning to play your role, learning to embrace this role, and learning to belong in this role is a sensitive, complex and lifelong trajectory. It wouldn't hurt to start that process early on, to start practising. It is certainly not intelligence that you need for this, at least not the kind of intelligence that is perceived as a narrowly defined cognitive skill. More than anything, you need courage and confidence – the confidence that you dare to take *and* that you deserve to receive. In addition, you especially need many enthusiastic role models, other people who have learned by trial and error to go for something and who stand for their choices!

## LET THE LEARNING CONTINUE

There was a time when people identified with their origin, geographically as well as socially. In those days, social mobility was rare or non-existent. Identity was a given, something stable and immutable, so that whatever else might change, a person remained the same throughout his life. This identity was pretty impersonal; it was a social identity. Personally, I would be 'one of the Bransens' or 'one of those guys from The Netherlands'. It was inevitable that this identity was impersonal, because the typically personal aspects of people have always been much more a matter of continuous change, which has given philosophers a lot to think about throughout the centuries. How can we understand the identity of individuals if this concept seems to imply immutability, even though individuals as we actually know them are constantly changing, growing and developing?

The Romantic Era – that intriguing counterpoint of the Enlightenment – gave us a new perspective on personal identity, one that revolves around self-development, around expressing ourselves and

fulfilling the promise at the core of every new human being. The Romantic Era gave us the idea of a personal destiny, a notion that fits well with the Aristotelian idea of a *telos*. But it is also an idea that leads to a modern misunderstanding, namely the fallacy to think that a destiny or goal is an ideal end state, an intended result. As if Odysseus' real aim was to arrive at Ithaka, and then – as in a modern fairy tale – be satisfied to live there 'happily ever after'.

But of course, we should not misunderstand this Romantic cliché. Fairy tales, like romcoms, always have a happy ending. But we should really interpret that ending as an *ending*. Done. The end. That's all folks! 'And they lived happily ever after' is not a peek into an ideal life that only begins when the lovebirds are finally united. On the contrary, the Romantic cliché tells us that it was about the journey and not about the destination. It is the final chord, and we all know this when we hear it. The goal has been achieved, the journey has ended and completing the journey is what the goal has been all along. But this is something we do not understand when we set off on our journey. Then we think it is about Ithaka, that it is all about reaching our destination as an ideal end state. But when we arrive, we know what it means to have been travelling to Ithaka. Then we know it was about the journey and that the journey *was its purpose*.

This is what the Egyptian-Greek poet C.P. Cavafy makes beautifully clear in his poem Ithaka.[30] Here, I will quote the ending of that poem:

> *Keep Ithaka always in your mind.*
> *Arriving there is what you're destined for.*
> *But don't hurry the journey at all.*
> *Better if it lasts for years,*
> *so you're old by the time you reach the island,*
> *wealthy with all you've gained on the way,*
> *not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.*
>
> *Ithaka gave you the marvellous journey.*
> *Without her you wouldn't have set out.*
> *She has nothing left to give you now.*

*And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.*
*Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,*
*you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.*

The message for education is clear. It is not about the degree. It is about the constant dynamics of the intergenerational experiment that we as *Homo educandus* live up to here on earth. It is about learning. Learning that never stops. So let's not tell our children that they are learning for a degree and that there is a happy ending to learning on the last day of university. Let our children experience that education is beautiful and worthwhile in itself, that it is all about the journey itself, and that education is not a necessary evil that they have to endure before they can begin real life.

Of course they will make it. Of course they will discover long after their formal education has ended that it was not about the qualifications at all, but about learning – learning to live together. Then they will pick themselves up, face their identity crises and learn to deal with the role distance that they will experience.

In my ideal educational system – which I describe in Part 2 – they will be able to pose their learning questions to a guide. Only then will they accept the trip to Ithaka. And they will hope that the road is long.

# CHAPTER 5. THE JOURNEY OR THE DESTINATION?

## AN UNEXPECTED FAILURE

It was only after many years that this debacle found its place in my biography. Slowly I had built a story around it that over time even I had started to believe. The story starts with a tribute to Karl Schuhmann. A long time ago he gave great lectures at Utrecht University, taking us through the history of modern philosophy and making us feel as if we were characters in a John le Carré thriller. Schuhmann skilfully built up the tension, used cliff-hangers whenever he could, and stirred up an eagerness for knowledge in us that had a magnetic effect on our attention. I made copious notes and studied the literature meticulously: four tomes of Copleston's wonderful *A History of Philosophy*, almost two thousand pages in all.

The exam stands out as a specific memory, as witness to a time when no one was wondering whether didactics should play a role in university education. I have written about it before:

> *The professor, looking somewhat disconcerted, entered the lecture hall, grabbed a piece of chalk, thought briefly and then wrote three names on the blackboard: Kant, Hobbes and Mill. This was the exam. No one dared to ask the professor what we were supposed to do now. This was apparently how exams went, and so we tried to write beautiful essays – as systematically and inspiringly as we could – in which we processed everything we knew about these Great Thinkers.*[31]

I got an F for the exam. My world collapsed – a cliché, I know, but it was true in this case. This was the world I wanted to belong to; I had studied seriously, and yet I hadn't passed. I had been found wanting. Apparently, there was no place for me in academia. So what now?

It wasn't like I'd never had a low mark before. My entire time at secondary school was filled with ups and downs; plenty of good grades on my Christmas report, followed by mostly low ones at Easter and a warning that I needed to buck up my ideas unless I wanted to be moved into a lower stream. From then on, I did my best until the end of June so that everything ultimately turned out fine.

But failing Schuhmann's course was the first really bad mark that I didn't understand. In secondary school I had always been able to see why I had been given a low mark. Somehow I had always known that I had not made a serious effort. But now, after having read the two thousand pages by Copleston, my notes from the intriguing lectures, my serious dedication... I had worked so hard for this. And yet? It didn't occur to me to ask Prof. Schuhmann to elucidate as to why he had failed me. Of course not. In those days there was no such thing as reviewing your own exam. The idea itself was preposterous.

I stumbled through the summer. Part of me was trying to forget it all, travelling to Norway with a group of friends, and part of me was trying to become a philosopher, working on an essay on Heraclitus and Sartre. I was thoroughly enjoying this, especially as there was no literature available yet in which these thinkers were compared to one another. I had to do my own thinking, alone, and I loved it. I was also revising for my Modern Philosophy resit, full of doubt and with a faint awareness of an unthinkable future if I didn't pass. This future was not even bleak or empty, but completely without shape or content. It was a void.

And then it was resit time. Prof. Schuhmann performed the same act, but this time it was Berkeley, Nietzsche and Descartes on the board. I got a B-, so I was able to continue my studies, and perhaps I belonged after all. I honestly couldn't see any difference in the quality of my efforts for both tests, but that didn't matter now. I could stay on. And I have thought for a long time that it was a matter of luck, or simply good fortune – I still think so – and that Schuhmann had graded the second test more leniently; perhaps he had even been displeased by one wrongly chosen word in my first attempt, who knows?

Intriguingly, I think this luck is actually completely irrelevant. Of course, the B- made my career possible, as I later was also very lucky with my first, second and third career moves, which put me on a path towards what I am doing now: thinking about education in a generous and sympathetic academic environment. But actually, I don't think it was that B-, nor all the other luck that I had that helped me. It was that unexpected F that put me on the right track, that made me make contact with what I really wanted. What I wanted in a learning life, a lifelong learning life. I wanted to philosophise, and I wanted to work for it, I wanted to make an effort for it.

I certainly don't want to say that I pushed myself so hard that the B- and the career were a logical consequence. That's not what I mean at all. I know it is easy for me to speak, because I did get that B- and after that it was one stroke of luck after another. I actually want to make a different point. Good luck and bad luck are unevenly distributed, and merit has little to do with it. But coming face-to-face with your own responsibility in an environment that you don't control will give you an insight into what it means to be a learning being. This is of course a shocking insight: a life lesson, an insight that will need time and will take time to sink in, to be understood. It is an insight that is completely at odds with the goal-oriented interpretation of education that dominates contemporary thinking so utterly that hardly anyone can imagine good education that does not derive its value from the learning outcomes. This chapter is about this life lesson and the value of learning outcomes in education.

## DERIVED VALUE

I am finding it difficult to make sense of the following line of thought. As I argued in the introduction, we can start relatively safely with the observation that education is a societal arrangement in which the older and the younger generation work together to try to promote learning. This leads to two implications, which I tend to endorse. First, if learning is promoted, there will be more and better learning. And secondly, if there is more and better learning, this will be visible

in the learning outcomes. However, this *seems* to lead to a conclusion, which is indeed often drawn, that I simply cannot agree with and that I wish to contest. This is the conclusion that more and better learning outcomes are evidence of better education.

This conclusion is usually considered a matter of course in most reasoning about the quality of education. It is usually not even considered a conclusion that must be derived from a number of premises. Of course, there is a great deal of discussion about the *quality* of the measured learning outcomes, about the *nature* of measurable learning outcomes, and about the *significance* of these measurable learning outcomes in determining the quality of education. But when people are concerned about the quality of education, they are concerned about the learning outcomes of that education. At most there may be an objection to the dominance of the concept of 'measurable', suggesting alternatives such as 'becoming visible', 'manifest' or merely 'noticeable'. But in these discussions it is indisputable that learning outcomes are what education is all about.

There are three things that I fundamentally dislike about the conclusion that more and better learning outcomes are evidence of better education. The first is that the focus on learning outcomes encourages a purely instrumental view of the quality of education. Education becomes a means to achieve certain goals and is then in fact *no more* than just a means to achieve these goals. We may disagree on the goals we would like to attain through education and the goals that we feel that education should achieve. And we can disagree on how education should be developed, designed and deployed. But it seems that we really aren't allowed to disagree on the fact that education is a means. That's just it, apparently. Education serves a purpose. Full stop. It's an instrument.

This means that education only has a derived value, and this is the second thing I dislike about the conclusion. The mistaken view that what makes education worth something, what enables you to talk about *good* education, is the value we can attach to, or recognise in, whatever outcome education is contributing to.

Let's compare this to the value of any other instrument, for example a hammer. A hammer is worth something because you can hit nails with it. A hammer is a good hammer if it allows you to hit nails successfully. But if there are no more nails to be hit or if another instrument has been developed that allows you to hit nails even better, then the hammer is considered to be of no further value in and of itself. There may be a place for it in some nostalgic museum or other, like for yesterday's telex and fax machines. Of course you could call the new instrument 'Hammer 2.0', but there may come a time when getting the job done with that new instrument has become so different that you don't want to call it a hammer anymore because this new instrument – a pneumatic stapler for example – is used in a way that no longer resembles the hitting of nails. Think how sending an email has completely taken over the function of the telex machine and has thus made the telex completely obsolete. A telex machine turned out to be an instrument that was only of value during a certain time period.

In a similar vein, Ken Robinson states that today's education is a nineteenth-century tool.[32] At the time of the industrial revolution, there was a great demand for disciplined people who were able to do monotonous work. Our education has been providing such people, but these people are no longer needed in the twenty-first century. Thus, our education has become worthless, an unnecessary instrument that should be relegated to a historical museum.

By now, Robinson's message has really had an impact in the world of education, but that doesn't mean that the conclusion has now been drawn that education is worthless. We think that education actually has more and different goals than producing disciplined factory workers. As a result, our education remains valuable, or it should become valuable again, because we have to understand that our education basically serves three purposes. Gert Biesta identifies these purposes as qualification, socialisation and subjectification.[33] This trinity can now be found all over the place, and in its ostensible clarity it now dominates all the thinking about good education. But in

doing so, the new thinking about our education only reinforces the tacitly self-evident idea that education has only a derived value. It is an instrument that derives its value from the value of the goals it helps to achieve. In my view, this flies in the face of the real value of education, no matter how important and valuable qualification, socialisation and subjectification are.

There is a third reason why I dislike the conclusion that education is all about the learning outcomes. If we think that the value of education can be derived from the value of the learning outcomes, it distorts our view of education, our relationship with education, and our understanding of education. If education is indeed a societal arrangement in which the older and the younger generation are involved with each other and in which they jointly try to make room to promote learning, then we should not try to base the value of that intergenerational experiment on the value of the learning outcomes. I am arguing that education is valuable *in itself*, and it is important to argue this, because we will fail to acknowledge what is so beautiful, important and valuable about that intergenerational experiment if we regard it as a production tool for learning outcomes.

A first, quick and intuitive way to make clear that something is wrong with such a purely instrumental, goal-focused view of education is the thought-experiment of 'pill or journey'. This thought-experiment is about the question whether we would rather not do something if there was a pill that would produce the same result. For example, I would like to be able to play the accordion, but to date I am daunted by the effort it would take to learn to play the accordion. If there was a pill that would give me the ability to play the accordion immediately after ingestion, I would certainly take it as soon as possible.

However, I also like to solve difficult sudoku puzzles, but don't see any value at all in a pill that would make me immediately, without any effort, see how to solve a new sudoku puzzle. Actually, there is already an equivalent of such a pill: most sudoku booklets have the solutions at the back. Of course, there's no point in looking up which

numbers go in which boxes as I am interested in the journey, in the effort, rather than in the result. Even though I must strive for the result so that I can go on the journey, achieving the result is also always the end of the fun. I would love to take a pill for drawing up a difficult budget or for fixing problems with my car, but clearly not for solving a sudoku puzzle or reading a novel (take a pill and the book is finished!).

If we think we can understand the value of education in terms of learning outcomes, then we are regarding education as an activity that could be replaced by taking a pill. I am quite convinced that there are quite a few pupils and students who would like to replace the lion's share of the education they are following by taking a pill. At the same time, I am also absolutely convinced that those who wish to do so are victims of a hollow view of education. In education, it is not about the outcome, in the same way as solving a sudoku or reading a novel is not about the outcome. But what *is* it all about then?

Clearly, there is a reason why I have named the thought-experiment 'pill or journey'. It is pill or journey, so if education is not about the pill, it must be about the journey. Quite. As the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It is not the destination, it's the journey". Nevertheless, even with the emphasis on the journey, there is plenty of opportunity to completely misunderstand the relationship between journey and destination. That is what the next section is about.

## THERE'S A CRACK IN EVERYTHING

In 2014, a prominent Dutch newspaper published an opinion piece in which I discussed my concern about the risk-averse advice that we offer our children to try to protect them from adversity, namely the advice to start their adult life with the highest possible education. I blamed us for trying to fool our little princes and princesses into believing that we, and they themselves, were able to guarantee them a successful life. I called it a misleading idea because

> *we all know, once we have been around for a while, that we learn the most important things later in life, that we learn most from our own mistakes and that we sometimes need to fall very hard and be in serious trouble to find the intrinsic motivation to learn our lesson.*[34]

I wrote that the best thing we could do, if we do indeed believe that we should teach our children an important life lesson, is to let them make their own mistakes. I still believe that this is true. Nevertheless, I hope that we will reject this suggestion as a *non sequitur*, as the antecedent is untrue: we don't have to teach our children how to live their lives. In fact, we are even unable do this. Even if a hard fall is the best way for a child to learn how to live his own life, and even if it is true that – as I wrote in that piece – falling down is the beginning of getting up, it doesn't follow that we should deliberately push our children over.

This is an interesting educational paradox, one that resembles that other, better-known paradox, the paradox of educating to autonomy.[35] This educational paradox arises as soon as we think about learning – and in particular about learning to live – in terms of learning outcomes, and we are thus misled into thinking that education is fundamentally an instrument. It is not! Education is not a tool for producing learning outcomes. In order to be able to substantiate this claim well, it is important to understand the difference between a learning goal and a learning outcome.

There are a wide variety of learning outcomes. A three-year-old child can learn to recite the six times table, just like she can learn a song. If she practises long enough, she will be able to give the right answer if you ask her what comes after seven times six; it's a bit like teaching a parrot to 'speak'. You could call that a learning outcome. The skill with which a woodworker can make a dovetail joint could also be called a learning outcome, and so could the way a Tour de France cyclist knows when to accelerate or an ice dancer knows how to do a pirouette. The same can be said of a microbiologist's insight into

the reactions of our autoimmune system. And so we can continue, until we reach life lessons, which are as painful as they are liberating. For example, my own realisation when I was given that F for Modern Philosophy was that as a learning person you bear responsibility for your own life in an environment that you cannot control. These are all learning outcomes, but it is clear that there are great differences between one learning outcome and another. And we may wonder whether bringing all these developed skills and insights under one umbrella term, the 'learning outcome', actually adds anything meaningful to our understanding of them.

Allow me to state the obvious: no, it doesn't add anything new if you refer to such insights and skills as learning outcomes. Of course, they are learning outcomes, in the same way as chess, Formula 1 racing and water polo are sports, and camper vans, bridges across the Seine and hotel suites are possible sleeping arrangements in Paris. Putting these under one heading is making them suitable for the same function in a particular practice. In the case of learning outcomes, this is the function of 'goals' in teaching practice. Unfortunately, this interpretation of the concept of goals distorts our understanding of education.

A learning outcome is typically a goal in the sense of result: that which is left behind, or remains, or is realised when a particular action has been completed. However, this is not the only meaning that the concept of goal can have in the context of intentional action. Aristotle pointed this out when he made the distinction between *poiesis* (which means something like 'making') and *praxis* (which means something like 'acting').

To explain this difference, I often like to use the distinction between painting and dancing. When you paint, you paint *something*, namely a picture. That's what you usually do it for: you paint in order to make a picture. This picture is the intended result of painting – the goal, the outcome. It is from this picture that the activity of painting derives its meaning. In other words, the activity of painting has a natural ending because it is always painting a particular picture which

will be finished at some point. You may feel that it is unsuccessful as a picture, but at some point you will still have to stop the activity of painting. Even if you are only interested in the activity, the painting, and you don't care much about the picture that is being produced, the picture still forces you to end your current painting session as soon as the picture has been finished. Of course you can immediately start a new picture, but you can't continue painting the current picture, because then you will mess it up and after a while it will even stop being a picture. Painting is a matter of *poiesis*.

However, when you are dancing, you are not producing anything tangible. You are creating a dance, of course, but that dance is nothing more than the performance of the dancing. You don't dance to provide a dance. That is impossible. As soon as you stop dancing, the dance has gone. A dance is not a finished product – no outcome or result – and therefore dancing as an activity has no natural ending. You may have had enough or simply stop because you're tired of it, or because the music stops, but the dance can't force you to stop dancing. By no means am I suggesting that dancing is worthless, or has no purpose, but it does mean that the value of dancing is not in any way located in or determined by what is left after the dancing. The activity of dancing is all about the dancing itself. It has its purpose in itself. Dancing is a matter of *praxis*.

This distinction between painting and dancing – or between *poiesis* and *praxis* – can be used to further clarify the difference between an activity that could possibly be replaced by a pill, an activity that may be considered a means, and an activity that really needs to be appreciated for its own sake. If it's about the picture rather than about the painting, a pill could be useful to you. However, if it is about the activity of painting rather than about the picture, a pill will be of no use to you. Painting may also be appreciated for the activity itself as well as for the result: combining *poiesis* and *praxis*.

That is exactly the difference with dancing. You can only appreciate dancing as the activity itself. A pill would be utterly pointless. It would mess up the whole thing. The purpose of dancing is not to be

understood as a result, an outcome, a finished product that remains or is left behind after the dancing. The purpose of dancing is the dancing itself.

Please note the distinction between the dancing you do in preparation for a performance and the dancing you do during the performance. It is about the latter, about performing the dance that has a purpose in itself. The main conclusion we can draw from this is that the relationship between dancing and the purpose of dancing should not be seen as a relationship between means and end. Dancing is not a means. Dancing has a purpose – an 'end', 'intention', 'meaning', the reason for doing it – but dancing is not the means to achieve that end. Dancing is a *praxis*. It has no derived value. Perhaps it has no value at all; I'd like to keep that option open. But as far as dancing has value, it has this value in itself, for itself. I would like to draw the same conclusion about education. Education is valuable – if indeed it is valuable – in itself, for itself, and not because it is a means to achieve an end.

However, if we conceptualise education as the activity that people undertake to achieve certain learning outcomes, to achieve learning goals, then there is a paradox in the case of life lessons: we should start encouraging behaviour that we would rather avoid, such as failing to intervene when our children are about to fall flat on their faces. But even more important than this paradoxical encouragement is ignoring the impossibility of proposing a life lesson as a learning goal. A life lesson is a learning outcome, but not a learning goal.

This is an important insight for those who want to reflect on learning and education, an insight clouded by the use of the word 'learning outcome', because life lessons are perhaps the most important learning outcomes we can imagine. This certainly applies to my unexpected F for Modern Philosophy, which taught me a valuable life lesson. At the same time, it is as clear as day that prior to that exam no one could have imagined the life lesson that this mark had in store for me. And it is absolutely not the case that I had been failed for the

exam in order to teach me a life lesson. Life lessons are learning outcomes but not learning goals.

Therefore, there is something wrong if thinking about learning immediately links learning to learning outcomes and learning goals. In his song *Anthem*, Leonard Cohen sings about breaking this link (at least that is how I interpret this chorus):

> *Ring the bells that still can ring*
> *Forget your perfect offering*
> *There is a crack, a crack in everything*
> *That's how the light gets in*

To me, the message is a simple one. There are important life lessons in everyone's life, lessons that allow people to build a good relationship with themselves, allowing them to live the life that is the only one they will get: their own life. These lessons matter. And these are learning outcomes, gained at the moment that something breaks, that a crack is formed in their existence, a crack that lets in the light. Even though these lessons are learning outcomes, they are not produced, they cannot be produced, they are not the result of an effort that is intended to generate these learning outcomes. No one will be able to have someone produce that crack so that they gain insight. Life lessons cannot be regarded as an end, or a learning goal, just as there are no educational activities that relate to these types of life lessons as a means to an end. If something really matters, if something can be learned that really matters, then there is no end-means relationship; in other words, what is learned is not something that was intended or could be intended to be learned, and what is being learned was not a learning goal.

## PUSHING FOR RESULTS

During their education, children easily grow to be three, four and sometimes even five times as old as they were at the beginning of their schooling. For young people, school is their life, for years and years. And all the while they are learning, especially as learning is

living, and living is learning: acquiring new habits, revising and transforming existing habits, reinforcing confirmed habits. Over and over again; day in, day out.

Of course, children aren't intentionally learning all this time. Teachers know this: twenty minute attention spans, and that is it. At most. After that, there needs to be a moment of laughter, of looking out of the window, of daydreaming. You include such moments when you prepare a lesson. You take them into account when you let children work independently. Such moments are necessary – but it is time that is unbillable, as they call it in other professions. How much unbillable time is there in education? Loads! There are so many unbillable hours that school governors should draw a lesson from this. I know a great example, from a Year 8 class at secondary school.

The pupils had been given an assignment for Science. As group work, they had to take certain measurements of things at home. They were given about ten weeks, from straight after the Christmas holidays until Easter, so that they would be able to study slow processes. The pupils had to keep a log. At the end of that period, after Easter, the class would organise an exhibition for their parents, where the pupils would present their test set-ups and their findings. The log would also be shown so that everyone could see what they had done during this ten-week period.

I have forgotten any other details, but I remember the unforgettable impression that one log made when I visited the exhibition as a parent. It was a notebook, with two columns. The first column contained all the dates of the period in question from beginning to end. Neatly written out in full – every day was there. The pupil had really made an effort: 'Monday 10 January', 'Tuesday 11 January', 'Wednesday 12 January', and so on until 'Friday 25 March'. The second column contained the pupils' activities for that day as part of their measuring task.

The log was great. It made me laugh out loud during the exhibition. For Monday 10 January, the entry read 'designed set-up'. It was

written down resolutely. It was clear that the group of pupils had figured out what they were going to measure and how they were going to approach this. For Tuesday 11 January, the entry was 'nothing'. The word was written down immaculately: 'nothing'. This same word was the entry for Wednesday 12 January, Thursday 13 January, and so on until Thursday 24 March. The words were all there. I am not joking: seventy-two times 'nothing'. Gradually, the words had been written down less neatly and more hastily. Perhaps the log had been kept for the first few days, and had then but been put aside. It was probably recovered on Thursday 24 March, the day before the assignment had to be handed in. The entry for Friday 25 March read 'set-up made, experiment performed and measurement carried out'.

I have no idea whether the pupils learned anything from this assignment. They probably won't even remember it themselves. They seemed to have had no idea what the intention or meaning of the log was. Yet this assignment generated an impressive learning output: *I* will never forget it! And now that I am reporting it, the learning outcome may well be many times greater and may reach far beyond what the Science teacher could ever have imagined. Pupils spend so much time at school, and so much time of that time is not spent on intentional learning, and this is fine because that is not what school is all about.

For young people, school is a community. It is a place where you simply get older together every day. This is precisely why there is so much misunderstanding in the typical concerns about how Covid-19 is affecting education. All too often the focus is primarily on the learning delay. As if that is what matters most when the schools close down. School, even for concerned helicopter parents, is also just a day-care centre, a place where you can leave children behind, in good hands. School is, to put it somewhat cynically, mostly out-of-school care. And this is fine. There is absolutely no need to change this. It is precisely for this reason that it is crucial not to base the value of education on learning outcomes or to regard education as a means to achieve learning goals. What Covid-19 has taught us is that

parents need schools as day-care centres, that they need time for themselves to be good parents, and that children need schools to learn to be part of the larger community.

Learning is living and living is learning, and therefore a community is always also a learning community. This concept – and similar ones such as the 'learning organisation' and the 'community of practice' – has been making waves in education for some time now.[36] On the one hand, this is quite right because a school offers wonderful room for intergenerational interaction, for the older and younger generation to promote learning together. But on the other hand it is also asking for trouble because the concept of education is in the hands of the older generation, who usually unthinkingly embrace three confusing misconceptions, namely that pupils learn and teachers teach, that learning outcomes are learning goals and that education is a goal-directed activity.

I have already said enough about the first two misconceptions in this and previous chapters, and therefore I will confine myself here to a few observations about the sense of goal-directedness that is so damaging to education. Let me first of all be clear and honest: of course there is intentional learning. And sometimes it is important and indispensable. If I want to learn to play the accordion, I really have to sit down and practise chords. The same goes for arithmetic, reading and writing: I learn these things by explicitly and purposefully investing time and effort. This also applies, albeit to a lesser extent, to the topography and history of my home town, of the UK, and of Europe and the world. And we can argue about learning abstract columns of French words by rote – wouldn't it be better to live in Paris for a while and make the language your own by actually using it? In any case, intentional learning is definitely one possible form of learning.

But here's the confusion: intentional learning is not the same as working towards a goal. And above all: education is not the sum total of goal-oriented learning processes. Primary school teachers understand this very well. They know that it will not lead to anything if,

after twenty minutes of attention, you allow a minute of relaxation and then make the pupils work purposefully for another twenty minutes. Seven years is just far too long for that. Children leaving primary school have grown more than twice as old as they were when they started. These are whole lives, lives in which they have learned an incredible amount, day in, day out, because living is learning.

But the time spent not working purposefully on an assignment is so much longer than the time spent learning purposefully. Remember that log: seventy-two days of 'nothing' between two days on which they did some work. If you look at those numbers from the point of view of a manager wondering how all those hours could be billed... well, then you would not be looking at them in the right way. This is because we are talking about education here, about intergenerational interaction, and about growing older together. We are not talking about achieving results.

Adults who populate educational institutions and who see their pupils coming and going as passers-by over the years run a great risk if they get acquainted with the educational concept of a 'learning community'. There is the risk that they will not be able to 'take the pupil seriously as a partner', as it is sometimes so aptly put. These adults want too badly to make it work. They want to teach. They want to set learning goals, generate learning outcomes, push for results. As a result, they don't see the gift that is right in front of them, up for grabs. If only they were to learn to let go of their students.

## IT IS NOT EVEN ABOUT THE JOURNEY

It is time to recap, to take stock of this chapter, and of the first part of this book. I have come a long way and I hope I have managed to take you along with me. I have tried to stir up your emotions. At times I tried to provide arguments, but they were never conclusive or decisive in a convincing way. I have been trying to make you think, encouraging you to ask questions about presuppositions and assumptions

that we usually tacitly take for granted. I have been trying to show you the distortions we inflict on our children because of how we feel about education.

I am glad you have kept reading all the way through to here. Your copy of this book may be full of red marks by now, and you may even have thrown it into a corner occasionally. I may have annoyed you, and left you too little room to disagree with me. But since you have held out with me until now, there is also a chance that you have experienced enough recognition, that you have seen things in a new light that you yourself had also noticed. Perhaps you couldn't find the right words for these things. Perhaps you had never seen them so clearly. Perhaps I showed you some new elements of what you already thought you knew. Perhaps I touched you, reminded you of your own pain or your children's pain. Then I hope I haven't encouraged you to look the other way.

It may have helped that this is a book. After all, books are patient. They adapt to the pace of the reader. You can go back, you can put the book away and pick it up again when it suits you. You can reread passages. And again. Time – your time and your reading speed – plays a key role when you are learning, as it does when you are living. We have plenty of time these days, as we live to an older age than ever before. Nevertheless, especially in education, we act as if we do not have enough time for anything. Why the rush? Put this book away if you really need to do something else urgently. I have all the time in the world.

In this chapter, I have questioned the total dominance of an instrumental, goal-oriented view of learning. Perhaps the most important conclusion that I would like to draw at the end of this chapter is this: learning happens. We have to give learning a chance to happen. We shouldn't be too much on top of it. We shouldn't want to force it. And this learning is meaningful and worthwhile in itself. It's not about the outcome, it's about the learning itself, about this learning taking place. It's not about what's left at the end. This is mainly related to the fact that all ends are arbitrary, no more than temporary delays

in an ongoing event, a moment that may help our thinking somewhat, but that thus also tempts us to interrupt the progress of our living and learning. You probably realise this if you know someone who, even though he has a driving licence, no longer dares to drive a car because he has hardly driven for years. Or think about what you remember about chemistry if you haven't done anything connected to chemistry since secondary school. You can also think of the anxiety among pupils who have revised for a test that suddenly has to be postponed by two weeks. They will have to revise everything again because they only did the work for the test, for that special moment when the learning outcomes can be collected. So what is so valuable about learning if it is not about the learning outcomes? This is a legitimate question and an obvious question in the present era, which is so utterly dominated by an instrumental view of evaluative issues.

This question will pop up in all sorts of ways in Part Two of this book. The present part has mainly been about the circumstances that make it so difficult to ask this question in a clear way. In Chapter 1, I challenged the dichotomy of human life, which suggests that learning happens in the first part of our lives and living in the second part. If we take this dichotomy for granted, then we cannot help but think that learning is a preparation for living and then the value of learning must be an instrumental one.

Chapter 2 was about another dichotomy, namely between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. This dichotomy also stimulates an instrumental interpretation of the value of learning, as it suggests that by learning you acquire a knowledge base that allows you to participate in social life.

Chapter 3 revolved around a third unfortunate dichotomy, namely between pupils who learn and teachers who teach. This distorts our view of learning by distorting the relationships between the older and the younger generation. As a result, members of the older generation expect too much of themselves, ascribe too much flexibility to themselves, and run up against their own frustrations with anger or anxiety.

In Chapter 4 I built further on these three deforming dichotomies by showing that if learning is isolated in education, it in no way helps pupils to build a healthy relationship with their own lives. As far as I'm concerned, this intentional learning means a decisive failure in our thinking about learning, a failure that I have tried to describe in this fifth chapter in terms of the infernal instrumental vision of learning – as if it is all about the learning outcomes.

The exploration of the five distortions undertaken in this first part has provided me with some traces of the formation that we – the older and the younger generation – are inflicting on each other. In the second part I will develop these tracks into a speculatively composed ideal educational system. If I were to be Education Secretary for one day, I might consider converting this book into a pill to be swallowed by anyone with some authority in education. However, I know I wouldn't do this because a pill shouldn't do the job and nor would it be able to. Let me, therefore, just be the author of this book, an author who follows Erasmus, engaging in politics by engaging in education,[37] by engaging in thought development.

In the same vein, Part Two works towards a change in mentality. It is an exploration of the formation that would be good for all of us, no matter how young or old we are. I propose how together we could develop an idea of what is worth paying attention to. After all, that is what intergenerational interaction is all about. That is what formation is all about: it is about making and finding a common viewpoint, a viewpoint that implies a triangular relationship, a rapidly branching, wide-ranging triangular relationship. As a writer, teacher or pupil – in fact simply as a fellow human being, a specimen of *Homo educandus* – I can see something worth paying attention to. I would like to show you this, whether it is the six times table, the location of Aberdeen, the origin of the word 'mentality', the example given by Erasmus, the difference between learning goal and learning outcome, or the triangular relationship that we need to learn to use in order to realise something together. To show you what I see, I need to point, I need to point out to you what I see. That is how teaching starts.

“Look,” I say, “there's a crack in that bowl.” “Ah, so there is,” you say, “you are right. Look, you can see some light shining through it.”

Of course, I can do my best to force others to see what I think is worth paying attention to. Especially as a teacher, I could try this. Maybe I can teach them to look at it in the same way as I do. Will they then see what I see? Will they see *it*?

One more anecdote, an old one that I heard from my father. My father was headstrong, just like me, and it must have been in this context that he told me about his final history exam. History was his favourite subject, understandably, so soon after World War II. It was an oral examination and the teacher asked him a question: I forget what it was about. Perhaps something about Churchill, about the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in the run-up to the second world war, or about the Weimar Republic. I can’t quite remember. The thing I do remember is the question from my father's history teacher. Excitedly, my father had given his answer to the question he had been asked. However, the history teacher was not satisfied. “Yes, but Adrian, what does *the book* say about this event?”

My father wouldn’t have known. He had read everything there was to be read about European history, but he didn’t remember exactly what was written in the course book. It was to be his only bad mark: for his best and his favourite subject. Somewhat wryly he was proud of it. Sadly, his history teacher never knew.

# PART II

# WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

# CHAPTER 6. A NEW MENTALITY

## THE LAST WORD BECOMES THE FIRST WORD

It is time for some uplifting chapters, and there are four of them in this book! As human beings, we cannot do without education, and nor would I want to do without it. Of course I have been complaining about the deformation that education is inflicting on us, but that is in fact simply a new attempt, a new call, a new invitation to become serious about education, but in my own way. You can choose to resist this, or to support it, and you can feel thwarted or inspired by it. Still, no matter how you look at it, our coexistence is formation from beginning to end: reformation, transformation, deformation – *formation*. Of course it matters *how* we form ourselves, but there's no denying that we do form ourselves, even if we *de*form ourselves.

In 1979 Pink Floyd sang bitterly, bravely and hopefully "we don't need no education," using the image of a wall that they wanted to break down so that we could finally be truly outside, where life is limitless, beautiful and free, and where no more formation is needed – but this is a misleading image. It is an eschatological metaphor, based on the idea of the End of Time and the Day of the Last Judgment. This metaphor has a long religious history: after the Fall of Man, life on earth is at best a valley of tears from which we can escape only through death. At this point, the promised heavenly life awaits us.

The idea of a definitive escape is found in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but it is also an idea from the Age of Enlightenment, and the idea has been firmly embedded as utopianism in our modern, secularised culture. Even elements of Eastern wisdom have been taken on board. The definitive escape is no longer a matter of transcending beyond this earthly valley of tears: heaven – that is, utopia – awaits us here on earth. We may be like larvae and caterpillars, but we will be able to attain Enlightenment, spiritually on our own or collectively thanks to science and technology. We will be transformed, and

will transform ourselves beyond recognition; in short, we will go through a complete metamorphosis. And then...

Well, I think then we will still be stuck with the old idea that there needs to be a final breakthrough to attain a truly free, perfect life. However, we can only conjure up a somewhat hollow image of such a life. *And they lived happily ever after* – and then the credits of the romantic comedy rapidly liberate us from our lack of imagination.

The desire for a definitive breakthrough leading to a utopian, perfectly happy life is certainly not my cup of tea. My aversion has nothing to do with the awareness that we must be realistic: as if I would agree with the pessimists who are so eager to hear that there is a direct link between gloom and wisdom! No. I am an optimist. I have an incorrigible zest for life, and this is why I keep seeing opportunities: actual, genuine opportunities. Obviously, that's all they are: opportunities, not realities. But as opportunities, they are real, facts that demand exploration as well as curiosity, which is exactly what education is all about. Opportunities offer hope, they fuel our expectation of happiness. They stimulate formation, the movement in the here and now. To me, this is the crux: the ability to think of the here and now as something that is in motion, that is intrinsically *temporal*, that exists in time, that passes, but that therefore also lasts, expands, and grows.

However, utopists want to stop time; they long for an end point, a final result, so that they have finished and they can close things down. The utopists in our society seem to think that moving, developing and growing are simply ways of preparing yourself, as if these actions are not what it is really about, as if it is really about what comes after, something that is stable, that is finished, that remains constant.

I fully understand the feeling. When I was nine, I loved geography, particularly maps, charts and atlases, and my father gave me an old map of the city of Utrecht, where we were living. Clearly not everything was on the map. Whole neighbourhoods were missing, even

our own neighbourhood. It dawned on me that at the time no final map of Utrecht could be made, as large parts of our neighbourhood were still under construction. This made me uneasy, especially when my father, who worked for the council, told me that there were many more building plans. I realised that the city might never be finished, that our city was some kind of gigantic organism that could never be conclusively captured on a map. This troubled me. The beautiful maps in my atlas would age. At some point, I would no longer be able to see where everything was, perhaps never fully know what the world really looked like in its entirety.

Utopists are overly fond of paper. They have been deceived by their education, and they have made the transition from the living conversation to the written word. They have come to love the orderliness and immutability of the written word. They have come to believe that there actually *is* a last word, a definitive truth that can be entrusted to paper, which can be written down, and which then exists, as an absolute, unchanging Truth, with a capital T. It is the utopists among us who love degrees, who love people to round off study programmes, who like to see graduates leave university. It is the utopists who want to stop the learning.

In my ideal educational system there is no place for utopists. Well, of course they are welcome. I don't want to exclude anyone, but in my educational system they will have to learn to cope with the constant flow of new events that constantly require further exploration. They will have to get used to the positive habit in my system of warmly accepting every last word as the first word of the next conversation. They will have to get used to the lack of degrees, to the fact that you will never be able to leave education in this new system. My new system is going to be a bit like *Hotel California*: "You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."

Once you understand how my educational system works, you will also understand that you would never *wish* to leave it, at least not after your finals, not because you have finished learning. It isn't because you accept that you have been decisively defeated that you

wish to stay here. Certainly not. Rather, it is because you realise that in my educational system there is no such thing as 'decisively defeated'.

You could compare it to eating. Of course you regularly stop eating. It often happens that you have definitely had sufficient, and perhaps you really don't have room for dessert anymore. Your host might possibly be able to tempt you with coffee and a tasty praline afterwards, but it is out of the question that you would begin all over again with a starter. After all, enough is enough! But even then, even when you have eaten more than enough, even then you have *not really finished eating*, of course. Completely done eating: you would not know what that means. When it comes to food, there are no utopists. And in my educational system it is the same with learning. At times, you may have had enough. Of course. But even then you will get hungry again, you will feel like some more exploration and you will be ready for a new lesson. And this will go on for the rest of your life.

I am well aware that the world of education is divided, that there is a great deal of commotion, and that there are a great deal of opposing views and inclinations. Various parties vehemently state that things need to change and that they know exactly how, and immediately they point enthusiastically and confidently in all sorts of different directions. For less assertive people, this is all extremely unsettling and their voices can also be heard, asking whether we can finally stop all this innovation. Can we just be done, please?

I recognise the desire to stop this constant innovation and, even though I don't know whether I understand it, I certainly think that I can identify two different attitudes in this desire. The first is a utopian attitude, a desire for a final solution, so that we have simply finished for all time. The second is the attitude of a person who has just finished eating and who now really needs some undetermined time to digest his meal in peace.

These two attitudes should not be seen as one. We must get rid of the utopian desire. It is not a match with life as it distorts our

perception of what makes life meaningful, and as it places that meaning outside – and in the original eschatological sense: after – life. The second attitude is a call for peace and quiet, for time for reflection, for stopping the rat race that is constantly spurring us on. I would like to grant everyone this peace and quiet. So just put this book aside if it's getting too much for you. It's a book: it is patient. At some point, you will feel the desire to continue. Or you won't. This isn't a cliffhanger. I am simply granting your attention the freedom to go where you want it to go, so that it will never be held hostage again.[38]

I hope you take your time and will feel hungry again. I hope you will then realise that you don't want a definitive solution, but instead you want good education. I think that is what we all want, including the enthusiastic know-it-alls who have already determined which way we should go. Of course, I am also one of these know-it-alls, but I sincerely try to keep realising that I cannot do this alone, that I cannot determine the direction on my own. I cannot even write my story on my own, because you, reader, always need to resuscitate my story for it to be a story at all. And then it is not *my* story anymore, it has become *our* story. I therefore hope that you will recognise and confirm my analysis of the following anecdote about learning to ride a bike, so that it will become *our* story – a story that we can use together to explain our vision of what good education should be.

## RIDING A BIKE

I learned to ride a bike in an attic, on a minute bike, in winter when it was too cold to play outside. My friend's older sister had got it into her head that she was going to teach me how to ride a bike. They had an empty, dark attic, just like at our house. I must have been about three and a half and I don't remember much about it. Some vague images and warm memories of his sister, who was already so grown up in my eyes, even older than my sister, although she can't have been much more than eight years old.

I imagine seeing my friend, Pieter Bos, sitting under the sloping roof. He understands that I will be the one learning to ride a bike and all he can do is watch. He's too small, a whole year younger than me. It has just come back to me that his sister's name was Elly.

I can't have had much more than a few yards. The sister, Elly, keeps putting me on the bike, pushing me, walking alongside me and holding my shoulder. I kick the pedals around with my legs and wobble with the handlebars. My bike doesn't have stabilisers, but by the time spring comes I have mastered cycling and can cycle back and forth behind the houses: from Pieter's garden to ours, and back again.

I don't have a clue how I actually learned to cycle up there in that attic. But I do remember how I taught my children to ride a bike. You put them on the saddle, hands on the handlebars, feet on the pedals. You push them and keep them stable and upright. In other words, you organise a cycling scenario in which you put your child in the position of the cyclist, as I was once hoisted into an Easter Bunny costume at the local shopping centre and sent out to meet the children. I had no choice.

What is interesting about learning to ride a bike is that there is such a clear, easy to define position, in which the only thing a child can do is *cycle*. It is also interesting that the person who teaches the child to ride the bike is explicitly not in the cyclist's position. You don't teach a child to ride a bike by demonstrating it. Of course, the child must be able to imagine what it looks like when someone rides a bike. In that sense, you may well have presented an example to the child, but it is not important that it is *you* who has set your child the example of a person riding a bicycle. What you need to do is keep the child consistently in the position of cyclist. You do this as realistically as possible, which is why you give the child a push and let them experience stability. For the child, the trick is to experience their own stability on the saddle as a function with three variables: the speed, the direction and the posture with which they keep their centre of gravity above the saddle. They manipulate their speed with their feet on the pedals and their direction with their hands on the handlebars.

What you as a parent take care of is their posture, keeping their centre of gravity above the saddle, and help them experience that they can control the three variables themselves. You help the child experience how to do it themselves. That's all. And then instinct takes over.

Let's analyse this experience more closely, so that we can use it as a good metaphor for what happens in a lesson, that intriguing cornerstone of education. I will use the terms 'teacher' and 'pupil' as neutral terms for the representatives of the older and younger generation, respectively, who in a lesson populate the scenario and who have to successfully run the scenario with each other.

First, it is crucial for the teacher to organise a scenario in which the position of cyclist is available and can be occupied by the pupil. Of course you need a bike and a route for this, as well as plenty of time. Once the pupil is on the saddle, with his feet firmly on the pedals and his hands on the handlebars, he cannot really do much else than cycle, especially if he is kept stable and in place and is given a push. The bicycle, the track and the time are part of the preparation of the lesson. The implementation of the lesson consists of keeping the pupil stable and in place and starting to notice when he can take over and cycle independently. This is a key experience for the pupil: *he can do it himself*.

In order for the pupil to experience the position of cyclist, it is important to realise that the lesson takes place over time. We have two words for this: 'event' and 'experience'. The lesson is an event, like a cloud passing over the sun, a downpour, a football match, a meal or a television programme. Events are processes, taking place in time, with a beginning and an end, such that there is a time period in which the event has not yet begun, a time period in which the event is happening, and a time period in which the event has ended. Events occur, in time, at a certain moment or during a certain period of time, and even if you are not paying attention or are not involved, such an event just takes place.

But an experience is something else. An experience is a certain type of event, namely an event that is experienced by someone, for example by you. If you have an experience, you take part in that event as an experiencing subject. 'Taking part' is a verb that we can and must take literally in this case: an experience is a co-creation, an experienced event. Without your involvement, the experience would not have been an experience at all, but simply an unfolding event. But now that you are involved, now that you are participating as an experiencing subject, this event – from your perspective – turns out to be an experience.

To teach a pupil how to ride a bike, it is not enough to organise events in which the pupil occupies the position of the cyclist. It takes *experience*. The pupil must experience that he occupies the position of cyclist. He must experience the event; he must take part in the event as an experiencing subject. But only experiencing it is not enough. There is a third concept that must come into play: *action*. In order to learn how to ride a bike, it is not enough that the pupil has the experience that an event takes place in which he occupies the position of cyclist: he also has to actually *cycle*. It is by 'cycling', by turning the experience into an action, that the position of the cyclist becomes more than a mere position: he takes on the role of cyclist. He must experience that he is performing the action that is cycling and that he is fulfilling the role of cyclist as a result of his own effort, which is the effort of a cyclist.

This three-stage set up is crucial: event – experience – action. It is crucial because it tells us something about the role of the teacher. The teacher can organise a lesson, prepare it and teach it. Such a lesson is an event for the pupils. Something else is needed to make that lesson an experience, and in particular an experience for the pupils. The pupils must experience that they are taking part in the lesson, literally, as experiencing subjects. They take part in the lesson in the position of actor, the position of someone who can already do what they are still learning. They cannot do on their own what they are still learning. But they can experience what it would be like if they

had already learned this. They can be put on a bike – feet on the pedals, hands on the handlebars – to experience the stability of someone who can ride a bike.

However, the pupil cannot achieve that experience on his own, and neither can the teacher. This is really about cooperation, very basic, primitive cooperation; it is about sharing attention.[39] You need at least two people for that. The pupil needs to pay attention and the teacher needs to catch the pupil's attention and focus it on what the pupil would experience if he were able to do what he still has to learn. This is the first major breakthrough. Teacher and pupil have jointly focused their attention on what the pupil would experience if he could do what he cannot yet do: organise his own stability as a cyclist himself.

This requires a second breakthrough, from experience to action. For that, the teacher has to let go. In the case of riding a bike, the teacher literally has to let go, but also in all other teaching situations this second breakthrough requires that the teacher let go. The teacher has to allow the pupil to take on the actorship, so that the pupil can experience that he is acting, that he is doing it *himself*, whatever 'it' may be.

The cycling example is relatively clear and unambiguous. Sitting on a bike, hands on the handlebars, feet on the pedals, gaining speed and experiencing stability, there is little else that you can do but be a cycling cyclist. How Elly walked alongside me, and later I walked alongside my children: it all comes down to feeling that the child on the bicycle is taking over the stability from you. You feel the child cycling away from you. This is quite an experience: as a cyclist, long ago in that attic, but also as a father, left empty-handed but terribly proud. For the cyclist, once you have had the experience, the actorship becomes easy for you. The transition from experience to action is relatively small for a cyclist, as the physical context realises such a large part of the action.

It is less obvious for teachers. Once you experience that the pupil is cycling independently, it comes down to turning the experience into

what is a new action for you. From now on, you are a teacher of a pupil who knows how to cycle. Elly had finished teaching me, but if her motivation, as an eight-year-old girl, was to give and receive teaching attention to and from her little brother's friend, then you can imagine there was still a world of possibilities for her. There was still so much that she could try to teach me. But it would also be a difficult world for her, as three-and-a-half-year-old boys don't always like to be mothered. So a girl like Elly would have needed to find ways to teach me without giving me the impression that she was actually mothering me, which is, of course, quite a subtle difference.

As a father, this didn't bother me, as I had different responsibilities. Once my children were able to cycle, I had to inform them of traffic rules, make it clear to them how far they could go on their own bikes (which meant that their range turned out to be smaller than they had hoped), and so on.

The new domain of practice for my children also opened up a new domain of practice for me as a parent. This is the same for the teacher. Time and again. A pupil who knows his five times table closes certain domains of practice for you as a teacher and opens up others. In a good lesson, this permanent dynamic gets all the attention and scope. A lesson is a constant, dynamic realignment of actions, experiences and events. In it, domains of practice are constantly opened and closed, for both pupils and teacher. For pupils, domains of practice are closed, too. Once I had found out how to ride a bike, I could no longer ask Elly to push me and keep my balance, no matter how much I had enjoyed the attention and her soft, warm hands on my shoulders. Growing up also hurts.

## PIONEERING

In the second part of this book I will outline a completely new and different educational system. This is exciting. It feels like the first few feet I ever cycled myself, long ago in that attic. As a philosopher, over the years I have learned to analyse critically, and exposing incoherent

assumptions is my daily work. I was able to use this experience in Part I. Moreover, targeting the current school system has not proven very difficult. After all, it is on its last legs. It is long past its sell-by date – a sentiment that is often reiterated. In Part I, I heard myself as one of the many voices in a loud choir. But in Part II I will be singing solo; encouraged by my readers, but still, it feels like those first few feet without Elly's safe hands on my shoulders.

The first notes of my solo performance are a characteristic part of the experience that, as far as I am concerned, should be central to education. After all, education is an intergenerational experiment in which the dominant verb is not so much living, learning or teaching, but pioneering: arriving somewhere for the first time and trying to make the best of it. That is what pupils do during a lesson; they constantly encounter what to them is unexplored territory. They explore the reality of possibilities. In my educational system, this is also explicitly what teachers do. Even if they have perfectly mapped out their domain for themselves, and even if they have mapped out from A to Z how they are going to take their pupils from the beginning of the lesson to the end, it is true that they have never spent time together in *this* domain with *this* new pupil or with *this* new class.

By characterising the lesson in this way, I emphasise the social and temporal character of the cornerstone of education. The lesson is an event. It takes place, once, in the actual meeting between teacher and pupil, and the confrontation with concrete subject matter in a specific geographical, historical, conceptual, emotional and socio-cultural context. It is true for every lesson that this particular lesson has never existed before, and thus that something new is being explored and realised. As with learning to ride a bike, the lesson is literally made possible by the pupils who take part in it as an experience and who have to act accordingly, because they are being manoeuvred into the position of actor. They find themselves, so to speak, on the saddle with their hands on the handlebars.

This requires a specific attitude from the teacher. She doesn't *teach*. She also takes part in the lesson, just like the pupils. The teacher is

the first among equals, a pioneer with experience. The course is partly determined by the pupils, and therefore the course is also uncharted territory for the teacher. This means that the teacher should not pretend to know what her pupils know and what they do not know.

In my new educational system, the teacher doesn't try to stop her pupils from showing initiative. Even if the pupils try to imitate their teacher, they will have to try to learn to deal with the subject matter in an exploratory way. The teacher's approval may then not become an end in itself. It is the subject matter that challenges the pupils, and this in turn challenges the teacher. The subject matter is not repeatable. Learning goals cannot be formulated in advance as testable end terms in my new educational system. As a result, pupils will be stimulated and encouraged to develop their own critical judgment. Confidence and courage, that's what they need.

The relationship between teacher and pupil in a lesson makes it clear that in my new system education is not only a cognitive but above all a *volitional* process. The fact that you arrive together somewhere for the first time and that you are going to try to make the best of it by exploring possibilities not only appeals to the development of your cognitive abilities, but especially to the development of your will. And this leads to a development in every dimension of human existence.

I will distinguish three fundamental dimensions of human existence and thus arrive at three fundamentally different forms of education. The three have in common that they can all be considered variations of the lesson about learning to ride a bike that I described above. But furthermore, they are radically different from each other, so radically different that you can easily be mistaken if you talk about education in a general sense and then believe that you can say something essential about the general educational interaction between representatives of the younger and the older generation. This is why I will introduce appropriate and distinctive terms for each stage of education. In the first stage of education I will use 'pupil' and 'teacher' as

terms for the representatives of the younger and older generation, respectively. In the second stage of education I will use the terms 'junior' and 'mentor', and in the third stage of education the terms 'apprentice' and 'guide'.

My trio corresponds to the three phases that are distinguished in the current educational system: primary, secondary and higher education. By the way, I will give them other names, in particular because I have difficulty with the term 'higher' as it has a number of unacceptable connotations in social terms. But as human beings, we go through my three forms of education in three phases, just like we are used to doing at the moment.

My trio also corresponds with another trio that has become commonplace in the educational world. This is the distinction between qualification, socialisation and subjectification, derived from the work of Gert Biesta, who I mentioned in Chapter 5. This trio can be used – but only as a rough sketch – to characterise the three forms of education that I distinguish in terms of the specific challenges that come to the fore in these forms.

I agree with Biesta that all education – and therefore every lesson – always has an effect in all three target domains that he mentions. But I also think that in each of the three forms of education that I distinguish, one specific target domain stands out the most. And this results in an interesting phasing. Remember, however, that I am talking about internal goals here, not about retrospective learning outcomes. This is in line with my argument in Chapter 5 that education is a *praxis*, that it resembles dancing in not having an end product. With this caveat in mind, I argue that *socialisation* is the fundamental challenge in the first stage of education, *subjectification* is the fundamental challenge in the second stage of education, and *qualification* is the fundamental challenge in the third stage of education.

This is an order that we are not used to in our current school system. But in the following three chapters I will defend it as a perhaps surprising but also convincingly plausible view of phasing the challenges

in education. The first stage of education is mainly about teaching pupils to develop the confidence to speak out as members of our language community (socialisation), in the second stage of education it is mainly about young people learning how to play their own role (subjectification), and in the third stage of education it is about pupils learning how to develop as professionals in any direction that life demands (qualification).

What does that look like, and what will it require from teachers, educational institutions and society at large? This will be made clear in the following three chapters.

# CHAPTER 7. AUTOMATING YOUR CONFIDENCE

## AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF LOOKING AT PRIMARY EDUCATION

### SHAPING THE ZEST FOR LIFE

Small children are real 'learning monsters': tirelessly eager, greedy little Pac-Mans who want to know everything and want to be able to do anything, and who see a fascinating challenge in everything. Their appetite for learning is unrivalled. Evolutionary biologists have a good story about this, a story that I would like to share with you, though with a specific spin in some places.

In order to survive, human children depend on the care of adults for an enormous length of time. This results in years of interaction between the generations, giving children plenty of opportunity to feel at home in the meaningful, social habitat in which they were born. They learn to use their bodies. They learn to understand the language spoken by the people around them. They learn to shape their zest for life. They make an incredible number of connections between the impressions they obtain and the behaviour they gradually learn to display in response.

Of course, they don't do this consciously and they don't actively think about it – it simply happens. Connections in their nervous system arise, develop, change, strengthen and weaken, so that these young specimens of *Homo educandus* can be taken up in the scenarios in which their lives take place and in which they take part more and more. I discussed this phenomenon in Chapter 1: the learned perception-action couplings, as cognitive scientists call them. I call them habits: structured patterns of reaction.

By forming habits, people learn to deal with the continuous flow of events in which they take part. There's always so much going on all

the time, at the same time. Many of these events – but by no means all – are experienced by those involved. And many of these experiences – and again by no means all – are brought about by those involved. In every scenario, incredible numbers of events, experiences and actions take place simultaneously.

If you try to imagine this concretely and in detail, you will feel huge admiration for everything that we have learned so far. Just think of how – without even thinking about it – you get up in the morning, walk to the bathroom and brush your teeth. Then remember the baby you once were, who took months just to learn how to roll over. Think of the ease with which you can now go on a bike ride with a friend, avoiding pedestrians, speeding up because the traffic light is amber, watching out for cars that do not give you right of way and in the meantime chatting away to your friend about the film you saw last night. And then think about how long it took you to learn to ride a bike, like I did in that attic, how long it took you to start talking, how much time had passed before you knew how to order cinema tickets, not to mention that fabulous eye-hand-voice coordination that you now control completely naturally. If you start to think seriously about the number of neural connections that have been made to let you have the expectations and dispositions that you obviously have and that help you through everyday life in such a carefree manner, then it is easy to see that this number must be many times larger than the largest number you have ever learned to do sums with.

Fortunately, we do not have to worry at all about the formation of most of these connections. And certainly not at the level of the nervous system. As a baby, you roll over on your own at some point. Even if your parents don't encourage you at all with their enthusiastic tone of voice. But of course this is exactly what they do do, and normally that's more than enough to get you to crawl, to walk and to talk. As an adult, you can try all sorts of things to promote the construction of these kinds of connections, but you really don't need much more than just everyday common sense. This common sense develops under the influence of your

experiences and of the knowledge that you are constantly gaining, even if you're a psychologist and you are gaining knowledge of atypical neurological developments. But it is still everyday common sense. That is what is most useful in real time when you're dealing with children who are learning.[40]

Of course, there are children who do not learn to walk, who do not learn to talk, or who do not develop other common habits. And of course, there are all kinds of habits that children don't develop on their own, or that they don't develop correctly, or that they can't develop in their everyday, informal, playful, family environment. This leads to questions about what you should offer children in education to help them develop the habits that you think they need in order to live their lives properly. These are important questions that deserve serious attention. As far as I am concerned, these are fundamentally philosophical questions, questions about what people should know and should be able to do to live their lives *as human beings*.

Although these are questions concerning our educational system, I would certainly like to ask these questions in a broader sense. What we should offer children in our education is not an educational question, not a didactic question, not a developmental-psychological question, not a neuro-psychological question and not even an educational-pedagogical question. It is a philosophical question, a question in which the concepts of 'human being', 'human life' and 'humane life' themselves are called into question.[41] Even if you focus on a small problem, this broad, philosophical question will soon arise.

This is how it works for me. Just imagine a school whose management is worried about their pupils' reading skills. Suppose they wish to do something about the concerns that young people would rather play games and watch Netflix than read books. And suppose that they feel it is their responsibility to teach their pupils the joy of reading, and that they are wondering what the best way to achieve this would be. This is a didactical or pedagogical question that is undoubtedly just as interesting as it is tricky. But it is impossible for a philosopher to begin with such a question, it is impossible for a

philosopher to accept that this is the first question that should be asked. Why would it have to be about the joy of reading? What is wrong with gaming? Or with watching Netflix? Why does the school feel responsible? And why would this matter at this particular moment in time? And if it matters, why would this lead to the quest for the best possible approach? Are there course books that aim for the joy in reading? And are these successful? And what does it mean to say that they are successful? For whom? By whom? And thus I keep on asking questions. Completely as it should be, I think, because as soon as I stop asking, the reasons for my doing so will be random.

Can we teach a child habits without working towards core objectives? Of course we can. And we do it all the time, intentionally or unintentionally, with or without good intentions. This is what the entire first part of this book was dedicated to, and it is why I now want to work fully on fundamental questions, such as what people should know and should be able to do in order to live their lives *as human beings*. Of course, there is no quick answer to that, but as a philosopher I am not really interested in answers anyway, and I can't do much with plausible answers to questions that are too limited. Such answers only invite me to ask new questions, to ask so many new questions that I will soon be drawn back to that original big question: what habits do people need to develop in order to live their lives as human beings?

Over the years, I have come to love a few of the answers to this big question.[42] These answers provide the background to the outline of the new educational system that I am about to describe in this part. Central to this is the observation that we are a talking species, that together we form one language community. In this community, we are always dealing with several generations at the same time, the older and the younger generations. This entails loving, educational interactions, but of course also all kinds of misunderstandings and unpleasantness. After all, language not only brings us together, but it also separates us. This is why we need to develop common sense, need to learn to welcome our emotions and need to be able to adopt

an inquisitive attitude when necessary. A first central component of this common sense, as I have argued in my book *Don't be fooled*, is our autopilot.

## THE AUTOPILOT

As a pupil, for years you enjoy the creation and development of your good habits, of the marvellous autopilot that will guide you through everyday scenarios throughout your life. Just think of the three, six and seven times tables, and how naturally the numbers 18 and 42 come to mind when you think of 3x6 or 6x7. And look at the word 'class'. Have a good look and try *not* to see what it means, try *not* to see that it is a word, but a series of loose letters, or more extremely, an intricate pattern of very small black specks. I cannot do that. And you probably cannot do that anymore either, because your autopilot took over long ago. You merely read what it says, just like a Greek immediately sees what it says here: 'τάξη'.

This autopilot must first be developed and properly installed, so that children will go through daily life with such ease and agility that for the rest of their lives they can start to deal with what the rest of their lives will be about: that they can live their own lives and play their own roles. So what needs to be automated during those first few years? I'm not going to present any concrete ideas about that here and now. We can discuss these – with all people whose business it is to be concerned with educational science and educational management – as soon as we have a better understanding of the function of our autopilot, of our good habits, and of the expectations and dispositions that we develop. For this, we first need to better understand what automation is and how it works.

These days, it seems obvious that we need to consult neuroscientists to understand this, or perhaps scientists working on artificial intelligence and robotics. This may be a good idea, certainly in the long run.[43] But for our everyday functioning, we don't need such deep levels of exploration. Moreover, our fundamental expectations and

dispositions are normative in nature, as I made clear in Chapter 1, and it is still difficult for neuroscientists and robotics researchers to deal with normative dimensions, with these mutually attributable entitlements and obligations.[44] However, these are areas that the old-fashioned schoolmasters of yesteryear could cope with very well. They had an excellent understanding of the difference between 'reward' and 'success'. I'd like to expand on this.

Automating means developing habits, habits which become so firmly established in your body that they control your behaviour, even if you don't pay any attention to them and even if you would rather not exhibit certain automated behaviour in a given situation. Automated habits evade your conscious control. In a way they are similar to your heartbeat, your breathing or the reflexes you display when a doctor taps your patella with a reflex hammer. But unlike such physiological processes, automated habits are learned habits. Of course it is preferable if these are good habits, habits that you like having, because once established in your body they do their own thing, even if you don't want them to. As they are learned behaviour, they can also be unlearned or transformed, but this takes time, focus and energy. So it is better to develop only good habits.

Habits are developed by rewarding the behaviour you exhibit in a given scenario, and here, 'reward' can mean anything. An encouragement or compliment will do just as well as a sticker or a sweet. There are 'social' rewards, rewards that you receive from another person, and which you receive *as a reward*: encouragement, consent, approval, appreciation. There are also 'instrumental' rewards, rewards that you get by overcoming an obstacle in a scenario, by solving a problem, by circumventing a hindrance. Think of a baby learning to crawl to reach the toys that are far away. Or think of a computer game in which you can proceed to the next level if you have solved a certain problem.

The distinction between these instrumental and social rewards is interesting and quite fundamental to the beings that we are. Three differences are important here. Firstly, there is a difference between

instrumental success and social success. Secondly, there is a difference between a reward that is an indication of success and a reward that is the success in itself. And thirdly, there is a difference between what a child desires and satisfying that desire.

Of course, it is completely understandable if all these differences are making your mind spin. Nevertheless, children – even very small children – have a clear sense of what distinguishes these differences. I'll give you an example. Imagine that I am a child and you want to teach me to wash my hands before dinner. Let's suppose that you are my guardian, and you want me to develop this habit. How do you proceed? You will have to start by teaching me how to wash my hands. This is going to take quite a few years. Now, of course, you could do this at all kinds of random times of the day, but you will probably wish to do this more or less systematically before dinnertime. After all, that would be most useful, as you wish me to wash my hands before dinner, as this is sensible, healthy, and desirable. This means that you should naturally familiarise me with two regularities: I learn to wash my hands when you say so, and I learn to wash my hands before dinner. I probably don't see the connection between the two at all, any more than Pavlov's dog saw the connection between the sound of the bell and his own drooling. As neuroscientists say: *what fires together wires together*.

Right. I have now learned to wash my hands. I do so when you say it and I do so before dinner. It was necessary that you taught me, because I probably wouldn't have learned to wash my hands of my own accord. Why would I? But actually, you don't want me to wash my hands *because you say so*. This connection was only necessary to get the desired behaviour going – the behaviour that *you desired*. But what you really want is that once I know *how* to wash my hands, I will know *that* I have to wash my hands before dinner. And why? Because it is *hygienic*. There's a reason why you wish to teach me certain behaviour, and it is not a reason that is there for you, or that suits you better, but it is a reason that is there for me. It's good *for me* to wash my hands before dinner. I need to learn to make that

connection, too. I should *want* to wash my hands before dinner. Not because of the social reward, and not even for a reward at all, but because *I want to do it*. You will undoubtedly recognise the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The crucial challenge is to get me to want to wash my hands before dinner, to make me intrinsically motivated to do so.

So how does that work? How do you make that happen? Or better still, how do *we* make that happen, you and me together? The social success comes first: I learn to wash my hands, because you tell me to, because you encourage me and because you reward me for it. For me, the social success, your appreciation, coincides with the experience of feeling good. I am happy with your encouragement and with your kind and positive comments because your approval evokes a good feeling in me. Nature has done a great job here, as we can see in my brain. In situations like these, we can see rising levels of dopamine in my *nucleus accumbens*.[45] Thus there is a triple reward: you encourage me positively (the social reward), my hands are clean (the instrumental reward) and I feel good (the physiological reward).

You may be inclined to think you understand it now. You can see that there is intrinsic motivation: I want to feel good. I want the physiological reward, the dopamine shot in my *nucleus accumbens*. That is basically all I want, and because you manipulate me with your positive encouragement when you want me to wash my hands, my brain creates an unnatural, learned connection between washing my hands and the shot of dopamine. After all, what fires together wires together. I will mistakenly think that I want to wash my hands when in fact I only crave the physiological reward. This is a reductionist reasoning that you come across occasionally, but which nevertheless falls short as it shows too little insight into the social dimension of our existence, and thus also in the *normative* dimension of our existence.

Because if the neurological reward is all I intrinsically want, then why did I try as a baby for months to roll over? Why did I start crawling, walking, talking, and why did I want to feed myself? Why didn't I simply lie contentedly in my cradle, calmly waiting for the return of

that good feeling when my parents showed their parental love for me again? The answer is obvious, and it tells us a great deal about the distinction between my desire and the satisfaction of this desire. What satisfies me initially does not satisfy me sustainably. The first time I manage to roll over on to my stomach, it gives me a huge buzz: dopamine all over the place. But once it has become an everyday thing, rolling over doesn't satisfy me anymore. I want something different, something new. I want to explore my surroundings further. I want to be able to do more, perhaps something I see others do. And so a new desire is building up, a hope, an expectation: I want to crawl!

After crawling comes walking, talking, feeding myself and cycling. I want it all, and the reward is always huge. It is an instrumental reward: the thrill of being able to do something myself. It's like going to the next level in a computer game. In this sense, there is always a social reward along the way: that I now belong as a human being to a new domain of practice.

This is exactly how I managed to *want* to wash my hands before dinner. Not necessarily in the context in which you taught me. In that context, the whole business with the hands was a delay, an extra hurdle, which wasn't there at first and which cost me something without it giving me anything in return. But still I succeeded, even though the details have faded into the past. It may have taken me until I was 32 years old, when I had children of my own and had to lead by example. But I hope it was before that. Perhaps when I was together with my first girlfriend, or even before, when I was staying over at a school friend's house and wanted to make a good impression. The instrumental success became a social success. I didn't need this social success at home. Your appreciation wasn't enough for me: you would love me anyway. So once I had learned to wash my hands myself – and it was no longer just cool – the whole business before dinner was primarily annoying. However, at other people's houses it turned out to be a good habit to be seen washing my hands before dinner. It made me belong. And I belonged in a way that was also intrinsically

valuable to the healthy society that we realise together with others. Especially in this post-Corona era we have learned it the hard way: we know that a healthy society benefits from hygienic people who constantly wash their hands.

Time for a recap. There are social rewards and instrumental rewards. The approval and appreciation that you express when I wash my hands is a social reward. Getting hold of a toy by crawling towards it provides an instrumental reward. Both rewards coincide with a good feeling, a physiological matter of dopamine in the *nucleus accumbens*. The good feeling drives the creation of a habit: it leads to my autopilot developing and strengthening.

If the learning curve flattens, the good feeling will become weaker. The reward doesn't mean so much to me anymore, as by now I can do it on autopilot. My own conscious contribution, which would make me enjoy that reward, is diminishing. What remains is success, which is somehow a reward, but once this success has become a matter of course, it is no longer perceived as a reward. When I manage for the first time to turn a bar of soap around in my hands and put it back on the soap bowl without dropping it, it really feels amazing. Wow! But once I have done so a hundred times or a thousand times, then 'success' sounds rather like an overstatement. This is simply something that I can do. I do it automatically. This happens when I wash my hands. I can do it, but the actorship has completely disappeared from view. This is the work of my autopilot. Successful work, of course. But so totally successful that there are no longer any feelings of 'reward'.

Besides 'instrumental success', there is also 'social success'. This success can also coincide with and initially even be identical to the social reward. The fact that you appreciate and approve of me for washing my hands before dinner is a reward that I will really be able to experience as a sign of belonging, that I am as grown-up as you are, because – like you – I wash my hands before dinner.

Yet here, too, the weakening of the reward is imminent. After all, I will soon notice that grown-ups simply wash their hands before dinner without gaining any appreciation. So if you go on for too long with your approval, with your rewarding compliments, I am only going to feel that you are belittling me. Then my social success will not be a success at all. Social success is its own reward – that I can simply take part, as a matter of course, without having to be explicitly appreciated. This feeling is stronger when I get to eat at a friend's house and I wash my hands of my own accord. I quietly enjoy my own maturity those first few times. The reward may be wearing off, but the social success remains, of course. It has become a normative positioning. I take part. This is who I am. I am a hygienic person. I wash my hands before dinner. Obviously. This is not something we talk about. And the thing we don't talk about anymore is my autopilot, the habits that I experience and embrace as good habits. My autopilot helps me live the life I want to live, the life that tacitly shows my zest for life.

The teacher who helps his pupils develop their autopilot always moves in that social and practical space in which he can highlight and reinforce instrumental and social success. This is a matter of rewarding, guiding, encouraging and challenging. It requires sensitivity to the effort a pupil makes when he carries out a task as well as sensitivity to the extent to which that task is becoming self-evident to the pupil – so self-evident that the pupil begins to notice that his autopilot is taking over.

What happens to the pupil in that process is that his desire is increasingly going to focus on the task, so that there is a shift from social reward ("Well done!") to an instrumental reward (no errors in a series of sums) to a success that is his own reward (you simply know the four times table). This success often has both an instrumental dimension (reading a Level 2 book takes no effort at all) and a social dimension (you can work in a group on a history assignment).

The teacher can be assisted in all kinds of ways by methodology and testing. These can be great tools, but in no way can they replace the

sensitivity that a teacher needs in order to keep in touch with the pupil's zest for life – and his zest for learning. As a teacher, you need to be alert when working with these tools. They can hinder the contact between teacher and pupil, without anyone noticing. Compare this with a camera that hinders the contact between the tourist and the landscape. It does so without the tourist noticing. After all, she is busy recording what she will be able to see again at home. But this means that she does *not* see it twice, that she is *not* actually present twice.

Hence my reference to the schoolmasters of yore, who simply had to use their sensitivity. They continued to practise this sensitivity, so that they could recognise the difference between reward and success. After all, it's only about continuing to recognise and feed your pupils' zest for life. About giving them confidence. Then they will learn enough.

## LANGUAGE COMMUNITY

It is perfectly obvious in many ways that language receives an enormous amount of attention in education. People are talking animals, *zoa logika*. Even the ancient Greeks knew this. People live *in* their language – in a matter of speaking. Asked and unsolicited, they constantly comment on their own behaviour, explaining it, putting it into context, trying to make it understandable. People try to put their lives into words, over and over again. We are social beings and this means that we constitute a *language community*. This is why children learn to read and write. This is why they are familiarised with the textual dimension that is so characteristic of our language in our culture.

But language is much more than text, much more than words, than grammar, than syntax and than semantics. Language is fundamentally a practice, a *praxis*, a matter of pragmatism, even a matter of *living*. This is why Wittgenstein called language a form of life. After all, the words that become normal to us, that sound self-evident to

us and which we tacitly understand – these words form our lives. This can be on a global scale, such as the form evoked by big, abstract words such as 'freedom', 'equality', 'brotherhood' and 'democracy'. But it can also be on a much more specific, local scale, such as the typical English form evoked by words such as 'pub', 'Guy Fawkes Night', 'wit', 'Sunday roast', 'queueing' and 'sorry'. And of course there are even more local and characteristic forms, associated with your catchphrases, or with nicknames, terms of endearment and other specific jargon that is used without thinking in a particular group of friends or family. All these different forms of language are also forms of life in which children get to feel at home, languages that strengthen and shape their autopilot.

Feeling at home in our language is not only a matter of language, but also of maths. This seems to be different from language, and within the context of British primary education, maths is really something other than language, but within the context of the language community we form, maths is in fact a matter of language. Our twenty-first-century English language community has a deeply *numerical* character. This has to do with all sorts of things, with the dominance of money in our economy, the dominance of statistics in our news and the dominance of mathematics as the language of science in our knowledge society. If you cannot do sums, you cannot join the conversation, and you don't belong.

Ironically, there is a considerable debate in maths education at the moment about so-called 'Realistic Mathematics Education', and this controversy does not stem from the fact that maths has come to dominate our language, but conversely that our everyday language has started to dominate maths. I am not going to get involved in that debate. Of course, in my new educational system, I want teachers to continue challenging and enticing pupils to access the numerical language community, to be able to talk about numbers, fractions, percentages, averages, differentials, and so on. For that, they will have to practise, rehearse and expand their autopilot. But I'm not going to allow myself an opinion about how best to approach that. This is just

not the book for it. Still, I am going to discuss what happens when you develop your autopilot, when you join a language community, when you learn maths, reading, writing and talking, when you learn to join the conversation. What happens next is that you acquire authority, an authority grounded in the awareness that you can trust your own habits – your own expectations and dispositions.

For an example, I'm going back to my secondary school. I'm in Year 9 and I have started learning German. It is early September, the year has just started and I don't feel like revising for German at all. I don't feel like doing any school work. After dinner, I play football outside, as long as possible before twilight sets in. Inside I do other things: write poems – cryptic, grandiose verses. And just before going to sleep, I quickly check my homework. Just as a matter of form. The year has only just begun, so why would I get worked up? But then I see a misprint in my German book. At least, that is what I think at first, but I reject the idea immediately. I am sure I must be wrong.

I forget about the misprint. I have other things on my mind. But then on a gloomy and cold November evening, I have another look at my German book, just before going to bed. I have a test the following day, that's why. And then I see another misprint. Now I am certain. It says *bite*, with only one 't', while it should be with double 't'. I leaf back to see if it was the same mistake last time, but I can no longer find the other misprint. It doesn't matter. Perhaps it wasn't even a mistake then, but this time I'm absolutely sure. *Bitte* is written with double 't'. I can feel myself glow in the dark, a bit much, no doubt. But my confidence makes a deep impression on me that night. Here I am, an ordinary schoolboy, and I know better than the German author of that book, better than the editor, the publisher, my teacher, the school, the bookshop – I know better than all these adults who have failed to notice the misprint, all the professionals whose only job is to give me a correct and flawless book so that I can learn German. Well, I did learn German. *Despite all the experts!* It is only a small victory, of course, but I write another poem about it that same night. A pretentious poem, of course, as I was only 13. But for all that

ostentatiousness, what it is really about is this: if your autopilot tells you that six sevens are forty-two, that this is simply indisputable, that *bitte* is written with double 't' and this word here definitely says ‘class’, and that you can’t even manage anymore to *not* see that, then you have joined a language community. Then you have authority. Then you *deserve* to have authority. Then you have contact with the world that you share with your language community.

When it comes to automation, it is really about authority and confidence. To be a member of a language community, you need an autopilot – a body subject, as Merleau-Ponty would call it. You need immediate expectations and dispositions that spontaneously occur to you when you have to deal with certain affordances. These expectations and dispositions have an indisputable self-evidence which may not imply correctness but which initially does have an uncomplicated authority. You see a ball and you say, or you think, ‘ball’. You hear your name and you know you are being called, that someone is asking for your attention. You see the letters that spell the word ‘class’, and you say, or think, or read, ‘class’. You see a sum, 6x7, and you say, or think, 42. Developing this authority is what makes automating so important.

Automation is a matter of building self-confidence, the confidence that your expectations and dispositions initially have an uncomplicated authority. I see a misprint and that’s what it is: a misprint. I simply notice that. *I know it*. And that’s why I can tell people, point that misprint out to others, correct others. I have joined the conversation. I matter as part of my language community. Within my language community, other people have to take my expectations and dispositions into account. These expectations and dispositions give me *entitlements*, in particular the entitlement to join the conversation, to tell others what I think, to appeal to others from the uncomplicated authority that my expectations and dispositions deserve. They have that authority for me: I always believe my own expectations and dispositions. This would be true even if I was revealed to be a completely unreliable person or if I had the disposition to

always immediately think that I didn't understand anything and thus always expected other people to know better. Let that idea sink in for a moment. Even if you have grown up in a totally unsafe environment and have developed a huge inferiority complex, there are still expectations and dispositions that *for you* initially have straightforward authority. After all, you will always think that *you* do not understand it and that you are unquestionably right in thinking that.

Of course, we don't want to create inferiority complexes. Not for anybody. This is precisely why we need to make sure there is a healthy autopilot, one that is firmly rooted in the regularities that characterise our natural and social environment. This requires automation of language: of reading, writing, talking and listening. This requires automation of maths. And it requires automation of our orientation in the world, in the scenarios that characterise our world.

This can be done in many ways and of course I don't want to decide this on my own. But if I get my way, pupils will have a great deal of exercise (call it PE or dancing). They will do a lot of playing, especially acting, and a lot of sharing with each other (call it arts and crafts, drama and class discussions). They will also explore their near and distant surroundings in all sorts of more and less abstract ways (call it walking, cycling, travelling and/or geography). Finally, they will explore their time and temporality in all sorts of more and less abstract ways (call it music and history).

I think it is all right to argue about the dimensions of human existence that we consider the most important. That is precisely what a language community does. But for that, it is crucial *that we are* a language community, that we encourage everyone to gain authority, to develop their autopilot, to reinforce their expectations and dispositions in such a way that each of us feels called upon, *by his own dispositions*, to speak out if there is a reason to do so. Because that is exactly what makes us a language community, a collection of people who want and try to understand each other and themselves.

## KEEP ASKING QUESTIONS

Interestingly, automation processes are always a two-edged sword. This has to do with the crucial role played in our lives by *what is normal*, which was discussed in Chapter 1. The development of our habits brings along a fundamental *normality* because we take some responses completely for granted. We get used to customs and regulations. As a result, certain questions disappear from view, sometimes totally, radically. When I see the word 'class' written down, it is no longer possible for me to *not* see what it says: I just see it immediately. The same goes for the times tables: I can no longer ask myself what 3x6 or 6x7 is. When I hear a blackbird singing, I can no longer wonder what kind of bird I hear. And I can no longer ask myself what I should do with my hands before dinner.

Automation processes help to empower our autopilot. And this empowering is fundamental to feeling at home in our own lives. We need habits in huge numbers to make our lives liveable. It is consequently of great value that our children are so good at automation and that our adult context assists them so superbly in this.

But there is a downside. The stronger your autopilot, the more insensitive you become to ambiguities. This is not always justified, as we occasionally notice to our regret. Consider, for example, the unnerving confessions revealed by the #MeToo movement. There are limits that some people overstep without giving it a second thought, limits which they do not even experience as such, as they are blind to the difference between flirting and unseemly sexual behaviour. Of course, the difference is not always clear – that is the rub. But no one wants the rightful exposure of offensive sexual abuse committed by all kinds of powerful men to turn into a new prudishness that makes flirting and chatting up someone suspicious. Ambiguity is ambiguity. And it requires an inquisitive attitude, a temporary stop to the obvious response that our habits suggest to us.

We know this inquisitive attitude, in a rather primitive form, from two-year-old toddlers who keep on asking us "why"? Toddlers are

starting to realise that scenarios can run in different ways, that each follow-up is optional, as there could always have been a different development. So they wish to know why it is this particular development that is actually taking place. Our answers give them stability and over the years they become pre-schoolers and pupils who develop more and more habits and become familiar with how things work, in a causal, an instrumental and a normative sense.

With this increase in habits, the questions slowly disappear. Pupils become better and better at understanding how things work and what is supposed to happen. In the didactically responsible context of a school, they develop new habits to deal with questions. They come to understand that sometimes they do and sometimes they do not know the answers, and they learn how to find missing answers. This means that over the years pupils develop a methodical, school-related approach to their own ignorance. This is an interesting but also a worrying phenomenon.

If this school-related approach to their own ignorance is coupled with the realisation that there are correct answers to *every* question triggered by their ignorance, then a new habit may develop that is quite detrimental to the pupil's critical mind. This is the habit of suppressing every question, as asking a question merely presupposes displaying avoidable and therefore culpable ignorance. In short, the pupil may mistakenly start thinking that anyone who asks a question is stupid. If you ask a question, you are showing that you do not know something, something that can be known and that others therefore *will* know. Sadly, it is mostly the pupils whose cognitive skills are not so strong who are susceptible to this habit.

But in the normative domain especially there are many questions to which there is not one perfectly correct answer. Therefore, asking a question in the normative domain is usually not a sign of stupidity, but rather a thoughtful way of raising a possible ambiguity. This doesn't have to be an outspokenly critical or rhetorical question from a position of perceived moral superiority. Asking questions may genuinely be an opening to a good conversation. This is exactly

what you want to provide children with. In this way they practise the inquisitive attitude that they need in order to develop a reflective, sensible and mature relationship with their own autopilot. At school, this can be done very easily by philosophising with children, by familiarising them with thinking questions, questions they can ask themselves, which allow for various answers, and even questions without an answer, or questions that are *still* without an answer. Socratic questioning techniques are perfect for this.

This doesn't have to be done in any advanced way. Of course I would like everyone to have a thorough philosophical education, and I would like every graduated philosopher to have a wonderful job in education, but asking an open question to help children develop a reflective relationship with their own autopilot is not that difficult at all. We can all do it. It can be practised anywhere. And the great thing is that it is the two-year-old toddlers who can help us here. Just consider how you respond to the 'why' questions they ask you, and what your response would be if pupils asked such questions:

*Why do I have to wash my hands?*
*Why is 6x3=18?*
*Why is bitte written with double 't'?*

Of course you could respond to such questions with "just because". End of story. Basically what you are then saying is "shut up". Sometimes this may be a good response, but if it is your own two-year-old asking "why?" for the first time, "just because" is a rather harsh and unsympathetic answer. Surely, as an adult you have other ways of responding, and the most obvious one is to give the underlying reason. You know best how to deal with your toddler, and when it comes to washing hands before dinner, you will no doubt say something about hygiene, about all the things he has touched that day, about the existence of germs that might be on his hands because he has been touching all these things, about how he can become ill if these germs end up on his food and in his mouth, and about how he can wash these germs off his hands with soap and water. Expand this story or water it down if necessary. You wouldn't want to encourage

OCD, but on the other hand you do want your child to learn to navigate his world in a safe, healthy and independent manner. This is why you give your child insight into the relevant reasons, in a way that a child can understand.

There are all kinds of ways to make this explanation shorter, especially if you suppose that there are some more or less normative ideas in the background. "Because it is hygienic" is a good example of such a normative idea, an example that still highlights a reason but above all also presupposes a great deal of understanding of the implicit relevant normative idea in the child. This can work if the child understands normative ideas. But this is, of course, a competence that can take a very long time to develop. As a result, children are often unable to distinguish this reason from the other answers that you could give: "because that's how we do things", "because I want you to" or "because I say so". However, there is a crucial difference between these last three answers and one that somehow unlocks the relevant normative idea for the child. I once called this the distinction between *independence-promoting* and *dependence-enhancing answers*.[46] I would like to say something about this briefly, as it is an important distinction, which is crucial for pupils who are strengthening their autopilot.

To that end, let's have a look at the three times table. Why exactly does 6x3 equal 18? Of course, the answer is not "just because", as this would suggest that it is purely contingent, that there is no reason for it, not even a mutual agreement. This is not how the world of numbers works. These numbers have far too solid, logical, necessary relationships. But why do we use the symbol '3' to refer to the number 3? Why don't we use a completely different symbol? Why not 'Δ'? These questions do deserve an answer like "just because", as here it is simply accidental. But even then, you wouldn't answer with "just because". If you did, you would be saying "shut up" and in fact, "you are not part of the group, so you must listen to what I say". This is how you make pupils dependent on your personal whims. And *your* whims are really quite different from *our* whims, our community's

whims or our culture's whims. After all, we might easily have arranged to drive on the right in the UK, in line with people on the continent, but once an agreement has been made, however random, then this agreement deserves the consent of every newcomer. Once a rule has been established, everyone deserves to understand the rule as a rule that should be followed. And this is certainly so when it comes to traffic safety.

By the way, this does not mean that responding with "because that's how we do things" is the end of the matter. Because what you're then saying is that there is a rule, but you won't say what the rule is. Consequently, you are still not helping the pupil to learn to follow the rule himself, and thus the answer is actually the same as one of the two other *dependence-enhancing* answers: "because I want you to" or "because I say so". All these answers make a pupil dependent on your whim. The price of this dependence is high, as the pupil will not develop a solid autopilot at all, will not develop habits in which he *himself* can have confidence. A pupil who has only heard dependence-enhancing answers will not end up in a scenario in which he discovers a misprint in a German book. Of course, such a pupil will still be able to discover the mistake, but he will not know who he can blame for this error or how he can report this error. Such a pupil will not be straightforwardly confident that something is not right and that *what* is not right is a misprint, a misprint in a book and thus a mistake made by quite a few adults. Such a pupil does not learn to stand up to all these adults in the knowledge that he is right and they are not, even though he has every reason to do so if there is indeed a misprint in the book.

*Independence-promoting* answers do something else with and for pupils. Such answers encourage them to explore the normativity which becomes apparent in a habit. Remember the example in Chapter 1, in which your child discovered that she was supposed to use a serviette when eating lunch at her friend's house. Or consider the following example. Let's assume that your pupils already know the rule that in your class every pupil must raise their hand if they want

to say something. And suppose that there is one of your pupils, who is so engrossed by an interesting subject that he just starts talking a number of times, even though it is not his turn. And let's assume that you simply allow him to continue, perhaps because you think he is making a good point, or because this pupil is usually rather shy and you are glad that he is expressing his enthusiasm. Another pupil raises his hand and asks why the other pupil is allowed to keep on talking without raising his hand. What do you do now? What is the normative issue at stake here? What are you going to say? Are you going to try to get away with 'just because', 'because I say so' or 'because it's up to me'? I cannot imagine you'd say any of these things. And I would be disappointed if you left it at 'sometimes that's the way things go' or 'there is an exception to every rule' because you cannot say the latter two without qualifying them further. So if you say 'this is what should be done', your pupils will not be able to follow that, as it would mean that something should be done while at the same time it should not be done.

In this case your pupils would discover an ambiguity, a normative ambiguity. Like your child eating lunch at his friend's house. Children will encounter many of these normative ambiguities in their lives. And it is crucial that they learn to deal with them, that they start to recognise themselves as a person, as a discussion partner, as a member of the language community. A person with *his own voice*, someone who interprets situations and who has the confidence to stand up for his interpretation.

Your own voice is fundamental. It is never going to go away. Your own voice will have to last a lifetime. You will need to feed this voice, listen to it and make sure that people hear it. To us talking animals, learning to live our own lives means nothing more than developing and learning to use our own voices. This means learning to deal with reasons, with independence-promoting reasons, with answers to "why" questions that you can understand, that you can give yourself, that you have the confidence to defend and which you can appropriate. This is

a matter for the next chapter, for the second stage in my educational system.

Let me briefly round off this chapter. In the first stage of my education, pupils are mainly concerned with automating, with the development of a solid autopilot. This autopilot provides them with self-confidence, provides them with the habits that give them the space and time to become attentive to living their own lives. As pupils are gradually becoming independent members of our language community, they need their own voice for this, a voice which is firmly rooted in their good habits, in the immediate expectations and dispositions that they have learned to automate. But this voice is rooted equally firmly in their ability to adopt an inquisitive attitude, to ask questions about the normative ambiguities that they detect. The character of such *normative* ambiguities is different from the character of causal and instrumental ambiguities. The latter two can be clarified by gaining better knowledge of the underlying regularities. But normative ambiguities are not to be clarified individually, they are not a matter of more knowledge, but of more mutual understanding. And you need a plurality of voices for this understanding. Time for the second stage of education!

# CHAPTER 8. LEARNING TO PLAY YOUR OWN ROLE

## AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

### A VITAL BOOST

It is around the time they are becoming teenagers that young people begin to realise that they are living their lives. They *have* a life. And that is because they *are* living. They begin to realise, so to speak, that there is a difference between 'life' as a noun and 'living' as a verb. They *live* their *lives*. This is what they are doing, and once they understand this, they are going to realise that of all the possible lives they can live, all the realistic or imaginable lives, they can only live one. They have to live this particular life. This is the only life that they can live. And at the same time, they are the only ones who can live that life, who have to live it: because it is their life, a life that belongs to nobody else.

Once they realise this – and of course this is absolutely not like factual, unequivocal information that can be suddenly communicated to them – then it is time for them to enter the second type of education in my new educational system. In this second type, juniors will learn to deal with their own lives. They will learn what it means to belong, what it means to really go for something and what it means to stand for something. Because these are the things that your teenage years are all about. They will have to learn to play their own role. And thus, it is high time that education is adapted accordingly.

Let me get straight to the point: my alternative educational system barely resembles that which we find today at a run-of-the-mill secondary school. I suggest the following five major changes:

1. The transition from the first, earlier type to the second, later type of education will be determined in good consultation

between the junior, their parents and their mentor. There is no need for a national final test.
2. Each week, juniors will go to school for three days and engage in out-of-school learning-by-working for two days.
3. At school, juniors will be part of a mostly heterogeneous mentoring group, in which everyone will be treated individually (and therefore everybody will be treated differently).
4. Mentors will give regular constructive feedback, but no marks as there will be no binding attainment levels to work towards. Instead, juniors will compile a portfolio.
5. As there will be no central exams, no more nationally defined qualification levels and no diplomas, mentors will have plenty of scope to provide customised education and to give juniors all the room necessary to explore and develop their talents.

I am sure you agree that this is quite something. But these are necessary changes if we want to shape education such that it is tailored to match the existential questions that young people ask themselves when they begin to discover their identity. And education must also be shaped in such a way that it provides support for older people in their role as mentors.

No matter how innovative my second type of education looks at first, in fact quite a few similar transitions are already happening in all kinds of places and in all sorts of ways, for example in Montessori education, Steiner schools, and the various democratic schools. Also, consider the possibilities that makerspaces like *WALHALLAb* offer as an addition to regular education or perhaps even as a replacement of it.[47] What this kind of experimentation shows is that enthusiastic and innovative people in education are managing to create a huge practice space for young people who are eager, or who can be made eager, to explore and to appropriate their own education.

Educationalists may well be inclined to think that I am referring to strengthening juniors' ownership of their own learning process. But this is not what I mean. Such emphatic attention should not be given

to a person's own learning process. My second type of education does not need to focus on the learning process. This learning will follow naturally if something else is given priority: *young people's ownership of their own lives*. Have a good look again at the differences and you will understand what I mean. I am not talking about pupils, but I am talking about young people. Young people are not pupils first and foremost, not even when they are at school. Young people are not interested in the ownership of their learning process, but in the ownership of their lives. Calling them pupils and encouraging them to appropriate their learning process constitutes a double error. First of all, it is wrong to think from the perspective of the school system, the perspective of the school, or the perspective of older people. It is not from this perspective that young people are interested in their ownership – of anything. A young person who wants to appropriate something must be able to do so from their own perspective, from their *experience* of what is happening and of what they are doing, as we saw in Chapter 6. A second error is to presuppose that there is a dichotomy between learning and living, and that learning precedes living. This misconception was discussed in Chapter 1.

## BELONGING

People are always learning, but they rarely do so explicitly and intentionally. Explicit and intentional learning is a distortion of everyday practice, an effect of the 'schoolification' that will no longer occur in my educational system. Juniors will continue to learn, of course, just like young children and just like older people. But this learning will be mostly an *additional* activity. Learning will take place as a consequence of doing something else, because juniors are intentionally trying to do something else, because they are *practising*, practising to play their own role. They will try to appropriate their lives by wanting to belong – to other people, to other beings who are living their lives. Here, two aspects deserve some extra attention: firstly, the paradoxical relationship between the appropriation of one's own life and the

desire to fit in, and secondly the relationship between practising and learning. I will discuss them both.

## Appropriating by belonging

It may sound paradoxical and counterintuitive, but appropriating your own life and wanting to belong are both fundamentally related. They need each other like two sides of the same coin. Superficially, however, they seem to be two markedly different tendencies. If you are busy appropriating your own life, then your gaze seems to be averted away from other people. You do not want to be part of anything. You are focused on yourself, you turn your back on other people and you do not want to have anything to do with the people who used to be your intimate friends and relations. Too bad for your parents, your siblings, your best friends, but that's the way it is...

The discovery that you have a life to live, *your* life, only happens at a time when you have had both legs firmly planted in life – in your life – for quite a while. Your life has been going on for quite some time by the time you realise this, and all this time you simply accepted any habit and practice as it presented itself. You were actually living your life without giving it much thought. You may even conclude that until then you had *allowed other people to run your life*. You sort of accepted it all, as if things just happened to you and you had no influence on them.

However, this is no longer possible once you have discovered that *you* have to live your own life. Life is not a series of events that simply happen to you; at least, that is not the only thing it is, or not the only thing it can be. If you just let life happen, others will live your life for you. Then your life will in fact be their life. This is a toxic realisation. And as you realise this, you may also think that this has been true for far too long. It is time for emancipation, for autonomy, for liberation from your self-imposed immaturity, as Kant called it. The shackles must be thrown off. Your life has belonged to other people for far too long, and that needs to stop right now!

It's all part of growing up.

You are not the only one. All your peers are fighting the same battle. All your peers are having difficulty living their lives with their parents, with their families, with their siblings, and with their best friends. And with themselves, too, of course. Same as you. And it is exactly because of these difficulties that you pick fights and start arguments. Just like you, all your peers are trying to be themselves, are trying to live their own lives, to reclaim it from all those familiar people who simply want to continue day in and day out with the same spiritless and pointless grind – with their thoughtlessness, their dreary listlessness. This similarity creates a bond; strikingly enough a bond that is *not* stifling. It is an abstract bond, a bond that you do not have to do anything with, but that you can see as an encouragement, a nod of consent. This is the power of recognition, which of course you do not experience with all other young people, but every now and then, without explicitly identifying it, this recognition embodies the beginning of a subculture in which you feel at home. You have found a specific group of friends you want to belong to, and you recognise a lifestyle that could be yours.

I suppose we all recognise this pattern. We begin to play our own role by replacing our contingent, coincidental, *given* relationships with *chosen* relationships, which are of course just as contingent and coincidental but which at least suggest that they bear our stamp of approval. After all, these are the relationships we have chosen *ourselves*. Still, at this age we barely know what choosing actually is, and this is part of the quest that will keep us busy for ten years perhaps, or more likely for a lifetime.

The lesson for adults seems to be obvious. Let it happen. This is really something about which you as an adult, or actually, as *another person*, can do absolutely nothing at all. If someone is struggling with the ownership of their own life, when they try to appropriate their own life, try to play their own role, then there is simply nothing in that process that you can do. *Nothing at all*. This is an analytical, *a priori* truth. It is like a child wanting to ride a bike. He has to do this himself, you cannot ride it for him.

Of course, you can still do a great deal for juniors. For example, you can listen to them. Really listen. And you can tell them your own story, sincerely, in all honesty, of how you have struggled – and are still struggling – with the ownership of your life. You can even tell them that right now in this conversation you are not exactly sure where your limits lie and where the space begins – their space –that you will have to respect, so that you can leave them alone in a supportive way and they can appropriate their own life. You can be there for them, actually by paying attention to your own life, by playing your own role.

This also means, of course, that as a mentor you show what is obvious to you, and that it is clear to you in an uncomplicated way where your boundaries are, that you will enter into clear agreements if you think this is a good idea, and that of course you will hold the other person to those agreements. You can be there for them just by dealing with your own life, your own certainties and your own doubts. They may recognise the abstract bond, the consenting nod of someone who is also trying to play his own role, just like they are, someone who is simply familiar with the role that is his own in all sorts of ways and at all sorts of moments. In this way you are an example, not because you know how to do it, but because you are familiar with this self-relationship, because you can play your own role, and indeed live your own life.

## Practising and learning

In my second type of education, there will be plenty of room to practise with the appropriation of your own life. This will not be a question of navel gazing or endless reflection. There is no need for that at all. Juniors practise appropriating their own life by practising belonging. In this second type of education, juniors will be free to choose to enter into partnerships that are long or short and intensive or superficial. Younger and older people will work together continuously in this type of education, in large and small groups that are sometimes extremely heterogeneous and sometimes less so. Projects will be conceived, developed, set up and implemented, within

the walls of the school and outside, for the long or the short term. All these projects will be about the dynamic movement of not only belonging but also of being there with yourself and for yourself. Although they will always be about attracting and repelling, about becoming a full member of our language community by finding your own voice, this will not be the explicit and exclusive aim of any of these projects.

This type of education is closely related to the crucial distinction between learning and practising. This distinction is based on a striking resemblance, namely that both verbs are intentional verbs, in the sense that they imply a relationship with an intentional object, with a particular goal, with the thing that needs to be practised or learned. When you learn, you always learn *something*. The same goes for practising. When you practise, you always practise something. It cannot be learning if there is not something that is learned, just as it cannot be practising if there is not something that is practised. But there is also a difference. To practise something, to practise what you are practising, you need to pay explicit attention to the thing you are practising. This is not the case when you are learning. You can learn something without explicitly paying attention to what you are learning.

Let's have a look at the following metaphor. Suppose you are waving to your friend Alan, who is walking across the street. You lift your arm and move your hand back and forth. Alan sees you and waves back cheerfully. Now suppose he is walking there with Sarah, a girl you really like – it was actually her attention you were really after. In fact, it was for her sake that you started waving to Alan. But she is not looking, and of course you cannot call out to her. Let's also suppose that you fail to notice that an ex-girlfriend of yours is walking just a little bit further down the road. She sees you waving and wonders whether your waving wasn't actually meant for Sarah.

This example shows how intentions and any intentional and unintentional side effects relate to what you do. In terms of concrete behaviour, you waved, lifted your arm, and moved your hand. You were probably intending to do two other things, one that was successful

and one that failed. You greeted your friend Alan, intentionally. You were also trying to attract Sarah's attention, but that failed. By the way, you did the latter so poorly that it may be better to say that you would have wanted to do this, but in fact did not do it at all. This is recognisable, typical adolescent behaviour, in which intentions and behaviour are sometimes completely disconnected. Finally, in this example, there is something else that you have done, although not intentionally: you have attracted your ex-girlfriend's attention. This was an unintended side effect.

With regard to the distinction between practising and learning, practising can here be compared to the intentional and successful greeting of your friend Alan. This is how practising works: you do it intentionally, hoping to be successful, and the success contributes to strengthening the habit you are practising. If we compare this success with the failure of attracting Sarah's attention, we realise that practising something is a bit like trying to do it, but if what we try is too far removed from a successful performance, then it turns out not to be practising at all. Consider the painful effect that may be the result of growing up with an unpredictable, violent or abusive parent. You will no doubt try to stay away from the blows, which will quite likely result in a coping style that attachment theorists call 'dismissive-avoidant'. You taught yourself a bad habit, by your own actions, but of course you didn't practise it. This is where the difference lies between learning and practising. Learning is developing a habit, and it does not have to happen intentionally. Your dismissive-avoidant attachment style is an unintended side effect, like you can attract someone's attention when you did not mean to. What *fires together wires together*, even if it is not your intention.

For example, when I was about nine years old, I was surprised to discover that it was not so much with the handlebars that I was directing my bicycle, but with my whole body. I started practising that for a while because I wanted to be able to do what older boys could do: riding with no hands. I was getting better and better at it. However, I remember that when I had got the hang of it, I was shocked to

realise that I had actually been steering with my body for many years without consciously doing or learning it. This hit me when I tried to direct my bicycle by using only the handlebars. I tried to sit up straight on my saddle and go round the corner by just turning my handlebars. After all, that is what handlebars are for, or so I thought. But it did not work. I did not fall off the bike, but I simply could not sit up straight on my saddle as I turned the corner. My body automatically tilted to one side, no matter how fanatically I tried to stop it from doing so.

And this is not an exception – this is the norm. Developing habits requires an implicit phase, requires shifting your attention from deliberately lifting your arm to greet your friend. When you greet your friend, that is what you are intentionally doing: greeting your friend. You lift your arm and move your hand, but you usually do not even know that you are doing these things. They simply happen, like an entrenched mechanism.

It is exactly this distinction between learning and practising that applies to juniors who are learning to play their own role. They are practising to fit in. In the second type of education, the challenge is a matter of personalisation, of what Gert Biesta calls subjectification.[48] It is explicitly a matter of wanting to be able to belong. Superficially, what young people are doing in education in their teenage years is participating in social experiments. But as a result, they are learning to play their own role – sometimes with more and sometimes with less explicit attention.

## GOING FOR SOMETHING

Of course, we must not be naïve. I like to think that juniors in my second type of education will feel challenged to participate in social experiments, and I also think that this will give them the ideal context in which to learn to appropriate their own lives – but of course there is also a fair chance that they will have no desire at all to do what I expect them to do. Why would they? Why would they go for

it? I can just hear them say it: "Leave me alone, mate." So now they are stuck in two ways. Their wish to be independent, makes them obstinate. But in their defiant reaction, they are doing exactly what I expect them to do. A double bind.

One of the paradoxes of human existence is learning to live with your limitations. Learning to embrace these limitations voluntarily, independently and authentically. But watch out, you may think that this is a lesson exclusively for juniors: after all, they are the ones who have to find their own place among us, and they need to do so by themselves, neither in an uncooperative nor in a docile way. But it is also a lesson for every adult reader, for every committed educational developer: learn to live with your limitations. This refers to *you*, too. Embrace your limitations. You need to realise that you cannot put juniors to work if you want them to learn to position themselves independently. You can challenge them, but you cannot teach them this. You can make it clear to them how *you* do this in *your* own life, but then it will be about you, about your life, about how you position yourself.

There is really only one requirement in my second type of education. This requirement applies to the mentors, to the older people who participate in this type of education. If they feel the need to give juniors a task and these juniors ask them why they are getting this task, then the older people should give an answer – as well as they can – that *promotes* the juniors' independence. Avoid telling them that it is in their own best interest, even if they cannot see this themselves yet, as this would *destroy* these juniors' independence. After all, if someone is trying to develop his sense of purpose, it would be disastrous to explicitly determine it from the outside, especially if there seems to be no way in which this person can be part of this process themselves.

What you can and will do as a teacher is what all people do if they are part of a particular field of action: they hold each other accountable for their behaviour, give each other reasons for their own actions and ask others for their reasons for their actions. In dealing

with these reasons, both younger and older people will be able to practise their relationship with themselves that is characteristic of someone playing their own role. It will always remain a matter of practice, a matter of improvising over and over again, because your relationship with yourself is always dynamic. This has to do with spontaneity and experience, both of which are constantly needed. But it also has to do with the role that other people play. How *they* play *their* role determines how *you* will be able to play *your* role. In your relationship with yourself, the strange and the familiar come together in constellations that are new each time. This is what makes life beautiful. This is also what makes life hard, delicate, fragile, full of risk. But it is a risk worth taking. High-spirited children know that, and you would like young people to hold on to their zest for life when they start realising that it is they themselves who have to live their lives. My second type of education offers juniors a social experiment that creates favourable conditions for maintaining this zest for life. I would like to discuss four of these conditions: enthusiasm, customisation, heterogeneity and learning-by-working.

## Enthusiasm

At present, one of the serious challenges in secondary education is the lack of motivation of the average secondary school pupil. For years, the academic motivation of our adolescents has been declining.[49] I am not going to try to formulate an explanation for this. Anyone who wishes to embark on that route should do so, but I predict that developing a serious, scientifically legitimised theory with a degree of success in educational policy will take at least 200 years. Unfortunately, it will take quite a long time before you can determine whether this hypothesis is true, but anyone who wants to try to formulate such an explanation is of course free to do so.[50] However, we really don't have the time to wait for it. We need to do something about our educational system now. And I would like to make a suggestion.

In the previous section, I argued that in my second type of education we should definitely create space for young people's *ownership of*

*their own lives*. I do not expect any motivational problems with regard to this task. After all, it is precisely in this task that their zest for life is apparent. It depends, of course, on how well these young people have developed their self-confidence in the first type of education and whether they have been able to start the second type at the right moment. But as I stated above, their own life is not the same as their own learning process. At least, that is how young people probably see it from their perspective. Two assumptions play a role in this. Chances are that, as children of our time, they still tacitly believe that there is a clean break between learning and living. This break was discussed and rejected in Chapter 1, but this is probably not yet part of our young people's mindset. Moreover, there is a good chance that, as children of our time, they still tacitly expect that it is not up to them but up to their teachers to determine what subject matter they need to learn. They may even know that there are legal regulations for this, and that it is not even up to their teachers but that it is the government who decides what juniors should learn. No wonder then, if you look at it like that, that juniors do not feel very strongly about their own learning process. "What do you mean 'our own' learning process," they might wonder. And rightly so.

But if you are a good and motivated teacher, you are faced with the question of how you can appeal to juniors' zest for life and motivate them for what you think is important and worthwhile. I am pretty sure that you will understand that there is no point in using your power. If you disagree, then it is probably better if you stop reading now. It is amazing that you made it this far in the book. Or did you accidentally open it on this page and simply start reading?

The way I see it, you have three options as a teacher: you can try to arouse a junior's curiosity, try to show what your commitment means in your own life, or try to capture their enthusiasm. First of all, curiosity is a wonderful state of mind, but to me it is too exclusively cognitive. It suggests that learning is primarily about knowledge. Secondly, I love your commitment, but it is yours, and if you wish to touch a junior's engagement, I am afraid that you may

quickly sound paternalistic. This is why I would go for capturing a junior's enthusiasm, but to be fair, it is a matter of emphasis. It is not that curiosity and commitment are wrong in my eyes, but I think that enthusiasm is a more pleasant, open, light-hearted and optimistic state, one that I would like to bestow on the juniors in this world.

It works if you set a good example. If you are enthusiastic, it is contagious. It works wonderfully well if you share your gaze with others, if you make visible to others what it is that inspires you. If other people also see what is worth your enthusiasm, then something beautiful will start happening, then that collective agent that I discussed in Chapter 3 will surface, the 'we' teaching 'ourselves'. For you as a teacher, your own enthusiasm is crucial, as is the reciprocity. I will briefly expand on this.

When I see what enthuses you – whether it is the future of the United Nations or the achievements of Manchester United – then I am touched. I do not just see what makes you enthusiastic, but your enthusiasm makes me see it in a certain light, from a certain angle: I see something that can evoke enthusiasm. Perhaps it is only because of your enthusiasm that I can see the United Nations or Manchester United in this way, but now that I regard them in this way, what I see makes me enthusiastic, too. Regardless of what you think. This may well be rather fragile enthusiasm, which must continue to be fuelled by your supplementary enthusiasm. Still, if I am enthusiastic, then I am so because of what I see, because the United Nations or Manchester United are worth my enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm is not the same as intrinsic motivation. Enthusiasm transcends or escapes the dichotomy between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In a way, enthusiasm shows that this dichotomy implies a conceptualisation of our minds that is not as self-evident as it might seem. This conceptualisation presupposes an atomic image of our minds, in that I have mine and you have yours, and these two minds have nothing to do with each other. However, this is a distortion of the nature of our motives. If I go all out to achieve something, it is true that I will indeed have to and want to achieve this for myself,

but my motives are clearly related to what I find outside of myself. And this includes you. This is our language. And this is our world.

To infect me with your enthusiasm, you will have to be enthusiastic yourself. This means that you should not focus your attention on me, but on that which fires your enthusiasm. If you want to infect me with your enthusiasm, if you are my mentor, if you want to mean something to me and help me go for something, then your smartest strategy would be to try to become enthusiastic about something that I am enthusiastic about. Then it will come naturally. Of course, this does not mean that you simply have to follow me, assuming that you have such a wide field of interest that you are actually able to follow me in my enthusiasm. Enthusiasm can unlock some of the many dimensions of the world. If Manchester United is the only thing I can be enthusiastic about, but you have set yourself the goal of making me enthusiastic about the future of the United Nations, then you will need a great deal of empathy, inventiveness, imagination and eloquence. It is not impossible to achieve, but you will have to find a route from my world into your world and back again. You will have to make *our* world visible, such that I can be attracted by your enthusiasm and be gripped by what is worthy of your enthusiasm: the United Nations.

I am not sure whether it is worth making it so difficult for yourself. What is so great and so urgent about the future of the United Nations, so inspiring that you would want to direct someone's enthusiasm away from Manchester United towards the UN? Would there not be anything other than the UN that I would want to go for, something that is closer to Manchester United, so that it is easier to enthuse me?

In my second type of education, mentors are not restricted to a curriculum, to a methodology or to attainment levels. After all, these would kill the mentors' enthusiasm. And the enthusiasm of juniors, too. Curricula, course books and attainment levels lead a mentor away from the crucial detour that he should make, away from the dynamics and dialectics that are characteristic of the collective agent's enthusiasm, the 'we' teaching ourselves. In my second type

of education, mentors have empathy, inventiveness, imagination, eloquence *and* enthusiasm – enthusiasm for our world, the world in which juniors want to go for something.

## Customisation

In the second type of education in my educational system, it will be quite radically accepted that education is always a concrete, local, situated and contingent process. It is about a particular junior and a particular mentor, in a certain situation, at a certain moment in time. A junior who is educated in York will have a different life than a junior who is educated in Hastings or Barnstaple. If that same junior moves from York to Hastings, his life will be different and it will be different again if instead he moves from York to Barnstaple. There is nothing you can do about this. Learning to play your own role takes place in scenarios where some roles can and other roles cannot be played. Besides location, there are many other relevant, concrete and contingent details. The same junior will have a different life if he has a particular mentor, if he follows a particular teaching method, joins a football club or a tennis club, joins a particular football club, wins a particular match or loses it, loses the match because he himself messed up or his best friend or a teammate who he barely speaks to messed up. And we can keep on adding endless details.

In education, we have long been deluding ourselves that these contingencies can be eliminated or avoided by working with legally defined core objectives, a mandatory final test and national exams. However, anyone with a modicum of common sense can see that this is only replacing one set of contingencies with another. People – young or old – are not the same. As a result, identical educational pathways have fundamentally different outcomes – if they can be identical at all, given the irreplaceable role that individual teachers play in these pathways. The fiction of uniformity does far more harm than good, even if – as is claimed – the compulsory final test in primary education does seem to have its benefits with regard to educationally disadvantaged groups.

My second type of education aims to firmly put an end to this fiction of uniformity. All juniors will be treated as individually as possible, and consequently they will not be treated the same, based on the premise that everyone deserves to be approached as an individual with individual needs and wants. Mentors will provide tailor-made solutions and will therefore be empathetic to juniors, pay attention to their hurdles and lucky breaks, to the development of their competencies and to any stagnation that might occur. Mentors do not teach from a fixed curriculum, with a fixed methodology and with fixed attainment levels. These are as relevant to a junior as the pavement he walks on, the door he has to open and the stairs he has to climb to reach the classroom in which he will spend the next hour. They are harmless obstacles at best. Of course, a mentor who delivers tailor-made solutions is not interested in fixed curricula with a fixed methodology and fixed attainment levels. He has better things to do. He pays attention to what the junior wants to go for. And you can tell this from the mentor's actions, and so can that junior. He is well aware of what his mentor stands for.

Two examples can illustrate this customisation. The first is the possibility of offering juniors apprenticeships. This would be a matter of tailor-made education, with out-of-school learning-by-working. Two days a week juniors learn somewhere in an industry of their choice, and the other three days they develop – in consultation with their mentor – the skills that they should be able to use well to play their own role as a professional in that sector. In consultation with the company where they work and with their mentor, it may even be arranged that they enter the profession with a starting qualification.

This may sound pretty traditional or schoolish, but when you realise that this is about the enthusiasm of a junior who is going to see a role for herself that she can handle and in which she matters, and who experiences the support of an enthusiastic mentor, then I do not think that it is important how it sounds, as it is above all an appealing form of education. And I have seen high schools where this enthusiasm is palpable throughout the building.[51]

As a second example, I can imagine that you – as an enthusiastic economics teacher –gather a group of juniors around you who want to seriously delve into Kate Raworth's donut economy, or that – as a maths teacher – you can make a group of juniors excited about cryptocurrencies. These juniors will not be able to immediately understand why Raworth's ideas are so innovative, or what blockchains are and what you can and cannot do with them. But if you can make them enthusiastic about the new vistas that you as a mentor can open up for them, they will also be excited about grasping all the prior knowledge that is needed to discuss these issues with you at a deeper level. It would be wonderful if together you could design a project that would last several weeks. This is possible if customisation becomes the standard.

## Heterogeneous groups

If you look at juniors from the perspective of the system, the school or the teachers, you can imagine that it would be nice to work with homogeneous groups. Just imagine how practical it would be to have a class full of pupils who all love economics, mathematics, history or acting. Especially if they are all more or less equally smart and equally good... Look at how much work you could do, and how little time you would have to waste on class management. But why would you look at juniors from the perspective of the educational system? Juniors have no need for that homogeneity themselves. Neither do older people. Society and humanity, to take an even wider perspective, do not need such homogeneity either. It is only the current school system that thinks it needs homogeneity. However, this artificially created homogeneity can cause considerable social damage. And it is indeed mainly an artificial homogeneity, despite the pretence of measuring instruments that make us believe that it is about discovering talents and competences that may be supposed to be present in our juniors.

Homogeneity – everybody equally skilful, equally old, equally patient, equally motivated, equally intelligent, equally sporty, equally musical, equally blonde, equally well-read, equally technical – is at

best no more than an unreliable snapshot that will partly live up to its claims with no other foundation than the selection itself. First you bring people together who, at some point according to some test, are all equally patient. Then you treat them as if they all are equally patient. Teach them to think of themselves and each other as equally patient and the result will be a stunning self-fulfilling prophecy. You can do the same with people who are equally well-read, technical, sporty, and so on. In football the disastrous, discriminatory and now notorious 'relative age effect' has been known for years.[52] Here, the criteria used when composing teams have a negative influence on the quality of young footballers.

In my educational system, juniors do not suffer from this homogeneity. Thankfully. They learn to play their own role by learning to belong to something. But if older people place them in a specific population, if older people make them believe that belonging to something is primarily a matter of establishing their cognitive level, how are they ever going to learn to belong? If they have always simply belonged to something, if that is an age effect, a natural, constitutional fact, then they not only miss the chance to practise belonging to a group, but they also miss the chance to learn to play their own role. We can see that all around us. I am from the generation who suffered from a midlife crisis. It was only when I was about 50 years old that I discovered that I had not really learned to live my own life, and this was the same for many of my peers. The current generation is much quicker on the uptake, as can be seen from the quarter-life crisis that is spreading rapidly.

I do not know if it will be any easier for juniors in my educational system. Easier is probably not the right word. Undoubtedly, learning to play your own role will take place with trial and error, just like all significant learning. But in the second type of education, juniors are being offered plenty of challenges right from day one as they will be in highly heterogeneous classes. Each person is different. The mentors will try to turn every mentoring group into a close-knit group, with obvious and natural ties, almost like a family, but of course not

by pursuing homogeneity. Homogeneity is not necessary for good relationships. What you need is hospitality, the ability to organise plurality.[53] This takes place in heterogeneous groups, where time and again people are called upon to take a stand amongst other people – younger and older people – who may be different but who are also similar, who want to go for something, together.

## Learning by working

One of the unofficial, hidden secondary functions of education is that of childcare. After all, children have to be somewhere when their parents are at work. Of course you could also put them to work; a cynical misanthrope might say that this would lead to a win-win situation: cheap labour, extra income and free childcare. Sadly, this is still happening in large parts of the world, but since the introduction of compulsory education, this no longer happens lawfully in Western Europe. At first, compulsory education was primarily aimed at parents. They were dutybound to take their children to school, and this had a major contribution to the impressive improvement in the lives of children who began their lives in unfortunate circumstances. But times are changing. Our culture is dynamic and thanks to the emancipation of post-war generations, compulsory education has gradually turned into a learning burden for our younger people. Young people need to go to school and they do not understand why. They realise only too well that they are being kept indoors most of the time, week after week, month after month, year after year.

It doesn't have to be for such a long time. In all kinds of scenarios, juniors show that the subject matter that the law stipulates they must master to pass their final exams can be learned in a relatively short time. There is no need for all these unproductive, empty, weekly hours over the years to learn this subject matter. This can really be done much more efficiently, and everyone knows it. However, I am not really interested in efficiency or in the subject matter that juniors have to master. This chapter is all about something else, namely how young people can learn to live their own lives. But the insight that young people are already spending many relatively

pointless hours in secondary education can be used as a plea for an early start of a dual process. Let us limit the time that juniors are in the school building to about three days a week. Organise out-of-school learning-by-working for the other two days. Thus juniors combine school education with social participation. Thus juniors really participate, and not just in an educational setting. This will be of benefit to their sense of responsibility.

Such a system will entail a huge societal shift. But there are already major shifts in the labour market on the horizon, especially now that the corona crisis has hit the economy. Therefore, teachers should be trained differently. Why not let lateral entry teachers continue to work in companies and institutions? I will expand on this in the next chapter on professional learning. Companies and institutions can appoint coaches who deal with all the teenagers that I want to take out of the schools. These companies and institutions could be care homes, hospitals, schools, training centres, universities, municipal services, police stations, shopping centres, catering establishments, waste disposal companies, farms, distribution centres, and so on. There is so much work that can easily be made manageable for juniors.

Of course, a great deal of support will be needed for this, but this support does not have to be purely didactic and educationally sound. After all, it is all about young people learning to play their own role. They cannot do so if they only learn to function in pedagogical, educational scenarios. It will have little effect if their role is not of any consequence. Young people deserve to be taken seriously in society. But as young people, of course. Look at the local supermarket: it cannot stack its shelves without young people. Young people learn a great deal from stacking supermarket shelves, but they clearly learn this implicitly, without it being the explicit aim. And that is excellent. What they learn in particular in such scenarios is what it means and what it takes to go for something and to stand for something.

The entry of this young labour force into the labour market will not happen without a struggle. It will raise complicated moral issues that

are beyond the scope of this book. It is undoubtedly a proposal that will be hailed with great disbelief and which will immediately be dismissed as completely impracticable. Still, I can see two huge long-term benefits.

One benefit serves a broad societal interest. Market forces in the public sector have not done these sectors much good – this is particularly true in healthcare and education, but also in the realms of public space and infrastructure. Money has done more damage than we envisaged. With my extensive out-of-school learning scheme, I advocate a completely different effect in these sectors: training. Training, for everyone and by everyone. This costs money, of course. But it cannot come as a surprise that healthcare, education, infrastructure and a humane public space cost money. These are fields that you should not actually want to *make* any money from, but that you should want to *spend* money on.

The other benefit is an immediate clear advantage for juniors who are dealing with the second type of education. They will be challenged to determine their relationship to all kinds of social projects outside of school for two days a week. What will they be going for? Where do they belong? Crucial questions for people of this age, for our juniors who are beginning to realise their existential situation: they must learn to live their own lives.

## TAKING A STAND

We all know the expression: the first step is the hardest. But when it comes to young people who have realised that they must learn to live their own lives, and that this is why they must learn to take a stand, the saying is wrong. Taking a stand starts really easily: by saying *no, not like this.*

This may be a good start, but it is only a start, a start that is embedded in the autopilot that gives schoolchildren their initial self-confidence. In the previous chapter I told you about a printing error I discovered in a German textbook: *not like that*. Interestingly, this start

is reinforced when young people enter puberty, when they begin to realise that the life they have lived up to then has not really been their own life. They have allowed others to determine their lives, and they really cannot do this any longer: *not like this*. But what is the alternative? What are you standing for if you reject an ingrained habit? This is a good question, a question that always has an answer, although it is an answer that will remain undiscovered for a long time. It will be behind Charles Taylor's horizon of significance.[54]

It is often a gut feeling: *not like this*. It is worth investigating this feeling, just like it is worth looking into any emotion. In my second type of education, there will be time, space and attention for this feeling. After all, emotions occur for a reason. If you feel that you no longer want a situation to occur, then you feel the distinction between a habit that is just an automatic routine (and which now feels like a bad habit) and a habit that is a good habit, which deserves to be respected as a prescript. The good habit often hides initially behind the horizon of significance. Something is worth it, but what is it? This is a value-seeking realisation that deserves attention, even though it usually only starts as negative resistance: *not like this*.

In my second type of education, such questions can and will be asked. Juniors will ask each other, themselves and you as a mentor these questions. And as a mentor you will also ask them such questions. These questions can be about anything and can start with every little deed of resistance. But as a mentor, you are not going to methodically hang on to your role of impartial conversation leader. After all, you are dealing with juniors who are appropriating their own lives, who want to be able to play their own role, who want to be able to be cross, and sometimes fly off the handle. Make use of their impulsiveness. Your role is not just to be an example, but an example of someone who stands for something, who can be held accountable and then take responsibility, who has reasons and answers. Remember Socrates, who compared himself to a gadfly: he was tenacious, had strong intuitions and was unreserved, and he knew very well when to resist: *not like this*. This was not because it

was dictated by the method, but because his gut feeling said so. Of course, this feeling is not the final word. Rather, it is the first word, the beginning of a question, a question asked by young people who want to stand for something.

In the second type of education, these basic, unclear feelings of small resistance will be cherished. They are wanted, and open to discussion. That is quite a challenge for mentors. It requires firmness in all dimensions of human existence, cognitive, professional, volitional and also relational. As a consequence, this clearly also lays a great claim on educational organisation. After all, as a mentor, you can only genuinely question juniors on their gut feeling – to explore what they want to stand for – if you are part of an educational community that you yourself agree with!

This does not mean that you have to agree on everything with your colleagues or the school management. But it does mean that together you can muster the hospitality that is crucial for juniors who need to learn to determine their point of view. And you can only muster that hospitality, if you feel it yourself, if you can experience your own functioning as a mentor within your educational community in an atmosphere of hospitality. The obvious welcoming of your role as a mentor requires a clear recognition and confirmation of your status, and your positioning. This is not so much related to the confidence in your professional knowledge, in your erudition, in your didactic skills, or in your professionalism. It has much more to do with an unconditional trust in your humanity, in your goodwill and in your educational ability to be a mentor of significance to the juniors in your mentoring group.[55]

This can be discussed and debated at great length. But such a welcoming climate must be created and kept vital. This is a matter of people who believe in each other and who trust one another implicitly and unconditionally. The current school system does not particularly support this climate. We can see this in the observation that it looks as if textbooks are becoming thicker while the teachers are getting smaller.[56] What I infer from this observation is that the

trustworthiness of education is being entrusted to the teacher less and less. As a consequence, teachers can also establish or enhance their credibility less and less, because they themselves have been trained in this climate and they take it for granted that they have to rely on the thicker textbooks and manuals. Their own critical judgment is becoming smaller. There has been too little practice with the autopilot, which could give confidence, and the inquisitive attitude you should expect from a teacher is increasingly being outsourced: to the methodology, to the textbook, to the manual, to the educational consultant, to the expert, to the parents.

For me, the teacher becoming smaller is not a matter of reduced erudition or a lack of expertise, and therefore not an argument to only employ higher-educated professional teachers. If this is what you think, have another good look at what I discussed in Chapter 2. Knowledge is not so much about acquiring content, but rather it is an activity: it is the ability to deal with claims to truth in concrete scenarios. Of course, this requires an understanding of and insight into reality, but above all it is an intrinsic relational ability, an ability to find the wise middle ground between objectivity and solidarity. In education, this is particularly a pedagogical ability.[57] It is this ability that you wish for educational communities, as they are the backdrop to which juniors must learn to play their own role and determine what they stand for.

# CHAPTER 9. LEARNING TOGETHER PROFESSIONALLY

## A DIFFERENT VIEW OF POST-INITIAL EDUCATION

### WHAT FOLLOWS COMPULSORY EDUCATION?

In the current school system you obtain your starting qualification after around twelve years of compulsory education. This qualification enables you to enter the labour market. Nevertheless, there is social pressure to keep on studying. Considerable pressure. This is understandable: there's still so much to learn when you're 16 or 17 years old. And as long as we continue to believe that you need to finish learning before you can start living your life, it seems obvious that we want to keep our young people in education somewhat longer.

There is no such pressure in my new educational system. After all, learning goes on for a lifetime. But of course it doesn't go on that long in the second stage of education. At a certain point you have finished that second stage. Not at a specific, pre-determined age, but once you know what you stand for, you are ready for a new challenge. Then it is time for your qualification. In the current school system, this is the moment that various types of education are ready to welcome you with open arms. You can do vocational training, go to university or enrol at a university of applied science. There are also other routes: a traineeship at a large company, and in-service training in the healthcare sector, in the army or in the police force. And after these types of education there are still plenty of opportunities to specialise even further, for example in postgraduate education or in other specialised education. The sky is the limit.

This final chapter is about restructuring these possibilities. I will use the term 'post-initial education' for all these possibilities together,

and in my new system this will be the third stage of education. The greatest change is that it will no longer be an *offer*. Although I like the idea that people are waiting for you with open arms if you want to qualify further, I really want to organise this third stage of education in a manner that is driven solely by demand.

Two characteristics stand out in my third stage of education. Firstly, access to the third stage of education is not unconditional, and secondly, this third stage is so fundamentally dual in nature that vocational education will need to be thoroughly integrated into the fields of employment at which it is aimed. In this chapter I will explain and demonstrate why these characteristics are essential to this third stage of education.

## APPRENTICE AND GUIDE

Good education cannot exist without the student's enthusiasm and zest for learning. In the first stage of education, this is not an issue: pupils want to develop their autopilot and thus their self-confidence as a member of our language community. And even in my second stage of education, this should no longer be a problem as it is organised around the need that young people feel to learn to live their own lives. But once they've finished their initial education, why would they keep on studying? They have obtained their starting qualification. They are ready for life. So why do they still stay on in education in large numbers? Is it because their zest for learning is so immense? I find this hard to believe. And it certainly isn't apparent. What I see is mostly desperation, the heavy burden of learning, the pressure to go for the highest possible degree, and a fear of the labour market.

I see young people struggling with the question of what on earth they should study. This is such an absurd question! Why bother trying to understand something if you don't even know what you wish to know, if you don't yet have a substantive learning need? It is like more food being served immediately after a copious meal, to use the metaphor from Chapter 6. The continuous learning trajectory with

an obligatory influx into higher education for anyone who is smart enough is like an offer for yet another lavish three-course dinner – or rather, a *five*-course dinner – to anyone who has just had a hearty meal and wants nothing but to relax and digest.

Imagine this in concrete terms. You're in a classy restaurant, and you have just had a great dinner, with all the trimmings. You're feeling replete. And instead of the bill, the waiter comes back with a menu and starts telling you about the fabulous five-course surprise menu that the chef proudly recommends. Can you imagine? Would you look at the menu for an alternative because the surprise menu might just be a little bit too much? If you were to do this, you would probably have the same distraught and jaded face as a secondary school pupil scrolling once more through the course prospectuses that his parents and the career guidance counsellor have advised.

More and more young people are taking a gap year these days, but what I'm going to recommend to them is a gap *decade*. Find a job, there's nothing wrong with that. It gives a great deal of satisfaction; it is relevant and significant. Don't regard that decade as an intermediate stage. Don't take a holiday from life; instead, escape from the waiting room in which you thought you could postpone life a little while longer. Why not? You have been stuck in that waiting room for far too long. Now it is time to see what else life has to offer. Would you rather wait twenty years instead of ten? Also fine. As long as you know that you are always welcome to the third stage of education if you feel a serious need for it, if you yourself feel it is necessary. This opportunity will be there for you, for everyone, throughout your lifetime. That is what I'm going to seriously work on in my new educational system: lifelong learning.

The third stage of education will take shape in thousands of different ways, but fundamentally it will be about an agreement between an apprentice and a guide. Here, I derive the term 'apprentice' from a tried and tested, wonderful form of education that we already know from the medieval guilds, where masters took learners under their

wings. These learners could become apprentices and eventually become masters themselves.

However, I will not use the term 'master' because of two unwanted connotations that are inappropriate for this third stage of education. First of all, 'master' is not gender neutral, and although I am using 'he' and 'him' in this book as neutral personal pronouns, this cannot be done with a word like 'master'. Moreover, 'master' has strong authoritarian and disciplinary overtones, indicating that the master knows best and that he provides an example that shouldn't be called into question.

Historically, this connotation is correct. The guilds also existed to monitor the institution, to keep the monopoly on certain jobs and to maintain certain traditional practices. The term 'guide' does not have this connotation and also evokes a pleasant association with the pioneer, an association which is, as far as I am concerned, characteristic of every specimen of *Homo educandus*, whether they are old or young. In the third stage of education the guide is the older, more experienced person. He is first among equals, not only a scout, but also a guide.

The guide will be a crucial figure in the third stage of education. He must be an educational all-rounder, typically with a dual day job, both in the professional field and in an educational institution. Actually, the traditional academic is a perfect example, working in scientific research as well as in university education. This is not too difficult for academics as their work is intrinsically a matter of learning, of approaching the world with an inquisitive attitude. Their workplace is both a real workplace for researchers and a real educational setting. Their profession is intrinsically dual.

Incidentally, I am well aware that this image of the traditional academic is under considerable pressure at the moment. At the level of the individual career, the researcher, who has to publish, is constantly being played off against the teacher, who is seriously challenged by

the large number of students he has to serve. I will get back to this in the last section of this chapter.

At universities of applied science, there are also many examples of great guides, experienced people with a part-time appointment in education and a similar appointment in the professional field. These guides also feel intrinsically that they are first among equals. But we must ensure that their dual day job is protected and encouraged, which means that universities of applied science will have to be integrated into the employment fields for which they educate their students – but much more thoroughly than is usually the case today. After all, in order to be competent guides, lecturers will also have to work in the professional field. The universities of applied science will therefore also have to become all-rounders because besides this integration they must be able to constitute an educational space in which guides and apprentices can work together productively. This will be a huge challenge, but it is a challenge that we must take on, so that we can guarantee the number of competent guides that will be necessary for the success of this third stage of education.

The arrangement that the guide and apprentice agree on is central to the third stage of education. In terms of content this arrangement will vary on a case-by-case basis, so I cannot say much about it in general terms. In any concrete case, it will be an individual, unique, one-off trajectory. However, a few general, striking and important comments can be made about the prerequisites. These fall into three categories: there are educational, institutional and financial conditions, and the guide and apprentice will together explore and discuss these during a series of intake interviews.

## EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS: EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING NEEDS

### Experience

It is currently common practice when entering the labour market that highly educated young people apply in vain for jobs that they

are not eligible for since they lack the relevant experience. This makes sense. After all, you need experience for many types of job. But it is my firm belief that this also applies to post-initial education. To benefit from this type of education, you need experience. You don't need that experience so much for learning intentionally, for processing literature and reproducing information. But you do need experience to understand why you would want to follow a particular type of education, to identify the learning needs that you are faced with, and to actually benefit from the high-quality educational input that this education can offer you.

When you are young, you don't have much experience. This may be unfortunate, but that's life. (By the way, it is important to realise that without the ballast of experience, you can benefit much more from youthful bravado, making you brave enough to take on the most fantastic challenges without even a second thought.) However, for your chances on the labour market, it would be quite useful to have ten years of experience. But it takes ten years to gain this experience. We don't seem to want to invest that time, and we have apparently a way around this. We are sending swathes of young people with no experience into higher education lasting only three or four years. But does anyone seriously think that these young people could gain ten years of experience in just four years? And has it ever struck anyone how much more efficient it is if people attend higher education later in life? People can easily follow a four-year course in two years if they already have ten years of relevant experience under their belt.

I am not afraid to make the following claim: only after an average of eight years of work experience after your studies are you an accomplished professional. There will undoubtedly be some variation from field to field, but whether we are talking about a journalist, a social worker, a policeman, a teacher, an econometrist, a chemist, a surgeon or a lawyer – you need quite some years of experience after your studies before you know the tricks of the trade.

Let's just say that it takes an average of about twelve years of post-initial education before you are a professional who is naturally at

home in his profession. Now take a good look at these numbers and wonder how sensible it is to cut those twelve years into two pieces, such that the first part of four years consists of only studying and the second part of eight years consists of only working. Where have we seen this strange distribution before? In Chapter 1. In post-initial education, we simply repeat the incoherent idea that you must learn before you can live, or in this case before you can work.

In my new educational system, we no longer follow this foolishness. For higher education, you need experience. You need to understand how the world works before you can take it apart. Only if you have that understanding will you benefit from those separate parts and will you be able to turn a disassembled world into a better functioning one. So first start working: put some distance between yourself and school and gain some experience. Find your place in one field or another; start at the bottom, start as a junior assistant. The labour market will undoubtedly have to get used to this because there is probably no need for so many junior assistants. But in higher education we don't need so many first-year students either. In a complex society like ours, there is a great deal of hidden youth unemployment because there aren't many jobs you can do well without experience. However, it is unfair to burden education with this problem, at least the traditional education which tries to function as a full-time job for young people. This makes life unbearable for the teachers, as we can see all around us. And it doesn't make education any better either. Definitely not. In an educational-political sense, this is perhaps the most important message of this chapter. We really need to work towards a form of higher education that has a fundamentally dual nature. It is necessary for working and learning to be combined, and they can go together very well in this age group.

A linear, gradual structure may be ideal, similar to degree apprenticeships in nursing and in the police force: you both learn and work from Day 1, but in fact you mostly learn in the first few months and you mostly work at the end of the training. I don't have a strong opinion on the details of such on-the-job training. I merely present a proposal

in this chapter, and I would like to discuss this with anyone who is interested. For the time being, I would prefer to see young people work for a while after the second stage of education. So that they have really left school, so that they have the opportunity to create learning needs in the workplace. Because that is what it's all about, authentic learning needs.

## Learning needs

If you work, or otherwise live your own life in a social context, you will undoubtedly be embarrassed about your own performance at times. There is always something that you are unable to do. Or that you don't quite understand. Such a realisation may become a question, a learning need, and it may lead to an inquisitive attitude that stays with you. Talk about this realisation with a guide, even if it is still no more than a vague idea. Arrange an annual talk with an educational guide. Once the third stage of education has been successfully implemented in our society, such a guide will never be far off. Who knows, the time may have come when you are ready for a new educational challenge. Perhaps you are on the way to becoming an apprentice who together with a guide will arrange an educational journey.

Your possible educational journey as an apprentice starts with a conversation with a guide about the embarrassment you feel about your performance and about the learning needs that may be contained in this embarrassment. The guide will not have any other incentive than the educational challenge that your learning needs may have in store for him. Perverse incentives do not enter into this conversation. Compare it with a consultation with your GP, an intake interview with a psychologist or a visit to a Citizens Advice Bureau. Or compare it to a good conversation with a colleague or a friend who you want to consult about your first visit to Rome, which he has visited quite often. In today's neoliberal climate, it is not easy to imagine a conversation like this, which is purely about the educational quality of your learning needs. These days, there is

nearly always a perverse incentive, a business model, an expense, a bonus for your image: in other words a selfish opportunity.

But in the intake interviews of the third stage of education, the way I imagine them, the guide is completely free of any such constrictions. She has the freedom to be only interested in your learning needs and what she can do for you. I would like to compare this with what I consider to be the most beautiful form of education: the one-on-one talks with students who want me to supervise their thesis, who come to me with vague plans and shaky intuitions and with whom I see the text that they are writing come to life: a lucid, reasoned plea discussing an intriguing concept.

The learning needs do not have to be lucid at first. But they must be authentic, they must be real learning needs, demonstrating a genuine lack of understanding, a matter of truly experienced performance embarrassment. Here, the guide will inquire further about your motives for post-initial education. After all, it is quite possible that you are just looking for a new challenge, that you actually want another job, or that you wish to move up the career ladder. It is also quite possible that you are not the only one who thinks it is necessary for you to follow post-initial education. It may also be your boss, your parents, your partner, your children or someone else who is influencing you. It is even possible that you think it's necessary only because a significant other thinks it's necessary. But if you have not made that necessity your own yet, then the guide will see through you during these intake conversations. If it really *is* your own ambition, then perhaps the next step can also be made: recognising that your career needs are an expression of an underlying learning need. The guide will have some examining to do, and thus this may turn out to be an extremely interesting and formative conversation.

You need to realise that the guide has no other ambition than to explore the nature of your inquisitive attitude. Think of a consultation with your GP, who goes through all the symptoms and then gives a diagnosis. She searches for the best explanation for the symptoms that she finds. So does the guide. What has motivated the apprentice

to come here? Does he want a higher income? Does his boss want him to work in a different capacity? Is he tired of his current work? These are career-oriented motives, but they may nevertheless contain genuine, interesting and authentic learning needs. In this sense, the guide is also a kind of detective who can sense educational opportunities with her naturally inquisitive attitude.

The guide will walk along with the apprentice on a narrow ledge. On the one hand, she shouldn't talk her apprentice into accepting a learning need that would be interesting mostly to herself, but on the other hand she shouldn't immediately dismiss a camouflaged learning need as an improper motive, such as nothing more than a banal desire for a higher income. Such a desire may well contain a desire for more responsibility, which in turn might be a desire for greater expertise, not for status but for a dormant lack of insight, knowledge or understanding.

Once it has become clear that we are dealing with an apprentice who has interesting learning needs, then the guide and apprentice can jointly establish an educational pathway, and then they will be able to draw up an agreement for a third stage of education. Only then will the educational conditions have been met.

## INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS

The purity of the educational relationship between apprentice and guide is precarious. It is crucial for the third stage of education – in fact for every type of education. It was at the heart of my learning experience with Elly and the bike, long ago in an attic, which I discussed in Chapter 6. The most positive educational memories are always about such a purely educational relationship, an experience isolated in time and space. Teachers, who are struggling a bit these days, long for such moments when they have a fantastic lesson with their pupils in a classroom. For a while, the outside world doesn't matter at all. The world is limited to what is going on within these four walls, is totally present in all its relevance in that teaching experience, in which

everyone feels that something is really happening, that something is really being learned.

Such a moment, such a lesson – that's what education is all about. But these four classroom walls are, of course, not the self-evidently correct and definitive means to realise that purely educational relationship. In any case, this educational relationship is embedded in a complex reality in which a great many interests manage to capture and hold the attention of all kinds of different people. This is even stronger in the third stage of education than in the first two stages. In the adult world of post-initial education, there is no simple switch, no trick or button to isolate the educational relationship from the rest of the world. There are no classrooms where, as a teacher, you can close the door and magically start the lesson as a moment of pure education.

So how do you do that, as a guide and an apprentice? There is one important lever that you can use to keep both the apprentice and the guide alert. This lever is the fact that the interaction between guide and apprentice is a response to the apprentice's learning need. Consequently, there will be constant detailed, personal feedback, demonstrating and imitating, and continuous formative feedback. But there will never have to be any summative testing in the interaction between guide and apprentice. Such testing has no place in this stage of education. That is not what it is about. This applies at various levels to various stakeholders, of whom I will distinguish four: the training programme, the profession, the employer and the societal client.

In medieval guilds, the relationship between master and apprentice was always about the protection and preservation of a tradition. One of the master's fundamental tasks was to secure his craft, to save his traditional methods from possible decay, to train a successor who would uphold the discipline and who would in turn train his own successor.

Of course, such a master passionately loved his profession and his proficiency, and no doubt he was sincerely and honestly convinced that the transfer of his expertise, of his mastery, was the best response he could give to his apprentice's learning needs. His authority and the craft's status were beyond question. They were what the guild stood for, untouchable, proud.

Although times have changed and status has become much more fluid, we can now still find the master's triple agenda in many different aspects. However, in the third stage of education, we are no longer dealing with masters, but with guides, and thus we are able to name these interests and create the conditions to separate them as best we can. The first interest is the purely educational interest, the best response to the apprentice's learning needs. In addition, there is the importance of the training programme, whether or not this is part of an institute for tertiary education. And finally, there is the interest of the profession and the guide's professional pride; after all, alongside his educational role, he is a professional who definitely knows how things work.

## The training programme

Fundamentally, my third stage of education is an arrangement between apprentice and guide. It is definitely not an arrangement between the apprentice and the training programme. I want to get rid of the current massive and anonymous enrolment in many higher education courses. To a large extent and in many ways, training programmes are negatively affected by their own institutionalisation. This is not a problem that is easy to solve, but it is crucial to recognise it and to face it. A training programme must be able to look after its own interests, in order to guarantee a fruitful framework in which the apprentice can come into his own, and fulfil his learning needs. The purely institutional concerns of the training programme can be detrimental to the apprentice, and so can offering general training courses, as will be explained below. Both will have to be avoided in the third stage of education.

Most of the institutional concerns of training programmes come down to finding sufficient students, sufficient income and sufficient continuity. These are serious concerns that I certainly wouldn't want to downplay. But they are concerns that should not affect the educational relationship between apprentice and guide. Obtaining enough students, income and continuity is undoubtedly an uphill task for the administrators of universities and other institutions of higher education, but in the end I can't imagine that anyone can seriously believe that higher or university education should be about anything other than the educational quality of the relationship between apprentice and guide. The guide is mentioned here as a representative of the entire group of teachers. Every educational institution should put this ambition at the very top of their list of priorities: all efforts made to ensure the viability of the training programme should be secondary to the core task, namely promoting the educational relationship between apprentice and guide.

I will now immediately add an educational pitfall. An institution tends to think about the educational relationship between apprentice and guide in terms of the training programmes it offers. This is a real pitfall. And an obvious one. It is – to use a trite but common metaphor – as if it were part of the DNA of nearly everybody who works in education. I can clearly recognise it in myself. Typically, we are not only opinionated people, but also people who love to explain and who have their own ideas about what needs to be explained first and foremost. If you put a group of these people together and make them responsible for one or more courses, you can be certain that they will produce some beautiful and coherent course packages. However, this is of no use to an apprentice. Of course it is possible that the guide, as a true master, knows exactly what is absolutely necessary for every apprentice with a learning need, but before you know it you're turning the world upside down, and you are no longer looking for a training programme that will benefit the apprentice, but for an apprentice that will benefit the training programme.

This reversal should no longer take place in the third stage of education. Again this is comparable to a consultation with your GP or an intake interview with a psychologist. You don't want your GP or psychologist to come up with the same diagnosis and the same treatment for everyone. The psychologist might be excellent at EMDR, but that doesn't mean that EMDR is good for every vulnerable, languishing client. Customisation – discussed in the previous chapter – must be self-evident in education, and this is especially true for the third stage of education.

## The profession

The psychology of professionals who want to protect their field has always surprised and worried me. Why do they have such conservative dispositions, based on status and authority? I suspect that the hopeless situation among philosophers is to blame. During my studies I soon discovered that there are as many hotly contested views about what makes a philosopher a philosopher as there are people who call themselves philosophers. We do not have a professional association, and I am sure that we will not agree on whether that is a curse or a blessing. To me it is a blessing. It suits me as well as my – rather anarchic – pleas for my view of the profession.[58]

In the face of pressure from the field for a strict demarcation of the profession, I would like to protect the apprentice's learning need. There are many ways to learn to play a professional role. The world is changing, and there is constant innovation, often aiming for more interdisciplinarity. The third stage of education encourages such innovation. However, learning needs may also be local: an apprentice wanting to delve deeper into only one aspect of the sector in which he works, or into only one aspect of an adjacent sector with which he seeks a professional connection. Such customisation must be offered and stimulated.

In any sector in which an apprentice speaks to a guide about his learning needs, there will be pressure from the professional field. The guide's professional pride may have convinced him that the

apprentice will have to internalise the values of the profession: a surgeon cuts in *this* way, a policeman has *this* attitude, an accountant makes his calculations in *this* way, and a computer programmer uses *this* programming language to build an application. The guide will have his own preferences, will have his specific ideas on the professional virtues that are crucial for the formation of the apprentice. This preference cannot be removed. Such a preference should be a matter of two professionals who have an educational relationship. Official professional groups should not want to meddle in this with extensive professional codes. Professionals need space for their own autonomy. This will undoubtedly mean that the guide influences the specific development of the apprentice. I think that is inevitable. And I think it is a good thing, something fitting which suits the human condition. Contingency is our lot.

I would like to say something in this context about the teaching profession. If you are a teacher, you may feel short-changed by me, because I say that a teacher shouldn't want to teach or because I call you a first among equals, a mentor and a guide, and I depict Elly, an eight-year-old girl, as a prime example of your profession.

I apologise if you feel that I have done you an injustice; I certainly didn't mean to do so. I know that opinions on the teaching profession vary greatly. The anarchist in me likes this disagreement. I welcome the fact that there is not going to be a Teacher Register in the near future. The Education Secretary first wants to work towards a solid professional organisation. I wish him well, but I can imagine that teachers are more like philosophers in this respect than the Education Secretary would like. Or more like ordinary people, in their endless variety. After all, education is human work. A powerful, uniform professionalism defeats its purpose. There is no such thing as being *professionally human*. So this is not something to strive for. It is more fruitful to embrace the fact that the teaching profession is about your humanity. To enjoy the realisation that in your work you are eminently shaping what it means to be a specimen of *Homo educandus*:

a person who influences and shapes the form of his own existence, pioneering from start to finish.

### The employer

Just like the second stage of education, the third stage of education has a dual trajectory. The apprentice makes an appointment with a guide about his learning needs, and together they determine how they can best address these needs.

I suggested above that it may well take twelve years before someone feels naturally at home as a professional in a particular field. These years will regularly include both educational tasks and professional tasks. Obviously the apprentice needs an employer for this, and I would suggest that in the third stage of education this employer should be in place before the training programme starts. I imagine that the learning needs will mostly become urgent in a professional setting.

This is not the only possibility. I can imagine all kinds of extremely fascinating and relevant learning needs arising in other scenarios. Think of the parenting embarrassment felt by young parents, which may well lead to valuable learning needs in the field of pedagogy or developmental psychology. Or think of the learning needs that arise when an elderly parent develops Alzheimer's, or if a partner, child or close friend has some other disruptive psychiatric problem. Then it would be good if you weren't only to get the opportunity to take on informal care tasks, but that you were also able to contact a guide for your learning needs so that you could become proficient in dealing with, for example, Alzheimer's disease or a certain personality problem.

Nevertheless, in most cases there will be some combined form of employment. It is quite possible that your guide also works for your employer, that she is simply an example to you in the workplace, or that there is a coaching team managed by your guide, most of whose members are employed by both the training institution and your employer.

As I said before, this third stage of education may take thousands of different forms. In your case, your employer will clearly have his own agenda regarding your educational journey. This agenda matters, but it is important and beneficial to the educational relationship between apprentice and guide that clear and explicit arrangements are made with regard to this agenda.

Let's say you're a bricklayer and you are training to learn to draw up quotations and to check them. You're employed by a contractor. The contractor wants to do a good job, he doesn't want to mess up, he doesn't want to get negative media attention, and he doesn't want to be in financial trouble. The contractor wants to shine, wants your bricklaying work to contribute to his good credentials, to his portfolio. This is an important perspective, but the arrangement with your guide should ensure that your boss's perspective doesn't interfere with the educational perspective that your training is all about. Of course, your guide should not want to cover absolutely everything. It is certainly also a question of mutual trust. What is needed for a good educational pathway is above all that the apprentice, guide and employer have discussed this, have recognised the risks and can all agree to the educational process – in other words, they all need to agree to the condition that the educational relationship between guide and apprentice should not be hindered by the employer's interests.

## The societal client

A contractor's clients want him to deliver good work, and they want him to employ professionals, so that he delivers good value for money. Of course, such clients don't want any negative media attention either, and they certainly don't want to live with the shame of, for example, a collapsed bridge. These interests will not easily interfere with the training programmes of the contractor's employees, because all parties have a joint interest in well-trained professionals. But suppose that the employer isn't a contractor but a public service, or an institution funded by public funds, then you might think that we – all of us together – are all the client, that society is the client. For example, we

want police officers to be well-trained, we want care workers to be well trained, and we want the auditors who check public finance to be well trained.

As a 'societal client' we might have interests that get in the way of the educational interaction between guide and apprentice. They might, but they should not, because – as I argued in Chapter 5 – education is not about the learning outcomes. From individual to individual, it is always about searching for the form in which an individual can realise his zest for life. This does not take place in a vacuum. People learn to play their own role as members of our language community: among us, so to speak. So we cannot demand or enforce that our young people only develop in a way that we approve of, but nor does it mean that we should facilitate their development into types of professions that we abhor. The conversation remains a searching one, a matter of taking each other to task, of asking each other for reasons for what we believe are good habits.

To my mind, one good habit in the sphere of the third stage of education is crucial and that is educational freedom – the equivalent of that famous and equally necessary academic freedom. Educational freedom is crucial to education. What I mean is this: if an apprentice enters into a conversation with a guide about his learning needs as a result of professional embarrassment that has put and kept him in an inquisitive position, then this conversation between apprentice and guide should be a purely educational conversation. It should only be about what the apprentice wants to learn. Social demands should not enter into this conversation.

It is important that you see what I mean here. Of course, it is possible that this conversation is about societal interests and values. For example, as a guide I will happily have educational conversations with anyone who wants to talk about the vision of education that I expound in this book. This conversation will be from start to finish about societal interests and about the human values that I believe should be represented by our educational system. But just as we will always defend that it is undesirable if the people commissioning scientific research

are allowed to order the results that they want, so we will have to defend that the people commissioning a training programme should not make any demands about the yield of that programme.

This is a subtle point, but it is crucial for an understanding of what education can mean to society. Suppose I work in a hospital, and I have moved on to being an intern in dermatology. It is my ambition to become a plastic surgeon, and I can formulate this as a purely educational ambition. And that is what it is. I have real learning needs, for example, about how surgical procedures could be beneficial to patients with atopic eczema. I carry out research, improve my understanding of the skin as an organ, hone my skills, and gradually it becomes clear that despite all this I am not suited to become a plastic surgeon. My guide will tell me this. And there will come a time when I also understand this, when I see this, when I accept this. My guide makes it clear to me that there are societal requirements for a plastic surgeon and that I will not be able to meet those requirements.

What does this mean for the education I followed? Has it failed? On the contrary: I should be able to consider this education a success! It taught me something, namely an important life lesson. I should no longer wish to work as a plastic surgeon. I'll just stay a dermatology intern. That is quite a learning outcome. This insight will help me live my life. This has nothing to do with the societal requirements for someone who wants to be a plastic surgeon in the healthcare sector. Of course, these requirements apply to anyone who applies for such a position. But I won't apply. I won't, because I know it is not for me. This is what I have learned and when I am over the disappointment – which will certainly be there as it is a bitter pill to swallow – I will be grateful to my guide and myself for the lesson I learned, for the intergenerational experiment that was valuable in itself.

If, on the other hand, I am the guide, I will need the educational freedom to go on a journey with an apprentice and to have the freedom to simply see where it leads us. On this journey, I should not be bothered by the societal client who expects specific results from public services. This is an institutional condition that as a guide I should be able to

discuss with my apprentice and which should be able to be part of the agreement. I don't offer my apprentice a training programme, nor do I promise him a degree. All I can promise him is the educational freedom to thoroughly explore his learning needs.

Nevertheless, the societal client has a second interest, which must be distinguished from these institutional conditions: society pays huge sums of money for higher education. And this brings me to the financial condition.

## THE FINANCIAL CONDITION: A VOUCHER SYSTEM

Current higher education is considered an extension of regular, initial education. Although compulsory education ends after twelve years and we apparently consider young people capable of living their own lives after these twelve years, we continue to offer extensive higher education to a select group of young people. If you are smart enough and have been able to stay out of vocational education in these first twelve years, you will be socially rewarded with another four years of education. In this way our current school system promotes social inequality and funds it generously, in fact where it is least necessary. I think this is unfair. However, we seem to find it quite acceptable to increase initial education for the cognitive upper layers of society to sixteen years of age, and the European Union (that the UK has left) even required that by 2020, 40% of the labour force will have followed higher education. In doing so, the incoherent idea that learning precedes living is stretched out to unacceptable lengths.

I oppose this. In my educational system, the third stage of education is completely post-initial. This involves the need to rethink the funding of this post-initial education. The socially defensible position that initial education should be paid from public funds suddenly has a surprising consequence. There is no longer an obvious reason to finance only part of post-initial education with public funds. In my educational system, higher education and scientific education are

given the same status as post-graduate education, business training and all the other private training courses offered to adults. These private training programmes can now also claim public funds or, vice versa, we can also decide not to publicly fund higher education and scientific education. This will have a great impact.

I have a proposal – but it is just a proposal – and people who are much more at home in the details of educational funding than me will need to give this a great deal of further thought. My proposal is to take the financial resources away from the institutions and allocate them to anyone who has finished initial education. This is, of course, much more in line with my third stage of education, as this is all about the learning needs of the apprentice.

I propose a voucher system. Every young person who leaves the second stage of education receives vouchers that allow them to pay for education for which they feel the need at some point in their lives. I think it should be possible to give every young person vouchers for six or seven years of post-initial education. These vouchers don't need to be used straightaway. And they don't need to be used in one period or for one particular course. They can be used in small parts. And they don't expire. Thanks to these vouchers, every human being can take his time. People can travel, or they can go to work. They can turn their extracurricular learning work into a job. That is probably the best start, better than trying to continue studying immediately. After all, it is not very likely that at such a young age, without experience and without learning needs, people will be able to successfully complete the intake interviews with a guide.

This method of funding is much fairer to all the young people who, in the current system, are not able to enter higher education early enough. It would set their minds at rest: their time will come. There's no urgency. There is probably no need to repeat it, but I am doing it anyway: receiving all your education in the first part of your life is an exceedingly silly idea that we should never have allowed to invade our thinking habits.

Of course, because of this radically different funding system, we need to think carefully about how to give a firm central position to universities of applied science. I can imagine that the voucher system can help to support the change in mentality that is needed in the third stage of education: that educational institutions take the individual with a learning need as a starting point, rather than the courses these institutions can offer.

It should also be clear that the support offered by these educational institutions also implies that they will have to make sure that the institutional conditions are met. Education deserves an exclusively educational orientation. It is all right if educational institutions look after their own interests: this is their destiny. But all these efforts to take good care of the educational institution itself must always be secondary to the core task, which is the educational interaction between apprentice and guide and the support these institutions need to offer great educational guides.

It would therefore be especially good if the government could make market forces disappear from education. Education costs money, and we should all be happy to spend money on it. And you shouldn't want to *make* money from education. Like any institution, educational institutions have to be responsible for their own funding; however, they must also be protected from financial concerns about their self-preservation. As a society, we must unconditionally cherish institutions of post-initial education, just like we cherish primary and secondary schools.

## A SANCTUARY FOR EDUCATION

It is time for my finale, which is an ode to the university, or rather, an ode to the sanctuary for thought, which to me is a sanctuary for education. Universities are the jewels of civilisation, of our civilisation. They are the perfect places for *Homo educandus*, the intriguing creature who forms himself, who thinks about himself and who judges himself. I owe my happiness to that sanctuary. But I also have

my concerns. It is precisely because of what I see happening at university that I have become interested in our educational system, and that I have become angry about what this system is doing to us and to that wonderful institution.

My ideal is university education *as it was intended*. This education explores the limits of our knowledge, so in didactic terms it is impossible for teachers and students to have an unequal position. And this makes university education fundamentally democratic. After all, neither teachers nor students know all the answers: they are researching. They haven't found the answers yet. They want to know something that no one else knows yet, something that is not yet known at all. As a result, no one can presume that they understand what's going on, nor presume that they see why the other person doesn't understand it yet. At university, no one has the helicopter view that you need to be a teacher who *knows*. There is no explaining, but instead there is showing and trying out.

Of course, the university lecturer is a first among equals. She has been doing research for years. She is experienced, certainly. But it is precisely because she has been searching for so long that it might just be true that her students will have to help her open her eyes. What she's looking for may not be untraceable at all if she stops looking in the wrong direction. In principle, this possibility cannot be ruled out at university. No one knows for sure. My ideal university lecturers are questioning researchers, real pioneers, not the administrators of libraries full of answers. I discussed this in Chapter 2.

Unfortunately, this ideal is rarely found at universities today, perhaps only in some forgotten corner where an enthusiast and a few students have managed to escape the all-seeing eye of the Director of Education with a budget deficit. Of course I'm exaggerating somewhat. But the massive increase in students, dwindling funding, the intensification of large-scale education, the constant pressure to publish, the undesirable opposition between education and research that is constantly fuelled at the level of individual careers, the usual reluctance to educational innovation, the enormous lack of interest

in the labour market perspective and in students' personal development, the increasing hold on academic freedom by controlling authorities with a love of formal criteria – these are all aspects of the current university climate that seriously threatens academic education, which used to be so wonderful.

But I'm not here to grumble. This is the conclusion of the second part of this book, which is meant to be uplifting, and I am discussing the third stage of my ideal education. This stage of education fits perfectly within the context of the university. And it doesn't take much to see why. Traditionally, the university world is a place where learning equals working and working equals learning. Academic staff all have dual learning workplaces. By default, they have dual appointments, as researchers and as lecturers. Their professional day job is an educational day job: learning and working go hand in hand at university. Moreover, at the limits of knowing, the roles of apprentice and guide should merge: both are explorers, each in their own way. How could it be more democratic?

This is the ideal of what education can be. And let me be clear: this is not an ode to only the highest of high education. Every purely educational interaction – any form of education as it is intended – has these characteristics. Every type of education is an intergenerational experiment in which older people and younger people together find and create ways to express their common existence as specimens of *Homo educandus*. In the third stage of education, there is a purely educational focus on learning needs that arise in a professional setting, in the workplace, in the hectic nature of concrete, social life. In secondary or higher vocational training, these learning needs require, in all sorts of ways, growth in craftsmanship, skills and ambition, as well as the time and space for professionals to become proficient in unanticipated directions in response to a constantly changing society. And at university, the learning needs become metacognitive, methodological, philosophical questions about the limits of knowing – critical questions of confident and reflective individuals who will continue to wonder throughout their lifetimes what role

they have played, and will continue to play, in any claim to truth that they are inclined to stand for.

Now I am placing this book in your hands. What has been my role? And what has been yours? Were we *formed* by our educational system? Or was it a matter of *de*formation? And what are we going to do about it? You and me. Older people and younger people. Are we going to work together on this? I certainly hope so.

# A FINAL WORD

I had a fantastic time working on this book. I am grateful to Radboud University, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Sciences, the Teaching Institute for Pedagogic Sciences and Education and the Radboud Centre for Social Sciences for giving me all the academic freedom I needed. This allowed me to do much of my work outside of university. I have visited schools, spoken to teachers, pupils, parents, principals, administrators, educational experts and other educational consultants. I have learned from them all.

I have been fortunate enough that many of the people I spoke to wanted to read parts of the manuscript and provide feedback. Some only read an early draft, or a version of a chapter that ultimately didn't end up in the book at all. I asked some people to read one specific chapter, and others to read the complete book. But all of them have given me useful feedback that I struggled with and that has helped me learn a great deal. This has led to a text I could never have written on my own. I would like to thank all of these people, but I feel I should mention a few in particular.

First of all, my indispensable reader Melissa van Amerongen. So far, she has provided critical and constructive feedback on every book I have written for a wider audience. I put her to the test with this book, and she returned the favour, as it seemed that she loved the current school system much more than I did, and perhaps she still does. This resulted in some heated debates, but also in so many excellent suggestions about the structure and my language that I wonder if I will ever dare to write a book without her help again. I just hope that this will never be necessary.

In addition, my close colleague Wim de Muijnck deserves special attention. I didn't ask him to read the manuscript until there was a complete first draft. He read the whole text in only a few days. This resulted in a series of observations that I have been able to use to my

advantage. My wife, Liesbeth Stöfsel, also read the entire manuscript and commented on it. I thank her for the endless conversations about education, philosophy and humanity that have found their way into this book in all sorts of ways.

I would like to thank (in alphabetical order), Marion Arts (emphatically), Joris van den Berg, José Berndt, Fred Bon, Pieter Boshuizen (emphatically), Anna Bosman, Carla Bransen, Monique Bueving (emphatically), Berita Cornelissen, Iko Doeland, Hanke Drop, Rutger van Eijken, Robert-Jan Gruijthuijzen, Marije Hiemstra, Jeanet de Jong, Kathelijne van Kammen, Willem Kox, Susanne van Lent, Mirjam van Limpt, Jacandra van Megen (emphatically), Mariëlle Polman (and some of her pupils), Joan de Ruijter, Monic Schijvenaars (emphatically), Ilse Speelman, Sam Terpstra, Hans Thissen, Hartger Wassink (emphatically), Gerard van de Weijer and Jan Winters. This book is for you and for all your colleagues, children, pupils and students.

This English translation was made with social distancing, during the terrible pandemic lockdown due to Corona, by Fulco Teunissen and Kate Kirwin of *Twelvetrees Translations*. They've done a splendid job, struggling at times to find the British equivalents for all too Dutch examples and issues, and spurring me on to clarify passages that concealed obscurities that I hadn't noticed, but that needed to be sorted out to get the translation right. *Thanks!*

A special thanks to Hartger Wassink for suggesting the striking subtitle of the English edition, and to Tim Wengelaar for the terrific photo on the cover featuring Timo Huijsmans forging a knife at WALHALLAb, an uber-cool design-based learning hub run by Marco Mout.

Finally, I am grateful to Natalia Grygierczyk and René Mijs for the great job of setting up the Radboud University Press and I am proud that this book is the first to be published by them under the terms of the Creative Commons 4.0 international license. Thank you very much for the opportunity and the support.

# NOTES

[1] Jan Bransen, *Don't be fooled: A philosophy of common sense*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017.

[2] Anne Fernald, 'Four-month-old infants prefer to listen to motherese', *Infant Behavior and Development*, 8(2), 1985: 181-95, and Maria Spinelli et al., 'Does prosody make the difference? A meta-analysis on relations between prosodic aspects of infant-directed speech and infant outcomes', *Developmental Review*, 44, 2017: 1–18.

[3] I used the term for the first time in 2003, in the chapter 'De opvoedbare mens', in Martin van Hees, Else de Jonge, Lodi Nauta (eds.), *Kernthema's van de filosofie*. Meppel: Boom, 2003: 89–109, as an addition to the list made by earlier philosophers and anthropologists, including Henri Bergson's *Homo faber* (human who creates), Ernst Cassirer's *Homo symbolicus* (human who uses symbols) and Johan Huizinga's *Homo ludens* (human who plays). The term has been used before by other authors as well (see, for instance, Paolo Jesus, 'From *Homo Educandus* to *Homo Æstheticus*: Kant on Education', *Studi Kantiani*, Vol. XIX, 2006, 121–130; Juha Hämäläinen, 'The Concept of Social Pedagogy in the Field of Social Work', *Journal of Social Work*, 3(1), 2003, 69–80) so I cannot, and do not intend to, claim having coined the term. Much of the argument of my 2003 publication (which is only available in Dutch), but not the term, can be found in Jan Bransen, 'Educatability: Dissolving the problem of man's uniqueness'. *Journal of Anthropological Psychology*, Vol. 20, 2008, 2–27. See https://psy.au.dk/fileadmin/Psykologi/Forskning/Forskningsenheder/Journal_of_Anthropological_Psychology/Volume_20/jan_bransen1.pdf.

[4] Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch, seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*. Berlin: Junker und Dunnhaupt, 1940. (Translated as *Man. His Nature and Place in the World*, Columbia University Press, 1987).

[5] These words were borrowed from Robert-Jan Gruijthuijzen, teacher, philosopher and musician. See https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/de-muziekschool-van-repetitiehok-tot-oefenruimte-gruijthuijzen.

[6] There were many. See 'A final word' on pp. 235-236.

[7] For a good introduction of Dewey's philosophy of education set within the larger project of developing a pragmatist, cultural naturalism see Hildebrand, David, "John Dewey", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). See https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/dewey/.

[8] See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1959, and George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, & Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934. Classic presentations are Martin Hollis, *Models of Man*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, and Rom Harré, *Social Being. A Theory for Social Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.

[9] Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1928. (Translated as *The Levels of Organic Life and the Human: Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

[10] See Chapter 2 'Expectation between hope and prediction' in Jan Bransen, *Don't be fooled: A philosophy of common sense*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017: 31–46.

[11] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

[12] These words were taken from a Dutch committee who wrote an advisory report for the Dutch government. *Een goede basis*. Advies van de Commissie Kennisbasis PABO. Den Haag: hbo-raad, 2012: 4.

[13] I call this the 'missing information subroutine' in Jan Bransen, *Don't be fooled: A philosophy of common sense*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017: 8–11.

[14] Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo deus: A brief history of tomorrow*. London: Harvill Secker, 2016.

[15] Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', *Philosophical Review*, 83(4), 1974: 435–450.

[16] Of course this view of data is not undisputed, but it has been substantiated by many different philosophers and cognitive scientists working within the 'embodied cognition paradigm', including Humberto Maturana & Francisco Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge. The*

*Biological Roots of Human Understanding*. Boston: Shambala, 1987; Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life. Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010; Alva Noë, *Action in Perception*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004.

[17] See Richard Rorty, 'Solidarity or objectivity?', in Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth. Philosophical Papers I*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

[18] See Onur Bakiner, *Truth Commissions: Memory, Power, and Legitimacy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

[19] See Samuel Arbesman, *The Half-Life of Facts: Why Everything We Know Has an Expiration Date*. New York: Penguin, 2012.

[20] This has been a major theme in the work of Habermas ever since his *Erkenntnis und Interesse*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1968. See Jürgen Habermas, 'Realism after the linguistic turn', in *Truth and Justification*, translated by Barbara Fultner. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003; Jürgen Habermas, 'The Language Game of Responsible Agency and the Problem of Free Will: How can epistemic dualism be reconciled with ontological monism?', *Philosophical Explorations*, 10(1), 2007: 13–50.

[21] Although I would like to remark here that in recent years the individual career perspective has drastically deteriorated for scientific staff.

[22] I discuss this theme in Jan Bransen, *Don't be fooled: A philosophy of common sense*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017. The two paragraphs above are based on Chapter 7 of this book, 'Waking up without science'.

[23] Several stakeholders see this as the root of all evil. See for instance Geoff Troman (2000) Teacher Stress in the Low-Trust Society, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21:3, 331–353, https://doi.org/10.1080/713655357.

[24] The imagery is taken from F.J.J. Buytendijk, a Dutch philosopher and anthropologist who developed a most interesting general theory of human posture and movement. Some of his work was published

in English, e.g., F.J.J. Buytendijk, *Prolegomena to an anthropological physiology*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1974.

[25] As happens so often in educational literature, these concepts were derived from Ryan & Deci's well-known self-determination theory. However, I interpret these concepts in a somewhat unusual, conceptual manner. I think Ryan & Deci are mistaken when they claim that these are three empirically fixed and satisfiable, basic human psychological needs. However, this makes no difference to my argument in this chapter. I discussed this earlier in Jan Bransen, 'I want to be able to be myself! Self-control in behavioural sciences', in Maureen Sie (ed.), *Hoezo vrije wil? Perspectieven op een heikele kwestie*. Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 2011: 171–189. For the original sources, see: Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. 'Approaching and avoiding self-determination: Comparing cybernetic and organismic paradigms of motivation', in R.S. Wyer Jr. (ed.), *Perspectives on Behavioral Self-Regulation*, Vol. 12. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999: 193–215.; R.M. Ryan & E.L. Deci, 'An overview of self-determination theory: An organismic dialectical perspective', in E.L. Deci & R.M. Ryan (eds.), *Handbook of Self Determination Research*. Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press. 2003: 3–33; R.M. Ryan & E.L. Deci, 'Self-regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will?', *Journal of Personality*, 74, 2006: 1557–1585.

[26] Harry Frankfurt, 'Rationality and the unthinkable', in Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

[27] For a good overview, see 'Personal Autonomy' by Sarah Buss and Andrea Westlund in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. See https://seop.illc.uva.nl/entries/personal-autonomy/.

[28] See Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, and Jan Bransen, *Wie ben ik dan? Een filosofisch draaiboek voor je toekomst*. Leusden: ISVW Uitgevers, 2015.

[29] For example Hobbes' and Locke's 'possessive individualism', Weber's methodological individualism and the rational atomism of Homo economicus, which stems from Mill and Pareto. See C.B.

Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962; Joseph Heath, 'Methodological Individualism', in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015. See https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/methodological-individualism/; and Amartya Sen, 'Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 6(4), 1977: 317–344.

[30] From C.P. Cavafy: *Collected Poems*. Translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Translation Copyright © 1975, 1992 by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard.

[31] Jan Bransen, 'Doceerbaarheid', in W. Sanderse & E. Van der Zweerde (eds.), *Denkruimte. Reflecties op universitaire idealen en praktijken*. Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2012: 108.

[32] See this video by Ken Robinson, 'Changing Education Paradigms'. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U.

[33] See Biesta, G.J.J. *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Boulder, Co: Paradigm Publishers, 2010. and Biesta, G.J.J. *The beautiful risk of education*. Boulder, Co: Paradigm Publishers, 2014.

[34] Jan Bransen, 'Het is tijd om te vallen, lieve prinsen en prinsesjes', *de Volkskrant*, 3 oktober 2014.

[35] See for example Graham Haydon, 'Reason and Virtues: The Paradox of R. S. Peters on Moral Education', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 43(1), 2009: 173–188.

[36] Etienne Wenger. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[37] See Jan Bransen, 'The upbringing of future politicians', *Erasmus Magazine*, June 15, 2016. See https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/en/2016/06/15/the-upbringing-of-future-politicians/.

[38] This is a serious problem at the start of the digital era. See the interesting work by Tristan Harris, founder of Time Well Spent, an organisation that deals with humane technology. See www.humanetech.com.

[39] Michael Tomasello has done a great deal of research into the role of 'joint attention' in cognitive development in human beings. See Michael Tomasello and Hannes Rakoczy, 'What Makes Human Cognition Unique? From Individual to Shared to Collective Intentionality', *Mind & Language*, 18(2), 2003: 121–147.

[40] See Jan Bransen, *Don't be fooled: A philosophy of common sense*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017.

[41] See Jan Bransen, 'From Daily Life to Philosophy', *Metaphilosophy*, Vol 35, 2004, 517-535.

[42] See Jan Bransen, *Word zelf filosoof*. Diemen: Veen Magazines, 2010. [4th edition, reprinted by ISVW, 2014]; Jan Bransen, *Don't be fooled: A philosophy of common sense*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017.

[43] But this is still a long way off. See Gary Marcus & Jeremy Freeman, *The Future of the Brain: Essays by the World's Leading Neuroscientists*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

[44] See Selim Berker, 'The Normative Insignificance of Neuroscience', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 37(4), 2009: 293–329.

[45] See for example Marc Lewis, *The Biology of Desire: Why Addiction Is Not a Disease*. Philadelphia: Public Affairs, 2015.

[46] Jan Bransen, *Dat kunnen we zelf wel! Over humanisme en het vermogen onszelf te corrigeren*. Inaugural Lecture, Leiden University, 2001.

[47] Take a look at their website: www.walhallab.nl. It is in Dutch, but Google Translate will help you out sufficiently to get to the heart of the matter.

[48] Biesta, G.J.J. *The beautiful risk of education*. Boulder, Co: Paradigm Publishers, 2014.

[49] Timo Gnambs & Barbara Hanfstingl, 'The Decline of Academic Motivation during Adolescence: An Accelerated Longitudinal Cohort Analysis on the Effect of Psychological Need Satisfaction', *Educational Psychology* 36(9), 2016: 1698–1712.

[50] The social sciences are so much more complex than the natural sciences, and the hypothesis we are discussing here is so completely

undetermined that we have no idea how we should operationalise it in a warrantable manner. Consequently, we need to seriously ask ourselves whether this is something that we should devote our intellectual energy to. I don't think so. It is not an issue I would like to raise here, even though it is the fundamental issue at the heart of my book *Don't be fooled: A philosophy of common sense*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017.

[51] Thanks to Vakcollege De Hef in Rotterdam, VSO Kristallis in Nijmegen, and Niekée in Roermond.

[52] This is a well-studied phenomenon. See for example Kelly Bedard and Elizabeth Dhuey, 'The Persistence of Early Childhood Maturity: International Evidence of Long-Run Age Effects', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 121(4), 2006: 1437–1472.

[53] See Herman R. van Gunsteren, *A Theory of Citizenship: Organizing Plurality in Contemporary Democracies.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. Also see Jan Bransen, 'Nou zeg, waar bemoei je je mee', Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte, 103(1), 2011: 4–20.

[54] See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press, 1991; Jan Bransen, 'Authenticiteit, integriteit en identiteit', in Martin van Hees, Thomas Nys & Ingrid Robeyns, *Basisboek ethiek*. Amsterdam: Boom, 2014: 46–60.

[55] See Chapter 4, 'Trust and accommodation' in Jan Bransen, *Don't be fooled: A philosophy of common sense*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, as well as Jan Bransen, 'Nou zeg, waar bemoei je je mee', *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte*, 103(1), 2011: 4–20.

[56] Frits van Oostrom, *Een zaak van alleman. Over de canon, schoolboeken, docenten en algemene ontwikkeling*. Kohnstammlezing 2007. Amsterdam: Vossiuspers, 2007.

[57] See Jan Bransen, 'Pedagogisch gezag is geen epistemisch gezag. Een pleidooi tegen de verwetenschappelijking van de pedagogiek', *Pedagogiek. Wetenschappelijk forum voor opvoeding, onderwijs en vorming*. 16(2), 2016: 175–198.

[58] Just like here 😊 ! See Jan Bransen, *Word zelf filosoof*. Diemen: Veen Magazines, 2010. [4th edition, reprinted by ISVW, 2014] and Jan Bransen, *Waar filosofen van houden*. Leusden: ISVW Uitgevers, 2016.

Linnaeus, the Swedish taxonomist, was wrong when he named our species Homo sapiens, i.e. wise man. We are not. We do too many senseless, destructive and irresponsible things to deserve that label. Actually, we need to be educated.

Fortunately, we *can* be educated. We can transform ourselves. We are *Homo educandus*.

Sadly, our current school system is broken. In fact, it does not support education. It deforms. This is what Jan Bransen claims in this book. He convincingly argues that our current school system is based on incoherent ideas, among which the notions that people need to study for years on end before they are ready to take part in our society, or that students learn because teachers teach.

We can do better than that. In the second part of the book, Bransen points out that we have reasons to be confident and enthusiastic. We can improve our education system. Applying a dramaturgical analysis of human action, Bransen explains what socialization should look like in primary education, how our personal development can be supported in secondary education and how qualification can be organized in dual tracks in higher education, integrating learning, working and living over our course of life.

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