

'Zingeving en goed onderwijs' (The search for meaning and good education)

Making good progress together

June 2013

Preface

'Good education' focuses on allowing each student to flourish. Everyone counts: the whole person¹. It's not just about qualifying for further schooling or a professional career. It's just as much about preparing young people to participate in society. The school is a guide to a humane society². The school literally puts 'good education' into practice by what it actually does, and does not do³.

'Good education' is more than the technical didactic implementation of an educational concept⁴. It is an ethical concept, based on a view of humanity and a view of society.

How do we engage in a meaningful conversation about more advanced views about 'good education'? Not everyone assumes traditionally shared visions⁵. In other words, how can we make identity a process of listening, dialogue, and understanding?⁶

In this text, we add three basic concepts to the discussion on identity: good education, being a good person, and living a good life. We illustrate our search with a metaphor of a journey. Our wish is to be inspired by displayed behaviour in our daily lives. After all, behaviour reveals what the true meaning of identity is.

As you set out for Ithaca, hope that
your journey is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
from: 'Ithaca', by C.P. Cavafy

Important values

In our schools, human beings are central. Students develop head, hand, and heart skills, in line with the vision on teaching and learning of their school. Teachers, staff and school management in turn, develop their skills to ensure this process is as successful as possible. Together, we provide 'good education'.

'Good education' motivates people and connects all members of the school community: students, parents, teachers, other staff and school management. But what connects the school community when it comes to philosophical values in a deeper sense? How significant are such values with respect to the quality of 'good education', and our behaviour towards one another?

There is no easy answer to this question. After all, we are living in a society that has less and less common traditions. More often, staff, parents and school management will have developed a personal vision, either inside or outside of a religious tradition, about what they think life means and how people should act as a result of this. Students come into contact with various worldviews.

Diversity in philosophical beliefs is a social reality⁷.

The journey

How do we go from an individual value orientation to commonly accepted behaviour and shared goals? Let's use a metaphor to help us visualise our search for an answer to this question, and which can also link our search – based on each other's individual principles or sources – with common goals⁸.

Everyone embarks on a journey, navigating by the coordinates of their own beliefs. You will be carrying these beliefs, either implicitly or explicitly. As participants of a school, we meet and ask ourselves what kind of common luggage we are carrying. Of course, all the requirements for 'good education', such as a school wishes to give shape to it: subject matter, didactics and pedagogy⁹. And what are we carrying in terms of philosophical principles? We shall focus on displayed behaviour: how do we ourselves show what a good person is and how to shape a good life?¹⁰

Our luggage

We will be carrying 'attention' for each other's points of departure. After all, the individual travellers will each have their own personal principles, ideas and beliefs, whether or not codified in sources: forming each person's starting point.

'Attention', in our suitcase, goes beyond mere respect: it concerns a genuine interest in each other's views, in meeting¹¹. We will take along a template of a map, which we shall partially complete. This map will help us see the school environment as a place where you can grow, where you feel safe, where another can feel safe with you, and where another can grow and become who he or she is. This map will help get a clearer picture of what good education is, and what it means to be a good person and live a good life.

What our luggage definitely shouldn't be missing is a compendium with an historical overview of the school's origins. The school was built on a Catholic foundation, which has greatly influenced how we think about society, and how we should treat each other. We acknowledge and appreciate this source, an essential part of our legacy, and want to express this in our culture.¹²

Sticking with our metaphor, a GPS will be indispensable, for showing our location. We orient ourselves by reference to the behaviour of students, teachers, staff and school management. Using a compass, each person will then determine their own position and thus measure their own contribution to collective behaviour.

Our landmarks

Which beacons are important? 'Good education', because this is not finished, until students can mirror themselves on behaviour, suitable for the school community, which is aimed at being a good person and living a good life.

A good person as a beacon, but what do we understand by a good person? Many people immediately have an image or feeling when it comes to a 'good person'¹³. What's mainly important is that we show and experience in our behaviour what a good person is. For example, that you want to support another, want to help them, and offer them opportunities. Rules, recommendations, or 'good works' have been formulated in the various religions, as well as in non-religious philosophies. How to be a good person is obviously also visible in day-to-day activities at school: helping someone with good advice, or providing support where necessary, without hesitation. And perhaps the most difficult: forgiving each other, based on the idea that you can start again every day.

Indeed, living a good life goes beyond merely having a well organised school community and clear agreements. Interdependence is the life blood of a community. Good living is thus especially noticeable from the developmental opportunities, the tolerance, the intellectual and moral freedoms that you grant each other, and the support and care you give each other. Living well is the foundation of good education, and makes it possible to be a good person¹⁴.

Staying on track

Views on 'being a good person' and 'living a good life' can and may differ, and may come from various sources. We are on track if our behaviour shows that we are working being a good person and living a good life. From our Catholic foundations, the Ons Middelbaar Onderwijs association is constantly alert to developments in society. We remain in dialogue with each other. This document aims to be a handbook for entering into a dialogue in each individual school. And together find answers to the following questions: what does this mean to us as students, as parents, as teachers? And what do you notice at school? That's the assignment.

Process accountability and references

This text came about through collaboration between the members of the working group on identity, in dialogue with the rectors, and after consultation with external stakeholders with the primary question in mind: how can we interpret the gospels in school practice in school practice?

After the text was drafted, we sought supporting scientific literature. Incidentally, only a limited list of literature is provided, with the main purpose of allowing readers to further investigate the background information. A number of relevant quotes have therefore been included to this end.

The references refer to certain passages via numbered references.

Sources

1

The Gospel is the primary source in this text.

2

Kees Schuyt, *Het onderbroken ritme. Opvoeding, onderwijs en sociale cohesie in een gefragmenteerde samenleving* ('The interrupted rhythm. Education, training and social cohesion in a fragmented society'), Kohnstamm lecture, 2001, Amsterdam.

The greatest power of education and training lies and always has in an autonomous assignment, which finds its most important purposes in itself. I would like to formulate this assignment for education as contributing to the formation of self-acting, autonomous people, especially by developing cognitive, affective, moral and social capabilities of young, undeveloped people. For education, I would formulate these autonomous purposes as developing, bringing to fruition – if I may use such an old-fashioned, Aristotelian word – of learners and pupils, in intellectual and moral, and emotional and social terms.

Ton Roumen, *'Pedagogiek van de aandacht'* ('The pedagogics of attention'), 2008, p.32, Zoetermeer.

Referring to Anselm Grün, Roumen says: *'training and education are aimed at allowing young people to learn to discover their own untouchable dignity and share it with each other, so as to experience the wealth of human life and human love.'*

In the wake of Benedict of Nursia (480–547), he writes (p.39): *'The Benedictine pedagogical concept is concisely referred to as "ganzheitliche Bildung" and can be characterised as an integral pedagogy that focuses on the whole human being, on their development and their healing. This pedagogy wants to transcend the restrictive view of learning, in which only knowledge is transmitted. In addition to the focus on cognitive education, emphasis is therefore also placed on social, ethical, practical, artistic and religious aspects of education. The idea is to address the whole person. Not only is an appeal made to the mind, but also to the body, the social sense, and the emotions. After all, learning is more than just mental learning.'*

Lia van Aalsum, *'Spiritualiteit in het onderwijs. Een handreiking'* ('Spirituality in education: a guide') (With an introduction by Professor Kees Waaijman), pp. 13–18, Delft.

She outlines four facets of pedagogy, namely the contribution to a) self-formation resulting in an autonomous and logical being, b) the development of an altruistic humanity, c) social ability, and d) the formation of 'head, heart and hands'. Elsewhere, Van Aalsum describes in her book that *in recent decades, what is perhaps missing most is philosophical, moral and spiritual education as an essential element of teaching* (p.110).

3

P.P. van Tongeren & K. Plasman-de Roo (eds.), *Voorbeeldig onderwijs* ('Exemplary education') 2007 (pp. 60–69) (Annalen van het Thijmgenootschap, Vol 95, instalment 2), Nijmegen.

4

Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. 1998, San Francisco.

Parker Palmer, *Leraar met hart en ziel. Over persoonlijke en professionele groei* ('Teacher with heart and soul. About personal and professional growth'.) (translation by Palmer, 1998), 2005, Groningen/Houten.

5

Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer (ed.), *Handboek jongeren en religie, Katholieke, protestantse en islamitische jongeren in Nederland*. ('Youth and Religion Handbook: Catholic, Protestant and Islamic Youth in the Netherlands') 2010, Almere.

6

Joost Dupont, *Identiteit is kwaliteit. De identiteitstheorie van Paul Ricoeur – als voorstudie voor een verheldering van de identiteit van katholieke basisscholen in Nederland*. 2010, Budel: Damon (doctoral thesis).

The question of identity is also important as we usually understand the word 'important', meaning 'of great importance to us'. It is a question about 'the reality we are'. And if anything is important to us, then it is surely this reality. With great interest, we like thinking about ourselves. We are looking for ourselves. We want to find ourselves. We want to be our true self. We want to be authentic. We are looking for inspirational sources, spiritual sources, 'all sorts of' sources, which can teach to become who we are. Organisations, too, wish to present themselves as 'authentic'. To this end, they draw up a vision. They formulate a mission. They want a powerful image. They think about the meaning of what they are doing and how they can do it better. The word 'identity' is a label for all these interests of individuals and organisations (p.18). See pp. 222–224 for an ethics of the discussion around identity.

7

Erik Borgman, *Overlopen naar de barbaren. Het publieke belang van religie en christendom*. 2011, Kampen.

Erik Borgman sees this philosophical diversity not only as a reality, or let alone a threat, but as a chance: this diversity is 'the birthplace of new insights.' Thus, the clash of visions is clearly revealed as the space in which the truth and the goodness that we seek and which feeds our lives, have always been present as a receding horizon. They do not coincide with one of the positions taken, but light up in the collision of these positions. It is therefore not a matter of trying to prevent the clash of universals through consensus decision-making ('polderen'). It is about allowing this clash to occur constructively – that is, without violence and with the greatest possible openness and freedom – but as fiercely as necessary. In the belief that truth and goodness will not be lost this way, but be revealed in the sparks coming off the collision. (pp. 89–90).

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T. Roumen, *De spirituele weg van verandering. Zoeken naar authenticiteit*. 2006, Zoetermeer.

9

Bill Banning, 'Een professionele leraar geeft les met hart en ziel en met kennis van zaken'. In: L. Braeckmans (ed.), *De leraar met hart en ziel. Naar een pedagogiek van liefde en vrijheid* 2011, pp. 65–182, Dieroo Academia, No. 17, Ghent.

10

F.A.J. Korthagen, *Leraren leren leren. Realistisch opleidingsonderwijs, geïnspireerd door Ph. A. Kohnstamm* (Inaugural speech, 1998, University of Amsterdam). Consulted on 07-02-2003, <http://www.waarden.org/studie/hoeken/2artikelen/korthagen/>.

I agree with Kohnstamm when I say that many lasting learning experiences derive from a substantial encounter, the encounter between teacher and student, in which both are present from their essential identity. (Kohnstamm, 1929, p. 60 speaks of 'the deepest self' and refers in this regard to the essence of the 'soul.') This requires daring, enthusiasm and involvement (with the pupil and with their own values) of teachers, but it also assumes that teachers and students interact with each other in a respectful way. This can be quite a challenge, in large, multicultural classes. Indeed, during their encounter, teachers and students will also come into contact with various boundaries inherent in their personalities and particular circumstances. But it is precisely through experiencing such boundaries, that awareness about norms and values can be promoted, and self-knowledge and respect for the personality of others can be developed.

In addition to the fact that the meeting brings the teacher and pupil (and students amongst themselves) in contact with boundaries, norms and values, it also creates the challenging need to search for new opportunities for working and learning together (accepted by all actors). It therefore also concerns a process of creation (of course, within the school's framework conditions and the social context).

With regard to the emphasis on 'displayed behaviour', reference can be made to the previously mentioned lecture of Korthagen, in which he developed the by now already well-known 'Levels' model. For Korthagen, behaviour is never just behaviour, but is always connected with skills, beliefs, feelings, (professional and personal) identity, and the level of involvement. In other words, the behaviour is coloured by the person, across all layers of their personality.

Idem, *Waar doen we het voor? Op zoek naar de essentie van goed leraarschap* (Lecture at University of Utrecht). Utrecht. Consulted on 06-06-2009, <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/22629/korthagen-waar+doen+we+het+voor.pdf?sequence=1>.

Erik P.N.M. Borgman, *Met het oog op goed leven, Cobbenhagen en onze universitaire cultuur*. Tilburg, 2011.

11

Dupont's work cited above, 2010, p. 223:

A second condition for a good conversation is that the discussion partners must indeed be partners, that is, they must intend to work together, which here means: they should want to understand each other. (...) Being a discussion partner means being open to other interpretations of practice than one's own. This openness to the other is a prerequisite for renewing your own insights (...).

Th. van Veldhoven, 'Ontvangen als intersubjectieve act', in: *De intersubjectiviteit van het zijn: keuze uit het werk van Prof. dr. Th. van Velthoven*, introduction by J.A. Aertsen, 1988, Kampen.

A successful conversation doesn't consist of a confrontation of two or more pre-conceived thoughts in order to compare them, or by voicing them at the same time, but of a meeting in which each person's thinking is further developed by either party's contribution (p. 67).
In the footnote he mentions a quote from Hans-Georg Gadamer taken from *Wahrheit und Methode, Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 1965/1975, Mohr, p.360): *'Verständigung im Gespräch ist nicht ein blosses Sichausspielen und Durchsetzen des eigenen Standpunktes, sondern eine Verwandlung ins Gemeinsame hin, in der man nicht bleibt, was man war'*

Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer, 'Het religieuze landschap van middelbare scholieren', in: *Handboek jongeren en religie, Katholieke, protestantse en islamitische jongeren en Nederland*, Almere, 2010, pp. 107–119.

12

Monique van Dijk-Groeneboer, 'Het religieuze landschap van middelbare scholieren', in: *Handboek jongeren en religie, Katholieke, protestantse en islamitische jongeren en Nederland*, Almere, 2010, pp. 107–119.

Toke Elshof, 'Religieuze erfenissen' in: *Handboek jongeren en religie, Katholieke, protestantse en islamitische jongeren en Nederland*, Almere, 2010, pp. 121–139.

YOUCAT, Nieuwe officiële jongerencatechismus, De nieuwe jeugdcatechismus voor de Wereldjongerendagen 2011, Lannoo.

N. Dullemans en anderen (ed.), *Katholieke scholen, vertrouwen in schoolpraktijken*, Part 4 KBVO, November 1979.

13

An abundance of information can be found about this question. We will limit ourselves here to a reference via Google, to scholieren.com, a forum where (on 03/04/2012) students discussed 'what a good person is'.

14

H.P.J. Witte, *Een ignatiaans perspectief op de ongemakkelijke verhouding van spiritualiteit en theologie*. 2011, Tilburg.