

The Adventure of Question and Answer



Proposal for a new school

's-Hertogenbosch, September 2016

“You deserve to be happy”

- Hannah Arendt

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[PAGENUMBERS NEED TO BE UPDATED ALSO IN FOOTNOTES]

Introduction

“The School of Athens” is the name of the famous fresco by Raphael on the front cover on this booklet. It depicts a colourful group of ancient Greek philosophers and scientists, as well as Raphael himself and his contemporaries. They all share the same goal, symbolized by the open arch over Plato and Aristotle: a continuous search and discovery of anything and everything accessible to human investigation.

The continuous and all-encompassing search for knowledge depicted in Raphael’s fresco underpins the educational proposal for a new school according to the mission of the Magnolia Foundation, as outlined in this document. The text describes how the school envisioned by the Foundation should ideally be, and is based on an educational approach that stems from the direct experience and insights of teachers, parents and scientists.

A school is, first of all, a meeting place for people who want to help each other on their way to self-realization. This written document is merely an attempt to illustrate how, in our view, such a place might look like. It is therefore meant to be a “living” document, one that becomes the subject of dialogue between our stakeholders: students, parents, teachers, partners from civil society and public authorities. We wish to learn from all of these parties. In fact, one starts a school, in the first place, out of a desire to discover new things himself. This desire constitutes our deepest motivation.

Just as depicted in “The School of Athens”, in the way that each of the characters moves with respect to the others, our motivation is a desire for a true movement towards each other in a passionate dialogue.

's-Hertogenbosch, September 2016

Renewing a tradition (orientation of the school)

“For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the truth”. (Plutarchus)

What is the problem

Nowadays, Dutch primary education is primarily a place of transmitting knowledge and skills. It is roughly shaped according to the ideals of the Enlightenment, aiming to teach as many facts as possible and, to a lesser extent, ways of using these facts. In addition, it aims to teach competences and behaviour. At the same time, however, it is generally recognized that many of the subjects being taught – or the impressions that remain from them – will have completely changed in ten years' time and might not even be relevant anymore.

Our children are growing up while we do not know the kind of world that they will be confronted with. And yet, the aim of a school is to introduce them to this future world, and to help them to find their place in it. The real challenge for a school nowadays is, therefore, to help the child to face new situations autonomously.

“ Nowadays information is available for everybody, anywhere and at any point in time. (...) Currently, school education is of a high quality, but it will need to adapt much more to the changes sketched. At this point in time the accent in school education is on the transmission of knowledge and the cognitive performances are particularly appreciated. (...) [School education] will need to prepare [the children] for a life in which they will permanently go on learning. The ongoing changes in society require this.”¹

At the same time, large-scale research that has been carried out on Dutch youth has concluded that problematic behaviour, such as the widely recorded abuse of alcohol and drugs, “*builds upon a need to estape, to flee one’s daily reality [...]. Apparently, for many young people, reality has less identity and fulfillment to offer compared to a dream, a fantasy or a kick*”². If true, this conclusion means that their education has substantially missed its goal of introducing the child to reality in a way that lets him recognize that reality is “for him” and that he is “for reality”.

The researchers come to the conclusion that such a lack of education “*can easily turn into a social time bomb, unless opposite forces arise to give a new shape to what is skewed and to offer a new vision for growing and educating. (...) Our research uncovers a deeply-rooted cultural problem. It would be very naïve to think that such a problem can be solved though public policies. This social time bomb is*

¹ Commission Our School Education 2032 (appointed by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science), Advice Guidelines: A Proposal, September 2015 <http://onsonderwijs2032.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Hoofdlijn-advies-Een-voorstel-Onderwijs2032.pdf> (in Dutch). The proposal – together with several other initiatives - aims at developing a new basic curriculum for schools. The quoted text is our translation.

² Frits Spangenberg and Martijn Lampert, *De grenzenloze generatie en de eeuwige jeugd van hun opvoeders*, Amsterdam, 2009, p. 69-70. Our translation.

*the social issue of our times*³. *“It is definitely time to break the silence, time to shake up the debate, time for a discussion about the transmission of values”*⁴.

We recognise these problems for our children and we wish to set up a new school to try to offer an answer to them.

³ Ibidem, p. 28.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 26.

Renewing a tradition

Introduction

As parents we wish that our children can become themselves. The most beautiful element in a human being and in a child is the desire to become oneself. Paradoxally, to become oneself implies the existence of relations with other people. Just as one 'comes into existence' through others, so too does one become oneself in a community.

This 'becoming oneself' happens in the encounter with oneself, with others and with everything, and continues for one's whole life. For it to happen, however, it is necessary to be helped by somebody more experienced. This helping a child to 'become himself' is, precisely, education.⁵

The parents are responsible for the education of their children, and a school helps them with this task. In order to step into life with confidence, children need to be accompanied, to be given a direction. They need to be enriched with knowledge and skills that are able to develop their personal taste. As all, their own ability to judge needs to be developed. Primary school is the place where children are helped to take their first fundamental steps along this adventurous path.

This path requires, in short, a threefold starting point:

1. *Amazement in front of reality: life is worthwhile living*

Educating means "introducing (someone) into reality".⁶ A child's school is a key part of this education and, as such, has the role of introducing a child, day after day, into reality.

⁵ The current project of a school and the vision we propose rely on our experience and ideas. They are formulated with the help of our partner schools and, in particular, are based on the insights about education of Luigi Giussani, Nel Noddings and Gert Biesta, respectively an Italian, an American and a Dutch professor with a remarkable expertise in school education. It is worthwhile mentioning that all three of them taught in (secondary) schools before becoming university professors.

⁶ J. A. Jungmann, S.J. *Christus als Mittelpunkt religiöser Erziehung*, Freiburg i.B. 1939, p. 20; cited in Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education (Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny)*, New York 2001

Furthermore, it is about reality as a whole, in its entirety (Jungmann)⁷. Reality as a whole means that everything is looked at as part of a unity (it is, thus, not about learning about separate aspects) and that the entire being of a child, with all his desires, is accompanied.

In the picture of the School of Athens by Raphael – which is depicted on the front cover of this document – the link between the different sciences (i.e. the different school subjects) is symbolised by the open-air view behind Plato and Aristotle: all subjects share the same horizon.

This understanding of reality as a “whole” leads to the awareness that an introduction into reality that does not pay special attention to its meaning is insufficient. “Reality is never truly confirmed unless the existence of its meaning is confirmed”.⁸ As a matter of fact, it would be impossible to become oneself if life and reality did not have a meaning.

In this task we have the best possible “ally”: the curiosity of the child himself. Every child is naturally open towards reality. He recognises how beautiful everything is, he wishes to discover everything. We want to accompany and encourage the children to deepen this desire and to explore the beauty of everything. The teachers and the school director wish to show this curiosity in their own way of living.

The only credible way for a teacher to demonstrate this curiosity is to deepen one’s own journey of exploration, starting from one’s own tradition. With the word “tradition” we do not refer to the “habits of some ‘good old times’ ” but rather to the elements that, in light of our history, are the most corresponding to our own personality.⁹ It is our ‘working hypothesis’.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ See C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Harcourt, New York, 1933; cited in Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, New York 2001

⁹ See Appendix: Loyalty to Tradition: the Source of Certainty, p.XX.

The tradition that constitutes the working hypothesis of our school is the Catholic tradition: in our experience, it enables us to explore and discover reality and its meaning in a convincing way. That is because the Catholic tradition holds, as a starting point, that the origin and the purpose of reality are essentially good. If reality really is good, then one can investigate everything with confidence. For this reason, an education in a Catholic tradition can also be very valuable for agnostic people, and even for atheists and for people with different religious backgrounds. As a matter of fact, it teaches the positive research attitude that is at the very root of Western culture.¹⁰

Raphael's fresco is framed by the Pope's apartments. It was a Pope who entrusted Raphael with the task of depicting the ancient Greek philosophers. The fact that such a task was given by the leader of the Catholic Church shows how much the Christian culture values the Greek attempts to investigate reality and its meaning.

Our starting insight is that, for the development of a proper critical attitude in a child, it is better to investigate a single hypothesis in depth instead of learning ten at a very superficial level. At a later stage, the child will be much more able to scrutinise other hypotheses of meaning as well.

This starting from a positive attitude to explore a reality that is essentially good is the most beautiful, thorough and coherent way of confirming and fostering self-confidence and curiosity in our children, of having them properly "equipped" to face reality and, in particular, a rapidly changing society.

2. Top quality school education

The introduction of a child into reality takes place in a school, and is done primarily by offering him knowledge and skills. The elementary school age is the point in time at which the child is particularly able to gather basic knowledge and skills. It is therefore the child's right that the school concentrates its efforts on this core task,

¹⁰ See e.g. Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason, How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*, Random House, 2005.

so that the child can step into his own environment with more self-confidence and can achieve the level of education that corresponds to him.

The school is, therefore, oriented to the core subjects of its curriculum: language, maths, history, geography, introduction to natural sciences, music, arts, gymnastics, religious education (catechism) and English. This last subject is taught at a higher level than in usual Dutch elementary schools. The purpose is to ensure that, already towards the end of elementary school, the children are ready to discover cultures outside of the Netherlands. In present-day Europe, this openness to other cultures is desirable, and even necessary.

The school critically evaluates the relevance of (attention to be paid to) other subjects and lessons. The minimal curriculum is shaped by the requirements set by the 'learning objectives' (*kerndoelen*) as defined by the Government, and in the way they are worked out. No maximum level is set: we aim at putting each and every child in the position to grow in the best possible way, which means offering him the possibility to reach his highest potential.

As far as the the *method* is concerned, the school considers the starting point to be the encounter between the pupil and the teacher (where the teacher is someone at an appropriate level, with an adequate life experience and expertise in the art of teaching in an elementary school).¹¹ The encounter¹² between the two happens when the teacher manages to take the child along by introducing him to *something beautiful* that triggers his enthusiasm. With the expression "something beautiful" we mean, in the first place, something worthwhile for the teacher, something sparking enthusiasm in the teacher himself. For this encounter to happen, we need skilful teachers with a genuine good will towards their pupils.

¹¹ Concerning the characteristics that the school requires of a teacher, see [pages XX](#).

¹² The educational expert prof. Biesta describes this theory in *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, London, 2013 (Translation in Dutch: *Het mooie risico van onderwijs*, Uitgeverij Phronese, 2015).

3. *Attention and appreciation for the child; the joy of being together and doing things together*

The direct consequence of the teaching approach that we describe is that the school is a community of life, not a place where the child is offered subjects that are ‘detached’ from each other. Life at school and, in particular, the details of the individual subjects need to be tuned to the child and to what is suitable for him. Since the child spends a large part of his day at school, it is necessary that the school be a place where his entire personality – feelings, reason and freedom – is accompanied and given every opportunity to unfold and flourish. This flourishing happens, in particular, in the encounter with other children and with the teachers. We wish to let the children discover how much more beautiful it is to be together and to do things together, and that one’s own pleasure grows if one can share it. To this end, great attention and esteem for the child are needed from the teacher’s side.

This attention for the child also implies establishing a deep unity with the life of community that he is part of, and, in particular, with the child’s family.

For this vision to become reality, it is necessary that the teachers are ready to learn from each other and to help each other to grow as human beings and as teachers.¹³

“The human being is shaped in a community in which he gives and receives.”¹⁴

¹³ See Appendix for more details and for the background of this vision.

¹⁴ M. Cobbenhagen, *Cobbenhagen Essays: de visie van de grondlegger op de Tilburgse Universiteit*, Valkhof Pers, 2015 (Cobbenhagen Essays: the founder’s vision for the University of Tilburg).

Consequences

The approach to education sketched above leads to the following three points of departure:

1. Beauty as the pedagogical and didactic point of departure

A child that engages in the adventure described above is in good hands. He discovers that life is worthwhile by witnessing how the teachers live their lives. He learns to appreciate beauty (as the visibility of something that is worth living) and he develops taste (as the recognition of something attractive). The school can foster this process through a beautiful and properly decorated and furnished building, a natural and green environment, through a calm atmosphere, tidiness and regularity, and through the attention for major and minor celebrations.

Furthermore, taste is developed by encountering beauty. Therefore, the teacher is entrusted with the task of highlighting the beauty in nature, in art, and in every other subject as much as possible. For this very reason the school pays a lot of attention to - and provides ample room for - nature and art as a privileged way of developing a taste for life. This happens both “passively” (by receiving) and “actively” (by contributing and generating).

2. Time is precious: criteria for defining a curriculum

A direct consequence of our vision for education is that the time that a child spends at school is very precious.

At school, the child is introduced to reality. In order to do so in a coherent way, it is necessary to fine-tune the curriculum and everything that the school offers to the steps that the child can take at a particular moment in time. To this end, a synthesis that links the different subjects is needed. (Along this line, a toddler needs to be able to relate everything he learns to what happens at home, otherwise he is not in a position to really understand).

The three direct consequences of such a synthesis are:

1. The school follows, as a minimum, the curriculum as defined in the “*kerndoelen*” (learning objectives) and builds upon such a curriculum from a synthesis-oriented point of view. The purpose is to aim for the highest possible level of education, starting from the gifts and the aspirations of each individual child. To this end, the school invests well above average effort into its environment, into human relationships and into equipment (for further details see the section about the school organization).
2. The school devotes particular attention to everything that helps in linking the subjects to each other – i.e. to a “synthesis” between the subjects – especially at the level of a unity in their meaning.
3. The school is, in principle, very selective concerning the course packs that are available for most subjects. Only course packs that are well in line with our vision of a school and that provide a valuable contribution in terms of what is set out above under points (1) and (2) are considered for adoption.

3. A calm and well-ordered learning environment

The above is made possible if the child (1) receives the love and attention he deserves and (2) is given the calm environment that is necessary for learning and for further processing what was learned. For these reasons, the criterion used to organise the teaching activities and the environment is the need for teachers to have enough time for each individual child, and for the children to enjoy a calm, tidy and well-ordered, both during the lessons and in the remaining time.

Results

1. *The burning desire to learn*

Every child benefits from a teacher who expresses a hypothesis of meaning by how he lives, and who, at the same time, highly values the personality of the child. Under such circumstances, the child is motivated and encouraged to further develop his natural curiosity, and will start asking intelligent questions. While education presumes these underlying questions, the questions themselves can also be awakened by the answer. A school oriented as set out above, and a teacher in such a position, can ignite the burning desire to learn.

We wish to underline that this is true not only for the moments in which the deep questions about life are brought up in the classroom, such as when particularly beautiful or painful events occur. Rather, the ultimate meaning of reality as a whole is something that always needs to be present – often implicitly, sometimes explicitly –in order to teach even the smallest detail (e.g. a mathematical problem) in a credible way, as described in detail in the next section about the “school organization”. It is an inherent precondition for motivating a child to learn an entire curriculum.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Paul Schnabel, President of “Platform Onderwijs2032” (Platform school education 2032), Trouw, 25 January 2016: “The most effective way to motivate pupils is to let them know ‘why they learn what they learn’ and to let the subjects be in touch with ‘real life’”; see also Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, New York 2005.

“Igniting the question, the curiosity, an open position in front of reality, awakening in young people the desire to learn: all this seems to be, especially nowadays, the essential precondition for a credible educational path. The itinerary aims first and foremost at stimulating a living personal interest for reality in the pupils, in all its individual aspects and in its overall meaning. The goal is educating to properly use reason and freedom to be able to face the challenges of the present and of the future. The high cultural profile of the school, the quality of teaching and the excellent structures [...] are meant to encourage the unfolding of the personality of each pupil and to let him develop a reliable method to face the task of studying and the other circumstances of life. The purpose is not to convince the pupils that a certain viewpoint is right, nor to protect them from an hostile world, but rather to raise individuals able to recognise and to personally adhere to the truth of their own experience.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Sacro Cuore school (a partner school), *Vision*, Milan 2014, our own translation.

2. *Thinking critically*

By placing the emphasis on curiosity, on the one hand, and on beauty on the other, the child is stimulated to think critically.

Thinking critically is the skill of uncovering the goodness and value in everything that one is confronted with. This skill grows, in particular, through meeting worthwhile people, through witnessing beautiful things, and through asking questions and investigating. This process starts at a very young age and is of crucial importance for facing new situations in a constructive way.¹⁷

“The ‘maturation’ of a child does not take place abstractly but rather in a serious and passionate ‘encounter’ with the various subjects – from the arts to the sciences, from literature to foreign languages, from history to mathematics – each one according to the method and the contents that characterise it. The teaching style is aimed at stimulating the development of the critical sense and of personal taste by highly valuing the questions and the interests that arise in the pupils themselves.”¹⁸

¹⁷ The fundamental value of the skill to think critically for the children to get along with new and quickly changing circumstances is particularly underlined by Joke Voogt and Natalie Pareja Roblin, *21st Century Skills*, Enschedé 2010. Their notes – based on highly authoritative sources in Europe and outside Europe – are one of the core documents shaping the renewing process of primary and secondary education in The Netherlands. In this process, “thinking critically” as a goal of education plays a prominent role.

¹⁸ Sacro Cuore school (a partner school), *Vision*, Milan 2014, our translation.

3. Civic education

Children who have such a positive-critical attitude, and who are open towards reality and, therefore, towards other people, become good citizens. They naturally wish to treat those who they encounter in the same positive way, to get to know them and value them. They are respectful of others, even if they are part of a minority. We think that educating to such an open and positive attitude is the best way to make children grasp the background of Dutch values and, therefore, to become forerunners in further developing and deepening them.

“The desire for democracy does not operate at the level of cognition and therefore is not something that can simply be taught. The desire for democracy can, in a sense, only be fuelled. This is the reason why the most significant forms of civic learning are likely to take place through the processes and practices that make up the everyday lives of children, young people and adults and why the conditions that shape these processes and practices deserve our fullest attention if we really are concerned about the future of democratic citizenship and about the opportunities for democratic learning in school and society.”¹⁹

¹⁹ G. Biesta, *Learning Democracy in School and Society*, Rotterdam, 2011.

In short

Starting from the vision outlined above, we wish to shape a school that is really attractive and formative, not only for the children, but also for the teachers. We are confirmed in our conviction by the excellent results obtained by our partner school Sacro Cuore in Milan, which has been putting this same vision into practise for 30 years, and with which we cooperate intensely.

The school we stand for is, then, really for the “élite” - not in the sense of an élite school, but rather in accordance with the etymological sense of the Latin verb ‘eligere’: to choose, to elect. Parents that consciously choose our school for their children and invest in the school give a clear sign that they wish to offer the best opportunities for their children. He who faces the adventure of question and answer – pupils, parents and teachers alike - receives his trust ‘paid back’ in return.

The school is aware that it is engaging itself in a well-founded undertaking, the outcome of which, however, is not guaranteed, as with any effort concerning the education of children.²⁰ Still, it is the best way to give children the chance to step into reality – especially our rapidly changing civil society – with self-confidence and with a positive curiosity.

²⁰ See also the Appendix at the end of this document, page XX.

A school for life (organization)

Introduction

According to the direction outlined above, a school should be a place of life, not simply an institute that offers unrelated fragments of knowledge. The structure of the day, the building itself and its furnishings, the environment and program of the school, and especially the attitude of the teachers and assistants and their relation with each other and with the children, as well as the contribution of external partners, together determine the atmosphere of our school.

The following frameworks are a proposal and an impetus for further development, as should take place in the follow-up of the realization of this plan. It should be carried out in consultation with all stakeholders and, in particular, with parents and teachers.

First and foremost: love for the child

The first and most important principle is that education can only be done well if the teacher sincerely wants the happiness of the child. And this is possible only when the teacher knows the place where to find his own happiness. A child who is loved is able to take the necessary steps to come to know himself, as well as everything and everyone. Every active learning relationship begins, therefore, with a sincere affection for the child. This affection expresses itself in a positive basic attitude, in emphasizing what the child is and can do (positive feedback), and patience. Beginning in this way, and constantly growing in this approach, is the most important gift and task for a teacher.

It is in such a climate that a child will discover for himself the satisfaction of sharing with others, and of working for people and for the common good. The same is true for the school community at large.

Pedagogical-didactic organization

A teacher with a convincing hypothesis of the meaning of things can communicate the usefulness of the techniques, topics and subjects that he teaches with authority. He demonstrates the relation between that particular and the whole, and why it can be interesting to a person, and to a child .

The development of the child as a person is the ultimate goal of education; the teacher must therefore demonstrate the meaning and reasons for everything that is taught by the way that he lives – implicitly, and sometimes explicitly. We hereby emphasize that “reason” does not stop at the mind; it is always something that is both understood and that touches the heart. Therefore, a reason must ultimately be about the “why” of life, in this way making learning worthwhile. The link between the material being taught and this greater “why” will not always be explicitly stated, but the teacher will always be aware of it.

Why is $2+2 = 4$ important to the world of a child? A teacher can explain to a child that it's nice to know how many eggs to cook if both grandfathers and grandmothers come to visit ($2+2=4$, that is), which has meaning (a reason) in a way that suits the child.

The teacher is the first pupil

In order to be able to communicate in a convincing way, the teacher and the team must first learn themselves (see the section about vision) – from each other, and from others. The school is therefore part of a network of European schools that think about which subjects to teach, and how to teach them. This work occurs at the level of teachers, who regularly – via electronic connection – share their experiences and learn from colleagues or experts who have studied a specific subject in depth. For this reason, the network maintains relations with other elementary schools, high schools, universities and companies.

Freedom for the teacher, opportunity for the child

The method of the school is the encounter (see vision). The teacher therefore has a lot of say and freedom in determining the methods and techniques to be used (see also “methods” below). He is also responsible for ensuring that the objectives established for the year during which he teaches are achieved. Because the teacher follows a group for several years (see below), he can assess whether the group or a particular child needs to be challenged more or given more time. The school thus encourages the teacher to take the liberty to determine the “how” and the “when”.

Curriculum: beauty and openness

Basic level of the curriculum

The basis for the curriculum as offered by the school consists in the elaborated learning objectives and the educational curriculum as established by the Dutch government. Building on this foundation, children are given the opportunity to broaden and deepen their knowledge, as described below.

In order to enable the child to develop himself as much as he can, the school actively offers a palette of detailed and interrelated subjects that are as broad and deep as possible. Working through the learning objectives is therefore the minimum requirement. An upper limit is not given in principle, but is determined by the needs of the child.

Beauty as a criterion for subjects

The school pays great attention to the beauty of reality (see ‘vision’), and it is therefore also a criterion for shaping the curriculum. It should be emphasized that, for example, even the memorization of mathematical tables or geographical notions can be beautiful if its usefulness and attractiveness can be conveyed.

The principle of beauty leads to (extra) attention to subjects that seem to immediately “engage” through their beauty:

1. Learning to listen to and make music (especially classical music), discovering classical works and composers. Children are given the opportunity to actively learn to sing and play (classical) music as part of the curriculum, and also during extracurricular activities. In this regard, the school will collaborate with [not yet published].
2. Discovery of nature as a source of beauty. The school cultivates the nature around the school and encourages children to participate.
3. When teaching a language, much attention is to be paid to poetry and (youth) literature, which is read to the children and which they read themselves. As an introduction to the valuing of their own identity and that of others, a privileged access to literature will supplement music, art and culture.
4. Meetings with people who, by the way they live, show that it is beautiful to discover new things; these people can include (local) entrepreneurs, public figures, politicians or artists. Such an example is valuable for children, because the essence of the school – namely, a living example to follow – is placed before them.

The topics above will be enlivened with excursions (three to four times per year per class). The goal is to have the experience of the subject greater and more tangible by visiting places where the subject can better be experienced (cities, museums, concerts, theatre, natural areas, a library, etc.).

Local and European dimension

Openness - the desire to know the whole truth, and coming to know oneself, the other and everything there is - is the hallmark of European and Dutch culture. The foundation of this desire to continuously come to know reality better is the joy of the Christian event and the rigor of Humanism and of the Enlightenment. It is from this desire that science, art, and the care and respect for others arose and have reached such a high level in Europe.

The school especially wants to help students to discover these European values. Learning these values is a great way of discovering an openness towards other cultures as a possibility of personal enrichment.

The school teaches these values primarily through the local culture that the school “takes in” and demonstrates. The Netherlands, and especially our region, have a unique history and culture that can be used as a “stepping stone” for the discovery of the European culture, and our place within it. Furthermore, the school will actively invest in programs that will bring European culture into the school, including (recent) history, science, art, literature and politics.

Within this framework, the school will devote particular attention to the highlights of Brabantian, Dutch and European art, thereby teaching the children to value their own identity and culture, as well as that of other European nations.

The school offers students the opportunity to learn English at a high level. In order to introduce the Dutch children to the European dimension, which is becoming an increasingly integral part of our Dutch society, the school will actively make itself accessible to children with a non-Dutch background who live in the Netherlands. This openness to international students will be offered not only through the organization of the lessons, but also in a practical way, as the director can directly communicate with students and teachers in English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. The contribution that children with a non-Dutch background can make to the classroom and the school will be highly appreciated.

With this openness, the school will create a “European Community”. In order to facilitate this cultural openness, the school participates in a European network of schools, thereby enabling the teachers to become familiar with the European dimension. In this way, the school prepares the children to become open to a wide range of cultures in their further education.

“Suppose an alien from outer space would visit planet Earth. He would distinguish four continents: Africa, Asia, America and Oceania. If we would tell him we distinguish five, he would be surprised, especially if one adds to this that this continent is a peninsula of Asia which we call Europe. We would have to explain to him that this peninsula is not a continent because of

geographical or demographical reasons (it has less than 1/3th of China's population), but because of historical and cultural reasons: it is here that people had asked the right question before they received an answer. Europe is a continent because it is the place where humans started to ask the following question: "who am I?" In certain languages, there is no word for "I". We cannot even imagine what it is like to not be able to say "I". Europe was born as the place where the question of the I is posed, the problem of who I am. Europe is the continent created by three civilizations: the Greek, the Roman and the Christian. These three have been merged in Europe. In each one of us, in one way or another, there is a small part of the spirit of Socrates, of Homer, a bit of the spirit of Vergil, a bit of the spirit of Dante, of Mozart and of Leopardi"²¹.

Teaching methods

The teaching team will jointly determine which teaching materials (textbooks etc.) are used. Besides the existing Dutch materials, the team will use materials like those provided by partner schools. The school translates and adapts these materials if desired, adapting them to its own situation, and supplementing them based on its own expertise and experience. This process is carried out along the lines described in the vision.

The school acquires the rights and takes care of the publication of the thus established materials.

²¹ Mariella Carlotti, *spoken text*, Bologna, 10 October 2013, our translation.

The importance of a calm environment

Experience is always a participation in a topic and is always active: by listening actively, or by actively doing. Subsequently, time is needed for rest and processing. Children, in particular, need time and a calm environment to process what was taught.

This implies that the learning child is entitled to both 'common' time (in the group at school, and one-on-one with the teacher), and 'processing' time (with himself, with his parents, with other children). The day should therefore be organized in a way that strikes a balance between home and school, between learning and play, between effort and relaxation. The organization of the lessons themselves should provide a balance between direct instruction, group work and individual work, and time to relax in the classroom.

Giving space for "processing time" is particularly important for younger children. The youngest group of children is taught for five hours a day, in addition to school activities. Children in the middle and upper groups (starting at 6 years of age) have six hours of lessons. The school organizes an afternoon program for children who do not directly go home.

Time for teaching, time for learning

To accompany the child as well as possible, it is better if the teacher is able to spend several years together with the child. He thus comes to know the child through and through, and knows his preferences and needs. In this way, he is better able to help. Conversely, the child learns to know the teacher well. This close relationship is conducive to a safe educational environment, and allows the school to attune what it offers to the child's needs. Children are therefore guided by the same teacher for several years (the teacher follows the child).

There is one teacher for the lower classes, one for the middle classes, and one for the upper classes. The child will thus receive his education from only three teachers (except for classes such as physical education, art, etc.). This exclusivity enhances

the student-teacher relationship, and the safety and appreciation that the child experiences. For the same reasons, the school aims to commit itself to appoint only full-time teachers.

The maximum class size is 20 children. This size allows the teacher to devote sufficient time and attention to each child, and to develop a personal relationship with them. As well, it allows for rest and processing time, which is important for the learning process.

The school directs its support in such a way that the administrative burden is taken away from teachers as much as possible.

Testing and tracking pupils

The measurable and comparable assessment of (basic) knowledge is done via the CITO methods. The aim of the school is for its students to score significantly higher than their peers. The testing will be discussed and communicated to the parents in a structured and transparent way. Moreover, the parents can inspect their child's file and speak with the director or teacher at any time.

In principle, the results of the CITO test are not communicated to the children. The scores of other tests are also only reluctantly communicated to the children, and then only with the aim of the possibility of giving a specific topic more attention, or simply to affirm them in their talent and/or dedication.

To accomplish this, the school uses a pupil tracking system. The child's progress and developmental perspectives are recorded in his file. The parents are consulted as part of this process.

In order to relieve teachers of administrative work, the school provides support in this area. However, the responsibility for the contents lies with the teacher.

Norms and behaviour

The school's standards derive from its values, in particular that each child be able to discover that life is worthwhile. Again, the teachers who live this value can successfully introduce it to the children. Children who are valued will, in turn, be able to value and respect their teacher and each other. Thus, standards are already implicit in the classroom's atmosphere before they are made explicit.

In order to help children to act within this atmosphere, the school sets (a minimum of) basic rules that every child has to know and follow while at the school. The children will themselves be treated according to these rules.

When a child behaves in a way that is contrary to these rules, he will have a talk with the teacher or the director. Parents will be informed in the case of serious or repeated disruptive behaviour.

Pupils with special needs

Students who, for whatever reason, need extra attention (for instance because of dyslexia, dyscalculia, speech impediments, sensorimotor difficulties or problems with their (working) attitude, or because of problems at home) receive the guidance that they need at school. This guidance is, in the first place, provided by the child's teacher. The Intern Supervisor is specifically responsible for assessment, organization and arrangement of this guidance. In order to give every child appropriate attention, the school works in a partnership with the relevant social partners.

Actors in and around the school

The board

The board of the Magnolia Foundation is the competent authority for the school. It is legally responsible. It monitors the vision of the school, it appoints the Director and monitors his performance.

The director

The school is led by a Director. The Director is for the school what the teachers are for the classes. He takes responsibility for everything that happens within the school. He knows every pupil. He is the ultimate point of contact/reference for the board, parents, partners and government. He exemplifies the qualities that are expected from the school's teachers. This personal responsibility – of course supported by the team – personifies the responsibility that the school wants to teach.

The teachers

The most important “asset” of the school is the teacher. In order to make the adventure of “question and answer” possible, an “authority” is required, in the previously described sense of the word. The school therefore invests in particular in its teachers by offering them freedom and by showing them appreciation, and by supporting them with internal guidance and training.

A teacher in the school has, in principle, the following characteristics:

1. Talent and training for, and experience with, the craft of elementary education.
2. An above-average passion, willingness, and commitment to this work. The school has a remuneration policy that makes it attractive for such teachers to work at the school.
3. Affinity with the vision of the school
4. A European orientation, supported by demonstrable (work) experience outside the Netherlands or with other European cultures within the Netherlands; (preferable) knowledge of at least one language other than Dutch, especially a Western European language, at the C1 level.
5. Appreciation and respect for the local Brabantian and Dutch culture, tradition and background.
6. Willingness to discuss the organization and operation of education with the management and other teachers on a regular (weekly) basis.
7. The willingness to assume responsibility towards the board and towards parents for everything that happens in the classroom.
8. The ability and willingness to develop additional teaching methods, or modify the prescribed methods if desired.
9. Demonstrable affinity with one or more forms of art or education of nature.

Society

The school's community mediates between the children and their families, on the one hand, and society at large, on the other. It is connected to both of them, as the families form a part of society.

The school community therefore needs the families, as well as society as a whole in order to fulfill its mission. The task involves cooperating with governments, especially the municipality, provincial government and ministry, as well as education inspectorate, youth services (Jeugdzorg), *Stichting Veiligheid en Onderwijs*, the municipal health service (GGD) and local organizations including businesses and foundations, but also inspiring individuals.

Parents

Parents are responsible for the upbringing of their children, and the school helps them in this task. The school is trusted by the parents, and therefore has a responsibility towards them. This responsibility means, on the one hand, that decisions about what happens in the school rests with the board of the school.

On the other hand, the school aims to involve parents as much as possible, because it is best for the children and their parents, as well as for the school community as a whole and the atmosphere within it.

Parents also have to invest in the school. This investment can take many forms: participation in the parents' association, helping with teaching in and around the school, or accompanying other activities. The investment is also financial, as the school requires a contribution to provide education. A contribution will also be asked for participation in (extracurricular) activities such as sports and music.

The parents are asked to be present at the school for one evening on a regular basis to see what the school community is and does. During these occasions, parents will be asked for suggestions on how to improve the process in the broadest sense.

More specifically having to do with their own child, the parents will be given an active role as an "inspirer" for the teacher and director. In particular, the parents are involved in drafting the Development Perspectives for their child. Parents always have access to the CITO results and the electronic pupil tracking system for their child.

European partner schools

The school is part of a network of top European schools. Cooperation within the network is particularly evident in mutual tutoring with peers and experts in matters relating to teaching content, methods, and organization.

Physical organization

The appearance of the school building, its equipment and environment serve the educational principles. For (the experience of) learning, all inputs are important, of which the learning environment is no small part. The school therefore attaches particular importance to environmental factors.

The building and its surroundings should be attractive to children, and should therefore have the following characteristics:

Building

1. The building exudes calm: beautiful but limited ornamentation;
2. There is a common space (auditorium).
3. There is a separate lunch room.
4. Each class has its own space (classroom?).
5. There is a teachers' room accessible only to teachers
6. There is at least one "artistic" space, suitable for listening to and playing music, and making arts and crafts. This room is equipped with instruments (technical, creative and musical).
7. There is a (physical) library, equipped with (youth) literature.
8. There is a gymnasium.
9. There is a chapel.

The surroundings

1. The building is surrounded by nature
2. The school is near a 2-hectare forest or natural area; a portion of the forest's plants and trees have labels with their name and an explanation.
3. There is a vegetable garden.
4. There are one or more sports fields.

Appendix

Elaboration: the beautiful risk of education²²

Introduction

The Commissie 2032 suggests adopting the following aim for ‘schools for the future’: “In the future the transfer of knowledge will still be important, but it will have to be balanced with the two other main goals of education: personal development and preparation for participation in society (...)”²³

We summarize this suggestion of the governmental commission as follows: the aim is to introduce the child into the world, both in the personal and in the societal realm, by providing him with the necessary knowledge and skills. Introducing the child into the world implies introducing him to reality in its entirety – including himself as part of this reality, and including the meaning of everything. Only when one is aware of the meaning will he find fulfillment. Conveying this awareness is necessary because we wish our children to reach true fulfillment, not an escape out of that reality using false fulfillment such as drugs or alcohol.

²² The title of this appendix is founded on Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Londen 2013

²³ Our translation.

Education: tradition, authority and freedom

What does such an introduction look like? It requires tradition (hypothesis), authority and freedom; it realizes itself through a risk.

"1. Loyalty to Tradition: the Source of Certainty

If by tradition we mean the whole structure of values and meanings into which a child is born, then the first guideline for educating adolescents is loyally adhering to this tradition. The adolescent uses tradition as a sort of explanatory hypothesis. There cannot be a discovery, step or contact with reality that we initiate without some idea of possible meaning, an idea more or less profoundly reflected and in any case present and active. This working hypothesis lends certainty to the positive nature of our endeavors. Without it we would be unable to act on anything or accomplish anything.

The marvelous eruption of discoveries, steps forward and chains of connections which define the educational development of a human being, that is his introduction to all of reality, cannot come about without an idea of meaning that is presented to him during his formation with solidity, intensity and certainty. Nature demands this and presents us with a perfect analogy in all fields. Grasping this hypothesis is a mark of genius; offering it to one's pupils is a mark of humanity, and a disciple's following it as it illuminates his journey is the first mark of understanding.

A genius presents us with a vision of the world and thus with a hypothesis of meaning. In this sort of education the phenomenon of genius is justified in its expression, in it the genius becomes the educator. Only where there are disciples can there be geniuses, because it is only by listening and understanding in the first place that we can hope to achieve maturity and in turn make judgments, criticize and even reject the received knowledge that first sustained us.

The above observations point to the inevitability of a particular path for each individual. Every child and every adolescent will encounter the bearer of what we have called an explanatory hypothesis. This is unavoidable and it

begins in the family, for the initial hypothesis is the view of the world we receive from our parents or from those to whom our parents have entrusted our education.

It is impossible to raise a child and take his education to heart without having some view of the meaning of reality, even if instinctive or confused. To educate means to introduce the child to reality by clarifying and developing this primary or original view. Education therefore has the inestimable value of leading a child to the certainty that things in fact do have a meaning. Let me repeat: reality is truly affirmed only when we also affirm its meaning. The unconditional need for unity that is at the heart of all human endeavor leads us to this belief.

Undoubtedly we must respect all natural movements and dynamics. Therefore we must be careful to ensure that the process of dependence does not become a dumbing down like a mechanical process where the educator arbitrarily imposes and the student passively receives. The latter must follow with increasing awareness and the former must make his proposals that find their strength in clear motives and experiences. In any case the principle we have outlined cannot be replaced, as is usually the case for the laws of nature”²⁴.

For us, this tradition – that is, this hypothesis – which shaped Europe, the Netherlands and Brabant, is the tradition of Christianity.

With “Christianity” we do not mean, analogous to how we’ve explained the word tradition, the totality of the set of customs used in the past. On the contrary, we mean that which we have received that is of value to our lives now. Specifically, it is the essence of Christianity that is valuable to us: namely the announcement that the Mystery of God (the meaning of everything) has become man and is to be met in the company of the Church. Within this announcement, possible other customs and traditions receive their meaning, and can and must always be renewed.

²⁴ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001

One could argue that the current age uses another hypothesis for meaning, namely: there is no meaning, or: you make your own meaning (the child has to construct his own meaning). We, however, are convinced that such an approach does not do justice to the child, because he is entitled to receive the most valuable thing we can offer.

It is based on this hypothesis that everything is worthwhile discovering, because everything shows something of the Mystery. It even puts us in the position to follow a more beautiful, more comprehensive hypothesis, should it arrive.

What is mentioned in the paragraph above is also the essence of learning and of motivation for the pupils. Based on this criterion, it is interesting to learn the basics of various ways of entering reality at primary school, whether it is through language, math, or global orientation.

“Insofar as the child is not yet acquainted with the world, he must be gradually introduced to it; insofar as he is new, care must be taken that this new thing comes to fruition in relation to the world as it is. In any case, however, the educators here stand in relation to the youth as representatives of a world for which they must assume responsibility although they themselves did not make it, and even though they may, secretly or openly, wish it were other than it is. This responsibility is not arbitrarily imposed upon educators; it is implicit in the fact that the youth are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world.”²⁵

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, 1954.

What kind of teachers are needed for this? It is persons who are mature and dare to be an authority.

"II. Authority: An Existential Proposal

A responsible role model is such for an adolescent because he is the most conscious expression of tradition. He is the location of a hypothesis for the teenager. This is the authentic concept of authority (auctoritas: 'what causes growth'). We experience authority when we meet someone who possesses a full awareness of reality, who imposes a recognition upon us and arouses surprise, novelty and respect. There is an inevitable attraction within authority and an inexorable suggestion within us, since the experience of authority reminds one more or less clearly of one's poverty and limitations. For this reason we tend to follow him and become his disciples. And while the adult will tend to recognize and choose authority out of a mature responsible confrontation with it, in young people this recognition of authority is fixed more instinctively in the individual's originating reality. The genuine revelation of life and authentic truth reside in developing our dependence on this authoritative reality.

In view of what we have said it is clear that authority is the concrete expression of the working hypothesis: it is the value testing standard that tradition has given me and the expression of the shared life from which my existence originates. In a sense authority is my truest self.

Too often authority asserts itself and is felt as a foreign element added on to the individual. It stands outside our consciousness, although it may be dutifully accepted in so far as it limits us. The educational role of a person with true authority is first of all one of coherence, a continual reminder of ultimate values and of our commitment to them: a steady standard for judging all of reality and a stable safeguard of the constantly renewed link between the student's shifting attitudes and the ultimate, total sense of reality.

From the experience of authority comes that of coherence: the continuity of life, an effective stability stretching over time. In a patiently evolving process like that of the introduction to reality, coherence is an indispensable factor. Unless this original certainty can continually repropose itself within a coherent development, it will seem an abstraction: something to which we were subjected, but that we did not actively embrace. Unless accompanied by true authority a hypothesis remains just that, it would either crystallize or be nullified by any further initiative. Yet a coherence that shows the steady presence of a total sense of reality beyond any fleeting liking or superficial opinion of the individual becomes a powerful factor that teaches us to be dependent on what is real.

At first authority resides in our parents - whether they are aware of it or not. They have an originating function as parents: the givers of life, they bring their children into a certain worldview, a stream of thought and civilization. Their authority is inescapable and is given together with a responsibility, even if they refuse to accept it. In the life of the adolescent they represent the permanent coherence of his origin, a steady dependence on a total sense of reality and something that precedes and goes beyond his consent. Clearly the school also has a position of authority insofar as it claims to develop and carry on the education received at home. There is a strange conception in our time that the ideal school is one where teaching resembles the action of a tape recorder. In this type of school the teacher-pupil relationship has been stripped of its properly human dimension, which is the unique value each teacher offers. In an agnostic or neutral school the fact that the teacher no longer offers meaning, strips him of his quality of being master and turns the pupil into his own master, leaving him to codify all provisional impressions and reactions. He will do so with the presumptiveness, impertinence and iron clad prejudices that so often cloud the open, frank attitude proper to youth”²⁶.

²⁶ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001

Therefore, we are looking for ‘representative’ teachers: ones who demonstrate and are able to communicate the hypothesis of meaning, with which they enter into reality and see its beauty. They do so by who they are and what they do, and, if necessary, with words. Our view of what constitutes a good teacher is summarized by the following quotation, a paraphrase of a sentence ascribed to Francis of Assisi:

“That is the one eternal education; to be sure enough that something is true that you dare to tell it to a child.”²⁷

How does one learn that, for example, the natural curiosity of a child is something good? That he is allowed to be critical in a positive way? That he can investigate everything? A child learns these things because an adult possesses these characteristics, lives by them and encourages the child in adopting them. The teacher is able to do so because he is living a tradition – hypothesis – of meaning.

“In education this responsibility for the world takes the form of authority. The authority of the educator and the qualifications of the teacher are not the same thing. Although a measure of qualification is indispensable for authority, the highest possible qualification can never by itself beget authority. The teacher’s qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it, but his authority rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world. Vis-a-vis the child it is as though he were a representative of all adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world.”²⁸

²⁷ G.K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World*, CSIPP 2009

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, 1954

But even a true tradition, lived coherently by an authority, is not enough to 'learn' genuinely. To do so, the freedom of the child is needed.

"III. Freedom: The Need for Verification

Even a clear presentation of the meaning of things and the real, intense authority of the educator is insufficient to meet the needs of the adolescent. He must instead be stimulated to personally confront his own origin. This means that the student must verify the traditional contents being offered to him, which can be done only if he himself takes the initiative, no one else can do it for him.

A central feature of the human personality is the strength of conviction: our creative energy, the positive contributions we have to offer and continuity and solidity are dependent on this strength of conviction. Conviction is formed when we discover a vital link between the idea we embraced or received and our own predicaments and find it relevant to our needs or projects. In this sense conviction is the result of a testing of the original idea or view that proves to be the keystone for all encounters. It is deeply relevant to our lives, the light which illuminates our experiences. Our reality as a person is in connection with that originating idea that unconsciously played the role of a hypothesis of meaning and to which we became devoted through the experience of its validity time after time. Precisely because it wants to present a complete worldview, a true education will especially want to teach students the habit of comparing their positions not only with those of others but especially with the tradition they have received (*traditio*, in Latin from *traditus*, literally: handed over). The urgency of this comparison implies a tireless reminder of the student's responsibility. While the educator may offer an idea and his support, only if the student becomes consciously involved will the value of that idea shine as he tests its validity in his daily life.

[...] We must be persistent in a systematic work of helping the teenager to draw the connections between what he has received (tradition) and life. Lacking this, new experiences will lead him to adopt one of the following

three attitudes, all hostile to Christianity: indifference: where he will feel abstracted from everything that does not directly touch him, traditionalism: where good natured or less lively people hide behind rigid beliefs to avoid being threatened in their faith from the outside world, and hostility, because an abstract God is certainly an enemy: someone who at the very least is a waste of time. The one method that could help avert these attitudes is to encourage the student to test tradition confronting it with everything (where the everything is important) otherwise his development will be uneven and rigid”²⁹.

Although the description above is relevant mainly for the period of adolescence, the necessity of freedom already starts in primary school. By “freedom”, we do not mean that the child is allowed to do whatever he wants; but that he is stimulated, by doing and thinking, to see why what he learns corresponds with his own need for meaning, for knowing reality.

“Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.”³⁰

²⁹ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001

³⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, 1954.

The beautiful risk of education

The combination of tradition, authority and freedom implies that learning is never something automatic, something that can be guaranteed by the teacher (and not even by the parents).

“The necessary risk for freedom

The purpose of education is to fashion a new human being; for this reason the active factors of the educational process must guide the pupil to act with increasing independence and to face the world around him on his own. To do this we must increasingly expose him to all the elements of his environment while also gradually allowing him more responsibility for his choices. This is in agreement with the outlines of an evolutionary path according to which the pupil must at some point be able to act on his own in every circumstance.

The teenager must be guided gradually as he matures toward a personal and independent encounter with the reality that surrounds him. It is here that the educator's stability becomes important for the increasing autonomy of the student. This task is a risk for the teacher's intelligence and heart, and even for his pride.

Then again it is precisely the risk of confrontation that helps create the pupil's personality in his relationship to all things, and it is here that he develops his freedom. While there are different ways of appealing to tradition, what must be clearly spelled out is that it essentially consists in representing values to be rediscovered in new experiences. And if indeed history and life are vehicles for rediscovering values in new experiences, to whom does the task of discovery fall? The parent? The educator? Not at all, because this would simply be traditionalism. It is the student who must undertake the task because only thus can his freedom truly develop. This love of freedom that leads us to accept the risk inherent in the process must be a constant guideline for educators.

An education based on the view that the person has total autonomy will leave the teenager at the mercy of his likes and dislikes, his instincts deprived of any standard of development. But an education dominated by the fear of a confrontation with the world and which aims only at avoiding a collision with it, will either create a person incapable of affirming his personality in relationship with the real or a rebellious and potentially unbalanced person. Here the situation of many educators both in families and in schools is painfully clear: their ideal is to risk absolutely nothing. The approach which has the most potential for achieving good is not encouraging an escape from reality or asserting that goodness resides in some separate realm, but is promoting the victory of goodness in the world. 'In the world' means in a confrontation with all of reality, a confrontation full of risks or to say it better: demanding. If we try to separate the teenager from the world or fail to help him and guide him in his confrontation with it the result for some sharp young minds will be the bitter discovery that there is no adequate direction in the struggle of good over evil"³¹.

Just as with freedom, the risk of education (being the condition for freedom) plays a lesser role during the primary school period. Indeed, in this period the child is making this verification less consciously compared to the adolescent. Still, the attitude of the teachers has to be accepting of this risk, taking it into account from the beginning. Out of love for the freedom of the child, the teacher is able to appreciate this risk, because, in the end, he appreciates the child himself.

³¹ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001

