Let’s Dance
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A Self-Other Ethnography on Educational Relations

Let’s Dance
Een Self-Other Ethnografie over opleidingsrelaties
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Introduction

In Argentina, men ask women to dance with a look—a certain glance, a movement of the head toward the dance floor or a smile that says, ‘Dance with me?’ This can take place from far across the room if the right eyes are caught. If a woman wants to accept a dance with a man, she smiles back and (most important) keeps looking at him while he approaches her. The slightest glance away is usually interpreted as meaning ‘I’ve changed my mind and don’t want to dance.’ This system is very wonderful and full of pitfalls. What if the asker is looking at the woman behind you? Did you really see a ‘yes’ or a ‘maybe?’ (Brown, 2000-2008)
An author presents texts and a reader combines these texts with his or her own texts or contexts, just like the improvisations of dance partners dancing an Argentine Tango do. It’s this combination of texts that will create the narratives; narratives that are created during the reading. To follow this line, an introduction can be compared to the exciting game of inviting someone to dance as described in the quote at the start of this chapter. In a way, as author, I invite you to read. You, the reader, can glance away or accept the invitation depending on your expectations about the dance our texts might create. When you decide to start reading, a dance can develop. I take the lead in this dance by presenting a structure, which you may follow, or ignore. You may want to start at the end or somewhere in the middle and create another dance. However, we are still in the invitation phase and I must introduce the texts in this introduction from their best side, as challenging and interesting as possible. Why should you read these texts on educational relations?

The concepts ‘hidden curriculum’ or ‘null-curriculum’ in educational literature (Eisner, 1994; Kincheloe, 2004), all refer to the idea that education has as much to do with the content or curriculum of a program as it has to do with relational realities created while interacting in an educational setting. This idea of relations partly creating the content of education puts the spotlight on processes of relating in education. The texts in this book contain narratives created in a Self-Other ethnographic (PhD) research in a context of education and especially higher education with a focus on teacher-student relations.

The Self-Other ethnography is a quest for reconsidering teacher-student relations, for instance reconsidering a relation in which the teacher knows what a student needs to know and transfers that knowledge (a teacher as sender and student as receiver). From a perspective of postmodern critical pedagogy, this sender-receiver relation seems too straightforward and undesirable. However, what else, what other possible relations can be created? The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy at the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences1 forms the context of this Self-Other ethnography. The program’s faculty claims to

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1 This thesis is positioned within the development of higher education in the Netherlands, based on the Bologna Accord in 1999. There has been, and still is a strong division between what in Dutch are called Hogescholen and Universiteiten. The hogescholen changed the translation of their names several times during the period of writing this thesis. Officially the Hogeschool Utrecht is now (2010) called University of Applied Sciences Utrecht. I continue to use university of applied sciences when referring to professional universities or hogescholen, and University of Applied Sciences Utrecht when referring to this specific institute. I name the universiteiten traditional universities.
create other than traditional teacher-student relations. However, do we walk our talk or teach what we preach? What is the hidden curriculum we enact?

**Texts**

These questions led to a Self-Other ethnographic research project in which I critically reflected on texts of me as ‘teacher’ or ‘coach’ in relation to a group of ‘students’ of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy. The ‘students’ took up the invitation to join The Living Environment Research Project as part of their Master’s program. In addition, I reflect on texts about other teacher-student relations: me as ‘student’ in relation to my PhD supervisors.

Teacher-student relations are seen as relational unities, just like the unity of Self-Other as Hosking proposes from a relational constructionist thought style (Hosking, 2005a). You will find many texts, texts chosen or written because I read them as having something to say about teacher-student relations and as relating to contexts of education. With the texts created in this research, I intend to challenge my educational relations, our hidden curriculum, and explore the possibilities of soft teacher-student relations in the educational praxis. How can I support ‘students’ in their learning, without knowing what ‘students’ should do? How can I develop awareness of the construction of dominance in educational relations, and how can I become able to co-create dissensus and facilitate openness and multiplicity? With the written texts, I offer teachers as well as students in education some critical reflexive thoughts on these educational relations and on what these relations might construct.

The texts are based on transcripts of workshops with students in the Living Environment Research Project and of appointments with my PhD supervisors. In addition, part of the texts is comprised of my journal notes and e-mail correspondence that transpired between my colleague and me as well as between the participants of the Living Environment Research Project. The texts are related to texts on relational constructionism in an attempt to create other possible narratives of teacher-student relations. Texts are not seen as representations of workshops, people, thoughts, or relations but rather as texts that have something to do with relations, workshops, and thoughts.

However, I intend to work on another level as well. I mean this Self-Other ethnographic account to serve as an example of reflective practice in educational settings. Starting from the ideas of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) and
the teacher and student as researcher (Kincheloe, 2003), I have explored the limitations of these concepts and the way these have become adapted by the universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands. With Self-Other ethnography as methodology or focus, I attempt to construct a reflective practice with a much more relational approach, in which Self is seen as supposedly imbedded in relations instead of separated from world.

Dancing Argentine Tango

From a relational perspective, relating can be seen as dancing Argentine tango. There are no prescribed ways to dance a tango, but communication and improvisation create a dance as a dialogue in the moment it happens. The idea of using dancing Argentine tango as a metaphor for teacher-student relations occurred to me during the course of my PhD study. Using dance as metaphor for learning and change is not new, and I agree with Rowe’s warning about the use of a metaphor like dance too easily (Rowe, 2008). I use the metaphor of Argentine tangoing, and not of the Argentine tango dance itself, as a way to create narratives and as another way to open up understanding of educational relating. It is not used merely for illustrating or for presenting a model of educational relating, nor is it used as an underlying root. Tangoing is passionate dancing, dancing based on improvisation. It is dancing as relating to one another. That side of the metaphor provided me with texts to write about teacher-student relations. To explore this metaphor, I did some research on tango dancing and interviewed Anja, an Argentine tango teacher. In my efforts to explore tango more profoundly, I also dragged my husband to a dance class during which we performed our first tango steps. Excerpts of texts from books, excerpts of the transcript of my conversation with Anja, and the notes about my experience of the first tango lesson with my husband, are included with the objective of opening up understanding of teacher-student relations. In addition, dancing the Argentine tango is used as a metaphor for reading and writing as well. Texts are put together in a kind of dance. Texts influence each other over and over again; the way that music, dance partners, audience and atmosphere influence a dance in such a way that it can never be danced the same way twice.
Overview of Chapters

The first two chapters can be seen as the preparation to tango; I set the stage by presenting texts about the ambitions that started my PhD research and portraying the context of higher education. In addition, I introduce a meta-theoretical positioning of critical relational constructionism. The Chapters 3 to 5 consist of texts of my PhD research that are largely centered on the Living Environment Research Project. The last chapter is constructed as a reflection on reflective practices in the previous chapters. I present some limitations and perspectives of Self-Other ethnography as a next step in the development of reflective practices.

In Chapter 1, *Entering the PhD Process with Passion and Inspiration*, I have created texts, which make up the story of significant moments, relations and passions that led to the research project. The context of the project that shaped the texts is portrayed in that chapter. This context is comprised of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy, the program for which I was a ‘coach’ of ‘students’. I explain what attracted me to Real-Life Learning, the pedagogical concept for higher education that underlies the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy. Along with that, I provide texts about my inspiration to undertake PhD research. I position my research as reflective practitioner research. Chapter 1 ends with an invitation for students to join a research project called the Living Environment Research Project as part of their Master’s program.

Chapter 2, *Tango of Critical Relational Constructionisms*, contains texts about relational and critical relational constructionisms. The texts about these meta-theories, mainly based on writings by Dian Marie Hosking, Kenneth Gergen, John Shotter, and Ann Cunliffe, are presented as dance partners for the texts in the following chapters. The emphasis on ongoing processes of construction is explained and related to education. I end Chapter 2 with texts on my understanding of critical relational constructionism.

The Interlude *Tango of Self-Other Ethnography* is an explanation about why I chose to typify this research as a Self-Other ethnography, in relation to literature on autoethnography. This interlude is followed by Chapter 3, *Learning the Alphabet*, Chapter 4, *Feeling Struck* and Chapter 5, *Soft Differentiation*. These three chapters have similar structures. Texts constructed in or by the Living Environment Research Project and my PhD research process are provided. The texts are often written as dialogues, based on notes, transcripts of workshops or
are excerpts from e-mail correspondence. These rough narratives are brought
to dance with texts on relational constructionism. These texts are presented
on a grey background. In these texts, the focus is on the critical reflection on
the texts. Several relational themes in education and writing text are discussed:
leading and following, silent voices, talking about relations, audience and
learning, improvisation, joint action and rhythm. Each of these three chapters
finishes with a reflection on that chapter.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 can be read as a Self-Other ethnographic story of teachers
and students trying to change teacher-student relations and trying to arrive at
collaborative learning within local, social and historical contexts of higher
education. Of course, there are many more stories, but as author, I took the
authority to highlight these. I also intend to present a narrative of trying to write
a book and a narrative on learning and critical reflection.

An interlude precedes Chapter 6. It consists of reactions to Chapters 3, 4 and
5 by several of the ‘student’ participants in the Living Environment Research
Project. These reactions are presented, not as a means to show that what I have
written is true or false, but as an opportunity to hear their voices, and to add to
the narratives I have selected and presented. Although these texts are written
by the ‘students’, I take final responsibility for these texts as well, because I
decided to present them.

In the final chapter, Chapter 6, I wrote letters to some of the characters
I created in the text and, as I promised in Chapter 1, section, Reflective
Practitioner Research, I reflect on reflective research as proposed by Schön,
Argyris, and Kincheloe. I state that their suggestions are too much focused
on epistemological quandaries, where from relational perspective, ontological
questions might be more appropriate. My Self-Other ethnographic account
is exemplary for another approach. Therefore, I invite the reader not only to
continue dancing with questions and tensions about educational relations, but
also with dilemmas, paradoxes, and questions of reflective practice, and the
possibilities of Self-Other ethnography.

Some Guidelines

In order to dance together, some mutual understanding is helpful. Throughout
my text, I intersperse the use of the terms tutor, teacher and coach, which is not
intended to imply great differences among these roles. In Chapter 2, I explain the constructionist idea of relational constructed identities that are not fixed to specific titles. Therefore, use of the word tutor can be substituted for teacher or coach.

Frequently, these words and the word ‘student’ will appear between quotation marks when referring to a formal position: I am the so called ‘coach’ of the so called ‘students’ that accompanied me in this research project. I was paid for being their ‘coach.’ When the words are used without quotation marks, I tend to refer to a non-formal role; a ‘student’ can become a teacher, and a ‘teacher’ can become a student (or a learner, learning through interaction with a ‘student’).

In Chapter 1, several people are described as more or less independent characters, while other people are only staged in dialogues and interactions. I chose to distinguish between various kinds of staging to emphasize different relations. The relations in dialogue are often more fluid, while the relations with the characters are constructed as more disturbing. To accentuate that these characters must be understood as constructed (novelesque) personae and that the texts really are narratives, I gave the characters nicknames: The Professor, The Master, and The Big Guy. To differentiate between roles and those nicknames, I capitalized the first characters of the words of the names. In Chapter 5, I will come back to this act of apparently stabilizing these personae, which seems opposed to the idea of the ongoing relational construction of identities, which forms point of departure of my work.

Many texts were originally written in Dutch and have been translated by the author. All translations have been edited by an external editor. This goes for the transcripts of conversations, journal notes and e-mail conversations, as well as for some literature quotations. I will only point to the fact that texts are translations when this is not obvious.

Acknowledgments

One of my earliest memories of school and a teacher-student relation is the following

As a little girl, I suppose at the age five, I was in Ms. Mitzy’s class. She was the teacher for the older preschoolers in a classroom
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situated in the basement of a Roman Catholic Church. In groups, we had to build a castle with wooden blocks. We built it quickly and Ms. Mitzy gave us all a sheet of black paper and assigned us to cut out animal figures that live in the castle. I started to cut out mine and some of the children laughed about how my animal had fat legs. The joking didn’t bother me because I had a plan and I continued cutting it out undisturbed. When finishing off my work, I cut the fat legs in two, bent them a little and my animal was able to stand upright on its own. I must have learned this trick from my mother, who always did crafts with my brother and me. Ms. Mitzy was very enthusiastic about my animal and after we had played with the animals in the castle, she placed my animal on the cupboard with Jip-and-Janneke\(^2\) curtains, where it stood for months, as I recall.

In contrast with the snapshot above, my goal for my PhD was not as defined and clear-cut as the creation of the paper animal. I started the process to create ‘Otherness’ and to learn, or to put it differently, to reflect critically on ways I thought education should be. This indefinite objective made me hesitate to draw conclusions, to shut down my thoughts and to demonstrate some conclusions. I regard opening up, learning and not knowing, to be important, and this led to further questioning and offers apparent contradictions and tensions, instead of clear answers.

To return to the snapshot, I have seen similarities in the way I acted then, with the process of ‘taking this path’ towards my PhD. When I’ve been met with resistance or when things tended to get tough for me, as in the story of when the children had laughed at me, I tended to withdraw and to seek my own path. I have only been willing to reveal my thoughts or path to others after I had thought them through thoroughly; i.e. after I had come to some sort of conclusion. During the process of my PhD, the philosophical differences between my two supervisors pulled me from one side to the other, depending on whom I had spoken to last. Tired of the idea that I had to choose between their ideas, I tried to combine them and to make up my own mind. I withdrew and I wrote a text without a co-reader.

I do see some benefits to this reaction to withdraw. I developed a style, a voice

\(^2\) Jip and Janneke are two well-known characters in Dutch children’s literature, written by Annie M.G. Schmidt and illustrated by Fiep Westendorp.
with all the different inputs, and I made choices. The other side of it was that while this was happening, I communicated very little with others. If I had explained to the other kids in the class, why I had created my animal with fat legs, they might have done the same, and we could have played with many more animals able to stand by themselves. Because I withdrew, the influence that others could have on my work, stopped. Other people were only able to approve or disapprove in the end. This turned the presentation of my work into a gamble.

I am grateful to Hugo Letiche for demanding a larger role in writing my book. Hugo, you made me realize that withdrawal meant that I demanded too much of myself. I expected that I was able to bridge the philosophical differences between you and Dian Marie Hosking, differences that were based on deep philosophical perspectives that I could hardly understand in the beginning, let alone that I would design a third path. You expected much of me and you were not easy to satisfy. Thank you for this vote of confidence. I learned a lot from it. Combined with your warmth and passion, it was of great joy to work with you.

Dian Marie Hosking, I want to thank you for bringing me in contact with relational constructionism and the idea of relational unity of Self and Other. Your thorough reading and precise comments on my language use was hard, but invaluable. I thank you for letting me experience and learn from differences in perspectives between you and Hugo. It was not always easy, but it was a great adventure. Learning is not always fun, but in the end, I can look back on it and see what I have gained and lost.

This book would not have been possible without the commitment of the students that participated in the Living Environment Research Project: Bianca, Caro, Corrie, Ellen, Esther, Femke, Gerda, Guus, Ivo, Joan, Karen, Laura, and Marinus, I thank you for your confidence and courage to join this project. Even though these are not all your real names, I know you will all recognize yourself when you read the texts that you have contributed to.

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Chris Kuiper, next to your critical feedback and your unconditional trust, your belief in my abilities to finish this project satisfactorily has been of enormous importance. Your suggestion to me to make use of and to continue using the metaphor of dancing the Argentine tango, added a touch of poetry to my texts, and for that, I am very grateful.

Hans Jansen, as I tell in the text, your disturbing questions made me do all this! Once lifted, the lid cannot be put back. I want to thank you for showing me how to lift it.

I also want to thank my colleagues and all the students of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy of the Hogeschool Utrecht and especially Paul, Marian and Nenette, Ben and Cees, for enabling me to learn with you. Riki Verhoeven and Marcel Meer, you made it possible to work on my research. Both of you believed that our Master’s Program would benefit from it. I thank you for the necessary support that was sometimes hard to find elsewhere. I want to thank my colleagues of the Hogeschool Rotterdam for their warm support that helped me to proceed. In addition, I want to thank the colleagues of the Alexander Roozendaalschool for my first experience of joint action.

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Willem van Baarsen, I thank you for bringing me in contact with Hugo. It’s amazing where a family reunion can lead to.

³ Marianne died recently and I regret that she was not able to see the result of our conversations.
Introduction

Dear friends and family, I want to thank you all for your never lasting endeavor to stay in contact while I did not enable myself to make time for these important things in life.

Last, but of course not least, I want to thank my husband Jos, and my children Hannah and Chiel. Jos, thank you for your inexhaustible patience, and for the conversations which helped me to make things more concrete. I imagine that you do not realize how important that is for me. Chiel and Hannah, you are both nearly finishing your initial professional education, but I am sure that that will not be the end of your learning. Your struggles and joy in education are part of my inspiration to undertake this research. Hannah, thank you very much for the cover design and layout. The book is beautiful, and I enjoyed making use of your talent. Chiel, thanks for your comments on the summary. I hope we will continue discussing philosophy of science.
Chapter 1

Entering the PhD Program with Passion and Inspiration

...it is in the momentary relational encounters occurring between people in their dialogic exchanges that everything of importance to our studies should be seen as happening. What occurs there should be seen, not in terms of pictures or representations of what that ‘something’ truly is, but in terms of the different possible relations it may have, the different roles it may play, in people living out the rest of their lives – relational rather than a representational understanding (p. 9, Shotter, 1997).
A PhD program is much like dancing the Argentine tango. The tango originated in brothels and gambling houses in the area of Buenos Aires, with original lyrics frequently referring to sex and obscenities (Elshaw, 1979). It all began towards the end of the Nineteenth century and the beginning of the Twentieth century and developed over time. When the Argentine tango spread out to larger cities in the world such as Paris, Berlin, London and New York in the late 1920s, the sexual connotation of the dance diminished somewhat; although, it was still considered to be a passionate dance. The dance has evolved over time, just as the definition of the word passion has. The connotation of the word has become less sexual. Here is the etymology of the word passion according to the Online Etymology Dictionary.


Just as the Argentine tango is described as a dance filled with passion and temptation, my research can be seen as a dance driven by passion and inspiration, and it was motivated by an ongoing search for temptation.

Obtaining my PhD degree was not my driving force; rather I regard passion and inspiration for learning and developing as the fuel that propelled my engine for undertaking this process. Although I cannot deny that finishing my studies has taken on more significance as I approached the end, my passion did not start there. In this chapter, I create a context by telling stories about important influences and dance partners that heightened my passion for undertaking this trajectory and for creating these narratives in this book or rather, in keeping with the metaphor, for creating this dance.
I won’t start with Adam and Eve or with my birth: and even though I have already shared some of my youth as a little girl in the Introduction, I’ll begin somewhere before my entrance to university. For the purpose of the story, I regard my acceptance to the Oxford master’s program as this entrance.

Right after I left the school desks of my Speech Therapist training, I started to work at a terrific place: a school for children with severe speech and language problems in Amsterdam. I worked for more than 20 years in this special education setting. At first, the speech therapists worked in a team of five, providing speech therapy for about 200 children. During my professional training, I had discovered that there was very little in the way of therapy options for these children. Therefore, our group of speech therapists (all women) worked hard to develop ideas for diagnoses and treatment, and in close collaboration with the classroom teachers, we worked out various methods to educate the children and guide their parents. As speech therapists, our days were extremely busy. As an example: during a somewhat hectic but exiting two-year period, each of us was pregnant and gave birth to our first child, while we collectively created a course to address the special needs of our pupils that would be used by all new teachers. All of this, next to our daily work with and for the children. Over time, the group of speech therapists expanded, partly because the school grew and partly because we all wanted to work part-time after the births of our children. We developed into a group of seven people and we acted as a highly motivated team to develop our methods of working with the children, and educating primary teachers about the children’s special needs. It was an intense and inspiring period of collaboration. Having worked with motivated people, who looked at their wristwatches only because they had to collect their children from day-care nurseries, and having worked together to develop successful treatment programs was all extremely rewarding and satisfying. We always tried to provide the best for the children, constantly reflecting on our effectiveness and creating new and better treatment.

Over the years, while attempting to provide structure and improve special education, due to governmental policies, our discourse began to include action plans, programs, and keeping records of our treatment sessions. Some of my colleagues developed the dyspraxia program (Meule & Houweling, 1998); work that I supported and participated in, after the program was published. I gradually became aware of the flipside of having planned programs and
organized structures for working with the children, which were developed in answer to quests for accountability and efficiency. The pleasure had been in discovering with the children the best way to cooperate with them, to listen to their stories, to help them develop their language abilities while listening, to be creative with exercises based on their stories. In addition to that, our collegial curiosity and questioning or challenging of our own ideas in the preparation of the programs, had also been rewarding. The only creativity the programs left over was in finding a way to challenge children to do the exercises. With the colleagues, we ended up in discussions of how to choose the best programs.

The school for children with severe speech and language problems had been a challenging place to work, especially for a speech therapist. However, after 15 years, working as a speech therapist in that type of setting, it no longer offered enough challenges. In other words, I was losing my sense of creativity and sense of surprise. I didn’t want to leave the school for similar work at another school, because my school’s environment was too interesting. It couldn’t be replicated elsewhere: no other school could provide such a dynamic environment. I wanted to change my position within my school, but I did not have the necessary degrees. When one of my neighbors returned to university, I felt envious and realized that I wanted to do the same. Therefore, I applied for the Master’s program in Special Educational Needs at Oxford University, in collaboration with the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht.

Passion for Possibilities and The Big Guy

It’s difficult to pinpoint an exact moment in the chain of events that led to what inspired me to begin the University for Humanistics PhD program, but I would attribute it to a Saturday afternoon in 1997. I was with seven other people in one of the horrible classrooms of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, a room with wonky furniture, a blackboard on the wall, linoleum on the floor and neon lights. When I looked outside the window, I saw traffic and motorways that alternated with stretches of grass, and in the distance sunbeams were highlighting the beautiful autumn colors of a wooded area. The windows of the room could not be opened. That was not allowed because of pollution from the traffic exhaust fumes, so it was a bit stuffy in the classroom. The main reason why I was in this horrible place on a sunny Saturday was because of one the people who was present, The Big Guy. This Big Guy, Hans, is the tutor of the other people, which were all working in education. We were joining the
part-time Master’s program in Special Educational Needs of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, in collaboration with Oxford University.

Hans, a rather heavy-set person with a dark beard and somewhat long hair for a man of his age, introduced me to many new areas of interest, raising topics that I had never heard of in previous courses, and he posed questions I had never imagined. They included topics like research paradigms and educational research, and questions such as whether or not we need special education in the way that it is currently organized in the Netherlands. On this Saturday afternoon, Hans was standing in front of the blackboard wearing one of his lively printed shirts and red trousers. We ‘students’ were sitting at desks situated in a square formation and he lectured about different research approaches, differentiating between inductive and deductive methods, while writing on the blackboard. I found the content of Hans’s story difficult to grasp, but I was intrigued, and as with all the workshops that took place, I absorbed everything. As a speech therapist, I had not heard about these different kinds of research before, and I tried to integrate the theoretical story of Hans with my personal experience. I wondered whether I could characterize part of the work of my colleagues and myself as following the inductive method. We had described a new type of language problem that we called severe language understanding problems, based on our experience with the children.

I raised my hand and when Hans looked at me, I said, ‘So, if I understand this right, we discovered this type of language problems through our own experience and if I want to position this discovery in research, we might say that we conducted our research based on what happened, and not on theory. Our theory developed out of our experience and that defines the inductive method. Is that right?’

Hans didn’t focus on my remark understanding the differences in research focus but directed his attention to an entirely different issue.

He asked, ‘Why are you making a diagnosis? Is it helping you?’

‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘we have all kinds of ideas about training programs for these children.’

‘Okay, but aren’t you defining the child by a small piece of his being, by his problem? Do you know what to do with this particular child, within this situation?’

I was stuck for an answer.

He asked, ‘Are you the expert, who knows what the child needs?’
The other students kept quiet. I had the feeling that they only witnessed the conversation without participating in it. It was as if Hans and I were the only ones in the classroom. I experienced embarrassment, and at the same time, I felt enormously challenged. Suddenly I became aware that my view on education and on children was restricted to one ‘expert’ point of view. A mixture of shame and an experience of openness intermingled. It was as if Hans had taken me by the hand and said, ‘Hey, this is your story and there are other stories to tell too.’ I felt like I was caught off guard by my assumption that my pupils are children with problems that need to be diagnosed and treated to ‘make them as normal as possible’. This is deficit thinking, which I see had been my major line of thought up until then. I was the expert, the one who knew best. I had compassion for children and knew that not every problem could or should be solved. That is true, but it is still taking the position of an external expert. I realized that it could be different, although I didn’t know how.

That was the moment during the course on that Saturday afternoon that served as an example of inspiration for my research: becoming aware of more possibilities, veering away from dominant perspectives, and opening up to other possible relational realities. Awareness of possibilities entails awareness of choice. I realized that I had a choice to do this or that. I needed to make choices as a responsible person. I can make choices!

The other aspect of this inspiration was passion. Passion is a word that I associate with Hans’s persistent efforts and infectious enthusiasm to open up ideas regarding education and related influences from authority and experts such as governments and institutions. I was overwhelmed and impressed. I imagined myself becoming a teacher like Hans, with similar power to inspire people to expand or to ‘open up’ their ideas about pedagogical/educational relations. My passion was to support others to ask questions rather than giving them answers, to question and to help them become more aware of relations among dominant influences.

I wished other people would be inspired too; however, I sighed because of the flipside of my awareness. Once I became aware, I could not go back and I was unable to ignore what I saw! Sometimes I wished I could crawl back to those former days, and act as if I were not aware of the continuous questioning and critical reflection associated with positions and power relations. Instead of

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1 ‘Open up’ is a term Hosking uses for instance in her article Can Constructionism be Critical (2007).
questioning if I was really doing the right thing, I seemed to know that what I did was right: just as I did with the group of speech therapists when we had collaboratively created methods for diagnosis and treatment. It would have been much easier to follow a path without questioning, rather than having to make (ethical) choices consciously. This downside to awareness, critical questioning and ethical considerations, did not make life easier, but that cannot be undone. Who am I, as a teacher, to judge that this is good for students? Is there any way that they could escape from my truth? Do they have any other choices?

The Big Guy became one of my role models, although I knew that I would never be able to replicate the way he deals with students. He and I differ in many respects. His persistence and attentive Socratic approach is inspiring and along with that, he knows what he is talking about. He has had much experience and has a lot of reading to draw from. Hans introduced me to philosophy, an area of thought that I had never delved into before. Philosophy intrigued me immensely.

Hans became Professor of ‘Innovative Methodology and Didactics in Teacher Training’ in 2002. He later developed his ideas on education into a pedagogical concept for higher education called Real-Life Learning. Hans, and several of my colleagues and I, sought to flesh out these ideas within the HKP. Real-Life Learning challenges traditional teacher-student relations. Jansen described Real-Life Learning in a publication in Dutch

The choice is made...for a pedagogical concept from a critical postmodern perspective and not for the exploration of *het nieuwe leren* or *natuurlijk leren*, two educational concepts that are based on the social constructivist perspective. With this choice, the ideas of *het nieuwe leren* or *natuurlijk leren* are not discredited, they are worthwhile, but is indicated that a few steps further are taken and that the philosophical choice is primarily a critical postmodern pedagogical choice (p. 27, Jansen, 2007).

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2 In Dutch: *lectoraat Vernieuwende Opleidingsmethodiek en – didactiek van de Faculteit Educatie van de Hogeschool Utrecht*.
3 In Dutch: *Levend Leren*, literally translated as: Living Learning. I chose to use Real-Life Learning as translation for *Levend Leren*, to strengthen the idea of learning from the daily reality of life.
4 HKP is an abbreviation for *Hogere Kaderopleiding Pedagogiek*, the precursor for the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy.
5 *Nieuwe Leren* and *Natuurlijke Leren*, literally translated into ‘New Learning’ and ‘Natural Learning’, are based on what is called constructivist ideas. For further information, see Chapter 2, the section on Constructions of Knowledge.
6 Jansen points at the more didactical connotation of the word educational.
This critical ecological panorama of Real-Life Learning, with which an open pedagogy (McLaren, 2003) from daily practice is critically designed, does not acknowledge separation between life, learning, work, play and art (p. 28, ibid.).

[T]he radical transfer concerns...a transfer from teacher towards learner (the learner becomes teacher and the teacher becomes learner) in a reflexive and permanent turnover of a learning adventure. It is a transfer that continues in a permanent cyclic dynamic and in which the teacher and learner invite each other to the dance of life and learning (p.10, ibid.).

Real-Life Learning, which I translate into learning to live in the daily reality of life, was also part of my inspiration to undertake my PhD. My relational realities as learner (for instance as PhD-candidate), educator or coach, created moments of learning for becoming coach or educator.

Learning and Researching

After I graduated in 2000, Hans asked me to join the group of ‘coaches’ for the HKP. When I started to work for the HKP, it was only the second year that the program was being offered. The HKP is a three-year part-time program for experienced education professionals. It is designed for those who have already undergone some advanced study and who are looking for a challenge. It’s for students who ‘feel themselves drawn to the liveliness of the professions of teacher, manager, policy adviser or social worker, and who want to advance their internal dialogue and the dialogue with their colleagues at a scientific level,’ as stated in the 2000 program brochure (p.5, Faculteit Educatie Hogeschool Utrecht, 2000). I started by guiding a learning team of five ‘students’.

I experience most students in our program as people with a passion to learn and develop in their work: they often express a desire to change education. They all choose to take this course themselves; they attend voluntarily, not because someone else required it of them.

The program was not organized around lectures, instead, a ‘coach’ guided small learning teams of ‘students’ on their path through a learning landscape. In the HKP, we used the term ‘learning landscape’ to indicate that ‘students’ could direct their own learning route without a prescribed order or content.

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The ‘student’ had to prove that he or she had acquired 50 competencies before or during the course: 50 competencies out of more than 150 that are in the learning landscape within five domains (scientific research, philosophy of science, pedagogy, specialization⁸ and competencies for educators). The choices within the competencies (each domain had five prescribed competencies and five electives), the precise content of the competencies, the order in which they were acquired, the way of obtaining the competencies, and the way of proving that one had obtained the competencies, were up to the ‘students’, who could expect to be treated as adult educational partners. We ‘coaches’ saw competence as the compound quality expressed in the formula: I*EAA⁹ (a product of Information and one’s Experience, one’s Abilities and one’s Attitude) (p. 7, Faculteit Educatie Hogeschool Utrecht, 2000).

Because the Master’s degree, I earned from England, was not recognized in the Netherlands at that time, I took the HKP myself, which meant that I continued being a ‘student’ of The Big Guy as well as becoming his colleague. Together with Renée, who is a friend from the Oxford Master’s program, and two others we comprised a learning team that met at the kitchen table at Hans and his wife Marjo’s home. While enjoying the coffee, tea, and lunches Marjo had made for us, we discussed all the different contents that are part of the HKP. Renée became an important critical friend and joined me during my research for my PhD. I describe how we met in the section Critical Dance Partners later in this chapter.

Hans Jansen on learning teams

In fact, learning teams are within the concept of Real-Life Learning live-and-learn teams’. However, for daily practice, the use of the condensed concept learning team was chosen (note 35, Jansen, 2007).

Several qualities a student develops and improves, during the course, in collaboration with his coach and learning team, can be made operational, practiced, elaborated upon, and improved.

A learning team is not a production team in which assignments of the course are worked out individually and composed into a shared product that is presented to the coach at the end (p. 34, ibid.).

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⁸ Possible specializations: management and policy, advice and guidance, diagnostics and treatment, education.
⁹ In Dutch: I*EVA (Informatie die de verbinding aangaat met iemands Ervaring, Vaardigheden en Attitude), adapted from a formula Weggeman suggests: K(knowledge) = I*EVA (Weggeman, 1997).
Let’s Dance

The brochure of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy (2005) on learning teams

To go on a journey
Travelling is exciting and challenging. The course departs as much as possible from the principles of Self-directed learning (SDL). That means that you are going to make your own journey, guided by a coach. However, you do not travel all by yourself. From an ecological perspective, people are connected to each other and the world. Encounters are therefore an important part of the journey. The travel companions who support you on your trip consist of all students and coaches of the course. You can meet them on training days. In a more direct way, you will make your journey with a learning team existing of fellow students and a coach with whom you make appointments. You will start with an exploration of the learning landscape. Topics that will turn up repeatedly during the course are ‘learning in a learning team’, ‘planning your activities’, ‘formulation of goals’, ‘formulation of criteria for quality’ and ‘organizing feedback’.

The Oxford/Utrecht Master’s program and the HKP differed in content. The Oxford/Utrecht program focused mainly on executing qualitative research, combined with philosophy of science with an emphasis on interpretative and critical streams. The HKP focused more on pedagogy, management, and educational competencies. In addition to the conversations in Hans’s kitchen, I developed several assignments for myself with which I tried to combine questions about developments in special education, with the competencies I had to meet. At that time, in 2000, there were some major developments in special education in the make. For instance, the government was advocating the establishment of regional expertise centers (RECs) as an improvement to the education system. This was set down in the Act on Expertise Centers (WEC). I analyzed this policy, using ideas taken from Jurgen Habermas’s *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, as introduced by Koningsveld and Mertens (1986). I closed my analysis in 2001 with the following.

This analysis has made it clear to me why I have some ambivalent feelings regarding the launched policy. Like Habermas, I conclude that communicative action is impossible for authorities. Politics will always be preceded by instrumental and strategic action. Costs for

10 ‘Self-directed learning - learning that is considerably steered by students. The student, in dialogue with his learning peers, twin mate, learning team, and his educator/coach, decides a respectable amount (a minimum of 70%) of the learning goals, the learning content, the sequence, the presentation of the content, the way of learning, the assignments, learning outcomes, and the assessment, etcetera.’ (p. 197, Jansen, 2007) (translation LH)
education will have to be controlled. That which is determined to be reasonable funding, is part of the political process. Scientists, and in this case pedagogues, need to perform Diskurs\textsuperscript{11}. Until now, I have not heard anything about that. The workers in the educational field, and the people in the schools, resign themselves to the policy of the government, for better or worse. The RECs are working on this foundation out of strategic considerations of self-preservation. The pedagogues are quiet. The execution of the indication system is bogged down in an instrumental level of describing children, which grates against my grain.

Making my own assignments by using input from a program, and raising questions about professional practice based on that input, entails mutual influence of program content and practice. This is what I call learning or researching.

When working as a `coach` with my first learning team, I frequently ended up in debates that started with questions from `students`, such as these: `How many competencies do I have to acquire?` `What do I have to do to obtain this competence?` `What do I have to read?` `When is this all right?` `Will I be able to do all this work within three years?` Because I felt inexperienced and I was not sure of all the rules, I asked The Big Guy to accompany me to several appointments with students, just to answer these kinds of questions. The `students`, The Big Guy and I sat around a large table at a conference centre\textsuperscript{12} at one of those appointments. Within the first five minutes of this encounter, Hans answered the questions in a direct way and told the `students` how to deal with the demands of the program, and how easily competencies could be combined. He assured them that they would certainly be able to finish within three years. Then he directed the discussion towards education and the underdog position of teachers and children. Immediately, I saw the `students` poising themselves

\textsuperscript{11} The term Diskurs is used by Habermas to refer to `to problematize`. Koningsveld and Mertens did not translate this term and explain the demarcation of Habermas between a theoretical Diskurs in which truth of theory is problematized and practical Diskurs in which justice of norms and systems of norms are schematized.

\textsuperscript{12} We `coaches` tended to make appointments to meet in these kinds of surroundings and also at the homes of `students` or `coaches`, or in their work environments. We wanted to avoid the traditional institutional learning setting in the building of University of Applies Sciences Utrecht, and we wanted to meet with `students` in places close to their homes. The idea behind this was that `students` should not be the only ones who travel: travelling was equally shared because `coaches` and `students` are equally important.
on the edge of their seats and I recognized the same inspiration that I myself got from these kinds of conversations. Giving grades and acquiring competencies were not on anyone’s mind.

In a meeting with the ‘coaches’, The Big Guy asked us what we do to stimulate the ‘students’ to raise their questions and deal with the demands of the program. I answered, saying that I give them examples, ‘I try to be an example myself by showing how I continue to learn and read. I tell them about the assignments I design for myself and the books I read.’ Then he asked what else we do and the only thing that we could come up with were additional suggestions for books ‘students’ should read, nothing more.

‘I am amazed by the difficulty students have in making up their own assignments. When I give them examples, they try to translate them almost literally, and try to copy them, but that is not what I intend,’ I say. ‘For instance, in the learning team I met with last week, we have been reading about philosophy of science; we started with the book by de Vries (1984). You all know that one. Hans made a module on that. It’s on the intranet. We discussed what they could do with the stuff, but the only thing they could think of was to make a summary and some sort of a time line reflecting the development of science. One of them is especially interested in history, so I can see where it came from. To relate the stuff to education, for instance, the whole culture of testing children, that is so obvious to me. However, although I make these suggestions, they are not grasping it. I don’t know how to deal with this. When I push them to try my suggestion, they still do not develop their own questions. How do I guide students to become researching or learning professionals, when they don’t have questions of their own?’

One of my colleagues, Riki, responded, ‘Maybe this takes time. These are first-year students, aren’t they? It develops during the course; that’s my experience.’

Hans’s question of ‘what else?’ required an answer concerning activities different than the ones teachers traditionally carry out, in the transfer of knowledge. It continues to be an important question for me to this day. What could I possibly do to support ‘students’ in their learning without putting myself in the position of the knowing expert or by directing students with my questions? If I act as the expert, and the one who knows what is good for students, I assume the same dominant position that I despise, and the students do not develop as self-directed learners.
Conceptualizing

In 2002, the BA/MA structure came into effect in the Netherlands and the HKP developed into the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy. The request for accreditation (Faculteit Educatie & Faculteit Sociaal Agogische Opleidingen Hogeschool Utrecht, 2003) characterized the program as one that fills ‘a gap in the pedagogical infrastructure’ (p. 5) with the following mission statement (translation LH).

The competence-based Utrecht’s Master’s program in Pedagogy actively wants to enhance the societal integration and participation of youth in general and youth-at-risk in particular, by contributing to the development of a more integral and ecological pedagogical perspective (p. 7).

It goes further to say:

A Utrecht pedagogue at a Master’s level can play a role as a person who is able to focus on relating, in different perspectives (p. 7).

The word ecological\(^\text{13}\) was already present in some of the competencies in the landscape of the HKP, including ecological diagnostics, ecological orthopedagogy\(^\text{14}\), and ecological schools in turbulent settings. The use of the word *ecological* distinguished the Master’s from other courses, and it seemed to make the course indispensable within the Dutch educational and pedagogical landscape. At the time the course found its place within the Dutch education system, the tragedies of the assaults and deaths of Rowena and Savanna\(^\text{15}\) were in the media, and resulted in criticism of the strong division between different departments run by the government. Schools, child welfare councils, guardianship boards, and similar departments all had different ways of operating. In addition, many different professionals seemed to work sequentially rather than collectively, in what were called multi-problem families. Collaboration seemed to be the new magic word.

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13 In later publications the word *ecological* is related to Bateson’s publication *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Bateson, 1972, 2000).
14 In the Dutch language, *pedagogiek* (here translated as pedagogy) refers to child rearing, while *onderwijskunde* (here translated as education) refers to institutional learning processes, and is often concerned with didactics. *Orthopedagogiek* often refers to what could be called child psychology.
15 Rowena and Savanna were two children who were murdered by their parents. Both were raised in so-called multi-problem families that were receiving assistance from childcare services. These terrible stories resulted in many discussions, doubts and questions about how childcare services function and whether they effectively collaborate with other facilities that are responsible for the children, like schools for instance.
In the Netherlands, education is understood to be concerned with institutional learning, which is separated from broader pedagogical meaning. Education and schools divide the learning of children into school skills (for primary school children this mostly involves reading, writing and arithmetic) and pedagogical goals (for instance, dealing with aggression, and bullying). The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy, and Real-Life Learning, viewed education as learning to live together, and the intent was to reconfirm the importance of pedagogy in education. It was the intention, to educate experts who consider collaboration important and are able to enhance collaboration. For doing so, we assume these experts need to have the ability to look at education from different perspectives. The processes of collaboration and change in perspectives in students’ learning processes were important.

The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy began with the same learning landscape as the HKP. Yet with the three ‘coaches’ who worked for the course on a full-time basis (out of ten ‘coaches’ all together) and Hans as Professor, we concluded that the 50 competencies ‘students’ had to obtain, served as a kind of checklist for the ‘students’; they did not start with questions from practice, but with the competencies they had to obtain. I noticed that the list of competencies made it more difficult to discard the idea that the content of the program prescribed what the ‘students’ learn. Learning was led by the competencies instead of by questions, and these competencies were formed by what the designers of the program (we) believed to be important. I thought that learning should be a crisscrossing between what the program-designers and what the ‘students’ thought was important, making the process mutual. Hans Jansen expanded on this concept in his inaugural speech as Professor. He suggested that in addition to the values of the program, the personal resources of the ‘student’, along with the requests and values of the professional field; and the resources of the ‘educator’, along with the science and business worlds, ought to influence the learning landscape of the program (Jansen, 2003). I initially found the questions about grading and course sequence very difficult to deal with, but I can easily deal with these questions now. I learned from Hans that I should pay as little attention to them as possible, to take away the uncertainty, and then to direct attention to what is really interesting and inspiring: pedagogical questions and doubts. What still

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16 Hans was no longer a coach in the course, but a Professor/lector of ‘Innovative Methodology and Didactics in Teacher Training,” and it was through this function that he was connected to the development of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy. Hans continued to guide some of the students from this course with their research and thesis.
bothered me was that these questions kept recurring; somehow, the learning landscape with 50 competencies was not helpful in this.

These problems and questions made Hans, Renée (my friend from the Master’s and colleague in the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy), Riki (as the educational manager of that program) and me, long for a new learning landscape. We took the initiative to design a new landscape with the ten coaches during a two-day workshop in the fall of 2004. The 50 competencies divided over five domains were abandoned. After several brainstorm sessions on the importance of pedagogy, pedagogues, and their qualities, combined with information from our stories on societal demands and values, we created a new learning landscape. All the statements and remarks we came up with, during our brainstorming were rearranged into larger categories, through techniques from grounded theory. We then organized this into five new domains with the tentative names of (i) Living Environment, (ii) Pedagogical Sensitivity, (iii) Pedagogical Language Game, (iv) Learning and (v) Pedagogical Challenges.\(^{17}\)

I was pleased with the orientation towards thematic subjects rather than the long list of competencies, which I often saw as being activities one needs to do or abilities one needs to acquire. Just the names of the new domains already raised questions: the domains included the questioning of practice. The learning landscape of the HKP, as I had experienced it, always involved a lot of talking by me as a ‘coach’ to put the ‘students’ on the track of seeing coherence among different domains and competencies, and I expected that this new landscape already entailed the connections. The 2005 program brochure (Faculteit Educatie & Faculteit Maatschappij en Recht Hogeschool Utrecht, 2005) described this learning landscape as follows.

**A learning landscape**

The program can be seen as a kind of journey, a journey through a learning landscape. In that learning landscape, every student is able to design his/her own learning route (journey). The learning landscape offers some fixed elements that the program, the field of practice, and professional societies, emphasize.

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\(^{17}\) In Dutch: *Leefwereld, Pedagogische Sensitiviteit, Pedagogisch Taalspel, Leren en Pedagogische Uitdagingen.*
Let’s Dance

The domains that are centered in this Polytechnic-master’s program are:

Living Environment
Pedagogical Challenge
Learning
Pedagogical Sensitivity
Pedagogical Language Game

This landscape offers space for you to fill in your journey, based on your own life and work experience and on your educational perspective. In this landscape, different kinds of journeys are possible, and the way of travelling can vary. It is possible to take a more or less direct route to your goal, but also possible to look for adventure. The intention is for you to experience your program as a meaningful and consistent whole.

During this period, The Big Guy worked out his ideas for publication. I then started to see our experience of working together beginning to gel into a concept. All that work evoked by reflective thinking, by the guiding and challenging questions, and by Hans’s inspirational drive, then got a name: Real-Life Learning.

Hans was no longer a leading and questioning ‘coach’ under ‘coaches’, but the leading ‘Professor’ among the ‘coaches’. Philosophies, like post-modernism and critical theory, became more and more important, in advocating the concept of Real-Life Learning. I saw conversations with The Big Guy ending up in various discussions, including discussions about right and wrong, discussions that I disliked intensely, and tended to avoid because I did not have the ‘right’ arguments ready on the spot. I experienced that I lacked a sufficient background in philosophical and educational literature. Reflection on work with ‘students’ seemed to become less important than did ideas and concepts during these discussions. This made me feel dumb and naïve instead of being challenged as I did during my ‘student’ days, although Hans still inspired me.

Not for the first time, Hans mentioned new terms, he read in the literature. This time it was free agent learning, self-directed and co-directed learning. I gladly embraced these terms. They helped me to put into words what I saw as important in the program and how the program differed from programs that were more traditional.

Free agent learning (FAL) became the main emphasis of our program. FA-learners are people who are able to direct their own learning processes, to find their own resources to learn from, and who cannot stop learning. Their learning is not
steered by exams and figures or forced, through teachers telling them what to do, but guided by the learner’s curiosity. I believe FAL people will infect other people with their continuous search for learning. I consider self-directed and co-directed learning (SDL/CDL) important foci towards becoming a free agent learner. Not only ‘students’ are supposed to become free agent learners, but also the ‘teachers’, ‘coaches’ and ‘educators’. The following is a translation of what Jansen says.

These educators/coaches should be able to make a radical turn from teacher towards learner (the learner becomes teacher and the teacher becomes learner in a reflexive permanently changing learning adventure), and to listen to students as a first step in this learning adventure.

That is to say, together with the students, they need to create learning situations in which it is possible to develop learning and communication qualities. They also need to alternate responsibilities for those learning processes with the students and finally leave these responsibilities with the students and their learning teams (p. 94, Jansen, 2007).

With the use of these terms, we veer away from learning that is mainly directed by teachers or programs, and explain to new ‘students’ the program’s aim and the idea of the learning landscape. These terms are used in conjunction with the term personal learning arrangement, which is explained in the program brochure as follows.

**Personal learning arrangement**
The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy offers students an adult education based on an educational arrangement that will be constructed with the students. The students are seen as adult educational partners with their own learning responsibility. In practice, this means that there are only a small number of formal lectures and traditional exams. The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy aims for students to develop a coherent package of life and work qualities at a Master’s level, that are relevant for the profession of a highly educated pedagogue.

The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy is a flexible course that meets many different desires for learning of students (adaptive education). In dialogue with the student, the coach, the exam committee and the learning team, a personal learning arrangement is created that relates to the personal wishes of the student, his/her previous educational trajectory and the specific educational profile sought. A personal learning arrangement or trajectory is a personal learning route that the student, coach and exam committee agree on to realize the specified combined learning goals (the learning goals in both the personal learning agenda of the student and the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy). This personal learning trajectory is formed by means of a personal portfolio in which the story concerning the present and future professional development of the student is recorded. (Faculteit Educatie & Faculteit Maatschappij en Recht Hogeschool Utrecht, 2005)
Let’s Dance

I had faith in what we, the ‘teachers’, were trying to achieve with the ‘students’ and felt proud of several ‘students’ I had guided. They had developed into free agent learners who, as I strongly believed, will continue to ask others and themselves questions and to look for temporary answers. These people will be able to change the way things are done in schools and maybe on a larger scale within education itself. With the way the course is designed, the idea of the learning landscape and coaching rather than teaching, we introduce new emphases. We aimed for outcomes that were different from what traditional courses aspired towards. In my eyes, other courses aimed to educate experts, people who ‘know how it is supposed to be’ or ‘what is best for others’. We aimed to educate people to question these kinds of relations, beliefs, and ideologies. We aimed for people who would search for other possibilities, people who would question education that is centered on the measurement of learning results and that is riddled with language like ‘input-throughput-output’. We aimed to challenge pedagogues to dare to ask what kind of society we want and how we want to educate our children (Giroux, 2000; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2006). Or as Leggo (1998) puts it,

My student-teachers come to me with an urgent practical agenda: What do I need to know in order to survive in the world of school? In effect, they want me to tell them how to fit into a world that they assume is structured like a grammar, with traditions and conventions and rules and patterns. They are seeking ways to conform to the pedagogic world as it has been written, but I hope they will seek ways to transform the pedagogic world, always written and always in the process of being written. I hope my student-teachers will seek ways to write, actively, deliberately, and imaginatively, the pedagogic world of students and teachers. I want them to learn to live un/grammatically, to challenge the ways in which the world has been written for them, to know that they are not only written by the world, but that they also write the world. I invite my students to write the unwritten sentences, the sentences that interrogate and subvert syntax and semantics, the sentences that create spaces where my students can live un/grammatically.

I saw the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy as a course whose goal was learning instead of transferring knowledge and this was what I wanted to convey to more people.
Collaborative Learning

The roles of teachers and students in education, from the primary school level all the way through to higher education, are too often subjected to black-and-white debates. I have seen all kinds of educational changes, including that of **het Studiehuis**\(^{18}\) in secondary education, in which attention has been paid to the changing activities of ‘teachers’ who have been told that they may no longer tell their stories. They have to let ‘students’ independently search for their own ways of finding things out. ‘Teachers’ have been asked to act differently. The didactics change, but the needed resulting changes in the relations between ‘teachers’ and ‘students’ are ignored. Attention seems directed to only changing the manner and patterns of teaching. The idea of every person constructing his or her own knowledge (constructivist perspectives, see Chapter 2) is often seen as the basis for educational change, change towards an even more individualistic approach to understanding society. In effect, I see the debates on educational change focusing on who is responsible: is it the ‘teacher’ or the ‘student’? Everything is centered on a binary debate: either-teachers-or-students\(^{19}\), a hardened dispute with inflexible viewpoints. The notion of ‘teachers’ and ‘students’ becoming free agent learners\(^{20}\), implies interchangeable roles and softens this binary either-or debate. Both ‘teachers’ and ‘students’ should be seen as responsible and responsive learners.

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18 In Dutch: **Het Studiehuis** (The Study House) for the Second Phase of **HAVO** and **VWO** became effective in 1998. This change in didactics, towards the so-called ‘new learning’ was initiated because of the complaints by higher education that students were not autonomous enough to deal with the demands of higher education. In The Study House, the transfer of knowledge from a teacher to a student was changed into students independently discovering answers to the questions raised by their tutors or by each other. They were seen as autonomous and responsible for their own learning processes.

19 In the Netherlands, major debaters are followers of the so-called **Nieuwe Leren** and **Natuurlijk Leren** (e.g., Kok, 2003) and the people of **Beter Onderwijs Nederland** (BON) are on the other side of the debating continuum. **Nieuwe Leren** and **Natuurlijke Leren** are based on what is called constructivist ideas (see Chapter 2). BON advocates the idea of transfer of knowledge from teacher to pupils in which the teacher is responsible, like in the old days. The clash between those opinions is, according to Gergen, based on different constructions of knowledge. This is explored further in Chapter 2.

20 The term **free agent learners** does seem to refer to individual processes instead of learning as on-going processes of co-construction and is not in line with the constructionist position taken in this thesis. At the start of my research project, I was not aware of that.
Meanwhile, I keep on questioning my role as ‘teacher’/‘educator’/‘coach.’ In my work with several learning teams and in supporting new ‘coaches’ in their introduction to the course and concepts behind Real-Life Learning, I continually fell into the trap of ‘teaching’, i.e. telling stories about how I saw the world. Those stories were sometimes followed by student remarks that they have experienced the same thing and I could not ignore the idea that ‘students’ were impressed by my stories. But what should or could be my role when I want us to write the world together (Leggo, 1998)? What is a teacher? What can a teacher become? How does one escape the dominant position? These are questions that I continued to ask my colleagues and myself. I love to search together with students, exploring new topics, as I did with Paul21. In his fourth year22, we explored the possibilities of narrative research; both of us inspired each other in our conversations based on reading and experience with the material. We searched for what would be new and for unexplored ways of researching. When Paul finished his research, he wrote in his report (translation LH).

After much hesitation, fed by resistance towards scientific research in whatever form, I did not know how to get started. Fortunately, my coach interpreted those signals correctly and put me in the direction of narrative inquiry. Thanks to that, I found a method of research by which I experienced that my research became my inquiry. I found the space that the methodology offered me very pleasant, because working with very strict prescribed rules did not captivate me. On the other side of the coin, the lack of a clear method demanded a serious search, especially in the analysis phase. Working through this, my way of analyzing changed and adapted. Looking back on this I might say that this is why I have the feeling that it was my research (May 2006)

I wrote about this process with Paul in an essay for a workshop Write What You Think23. This workshop occurred with the ‘coaches’ of the Master’s Program in Ecological Pedagogy. The workshop was guided by Tanny Dobbelaar and Marjan Slob and was based on the essay tradition of de Montaigne (Dobbelaar, 2005).

21 Paul is a pseudonym. During the course, he worked as a special educational needs coordinator at a primary school. After his graduation, he became a teacher at the vocational teacher training courses of the Seminarium voor Orthopedagogiek, Hogeschool Utrecht.
22 Paul had decided to slow-down his pace of studying and added a fourth year to the three-years course.
23 ‘Schrijven wat je denkt,’ see www.schrijvenwatjedenkt.nl. We were asked to write an essay for an imagined magazine, with a special issue titled, ‘The Best Coach.’
Entering the PhD Program with Passion and Inspiration

Essay by Loes Houweling
Vierhouten, 30 September 2005

‘Doing research, that’s nothing for me,’ Paul told me in the first workshop with his new learning team. I thought, ‘Let go; that will change.’ It soon became clear that it was not easy to change his mind. Frequently, he asked if things were compulsory or could be done differently. He frequently started discussions with me and other students. When I made use of the word ‘ought’ he jumped on that immediately.

Pigheaded, that’s what he was. He was not easy to convince. I saw, next to this pigheadedness, that he listened when I related something or showed my enthusiasm for a theme. He seemed to see me as an expert, whereas he wanted to make his own choices. How should I coach him in a way that he would do research as well as like it?

Three years later, he told me, ‘I have been working on my research during part of the summer holidays. What’s being said in the interviews is so interesting.’ What has been my role as coach in this?

Coaching is like sailing. You can sail in any direction, even against the wind. The zigzagging you need to do, asks you to know the ship, how deep it draws, and how fast it tacks. You need to stay on course while taking other boats and the wind into account.

As a coach, you need to get to know a student well enough to know how to work with him. What I learned about Paul was that he was seldom convinced in a discussion. He persevered with his opinion. He did not want to be pressured and I had to handle him carefully.

Paul kept on postponing his research. That was fine with me, as long as he knew that it was his choice. When I pointed this out, he made it clear that he would determine his own pace. He apparently did not want to start with his research. However, he explicitly knew what he was going to research: i.e. why do people want to become a special needs coordinator in primary education? He also knew how he was going to approach that theme; specifically, in the same way a fellow student did it, whom he helped intensively with a research approach based on grounded theory.
Our conversations about his research recurred frequently during this process, but he did not start. I thought that he had chosen a tame topic, but as long as it was important to him, that was okay with me. With such a pigheaded man, I wanted to put my energy in what I thought mattered. The way I saw it, the method of research he imagined did not seem to fit with his research question, but he did not want to hear that. He stuck to his choices. I realized that another approach was not only unfamiliar to him, but it was also difficult. When he was in a conversation with someone, he seemed to be mainly occupied with thinking up counterarguments, while in the narrative method as I envisioned it, he would have to be open to the other. That way of working not only fit with his research question, but it would also have been more challenging for him.

Every time we met, I started to talk about his research, to offer critical questions that teased his imagination, or I let him know my ideas about his research. None of this was intended to force him to make decisions. I expressed my ideas, left them, took distance, and returned to them the next time. I told him that he had to decide for himself. He got enough space to think quietly because the conversations did not force him to draw conclusions. I knew how to sail this boat.

Over the years, of course, there were moments that I thought, ‘let him be’. It was his responsibility. I had shown him some possibilities. He had to make his own choices. However, he obviously did not make a choice. He did not start and I could continue to ask him my questions.

I knew what was right for this student. He did not know himself, but I was able to see it. It was an unequal position. I was steering when I asked questions like ‘Is this really what you want to research?’ ‘Will you get an answer in this way?’ ‘Will you develop yourself by doing this?’ Implicitly, I was disaffirming and he knew that. I chose to touch upon the theme, let it go, and pick it up again. I knew how to handle this student. I manipulated him and with good results. Between two appointments, he started looking for the research method I had suggested. He told me enthusiastically about the literature he had come across and that he was busy reading it. He then knew what to do and he immediately started making appointments for interviews.
He made his choice, a choice he would not have been able to make if I had not stood behind my ideas about what he should have done. Together we examined the possibilities for narrative research and he made several choices from these.

Sailing demands concerted actions between helmsman and the boat. The speed and course that is sailed depend on both. It is a subtle play of tacking on time and not losing sight of the course. When the weather changes or the ship draws too deep, the course needs to be adjusted.

Manipulation sounds negative and certainly as a coach, you are not allowed to manipulate. To stimulate, that is all right. For me, there is very little difference between these two. Manipulating is stimulating, in a way that fits with the student. A coach who cannot stand by his course, cannot manipulate or stimulate. Without a course, there is nothing to coach and a coach without a course is adrift. I don’t want to be coached by such a coach.

During the introductory days with new students, one of them told me that he dreaded scientific research. I promised him that it would turn out all right. He did not believe me, I saw it in his eyes.

In this essay, I explored the relation of a student and me, a relation that inspired me, because as I experienced it we were able to learn and to switch roles. Sometimes Paul was teaching, explaining what he had read and sometimes I took up that role. I also explored some of the edges of these interchangeable activities, noticing that I was the one that kept the boat on course, whilst learning to become a coach and learning about narrative research. We both learned from the collaboration.

**The Professor**

After these significant stories of me becoming a teacher, I want to shift my focus to other educational relations. Starting with a story of how I met The Professor, one of the important characters for my book, these stories focus more on me becoming a student.
It could not have been just a coincidence that I had a conversation with my uncle, my mother’s youngest brother, at the end of a family reunion, a conversation during which we discovered that we were reading similar organizational literature, such as Senge (2000) and Weggeman (1997). When we continued our conversation during a lunch on another day, he recommended contacting Professor Letiche. My uncle stressed the importance of Letiche being a Professor of organizing rather than of organizations. Before he gave me this advice, I told him my story about the department of educational sciences at the rather traditional University of Utrecht, which started with my request to talk about possibilities for continuing my education in 2003.

Utrecht University had asked me to serve as a guinea pig in working with a portfolio as a form of assessment at the start. I selected work for the portfolio and sent it to the tutor. I ended my portfolio with some questions that inspired me to continue my learning process. In the conversation about my portfolio, the tutor’s first reaction was one of amazement. He realized, for the first time, that working with portfolios can enhance one’s learning needs. After that, we discussed the HKP and the underlying premises, which I described as constructivism24. At the end of our conversation, the tutor concluded that he still considered constructivism as being dangerous for education. He said that few of his colleagues supported such an idea. However, he did admit that our conversation about the subject was interesting. He said he hardly ever had this type of conversation with his colleagues. When I received his final evaluation on my portfolio a few weeks later, I learned that I had to start with a pre-Master’s, before I could enter the Master’s program. I did not get the feeling that my portfolio or our conversation had anything to do with this evaluation; every student with a HKP had to start with the pre-Master’s program. My Master’s degree from Oxford did not count at all, and my learning needs had no influence on the evaluation. This was very disappointing and I never had any intention of following that route!

24 At that time, I was not introduced to the differences between constructivism and constructionism, as constructed by, for instance, Hosking and Gergen (see Chapter 2). In this HKP time, we as ‘coaches’ had ample discussions about the name for our premises, discussions which later headed towards critical pedagogical and post-modern perspectives.
After my uncle’s tip to make contact with the Professor, I phoned Hugo Letiche, The Professor of the University for Humanistics, and explained that I was looking for a way to continue the learning process that I started in my Master’s program. I was searching for fresh new input for my process.

Much to my surprise, over the phone he said, ‘I always advise people with these kinds of questions to do a PhD’.

I had never thought of studying for a PhD before. I didn’t know anyone who had a PhD. Moreover, with the discouragement from Utrecht University in my mind, I did not think that I could even be eligible for a Master’s program at a traditional university, let alone a PhD program. A few weeks later, The Professor and I met in his study and while sitting in the two large chairs, drinking delicious cappuccino, we talked about my interests in pedagogy and higher education. He was about the same age as The Big Guy, but instead of a beard and lively printed shirts, he had fuzzy grey hair and wore a bulky jacket. His enormous study was full of books. On his desk there were books, all the walls were covered with bookshelves filled up to the high ceiling. There were also large piles of books on the coffee table that left little space for the serving tray with coffee and the plate of cookies, that he had arranged so nicely. Some of the books were discolored and faded from the light; others seemed brand-new. Next to those books, although there was hardly any place for them, were somewhat dusty wooden statues that stared at me.

At one point, during the conversation, he said, ‘I was a tutor many years ago for the MO\textsuperscript{25} program. That is the prerequisite for M.Ed\textsuperscript{26} and HKP. It was my experience that it took a lot of effort to make the students aware of larger contexts that influenced their work, especially with teachers like your students. So, I don’t know if what you are trying to achieve in this program will work out, but it is very interesting.’

I replied, ‘I believe we are developing a way to realize a social ecological aware pedagogy. Not all students reach that point, but quite a lot do. I would like to tell the story of how we are accomplishing this and to support this with theory because it is developed out of practice. In addition to that, I want to challenge our way of working and to develop it. I need input from other angles, just to keep on questioning our stories.’

\textsuperscript{25} The MO is equated with Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) and Master of Education (M.Ed).
\textsuperscript{26} Master’s program in Pedagogy.
After that, our conversation drifted towards some mutual acquaintances in the field of pedagogy, people he knew from when he worked as a tutor in the B.Ed/M.Ed courses and we found out that we mostly agreed on whom we favored. René Ransdorp, one of his former colleagues, came up. Just as he did during Hugo’s MO time, René also inspired our ‘students’ and the other ‘coaches’ as well as me with how he connected his beautiful Tao stories from Lao Tse and Chuang Tzu to pedagogical questions. The stories seemed continuously to challenge how I interpreted ‘how the world is’.

Somewhere in the conversation, Hugo said, ‘Buber’s *I and Thou*, that is something that might interest you.’ Right after that meeting with Hugo, I went to the library. I felt excited; this was what I’d been looking for, to get other input that was qualitative and high-standing in order to develop my understanding of educating and critical questions about experience.

I was impressed by Hugo, The Professor at the University for Humanistics. I was impressed by all of his books and by his interest in my story. I liked the way he listened and his joy in asking all kinds of critical questions, based on his own experience and on interesting philosophical themes. I perceived the main ideology of The Professor (as he later formulated it in an article) to see social research as an attempt to share observations and to make things visible and discussable, sometimes with the intent to alter or shift matters (Letiche, et al. 2008). Making relations visible and discussable and being able to develop them, that is what I wanted to do with our teacher-student relations in the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy!

I asked my manager at work for financial support. While shooting a glance at the program brochure, he said, ‘Are you really planning to do this? You won’t be able to earn these fees back you know! I can only offer you the amount of refund that is obligatory for all training.’ To my recollection, he added ‘little girl’ to his remark. I don’t know if that was exactly what he said, but that was the way I experienced it. His reaction shocked me. How peculiar is it that a manager of an organization advocating ‘lifelong learning’ would see learning as something that one does, to make more money; as if making money is ever the case in education. Why didn’t he understand my hunger for learning? This convinced me even more that I was on the right track. With the support of Hans, my friend Renée and, last but not least, my husband Jos, who knew that I would keep on looking for these kinds of programs and that he was unable to change my mind, I registered and started the program in January 2004.
I recall how I introduced myself during the first session. To explain about my work, I used the articles that I had received from the tutors prior to the first workshop, and I asked why I had received these articles. Were we expected to read them in advance?

I added, ‘I usually only read stuff when I have a question or because I want to read it. That is what we intend to do with our course, to have the students read and research because of their own questions, not because we tell them to do so.’

Immediately, one of the tutors made it clear that they sent the articles as an extra service. The articles were written by people who were presenting during the first week and it was up to me whether I wanted to read the articles or not. Even though I got the impression that my introduction was a bit too forceful, the tutor’s response pleased me. I thought it was the right approach. I experienced being treated as a responsible learner.

During the first year of the PhD program, I came to know Hugo as someone who was always asking difficult and provoking questions, like when I presented a research proposal in which I explained that I wanted to research how we could support ‘students’ who worked as ‘teachers’ in finding their own voice.

‘Hey,’ he said, ‘why start with the teacher, you give the teacher too much attention; why not start with the children?’

Another reaction to a proposal on self-directed learning was, ‘Your proposal is based on the assumption that self-directed learning (SDL) is important and something to desire; I have my doubts.’

Most of the time, Hugo’s questions and remarks threw me into confusion and I did not immediately have a proper response. The responses I usually came up with, arose when I was on the train home or when I discussed the issues with Chris, my fellow PhD candidate. Is this the same I experienced when entering into discussions with The Big Guy (Hans)? Am I encountering the same kind of fear and uncertainty again? Do I seek out these kinds of people?

Yes, I think so. I pondered their questions, but there was this slight difference between the questions from Hugo and those from Hans: The Professor asked me to deconstruct my images of what is right, to develop a critical perspective on the program and our educational view. He was not trying to convince me, although I could not ignore the idea that he liked to win debates and knew when he was right. When I thought of reactions and answers on the train back home, they were usually based on what I regarded as experience. I experienced SDL as important because it focused on learners to develop learning powers that will benefit them long after the course. I wrote DARE! in my journal after one of those occasions. ‘Dare to bring in experience, you’re not a fool.’ In addition, I
developed the idea that I wanted to ask these kinds of ‘Hugo-questions’ myself, both to myself and to my colleagues. I also wanted our ‘students’ to develop this ability of critical questioning.

The Master and Possibilities

My first encounter with The Master, Dian Marie Hosking, was via her website while conducting an Internet search using her name and found ‘Opening a door to relational constructionism’ (Hosking, 2005b). What fascinated me on the website was a whole bunch of articles and an outspoken focus that I found hard to understand. It attracted me because I could combine some of the elements with the ideas of Real-Life Learning. I was enthused by all the links to methodological literature, and by the idea of using methodology to construct other stories, and not as a goal in and of itself. I spent hours at that website and I was impressed by the enormous amount of information it contained. I made an appointment with Dian Marie and in an attempt to get an idea of who she was, I looked at her photograph on the website. It is hard to define the impression I got from it. It seemed a bit old-fashioned, a photograph of someone opening a door. I wondered whether she was suspended in the 20th twentieth century, or whether this is just an old photo chosen because of the door.

What mainly attracted me was the idea that critical relational constructionism is practical and theoretical. The notion that social construction seems challenging, in combination with Real-Life Learning and ecological pedagogy, was also an attractive idea. Looking at education as processes of construction, allows the possibility to construct education differently. I saw the focus on collaborative construction of critical relational constructionism, as abstract glasses through which one could look at teacher-student relations. It is an alternative to looking at these relations from the linear perspective, which is the ‘I do this, then you react’ perspective. I thought this might be helpful in opening up my traditional perspective on the role of ‘teachers’/ ‘coaches’/ ‘educators’. I got the idea that relational constructionism can open a door. It could function as a possible way out of the endless either-or discussions of who is responsible in education: the ‘student’ or the ‘teacher’. Especially challenging was the idea that the relation between students and teachers can be seen as a co-constructed relation open to other constructions.
In January 2006, I defined my desire to understand and to see if critical relational constructionism could open my ideas on teacher-student relations:

Individual, own voice, group and community, are constructs in accordance with critical relational constructionism. These are constructs I find hard to let go of because they are so interconnected with my perspective and I use them every day. Not using these constructs is a true challenge to my perspective.

Individuality, ownership of voices, ownership of knowledge, and thinking about what can be considered community are challenges that I believe resonate with the ideas of Real-Life Learning and our Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy about changing teaching and teacher-student relations. To me, critical relational constructionism seemed to offer an epistemological text with which one can work. Relational realities like ‘a teacher supporting a student to become a free agent learner in the process of collaborative learning,’ instead of ‘a teacher teaching the student,’ might create the need for other perspectives on ‘the Self’ as subject (teacher) acting on ‘the Other’ as object (student). In addition to this, I was fascinated by the possibility of opening up what is considered normal and usual. Critical relational constructionism focuses on these possibilities.

With these expectations, I met Professor Dian Marie Hosking in person for the first time during the summer of 2005. Hugo recommended that I contact her to see if she could help me with my research. After my search on the Internet, I made an appointment at her workplace at the Utrecht University School of Governance\textsuperscript{27}, a department at the Utrecht University. After the train journey, I walked to the institute. It was a bit further than I expected it to be, so I had to pick up my walking pace. I was a bit sweaty because of the quick pace, combined with the heat. I arrived just in time. The woman at the desk asked me to wait until The Master called for me and after a few minutes, Dian Marie opened the door from the corridor. In her pale brown linen trousers and her off-white blouse, she looked as if she didn’t feel the heat at all. She explained that she had kept me waiting because, as she said often happens, some students asked her what they had to do for their assignments and they had to finish it quickly.

\textsuperscript{27} In Dutch: \textit{Utrechtse School voor Bestuurs- en Organisatiewetenschap.}
'I get so tired of that. They don’t seem to take up their own responsibility,’ Dian Marie said.

‘Well, basically, those are the kinds of issues we try to deal with in the Master’s program that I want to study,’ was my response. I immediately had the feeling that we had something in common concerning the topic of teaching. While we walked through the corridor, I remarked, ‘What a nice area to work in.’

‘Yes,’ she reacted, ‘I love what they accomplished here with the reconstruction: the sober colors in the corridors with the bright colored spots here and there. They succeeded in preserving the old charm of the building. I couldn’t work in a totally new building,’ Dian Marie said.

We sat down in an empty dining hall that had bright green lamps and colored glass walls.

The Master asked, ‘you wanted to meet me. Why, what are you working on?’

I tried to explain as briefly as possible. ‘I have this plan to execute a research project on our Master’s program and essentially on the guidance of research as part of that course. We have this program which is different from traditional programs. For instance, when it comes to responsibilities, students design their own learning paths in a learning landscape.’

‘Have you read something of, what’s his name, uhm, Bruffee?’

‘No, I haven’t.’

‘I have to look this up, Bruffee it is. He might be of use; he is connected to our Taos institute.’ Upon my invitation, Dian Marie wrote his name in my notebook.

‘I have this idea about following a group of students, which I will guide in their research in the Life World\textsuperscript{28} of children. I don’t know if that is proper English, Life World.’

‘Well, it connotes, for instance, the concepts of Husserl and I don’t know if you want that, it’s a difficult concept and I have to know what you mean by that,’ The Master said.

‘It is the name of one of the domains students have to work in and we intend to focus on the world as it is perceived by children, what is important to children in their surroundings.’

‘Maybe just “living environment” is a better term to use. It has fewer connotations, but you still have to state what you mean by it.’

‘Okay, that’s important to know. Do you have any ideas about how I could carry out this research?’

‘Collaborative inquiry using a critical ethnographic approach: that might be

\textsuperscript{28} I translate the Dutch word \textit{Leefwereld} to the English term ‘Life World.’
a way to develop the research.’
An ethnographic approach: that resonated. That was what Hans had already suggested and what we were exploring in another research project, so I nodded in agreement.
‘If I had time, I would like to explore ethnography more fully,’ The Master added, ‘but it’s so time-consuming.’
‘Wow’, ran through my head, ‘this is an opportunity to explore this together!’
‘I think you should contact Carolyn Ramsey, she is a PhD student of mine, working on a project on teaching from a critical relational constructionist perspective.’

With Carolyn’s e-mail address and many names of authors, I walked out the door into the warm sun, thinking about what had just happened, at the end of our conversation. Dian Marie wanted to look up some literature in her computer and we walked to her room. When we arrived, a boy and girl came running in with some ice cream for her. I experienced this as meant to make excuses. When The Master’s eyes and mine met, I think I saw a glance of understanding. These kinds of relational aspects are interesting to question. The next day, I let her know that I wanted to continue our contact and that I would like to arrange a meeting with her and Hugo to talk this through, knowing that with this decision I would have to write in English.

After our first meeting, I read The Master’s article on discourses on relational processes in which she differentiates between positivistic and constructivist thought styles and proposes critical relational constructionism. I could easily follow her line of thought on the inadequacy of the first two styles, when she writes about constructivism.

In sum, post ‘this and that’ thinking succeeds in blurring, but not in abandoning, some S-O assumptions about relations and continues to prescribe S-O relations in the conduct of scientific inquiry. The characteristics attributed to the human subject include a singular self (I think), with a knowing mind (I think) and language ability, along with constructs such as motives and personality. The blurring of S-O is primarily epistemological and objective-subjective knowledge is about real objects, imperfectly knowable (p. 271, Hosking, 2005a).

Her alternative I found hard to grasp and that challenged me. I wanted to understand.

29 Hosking refers to Hermans et al. (1992) for an excellent discussion of this.
Critical Dance Partners

There were two important critical friends, with emphasis on friends, who have been important to my PhD program in different ways. The first one I met, was Renée. I introduced her earlier in the section Learning and Researching. Here is the story of how we got together.

When I got the overview of the participants of the Master’s program in 1997, I noticed that one of the women lived in Haarlem, as I did. I tried to phone her to see if we could make some type of travelling arranges to get to the university together, but I couldn’t reach her. I was a little nervous about what I would encounter when I arrived at the building and looked for the classroom where the first meeting of the Master’s program would take place. I saw a man and a woman much older than I was and I wondered if I had applied for the right program. Then Renée walked into the room and I thought, ‘thank God, someone my age!’ That morning, I found out that she was the woman who lived in Haarlem! After that, we travelled together, sat next to each other, and jointly completed several assignments. We also socialized together: drinking, eating, and laughing while discussing the other participants in the Master’s program, The Big Guy, and life in general. Later on, we became colleagues at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht. Our discussions of Real-Life Learning, the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy, and how this course should be executed formed a major part of our conversations, sometimes to the annoyance of others. Work, friendship, and life were totally integrated and I had regained the old feeling of building towards something collectively, the same experience I had had with the group of speech therapists. Renee and I differed on many things and that seemed beneficial when we worked together with students. What I liked about her was her passionate, ongoing critical reflection, and that she asked questions. In addition, there was her enormous sensitivity for interactions between people and power relations, and her humor, which sometimes shocked me as well as others while at the same time, it could loosen up the atmosphere. She would often show me different perspectives on situations and her inexhaustible critical questioning of power relations in education prevented me from accepting things as being just the way they are.
I met Chris, the other important critical friend, in the third workshop of the PhD program at the University for Humanistics, during our first year. He was introduced to us as a new participant. In preparation for this workshop, we were asked to write a paper on a theory we would be willing to live or die for, a question that I found very disturbing because I was neither able nor willing to choose. Chris introduced himself as an occupational therapist and lector. With a clear presentation, he told us about his interest in narratives as part of research strategies. His background in higher education was the first thing that intrigued me. We started to have many conversations about higher education and our research; we also arranged a study group with two other participants, Marrianne and Jeroen, to discuss our route in the PhD program on a regular basis. Chris became a critical friend in my process. He was always prepared to read my writing, to ask critical questions and to discuss our relations with our supervisors. His belief in my abilities felt like dancing with a dance partner who was willing to improvise and experiment, which is a necessary counterpart in the challenging critical dance of opening up all kinds of well-tread patterns.

During the twilight of the evening, Marianne, Chris, and I sat in Chris’s garden, under a large tree. Both Chris and Marianne were in the final phase of their PhD; they were writing the texts for the back flap of their books. I sent them a paper that I had written for a conference in Groningen (Onderwijs Research Dagen).

Chris said, ‘Wow, this is the first time that you have written down what the core of your research will be. I like that comparison of a relation between teachers and students with dancing very much.’

‘Yeah,’ I responded ‘I’m happy with that too. It stems from Dian Marie’s idea of a relational dance and I think that Ellen’s remark about our teacher-student relation as constantly changing and moving, fits that very well.’

‘It makes me think of the tango,’ Chris continues.

‘The tango? I didn’t think of the type of dance and certainly not that kind of dance. With those strict prescribed roles of man and

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30 At universities for applied sciences, the position of Lector was first introduced in 2002. Although the function of a lector at these universities can be compared with professors at other universities, two different titles are in use to indicate differences between professors at these universities and traditional universities.


32 This remark by Ellen, one of the ‘students’ in the Living Environment Research Project, is transcribed in Chapter 5, p.234.
woman and those steps and patterns, there seems to be no openness to it. That is not what I want to story!

‘I don’t mean just any tango, but the Argentine tango. That is a dance with much more space than ballroom dances. It’s based on improvisation; you might want to investigate that further.’

**Reflective Practitioner Research**

I have developed my research in the tradition of the researcher as practitioner, following Donald Schön’s idea of the reflective practitioner (1983) and Joe Kincheloe’s teacher as researcher (2003). Both authors relate their work to pragmatist philosophy and the pedagogy of John Dewey, who champions learning through experience and reflection on experience as a means to develop a more democratic society. Schön advocates practitioner knowledge in his frequently cited publications on the reflective practitioner. He proposes that the implicit knowledge of experienced practitioners is far more valuable in action than is technocratic scientifically proven knowledge. The malleability of practitioner knowledge suits the demands of the many different contexts in which the knowledge is applied, while traditional scientific knowledge is static. The reflective practitioner reflects-in-action on the application of knowledge in specific situations. The knowledge worker, when applying static knowledge, creates distance and power over clients. Schön sees a crisis looming in the valuing of static knowledge, because, as he observes, articulate consumers do not accept the power difference (Schön, 1983). A reflective practitioner acknowledges the contribution of the other. Decisions, for instance while teaching, should be made based on the knowledge and experience of the teacher and of students as well. Knowledge is situational, flexible, and personal. In his second book on this matter, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987), Schön describes how decisions are made implicitly by experienced professionals. ‘Learning a really new competence’ (p. 93), in an educational setting is inherently paradoxical, for one can only educate one self. Yet Schön sees a role for the teacher, when he supports learning to become a professional, through interaction with a master, in a practicum. Such a reflective practicum is meant to enhance reflection-in-action. In such a setting, the gap between espoused theory-of-action, (what we think we do) and theory-in-use (which governs actual behavior and is often tacit) (Argyris & Schön, 1974), can be displaced by making the processes of choice, explicit. In their model of single- and double-loop and deutero learning, Argyris and Schön identify learning with detecting and the correcting of errors.
Single-loop learning is correcting behavior based on predetermined, desired outcomes, while double-loop learning corrects errors between espoused theory and theory-in-use. Deutero learning redefines the espoused theory and theory-in-use and leads to change on a level of structure of organizations.

Kincheloe advocates teachers, as researchers of their own practice. They should study their relations in the historical and socio-economic perspective of knowledge production, in order to (re)gain their profession as knowledge producers, and to develop a basis in educational change. Kincheloe’s researching teacher redefines educational structures, based on the socio-economic analysis. The research he proposes could be seen as deutero-learning.

In bridging the worlds of universities and practice, Schön grants the professionally oriented school an important role. The Dutch universities of applied sciences accepted this view on knowledge-in-action and the reflective practitioner with open arms. Advocating the importance of practitioner knowledge, and attempting to develop professions through solidifying this knowledge in protocols, seemed a way of obtaining a position in world of higher education different from traditional universities. The focus of our master’s program on pedagogues being their own most important instrument, refers to the reflective practitioner as well. I located my ethnography in this line of thought on reflective professional practice. The workshops with students, described in this book, can be regarded as a reflective practicum for educational change. What I do, of course, as Schön does in his analysis of his practicum, is make the implicit knowledge of teaching and learning explicit. In Chapter 6, I will return to this theme of the reflective practitioner and single-loop, double-loop, and deutero learning.

Critical Ethnography

Before I started my empirical work in January 2006, I read several books and articles on critical ethnography. In one of them, Soyini Madison’s Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance (2005), I came across the name of Dwight Conquergood. Madison refers to him when she discusses several ethical issues. One thing led to another and I found and read Conquergood’s article, Street Literacy (1997). This article inspired me because in it, he describes himself as the researcher who is simultaneously also the person who needs to become literate when it concerns graffiti on the streets. He stories the lessons
he learned from a boy who explained to him the symbols used in graffiti and Conquergood emphasizes the shift in roles: a Professor who is learning from a person who is often seen as being less literate. This idea of switching roles and approaching research as learning interested me very much. This is what research and learning should be about, in my opinion. It shouldn’t be about the all-knowing researcher, analyzing and storying the lives of others. To the contrary, a researcher should learn from others as well as the other way around. Conquergood indicates that this is the ethical stance of dialogical performance (Conquergood, 1982).

With these ideas in my mind, I wanted to execute critical, reflective and collaborative or dialogical research, in which the separation between researcher and who is being researched is blurred. This would parallel my intention to blur the distinction between ‘teacher’ and ‘student’. With these ideals in mind, I started my research by inviting ‘students’ to participate. Meanwhile, I was unaware of having made hard distinctions in my invitation letter, hard distinctions between researcher and what is researched, as well as between ‘students’ and ‘teachers’.

**The Dancing Starts with Stuff**

I decided to follow a group of ‘students’ from the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy while they were executing their research in the domain of Living Environment and the students from the HKP33 in the domains of Scientific Research and Pedagogy. With my colleagues, Hans and Renée, I started this research project for students as a means to collect material, which The Professor refers to as the ‘stuff’. Without bothering with specific questions, without expecting a specific outcome, I decided to focus on supervising research because I regarded researching and learning to be tightly interconnected. In November 2005, I sent out an invitation. The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy had just started its first year and I had hoped to attract second- and third-year students from the HKP. I invited them to participate in a Living Environment Research Project with the following letter.

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33 HKP is the abbreviation of the Dutch *Hogere Kaderspelende Pedagogiek*, the precursor program of the Master’s program.
Invitation to Students
Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy and the HKP
Regarding: Living Environment Research

Utrecht, 28 November 2005

In education and youth care, there is a tendency to think for children. From our adult perspective, we know what is right for them. We think that we know what holds their attention and what they need in order to keep going in the world. However, do we really know what holds their attention?

In January, the department ‘Innovative Methodology and Didactics in Teacher Training’ will start a research course in which students of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy and the HKP can participate. The central theme within this research is:

How are children or youngsters doing in the world?

More themes can be extracted from this central theme. About 20 students can participate in this research. The entire course, including the report writing, will take about 18 months to complete. The project will fall under the domain of Living Environment and has possible connections with other domains of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy. Performing scientific research is one of the compulsory assignments within the program. For students from the HKP, this research falls under Domain 1 (scientific research) and along the course of the research attention will be paid to different research methods and philosophies of science (Domain 2 of the HKP).

Method of research
We have chosen to use critical ethnography as our method. In the first informative workshop, we will clarify the background and restrictions of this choice. Ethnographic research is a collective noun for research by anthropologists. Anthropologists engage in describing (other) cultures (for example, the culture of youngsters). Many different ways of collecting material is used, like visual anthropology and participative observation. One important characteristic of this research is that you don’t start with a detailed definition of a problem, but you develop it during the research. The critical element of ethnographic research focuses on: (1) the purpose of the research, since the researcher must weigh if the research is not going to harm but benefit who is being researched; (2) on researching because the researcher must constantly be critical towards his or her own context of interpretation. Therefore, looking from different perspectives is an important element within this research.

Who can join?
With this letter, we are inviting learning teams to join this research. New learning teams can also be formed around this project, but participants should take travel distances into consideration. It does not matter if you have just started the course this year or some time ago.
Guidance
Hans Jansen, Renée van der Linde and Loes Houweling of the department of Innovative Methodology and Didactics will supervise the research in central workshops and during learning teams appointments.

Droste effect
Loes Houweling will follow the process of researching in a critical ethnographic way. That will become a research of researching. If you participate in the research of the Living Environment of children and youngsters, you will be researched yourself. Obviously, all the information will be treated as confidential. If you have any questions about this, you can contact her at [phone numbers].

Planning
After an initial information workshop, you can decide whether or not you want to participate in this project. We will then make a collective start with four workshops (from January 2006 through May 2006). Further participation will take place in the learning teams. Every three months, an exchange workshop will be organized during which you will present the status of your research and during which we will take the time to discuss some central themes.

[Dates, time and place first five workshops, what to do with questions (contact Loes) and how to submit.] (translation LH)

On 16 January 2006, the gathering of the ‘stuff’ really began when we (‘students’ and ‘coaches’) met for the first time in an informative workshop about the Living Environment Research Project.

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34 This ‘Droste effect’ refers to an image on boxes of cacao that depict a nurse holding a tray with a cup of chocolate and a box of cacao with that exact same image of the nurse: it’s an image recurring within the image.
CHAPTER 2

Tango of Critical Relational Constructionisms

The Master, 30 July 2007: You need to give the reader a clue why this work of yours is important to read, you need to make your position clear, why did you do this project? You must make clear what your, uhm, well, not theory, not paradigm, well intelligibility nucleus is a good term to use; you must start with your intelligibility nucleus...
Constructionism and constructivism are words that show up in many writings about educational and organizational theory and research. The notion of relational or social reality as a construction of human beings, as a common orientation in constructionism and constructivism is widespread. The concepts constructionism and constructivism have been used so much, and in so many different senses, that I need to start by explaining what I understand by constructionism and in particular by critical relational constructionism. After an overview of a landscape of constructionisms, I present some themes to provide more detail about how constructionism might be understood. Each theme ends with the choices I made, choices in light of my perspectives, like the focus on teacher-student relations and the way constructionism can serve as a tool to open up stabilized patterns of interaction, as described in Chapter 1. I choose to write this chapter in a less fluent style than the other chapters to strengthen the difference from the other texts. At first, I compare constructionisms to dancing the Argentine tango. The Argentine tango is described on Wikipedia as follows:

Argentine tango is a social dance and a musical genre that originated in Argentina and moved to Uruguay, and to the rest of the world later on. In the US, it is commonly confused with Ballroom Tango, though this is a later derivation.

Argentine tango consists of a variety of styles that developed in different regions and eras and in response to the crowding of the venue and even the fashions in clothing. ... Tango is essentially walking with a partner and the music. Musicality (i.e., dancing appropriately to the emotion and speed of a tango) is an extremely important element of dancing tango. A good dancer is one who makes you see the music...

Argentine tango relies heavily on improvisation; although certain patterns of movement have been codified by instructors over the years as a device to instruct dancers, there is no ‘basic step’ ... Argentine tango is a new orientation of couple dancing. As most dances have a rational pattern, which can be predicted by the follower, the ballast of previous perceptions about strict rules has to be thrown overboard and replaced by a real communication contact, creating a direct non-verbal dialogue. A tango is a living act in the moment as it happens. (Wikipedia)

But what about relational constructionism? Like the tango, relational constructionism focuses on the process of constructing relational realities as processes that are always ongoing in the moment as they happen. The texts on relational constructionism in this chapter will be related to texts stemming from the processes of the Living Environment Research Project in the following chapters. I prefer to view this collation of different texts as creating new texts on relational realities of teacher-student relations as an Argentine tango, a living act that happens in the moment it is read.
To use a term coined by Kenneth Gergen and introduced to me by Dian Marie Hosking, I will describe critical relational constructionism as an *intelligibility nucleus*, which Gergen defines as:

...a set of interrelated propositions that furnishes a community of interlocutors with a sense of description and/or explanation within a given domain. To participate in the intelligibility nucleus is to ‘make sense’ by the standards of a particular community (p. 6, 1994).

Gergen continues, ‘[P]ropositional networks are essential constituents of more inclusive forms of action’ as ‘typically embedded within a broader array of patterned activities (writing papers, doing experiments, voting, praying and so on)’ (p. 7). Gergen indicates that intelligibility nuclei can be more or less localized and specific, or unbounded and totalizing.

In this chapter, I story critical relational constructionism as a meta-theoretical framework or intelligibility nucleus, a construction that can give the reader an ontological, epistemological, and methodological basis to read and relate to. I portray critical relational constructionism, without wanting to assume that there is one way critical relational constructionism really is. In my (relational constructionist) view, a portrait shows the painter as much as it does the painted or, even more precise, the relation between them (Hosking, 2005a). In other words, constructions of the Other always include (more or less implicitly) some construction of Self, in relation to that Other. By portraying critical relational constructionism, I intend to provide the reader with a framework. With this framework, I propose to ‘dance’ with the reader and the texts from the Living Environment Research Project.

**Landscape of Constructionisms**

In his *Camper’s Guide to Constructionisms*, published in 1992, W. Barnett Pearce depicts the diversity of the field. He describes constructionisms as ‘schools of thought within the contemporary ‘turn’ to what is variously described as linguistic, interpretative, narrative et cetera’ (p. 140). What the various types of constructionisms and constructivisms have in common are

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1 While epistemology, ontology and methodology are used here as three separate words, in the context of the critical relational constructionist propositions presented here, they should really be regarded as a trinity.
that (a) they abandon the possibility of representing the world as it really is, and (b) they embody the notion that people construct their own social worlds. Pearce distinguishes a variety of camps in this field, differing in both heritage and practice.

Pearce sees the differences in heritage between the camps as a split between a cognitive and a social orientation. He does not go into detail about the heritage of the cognitively oriented camp, which includes Forster, Von Glasersfeld, Maturana and Varela, among its inhabitants. He restricts himself to Kant’s critique of pure reason and Piaget’s study of cognitive processes. One may find Gergen, Shotter, Harré, Pearce himself, and Cronen sitting around the campfire, in the socially oriented camp, which Pearce also refers to as the camp of social constructionism. This camp has important traditions, including the ‘Other’ voice in Western intellectual history (for example, sophism, and hermeneutics), narrative theory and deconstructionism. Pearce sees the heritage of this camp as including Vygotski, Bakhtin, Derrida, Foucault, Heidegger, de Man, Wittgenstein, Bateson and the American pragmatists: James, Mead and Dewey. Hosking describes similar differences in Discourses of Relations and Relational Processes (2005a), and names the more cognitively oriented camp constructivism.

Pearce describes the differences in practice between the camps as follows:

In contrast to the venerable myth that words have meaning because they represent either things ‘out there’ in an objective world or ‘in the minds’ of their users, constructionists emphasize the formative function of language and its inseparability from human actions. However, some constructionists foreground the products of the formative process, focusing on the events and objectives of the social world that exist. Others foreground the process of formation itself, exploring the question of how these events and objects are brought into being (p. 149).

In the process-oriented camp, Pearce makes another distinction by contrasting the orientation of ‘those who want to make statements about the process from those who seek to join with the process’ (p.139).

As a pedagogue, I am interested in relational processes of living together and the ways we construct our concept of the world and of the Self. My interest in this was awakened in the Master’s program at Oxford and it influenced me in selecting the profession of pedagogue and educator. Pedagogy is a practice and science that is oriented towards rearing and development. In my view, pedagogues should question the worlds of today: How do we story how we live
together, and how do we story how it could be? Therefore, pedagogy is concerned with the future, with appreciating and choosing based on constructing stories of today’s worlds. Given this interest, I am more inclined towards socially oriented constructionisms (instead of the cognitive- and individual-oriented constructivism), but also to the process oriented variety. In sum, using critical relational constructionism for my dance means that I join the conversation at the campfire of socially and process-oriented constructionisms. It is perhaps worth emphasizing that the notion of joining with is a (relational constructionist) orientation towards the how of constructing research and writing texts. The exploration of constructionism is an attempt to open up new possible relational realities in teacher-student relations, and to reflect critically on the realization of Real-Life Learning and the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy. In other words, I’m using critical relational constructionism to open up discussions.

**What Not**

In *Discourses of Relations and Relational Processes* (2005a), Hosking writes about three different relational discourses: this-and-that thinking, constructivism and critical relational constructionism. Within these discourses, relations are storied differently. In an attempt to clarify some of the propositions of this camp or community of interlocutors, I will make use of Hosking’s texts to elaborate on some of the issues that critical relational constructionisms emphasize. I came across the before mentioned text after my first meeting with Dian Marie Hosking at Utrecht University and as I storied in the previous chapter I could see myself in her account of the limitations of the first two discourses. What she calls the discourse of critical relational constructionism seems to me to be a challenging and possible route to build upon the ruins of the other two. Before I explore some of the arguments of critical relational constructionisms in more detail, I will narrow the landscape by exploring what critical relational constructionisms are not.

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2 Lather talks about the angels and ruins of ethnography and pleads for exploring the ruins in an attempt to develop ethnography; with that, these ruins can turn out to be angels. I see a resemblance in exploring the ruins of the two discourses Hosking describes. The word ruins might refer to something with foundations, while relational constructionism tends to criticize foundations. For me, the term ruins refers to an idea of historical contexts, contexts which can be used while rebuilding as well as ignored or broken down. I see building on the ruins as creating what are ruins and what are angels, asking questions and trying for new/other directions within a historical context.
This-and-That Discourses

This-and-that thinking is a narration of objects with characteristics, as Hosking writes, ‘constructing a particular form of life as a stable entity with properties and possessions’ (2007). Individuals, groups, and other separately existing objects such as schools, students, and teachers are seen as entities with certain characteristics. Relations are seen as relations between these unified and bounded entities. To Hosking, a this-and-that discourse reflects a hard distinction between subject and object, variously referred to as objectivism (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992) or positivism’ (Hosking, 2005a). With regard to relations of teachers and students, a teacher is a teacher and a student is a student within this discourse. Each has his or her own stable and undeniable characteristics, acting and reacting to the other’s entity or prescribed role. Activities, outcomes and relationships are explained in reference to the assumed characteristics of these entities (Hosking, ibid.). For instance, one characteristic of the entity ‘teacher’ is having more knowledge than do ‘students’. The teacher’s activities are to explain, make use of a blackboard or flysheets, and determine grades. Organizing a workshop and deciding when it is time for a break, can also be regarded as teacher activities. Student have less knowledge than teachers, are willing to learn and/or obliged to follow classes. Characteristic activities of students can be described as listening, asking questions for elucidation, and (not) doing homework.

According to Hosking, subject-object relations are constructed with an active-passive binary in the this-and-that discourse: an active, knowing and responsible agent (for instance, teacher), and a passive, knowable object (for instance, student). She also observes that in this discourse a cause-and-effect reasoning is obvious, which makes it possible to discuss whether or not the activities of teachers are effective. In this cause-and-effect reasoning, we could story that if a class of students is bored, the teacher needs to motivate them; if test results are horrible, the teacher needs to explain things better, or to design a less difficult test, or make the students do their homework. With the teacher as subject, we might say that the teacher should know the students and that the teacher ought to design the right test, depending on the quality of his or her knowledge of the students, and what these students need to learn. When storying this from another perspective, with the student as subject and the teacher as object, the story might be that students know how they can get a positive grade with the

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least amount of effort when they know what this teacher is going to ask. The outcome of the learning process can be both measured and predicted. When the prediction seems insufficient (the test results are unexpectedly horrible), the causes of the disturbance can be revealed. This-and-that thinking can easily result in questions like: Who is responsible for the test? Who is responsible for the education or the result of education? Who needs to change behavior for better resultsthe teacher or the student?

Another detail of the this-and-that discourse that Hosking describes is that ‘the knowing subject is assumed to exercise his knowing mind in order to influence, form or structure other as object’ (p. 268). One of the characteristics of the teacher might be that he or she knows what the students do not know, and that the teacher knows what the students need to know. Those in power decide what is important to know. In this-and-that discourse, the teacher, the educational institution, or the people who design the curriculum, all have more knowledge and power than the students. Therefore, the values of the subjects that have influence (for example, teachers, educational institutions, or professional groups) determine the ‘objective’ knowledge that needs to be conveyed to students. This ‘objective’ knowledge is separated from the subjects that have influence. Within the discourse of hard differentiated subject-object relations, another detail Hosking describes comes into being, namely: relations are seen as instrumental. Both the teacher and the student can be seen as the subject exercising power over the Other as object. Students know about teachers and can exercise some form of power over teachers; for instance, by not listening, or by not showing up, or by making a fool of the teacher, or by keeping quiet and taking notes. Teachers can also exercise power over students, with grading being the most obvious example. Institutions can be described as exercising power over teachers as well, by designing top-down rules and procedures of control. In this-and-that discourses, teacher-student relations are simplified to the action-reaction of fixed entities, in attempts to represent the world ‘as it really is’. In this discourse, research is focused on making overall judgments on commonalities, mostly from an a priori or elite theory (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Just as the teacher-student relations are seen from the perspective of the one exercising power over the Other, so is the researcher-researched relation. The researcher, as knowing subject, describes the researched as unknowing object. The influence of the researcher on the researched is regarded as something that should be reduced as much as possible, as if it were something to be filtered out. Seen through this discourse, there is a (more or less) stable world with pre-determined roles and identities of in this case teachers and students. Relations are storied as the one acting on the Other. Change in these relations is reduced
Let’s Dance

to a subject willing to change the Other, i.e. as an object that exercises power over the Other.

What then might be the relevance of these ideas for my research interests? As stated in Chapter 1, the Master’s Program in Ecological Pedagogy claims to offer an alternative to such power/knowledge relations and to teachers and students as fixed entities; consequently, a this-and-that discourse seems insufficient and will only lead to shifts in responsibility and stories of power. For that reason, I wanted to explore other relational discourses and to look for possibilities of opening up relational perspectives.

**Constructivist Discourses**

Post-positivist thought styles vary enormously. However, Hosking (2005a) sees a shift in epistemology as an important common theme of constructivisms. This shift in constructivist discourses centers individual perception and mind operations, while acknowledging that one is unable to know reality ‘as it really is’. This thought style is focused on the (constructed) perception of the world: the knowledge of an individual, the product of mind operations, and the representation of that knowledge are the objects of research and of activity. It is assumed that the subjective knowledge of the objective reality (the construction of reality of the individual) can be captured and changed. Pearce (p. 143, 1992) quotes Von Glasersfeld’s four ‘two basic principles of radical constructivism’ to illustrate the cognitive-oriented constructionism (which I equate with Hosking’s constructivisms):

1. Knowledge is not passively received either through the senses or by way of communication, but it is actively built-up by the cognizing subject.
2. The function of cognition is adaptive and serves the subject’s organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of an objective ontological reality.

Within these principles there is a differentiation between the knower and a world to be known, without the dominant influence of the knowing mind on the social or relational realm, Pearce observes.

Just as there has been an increase in attention to constructivisms, in business and management studies (Hosking, 2005a), there has also been an increasing
interest in constructivism in Dutch education. In constructivist discourses both students and teachers are storied as creating individual constructions of the world (knowledge): both students and teachers are subjects. Education, in this discourse, is a process of social and cognitive restructuring. It is a process that can be studied, for instance by asking the students before and after a lecture what they think of the lectured topic. The influence of the lecture is then the difference between prior and latter expression. The answer of the student is assumed to mirror thought processes, albeit imperfectly. Outcomes of the learning processes cannot be controlled, as is supposed in a this-and-that discourse. In this constructivist discourse, we could say that the teacher offers possibilities for students to learn, by telling a story or creating situations to learn from; and the student is responsible for the outcome of the learning process, including understanding the story, changing behavior, and learning. Teachers and students are both regarded as thinking subjects and the outcome of the learning process is storied as object. The subject is seen as a differentiated and bounded Self, in relation with Other, with distinct roles and different responsibilities. The process of construction is regarded as an individual process. An example of a constructivist discourse is the research proposed by van Beukering and Touw (2005). These researchers investigated the personal constructs of teachers in regard to pupils with behavioral problems, as a means to come to self-insight and enhance the professional action of the teacher. This illustrates what Pearce (1992) indicated as the camp with a focus on the product of construction, i.e. the results of individual mind operations. Veugeler’s (2003) plea for teachers as stimulators of value development of pupils in his proposed attention for critical democratic citizenship in education, is within this discourse as well.

Like Pearce, Gergen (p. 68, 1994) also quotes one of Von Glasersfeld’s two basic principles of radical constructivism: ‘knowledge is not passively received either through the senses or by way of communication, but it is actively built up by the cognizing subject.’ While Pearce establishes the differences in orientation between socially oriented constructionist perspectives, Gergen points out an incongruity. After having announced that ‘both constructivism and constructionism are skeptical of foundationalist warrants for an empirical science’ (p. 68), Gergen argues ‘[f]rom a constructionist perspective neither ‘mind’ nor ‘world’ is granted ontological status, thus removing the very grounding assumptions of constructivism’ (p. 68).

Later, in the section Constructions of Knowledge, in this chapter, I shall explore constructivist discourses and this-and-that thinking in relation to education and, in particular, in relation to various understandings of knowledge.
Constructionisms

For Hosking and MacNamee,

Social construction is not a theory that proposes particular techniques or methods for practice, but is more of a general orientation or thought style – a way of engaging with the world that centers on dialogue and multiplicity – an orientation that gives new meaning and value to ongoing and open dialogues.

Social construction is, then, both a theory about theories and an orientation toward social practices and the kinds of people and worlds these practices create (p. 23, 2006).

One way to develop this point is to place the presumptions of who a person is, of Self and Other, of teacher or student in brackets (Gergen, 1997). Words like ‘teacher’, ‘student’, ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’, ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ are actually words that do things, rather than just being labels or names of things (Pearce, 1992). This indicates that the performance ability of language is emphasized; (linguistic) references are relationally constructed in the moment of interaction. In critical relational constructionisms, interacting is viewed as what creates ‘reality’. They create multiple realities because different realities will be created simultaneously. To me, one of the appealing constructions of critical relational constructionism is the relational construction of soft differentiation between Self and Other, as an alternative to a construction of a Self that is separated from the world. The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy claims to depart from a deep ecological perspective (Bateson, 1972, 2000) of interconnectedness and complexity, and to question the strong reductionist discourses in pedagogy. The concept of multiple Self-Other relations might serve as a way to put this ecological perspective into words.

This focus on relational processes as ongoing means of constructing multiple realities and multiple Self-Other relations is in itself a construction, and not a discovery of how the world really is (Hosking, 2005a). Critical relational constructionism centers on language and discursive practices, because these are constructing relational realities (Hosking, 2005a; Pearce, 1992). In the next sections, I will discuss some of the premises of critical relational constructionism in more detail. I will successively construct language; soft differentiation of Self-Other; act-supplement, text-context and inter-act; local, social, cultural and historical realities; knowledge; a critical relational constructionist approach; reflection, reflexivity and learning. These constructions will be used in the following chapters.
Language

In January 2008, I wrote about the hesitation I had in writing about my intelligibility nuclei or thought style:

During the processes of writing, I constantly experienced the hesitation to answer the questions on meta-theoretical frameworks or intelligibility nucleus explicitly. I write this text in an attempt to throw light on these hesitations because Heather Höpfl once told me (11 November 2005): ‘if you have a problem, write about it’. How to story this hesitation? What do I see as context of this hesitation? As an example, when I write about why I took up this project, that motivation seem to have changed over time. How can I take the reader into that process of change? Moreover, when I write down my intelligibility nucleus, how can it keep track of the moving and changing character of that intelligibility nucleus? Is putting my intelligibility nuclei into words on paper an act of stabilization? Is it a halt to the ongoing construction? Deconstructing these last questions constructs another perspective on my hesitation to write about my meta-theoretical frameworks. When I write those questions: ‘Is putting my intelligibility nuclei into words on paper an act of stabilization? Is it a halt to ongoing construction?; the assumption that underlies this is that the words on paper represent my anthropology. One of the important strains of post-modernism (Cahoone, 2003) is the impossibility of representing reality. The words that story my anthropology don’t represent my anthropology, but are texts that go together in particular ways to define a particular community of multiple texts. They are interrelated texts which might be identified here as Western, white, female, pedagogical, practitioner et cetera. Writing this following sentence can be seen as an expression of ambiguity: I write this text because of my hesitation to express my intelligibility nucleus and while doing so, I express parts of my intelligibility nuclei, part of my anthropology! I think of people and relations as constantly changing. I don’t want to make my intelligibility nucleus explicit. By telling why I don’t like to do it, I do the thing I don’t want to!

5 Jansen and van der Linde (2006) use the word anthropology to indicate a composition of (among other elements) images of mankind, childhood, self, society, profession, and educational philosophy. They propose an exchange between personal anthropologies of educators, students and course.
From critical relational constructionist perspectives, language is regarded as performative rather than referential. Words themselves don’t have a meaning. Meaning is constructed in context, which is a Wittgensteinian insight (Pearce, 1992) referenced in much relational constructionist literature (e.g. Cunliffe & Shotter, 2006; Gergen, 1994; Hosking, 2007).

Gergen writes:
Constructionism makes no denial concerning explosions, poverty, death or ‘the world out there’ more generally. Neither does it make any affirmations. As I have noted, constructionism is ontologically mute. Whatever is, simply is. There is no foundational description to be made about an ‘out there’ as opposed to an ‘in there’, about experience or material. Once we attempt to articulate ‘what there is’, however, we enter the world of discourse (p. 72, 1994).

Riessman explores the problem of representation in (narrative) research in her book *Narrative Analysis* (1993). She presents a model in which she describes different ‘levels of representation’, as she calls them. Like all models, this model is a simplification and (of course) not a representation, but it indicates some representational problems. Her model helps me, and students to whom I convey her explanation in courses, to consider problems of representation. Riessman’s levels of representation start with a primary experience in which a person pays attention to some present elements (level 1, Gergen’s poverty, death, et cetera). Then the person tells a story about the experience to another person (level 2), and we enter the world of discourse. The story is based on the attended elements and the elements that the storyteller wants the listener to hear, in words with which the teller ‘thinks’ to make sense to the listener. When this story is recorded and made into a transcript (level 3), information is lost (for example, inaudible information such as gestures). New information is added and other information is lost when the transcript is analyzed (level 4). When the new story is being read, the reader adds all kinds of information again (level 5). It is a long route during which the story changes at every step: from what Riessman calls the ‘primary experience’ all the way to the story as it is being read. The story, which keeps on changing, every time it is read, has something to do with this primary experience and with other experience too. Translation is a level that can be added to Riesman’s model, in the case of my research project. All original spoken or written Dutch words, all gestures, all information of the contexts have been translated into English in this book, first by me, the author, who is a native Dutch speaker and then by my editors, who added and deleted all kinds of words and punctuation to turn the text into more accessible English for the reader.
Hosking refers to discoursing language as inseparable from ‘real’ reality, ‘by seeing “textuality” as a defining characteristic of all phenomena, and not just written and spoken “texts”’ (p. 271, Hosking, 2005a). In the article of Hosking and Pluut (p. 6, 2010), they discourse language as relating and so constructing relational realities. With this way of discoursing language, the authors give emphasis to language as action and because verbal language is not seen as the only ‘tool’ in relating, they invite a wider understanding of language, including non-verbal gestures, postures, movements, body and tone of voice. As they propose, relating involves ‘what some might call natural objects together with artifacts of human activity’ (p. 6). They include all of these in their understanding of language, ‘any act or artifact that might be coordinated in some way and as such, constructing a communication’ (p. 120, Hosking, 1999). This broad definition of language as ‘tools’ for relating or interacting, and as inseparable from ‘real’ reality, goes beyond spoken and written conceptual language. However, the authors acknowledge that most of our interacting will make use of spoken or written verbal language tools.

Gergen states that ‘[w]e gain most, it is argued, when ‘language goes on holiday’ (p. 11, 1997). This is a statement with which he implies his preference for bracketing the representational understanding of words. I recognize a similar attempt in this Taoist quotation:

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you’ve gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you’ve gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him? Cuang Tzu XXVI (Watson, 1968).

These quotations from Gergen and Cuang Tzu both imply that when we take words and the use of language in their representational quality for granted, we close down many possible constructions, which is an idea that I like to make use of in my attempt to open up teacher-student relations.

This section on language and relational constructionism opens and closes with excerpts on the persistence of regarding language as particularly representational, a dominant context for me. But I want to focus more on the performative quality of language. In this last excerpt, The Master and I discussed some of my written

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6 Hosking refers to Stenner & Eccleston, 1994; Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Gergen, 1995; Hosking et al., 1995.
work over the phone. We both sat at our computers, while looking at one of my texts on our computers. Dian Marie had already commented on this work and on this excerpt. During this phone call we discussed the context of her remarks. I selected this excerpt because among the numerous other possible readings, I read the text in such a way that it illustrates my troubles with relating language and world. It confronted me with the way I am used to understanding language as representation.

**Student Loes:** You highlighted this sentence in green: ‘closely related to what happened.’
**The Master:** Ha ha, yeah, philosophically speaking, getting on tricky ground here. We have to talk about ethnography and how to present this as an ethnography in a way that it is consistent with our constructionist perspective, you understand my point here?
**Student Loes:** Yes, but at the same time, it bothers me; Hugo keeps on asking me these questions, and I don’t have the right answers.
**The Master:** [laughs]
**Student Loes:** Not the right answers, but a satisfying answer. [silence] I believe that something happened there but...
**The Master:** You poor deluded creature you. You’re just a confused human being huh?
**Loes:** [laughs] That’s the point in writing a thesis, isn’t it?
**The Master:** Yeah, but if you expect that you are getting out of that, you are mistaken.
**Loes:** I am aware of that.
...
**The Master:** Writing is part of an ongoing construction of reality, the present writing of a section you can story as an ongoing construction linked to earlier events, a reconstruction in a continuous process of construction and part of that process is working with the students et cetera. Ethnography is then storied as construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction. The stories are always partial, selective, in a particular context, reflecting your understanding in those processes.
**Loes:** Like I reconstruct the story of me: I always thought of myself as pretty structured and more or less as acting straightforward, but during this process I find myself being fond of all kinds of ‘distracting’ and philosophical questions.
**The Master:** If writing a PhD thesis is not changing you, then what is?
Loes: That is what I like about it, but I now want to get the work done and need to stop taking all kinds of distracting routes.

Soft Differentiation of Self-Other

Below is an excerpt from a transcript of a recorded conversation between The Master and me on 3 January 2008, in a restaurant in Heusden where Dian Marie lives. We met because I wanted to discuss some of my written work with her and to develop some ideas about the construction of my research.

The Master: You probably do need to develop a story of why you want to move away from hard differentiation, away from hard Self/Other differentiation.

Student Loes: Yes, I don’t want to move away from Self/Other differentiation, I don’t want to collapse that binary...

The Master: Collapse would be impossible.

Student Loes: Yeah.

The Master: Impossible, at least in any conceptual context.

Student Loes: Because there is no Self then.

The Master: Well, there is no Other either, there is no voice.

Student Loes: There is no relation.

The Master: There is no voice...You might actually, if you are a practiced Buddhist meditator, for example, and you could only tell the story when you in some sense came back and then again you story Self...

Student Loes: What is Self to you?

The Master: (contorted voice) Oh what a question that is. Is that a what-is-question?

Student Loes: Yes, that’s a what-is-question.

The Master: (still a contorted voice) You are inviting me into some solidification?

The Master: ... (serious voice now) Well, I talk about Self-Other as a relational unit, so there is no Self without Other. Therefore, I would not speak about Self in a way that invites someone to think of it as a personal possession or as bounded or stable. So you could talk about Self-Other relational units, for example; there are various ways of doing it, all of which have their difficulties. The more consequential you become or try to be, with respect to
a critical relational constructionist perspective, the more you have to pay serious attention to, uhm, multiple relational Self-Other constructions, coexisting and you can, if you are not careful, get into a kind of homunculus behind the homunculus.

In critical relational constructionism, ontology is given to ongoing relational processes that construct relational or social realities. Hosking emphasizes that the Other is regarded as knowable only through relational processes. Entitative styles of thinking, are ‘replaced by a dialogical conception of Self as multiple Self-Other relations such that Other, including the body, is no longer discoursed as “outside”’ (p. 272, Hosking, 2005a). She writes that relational constructionist practices that are open to Otherness, including other Selves, construct soft differentiation (p. 2, Hosking, 2007). So the processes of relating Self and Other, together with the multiple identities become the basic analytic unit for ‘exploration of how differentiations, whether hard or soft, are being constructed’ (Hosking, ibid.). From this proposition of relational construction, relational realities can be distinguished in three different possibilities: (a) Self as subject and Other as object, (b) Self as object and Other as subject, both of which are hard differentiations, and (c) Self-Other in soft differentiation.

To me, talk of the relational unity of Self-Other focuses on the co-construction of Self and Other: in this view, it does not make sense to use the word Self without a notion of Other. This conception invites attention to the processes in which identities of teacher-student relations and researcher-researched relations are co-constructed. From a relational perspective, we could say, ‘there are no pre-existing ‘teachers’ and ‘students’ in the Living Environment Research Project, but rather teachers and students and their relations are co-created’. The assumption of separate and pre-existing identities would then be understood as evidence of ‘stabilized effects or patterns’ (p. 273, Hosking, 2005a). Hosking writes,

Identity and other assumed characteristics become understood (1) as relational; and so (2) multiple and variable (for example, different identities in different self-other relations); and (3) as performed, rather than possessed, in networks of ongoing relatlings. (p. 275, Hosking, 2005a).
Act-Supplement, Inter-Act, Text-Context

Critical relational constructionism uses a variety of analytic tools for talking about relational processes. These include the terms act-supplement, text-context, and inter-acting. Gergen (e.g. in 1999) writes that acts only get their meaning in the supplement to the act, the action that follows on the act, which is also a supplement in itself. He uses the term act-supplement to stress the inextricable connection between act and supplement. An act of discursive positioning, such as in this text for instance, can be seen as an act of relating to a particular community, which can be supplemented in many different ways, one of which is acknowledging the positioning act as ‘making sense’ within the community. Using a concept as act-supplement can be regarded as such an act of positioning.

Gergen uses the language of act-supplement (1994) as a language tool to express this cohesion: An act gets meaning in the supplement, not as an act in itself with a linear relation with a reaction. To explain this, I simplify in an example: When someone who is called a teacher is telling a story and students are taking notes, the story of the teacher can be seen as a ‘good’ story. When the teacher is telling the same story and students yawn, this supplement might turn this same story (assuming ‘a same story’ can be told twice in exactly the same way) into an uninteresting story.

Text-con-text is a term that Hosking (e.g. in 2007) equates with act-supplement, based on her broad understanding of language and text. In the following example, text refers to written text, because one of the often-used ways of interacting is through written language. Hosking understands reading texts as text-con-text: the text read interacts with the con-texts of the reader. How to relate this to my work in this research: the ‘empirical’ work with the group in the Living Environment Research Project (with the many relational processes of text-con-text of construction, some of which are written, some spoken, others performed) produces written texts for this book. In following chapters, the texts of the Living Environment Research Project are brought into dialogue or dance with the texts on critical relational constructionism in this chapter. I

7 The online etymology dictionary explains the prefix con as follows: Con-: see com; com-: from L., archaic form of classical L. cum “together, together with, in combination,” the prefix sometimes used as an intensive, from PIE *kom- “beside, near, by, with” (cf. O.E. ge-, Ger. ge-) (Harper, 2001).
call these texts *Context.*\(^8\) When these written texts are presented, these texts are still texts in processes of construction. The reader will supplement with his or her context.

Other terms used are *Inter-acts* and *inter-acting*. Hosking (2007) describes them as follows: ‘talk of inter-acting here refers to performances that involve the coming together of whoever and whatever to (re)construct person-world relation as relational realities.’ Again, relational processes are indicated with the use of the term *inter-act*. Some ‘things’ (people, ideas, stuff or whatever or whoever) come together and something happens during this encounter of ‘whoever and whatever’. Some things are constructed: ‘whoever and whatever’ as well as relations between the ‘whoever and whatever’. Patterns of inter-acting are sometimes repeated and the relational realities are reconstructed in more or less the same way and become more stabilized. Sometimes something changes entirely. For example, when I organize the tables in the classroom in a square and I sit on the side of the square that is opposite the blackboard, something different will be constructed than when I sit on the blackboard side. I often experience that students only come to sit next to me when there are no other chairs left and it takes even longer to sit next to me when I am sitting on the blackboard side. I can story this as the coming together of different texts: (1) teachers usually sit near the blackboard, and (2) teachers need to see every student’s face. This coming together of texts creates other relations between teachers and students as other realities.

The terms *inter-act, inter-acting, act-supplement* and *text-context* all refer to these relational processes and will be used interchangeably. They are all used to speak about and open up other possible patterns of relating.

**Local, Social, Cultural and Historical**

From a theoretical point of view, relational processes are regarded as ongoing, never stopping and never totally closed. In other words, an ontology of becoming is favored over an ontology of being (Chia, 1995). The language of ‘act’ and ‘supplement’ (text-context) is used to talk about ongoing processes in which every act can be supplemented in many different ways, although the variety of

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\(^8\) I chose to use the more common term *context* instead of *con-text*, which seemed to be unpleasant for several readers of the rough version of the thesis. Context puts less emphasis on the broad understanding of ‘text’, but emphasises context as already ongoing constructions.
supplements is not limited, not very supplement will be accepted. Acceptance depends on the social, cultural, and historical realities or contexts involved. The image of a palimpsest (parchment or tablet that has been erased for reuse, a writing surface that has been used and wiped clean, which Lather (2001) borrows from the French philosopher Michel de Certeau, is a beautiful image, in this respect. Although we can try to do things differently, like supplement an act with an unexpected alternative, we can never totally wipe away that which was before. The previous text on the parchment will always shimmer through; it will form the context of what is to come. The previous multiple realities on the parchment differ and change, and new texts will influence the erased text as well. With the affirmation of local, social and historical relatedness, relational constructionism asserts that not ‘anything goes’, as both Gergen (1994) and Hosking (2005a) stress in many of their publication. All processes of inter-acting or inter-textuality are already ongoing processes. Critical relational constructionism and its focus on ongoing processes, imply historicity. As will be shown in the Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I attempted to change ways of educating in the Master’s program Ecological Pedagogy. However, the stories of ‘coaches’ and ‘students’ about their past educational experience greatly influenced the processes of reconstruction.

With the use of the concept of ‘local realities’ or ‘contexts’, critical relational constructionist writings indicate that these realities are not universal. What is considered local is a construction in itself and could be as broad as including the entire Western world or as narrow as the locality of a classroom. Strong local-historically constructed texts are texts about fixed entities with individual voices (with the focus on the ontology of being), texts that are very common not only to me personally, but also in the locality of the Western world (Gergen, 1994; Hermans, et al., 1992; Sampson, 1993/2008).

Regarding texts as constructing realities instead of The Reality is hard work for me. It is a challenge that leaves a trail throughout this entire book all the way through to the final chapter. Without changing a discourse, but by holding on to a dominant Western discourse (focused on being), possible realities keep getting closed down. In an attempt to open up other possible realities, a focus on an ontology of becoming instead of an ontology of being is developed. Relational constructionist discourses form a challenging thought style for me. Focusing on becoming, and on opening up stabilized patterns of text-context, and looking up reifications and dismantling them, I see as outstanding possibilities to create space for other possible inter-acts and, in this case, teacher-student interacts.
Let’s Dance

Constructions of Knowledge

In Chapter 1, I mentioned *Natuurlijk Leren* and *Het Nieuwe Leren*. Jansen regards these as examples of social constructivism. In contrast, he positions Real-Life Learning in the tradition of a critical post-modern perspective (p. 27, Jansen, 2007). *Beter Onderwijs Nederland* (BON) is a Dutch organization promoting traditional education based on the transfer of knowledge. According to BON, *Natuurlijk Leren* and *Het Nieuwe Leren* are dangerous educational developments. Gergen and Wortham place such discussions on educational design in a more epistemological/ontological context. In their article, *Social Construction and Pedagogical Practice* (Gergen & Wortham, 2001), they describe differences in traditions based on different perspectives on knowledge: primarily exogenic (world-centered) and endogenic (mind-centered). I summarize and annotate their descriptions,

In an exogenic tradition, the world is a given with a strong emphasis on nature. Observation that provides objective and cumulative knowledge with the least possible interference from emotions or personal values is highlighted. A child is regarded as a kind of tabula rasa, which should be filled with all kinds of information through observations, experiments, excursions, books and lectures, which all provide information necessary to succeed in the complex world. This knowledge is assumed to represent the external world, like an internal map of nature. Exams and standardized tests, often with multiple-choice answers, are favorite ways of measuring levels of development. Like the people of BON advocate, education is curriculum-centered. This exogenic tradition is connected to the positivist this-and-that discourse.

In an endogenic tradition, which emphasizes the mind and nurture, power is given to individual reasoning based on the assumed intrinsic human capacity for insight and conceptual growth. Education that is primarily child-centred uses class discussions and engagement in activities is favored over observation and lectures. ‘[K]nowledge [is seen] as the outcome of an individually centred rational process...’ (p. 7, Bowers, 2005) and it is claimed that these rational processes can be improved. This is why mathematics, philosophy and foreign languages are part of education, because these subjects are assumed to enhance the capacity for thought. Examining through essays and papers is favored. *Natuurlijk Leren* or *Het Nieuwe Leren* can be
recognized in this tradition, which can be related to constructivist orientations.

After this explanation, Gergen and Wortham write ‘the problem of knowledge is inherently insoluble (Rorty 1979)’. If we commence with a distinction between what is outside and inside the mind of the individual, we create an inherently intractable problem in determining how the former is accurately registered in the latter’ (p. 117-118). The authors indicate that both these traditions are based on the dualist assumption of person and world or epistemology and ontology. With the emphasis on the social construction of knowledge, they provide an alternative:

[T]his is to view knowledge as a by-product not of individual minds but of communal relationships. Or to reiterate a prevailing theme in this book, all meaningful propositions about the real and the good have their origins in relationships. This is to bring into sharp focus the site of knowledge generation: the ongoing process of coordinating action among persons. It is to foreground the moment-to-moment interchange between and among interlocutors and locate meaning within the patterns of interdependency (p. 119, Gergen & Wortham, 2001).

From Gergen’s explanation, different relationships will generate different constructions of knowledge, which will exist next to each other. This is in line with the concept of Mode 3 knowledge of Letiche, van Boeschoten and de Jong (2008) developed in reaction to the classification of knowledge in Mode 1 (scientifically proven knowledge) and Mode 2 (practitioners knowledge) of Gibbons (1994)\(^9\). The authors see Mode 3 knowledge constructed ‘as part-and-parcel of socially constructed networks of action, justification and goal-setting’ (p. 642).

Different understandings of knowledge result in different pedagogical/educational perspectives. An important context of the Living Environment Research Project is the University of Applies Sciences Utrecht and its

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10 The classification of Gibbons et al. is often used in discussions on positioning universities of applied sciences in the field of higher education in the Netherlands. In many publications, these universities are seen as focusing on Mode 2 knowledge and other universities on Mode 1 knowledge (e.g., in van der Vos, Borgdorff, & van Staa, 2007).
managerial texts. Some of these texts aim for what can be seen as Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge, knowledge as stable and separate from context, for instance, in the strategic plan Koers 2012:

This educational profile [competence-based education, in which conceptual bases or well-subscribed parts of the curricula are not always visible, which make it hard to attune different courses] has already led to standards and fundamental assumptions for further development in education. These standards are ready for ‘examination and assessment’, ‘theoretical foundation of the course’ and ‘loosening up of education.’ With this, the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht has made some steps in reducing several risks of competence-based learning. The implementation of this is not yet completed.’ (p. 11, Hogeschool Utrecht, 2007) (transl. LH)

And:

Research at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht is aimed at knowledge development and knowledge circulation. This knowledge is useful, it stems from societal needs, it focuses on professionalizing the professional practice and it meets the international methodology standards ... Knowledge is not static, but is characterized by an increasing turnover rate (p.33).

Research is, based on the adage ‘focus and mass’, organized in faculty knowledge centers, in which more than twenty professors and their departments\(^{11}\) cluster their strengths. These knowledge centers are:

- Knowledge Center Specified Care and Upbringing
- Knowledge Center Innovation of (Professional) Education
- Knowledge Center Diversity and Education
- Knowledge Center for Social Innovation
- Knowledge Center Innovation of Care
- Knowledge Center for Innovation and Business
- Knowledge Center Product Development
- Knowledge Center Innovation of Processes
- Knowledge Center Build Environment
- Knowledge Center Life Sciences
- Knowledge Center Communication and Journalism

(p. 34, Hogeschool Utrecht, 2007).

Knowledge as static, able to be stored and circulated, relates to the context of an exogenic tradition, which might be understood as Mode 1 knowledge; whereas words like *competence-based* (or Mode 2 knowledge) can be related to what Gergen describes as an endogenic tradition. It seems to me, an

\(^{11}\) In Dutch: *lectoren* and their *kenniskringen*. When abroad, professors of universities of applied sciences can call themselves professors, but in the Netherlands there is a distinct name for a professor of a university of applied sciences: *lector*
exogenic tradition gets the upper hand when we strive to eliminate the risks in competence-based education. The strategic plan does not address the context of the constructions of knowledge as Gergen and Wortham advocate. Knowledge is constructed as something disembodied from local, social and historical contexts. In this predilection of the University of Applies Sciences Utrecht for Mode 1 knowledge, I recognize what Letiche et al. (2008) refer to as de-valuing Mode 2 and 3 knowledge in organizations, because of their unstable character. I understand Real-Life Learning and the Master’s Program in Ecological Pedagogy as starting from dialogical knowing from within situated in ongoing constructed contexts, which can possibly be constructed as Mode 3 knowledge. This writing is an attempt to explore the possibilities of research and education from this dialogical perspective on knowledge.

A Critical Relational Approach

As far as I can see, Hosking is the first author within the relational constructionist community who writes about critical relational constructionism. She writes: ‘Critical relational constructionism is critical of any claim that is made about knowing what is or what is right for someone else’ (Hosking, 2007). With this, she points to the element of power as a quality of relational processes.

[A] critical constructionism theorizes power as an ongoing, relational construction, able both to open up and to close down possibilities. All acts (texts) ‘act into’ processes that are already ongoing (contexts) and so may contribute to the ongoing (re)production of power relations (Hosking, 2007).

Discoursing relations in which a teacher has knowledge and a student has to learn that knowledge, or in which a researcher knows what the researched experienced, can be seen as a discourse of subject-object relations and ‘power over’. Words like empowerment and liberation can also be seen as discourses with hard differentiated subject-object relations. Empowerment or liberation entails defining a boundary around who should be liberated from whom. If one knows that someone should be liberated or empowered, someone must be constructed as an object of a knowing subject. Another discourse of power and knowledge, as potentially constructed in soft differentiated Self-Other relations, becomes interesting. We are invited to think about how educational processes might open up stabilized patterns of teacher-student (e.g. as relations in whom the teacher knows best) and so enable other and softer relational realities to be co-constructed.
The term ‘critical’ is often associated (implicitly or explicitly) with claims to know what is right and wrong. Relational constructionism does not imply any particular action, as Gergen says about the relation between his propositions and actions.

I understand this quotation of Gergen to mean that relational constructionism does not imply any necessary position on what is right or wrong. It does not intend to be ‘a first philosophy, a foundation upon which a new world may be erected. There is no attempt to replace all traditions in the name of truth, ethical principle, political vision or any other universal criterion’ (p. 8, Gergen & Wortham, 2001). Hosking, on the other hand, clearly leans towards defending soft Self-Other constructions as a more ethical way of relating. As I feel myself connected to the critical pedagogical context of Real-Life Learning, I sympathize with Hosking and attempt to construct more ethical, soft teacher-student relations.

In pedagogical or research practice, as in any practice, we construct visions of what is right and wrong as aspects of some particular local, historical, and social context. The realization that right and wrong are constructions that could be constructed otherwise, invites attention to how to open up stabilized patterns. As an important example of stabilized patterns in education, I am attracted to how Gergen and Wortham point to the stabilizing effects of endogenic and exogenic knowledge traditions, and the ways these traditions serve to silence all kinds of voices (Gergen & Wortham, 2001). They refer to ‘the problematics of monologic vs. dialogic practices of meaning making’ (ibid., p. 126) which they associate with critical pedagogical critique on power and knowledge structures in education as identified by Freire, Apple, Giroux and Aronowitz. Crucial is that these power knowledge structures are grounded in the dualist perception of mind and world. For instance, ethnicity, gender, and class, historically influence the privileging or under-privileging of certain discourses in education. Organizations that set the standards for knowledge, as can be seen in the control systems of the University for Applied Sciences Utrecht, close down the possibilities of socially creating other possible knowledge constructions. Teachers are reduced to low-level employees, and standardized curricula are imposed on teachers deskilling them (p. 126). Both teachers...
and students are excluded from knowledge production (p. 127). Knowledge is constructed as a pattern of dominance. The relational analysis of knowledge serves to me as an example of how critical relational constructionism might be put to work to open up other possible constructions and developments.

Another important connotation of critical is that of political critique. Critical pedagogy, as storied by Giroux (1991) and Kincheloe (2004) stems from the Frankfurter Schüle, but is more indebted to the work of Paulo Freire than to that of Habermas (Miedema, 1997a). One of the main propositions of both Giroux and Kincheloe is that education is inherently political because it always includes making choices about what to cherish, emphasize or transfer. According to Kincheloe (p. 10, ibid.), ‘[t]he political dimensions of education should be pointed out in all teaching and learning – critical pedagogy included’. Jansen positions Real-Life Learning in the critical as well as post-modern tradition of thought. Awareness and recognition of power processes are regarded as being essential in order to liberate oneself from power structures. ‘Teachers’ as well as ‘students’ are to develop as critical researchers of processes of construction of dominance to enable them to free themselves from such patterns.

In my work, I use the word critical to recognize and open up stabilized patterns, and to develop critical sensitivity for the power or political aspects of relations. I attempt to minimize the exercising of power over Other. Awareness of, and opening up of relational realities, can be seen as taking part in the critical pedagogical discussion of the organization of schooling (p. 6, Kincheloe, 2004). I use the discourse of Hosking on soft Self-Other differentiation as a critical positioning to open up and become sensitive to hard differentiated relations that imply power over Others.

**Reflection, Learning and De-Construction**

When I make use of the word reflection, often ‘students’ begin to sigh. Reflection has become a trampled-down educational tool with very little meaning. Students are frequently asked to look back on their activities, often without guiding them on how to do this. I started this research in the tradition of

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12 Gergen quotes Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), p. 33. Also Joe L. Kincheloe refers to this in many of his publications (i.e. Kincheloe, 2004). This also refers to the stories of the teacher as coolie in the thesis of Hans Jansen (2009).

Schön’s reflective practitioner (1983) and in my work, reflection takes a major part. I think that reflection can be important in learning processes for it can provide critical sensitivity and open up stabilized patterns. I will explain why in this section, based on how I construct reflection within a critical relational frame. This construction of reflection differs from the construction of Schön and Argyris which I briefly pointed out to Chapter 1. It also differs from Kincheloe’s construction of the teacher as researcher (2003). The differences are further explored in Chapter 6.

From a relational frame, with a focus on ongoing processes of construction, reflecting entails producing text, text as a ‘tool’ in relating (see also section Language on page 69). Reflection is a re-construction or re-telling of narratives or stories. I reflect on texts produced in several interacts with ‘students’, ‘supervisors’, and ‘critical friends’. This results in new texts on which can be reflected, part of an infinite process of producing new texts (text-context). All these texts take part in creating new relations, for instance relations with the readers of the texts.

Reflection is often understood as looking back on what happened, or on what you did, or should have done. Re-telling the story of what happened aims to improve behavior (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Schön, 1983), based on constructing ‘reflexive intellectual critique’ (p. 39, Cunliffe, 2002). The reflection entails ‘a systematic thought process concerned with simplifying experience by searching for patterns, logic and order’ (p. 38, ibid.). This kind of reflection is constructed as a simplification of reality that leads to the development of procedures and protocols, by making tacit knowledge explicit (Mode 2 knowledge, in Gibbons’ construction).

Cunliffe distinguishes another kind of reflection or reflexivity, which aims at change through complexifying instead of simplifying experience: ‘[B]y focusing on our own, often unacknowledged, representations of realities and working from within our experience, the impetus for change can be far more powerful than that mediated by externally imposed frames’ (ibid., p. 40). Cunliffe calls this radical or ‘second order reflexivity in which we ourselves are text/self-in-relation-to-others’ (ibid., p. 40). The aim of this reflexivity is not to develop a better theory of practice (as Argyris and Schön intend), but to provide another understanding of practice, a (re)construction to provide critical change with a focus on enhancing complexity instead of simplification. This understanding of reflection is in line with the interest in multiplicity, and in the goal of facilitating openness and multiplicity in critical relational constructionism, and Real-Life
Learning. I regard this kind of reflection as inviting texts to tango with other texts, which aims for disruption and questioning. This includes dancing or relating to additional Self-Other relational realities.

Cunliffe advocates learning dialogues based on what she calls ‘being struck’.

Essentially, being struck involves our spontaneous response (emotional, physiological, cognitive) to events or relationships occurring around—a feeling there is something important we cannot quite grasp in the moment...Being struck is an anticipation of unfolding understanding, of making new connections between tacit knowing and explicit knowledge\(^\text{14}\) as we construct our sense of situations in ways not visible to us previously (ibid., p. 42).

Learning entails making new connections, making other text, to context. ‘Being struck is an embodied trigger for clearing the muddy water’, Cunliffe continues. Being struck might be equated with what Kuiper (2007a) calls ‘poetic moments’ (in this he follows Linstead, Cunliffe, Katz and Shotter), Dewey uses the term ‘aesthetic moments’ (Dewey, 1934/1958) and Lather (2007) writes about ‘getting lost’. Rasberry (1997, 2001) writes about the tangle and being tangled through a study of self studying education. ‘Writing practice—through the tangle—whether it is in a book or a poem or a life—is the practice of creating conditions that enable one to continue to practice writing practice, to continue theorizing the practice of writing—a book or a poem or a life’ (p. 121, 2001). All these terms refer to disturbances. I prefer the notion of feeling struck or being struck, because it emphasizes unsettling feelings. Learning often has the connotation of something that is pleasant, while I regularly experience that learning or major ideational reconstruction arises out of an unpleasant feeling. Poetic moments, getting lost, and being struck don’t imply learning or change, but offer possibilities for them.

Where Dewey sees reflection as that which emerges provoked by opposing responses in an empirical situation; Cunliffe assumes that we can create being struck by differences in texts through radical reflexivity, through creating dialogue with meta-theory, and through responsive knowing-from-within. Also Kuiper indicates in The Eventmaker (2007a) that proto-events (events that might lead to poetic moments) can more or less be created. Inviting ethical

\(^\text{14}\) Cunliff stays within the discourse of tacit and explicit knowledge, a construction that is related to a reified notion of knowledge, but uses the terms more in the sense of Shotter’s knowing within. She is searching for ways to connect various types of knowledge, instead of tearing them further apart. In this, I see her wrestling with the terms in relation to her emphasis on embodied learning.
Let’s Dance

considerations of, for instance, dominance in teacher-student relations, might construct possibilities of being struck, being moved, creating space, or opening up relational possibilities.

I prefer to story research as a construction of being struck or construction of proto-events through inviting other texts. I used another style of writing in this chapter on critical relational constructionism to strengthen the idea of inviting texts on relational constructionism as the Other. These other text-context relations might open up stabilized patterns of act-supplement, and result in other relational realities. If we don’t feel struck, why should we change our patterns, or our usual way of supplementing acts? I like to story the search for moments of being struck as becoming more sensitive to processes of constructing (and maintaining) relational realities and identities. Reflection, used in the way I propose, is a way to open up multiple realities through inviting other texts.

Encountering moments of being struck yields at least two notions for me: (1) feeling struck or moved because of feeling connected (a desire for feeling attached or engaged, being within) and (2) feeling struck because of a need for dealing with issues, for instance, asking (ethical) questions, addressing what is seen as contradicting or incompatible. These two notions concern being or feeling struck and can be seen as two opposite powers, or as conflicting notions; however, these notions are intertwined and dependent on each other. When we are engaged with Others, and attached to a certain socially constructed group, we tend to agree with the discourse of that group. However when we agree with everything, we neglect Others (similar to a multiculturalism of neglect or of co-existence as being next to one another (Giroux, 2000)). I see as an example of neglect, the idea of ‘anything goes’, for instance, in saying that everything is possible, or that every difference is all right, and that it is possible to see things in any which way, in a demonstration of relativism. Such neglect is not only a neglect of the Other; it is a neglect of the Self, or other-Selves, as well. Being struck can sometimes entail the double binary of willing to belong and wanting to be an individual self. Therefore, being struck has to do with commitment, with connection, with recognition, instead of declarations that everything is possible that neglects social, local, and historical contexts. When I assume everything is possible, when I assume that I can look at things from any angle or perspective, dialogue becomes unnecessary. I live next to Other, instead of with the Other. What I consider possible, or right, is formed by ongoing
constructed local and historical reality, and not by an individual, subjective notion, without context. Local and historical realities are not fixed or clear, but fluid and realities change, although not in every direction. Simultaneous multiple realities can cause feelings of being struck as well.

In this research, I tried to invite Other (texts) to enhance multiple readings of texts. The dance of critical relational constructionist texts with the texts developed in the Living Environment Research Project and the process of writing my PhD, is seen as a way to open up to being struck. Next to that, deconstructive or constructive strategies are used as a tool for enhancing critical reflection and awareness of stabilizing patterns. I constructed a set of strategies, on the basis of the deconstruction strategies of Martin (1990) and Boje (2001), and with the use of texts on critical relational constructionisms. Martin has developed strategies for deconstructing what she called ‘ordinary’ texts\(^{15}\). In her article, Martin deconstructs a text from a gender perspective to find out why she amongst others is upset by it. As a tool to explain this uneasiness, she developed strategies for deconstruction such as:

- Dismantling a dichotomy, exposing it as a false distinction.
- Examining silences – what is not said (i.e., noting who or what is excluded by the use of pronouns such as ‘we’).
- Attending to disruptions and contradictions, places where the text fails to make sense.
- Focusing on the element that is most alien to a text or a context, as means of deciphering implicit taboos – the limits to what is conceivable or permissible.
- Interpreting metaphors as a rich source of multiple meanings.
- Analyzing ‘double-entendres’ that may point to an unconscious subtext, often sexual in content.
- Separating group-specific and more general sources of bias by ‘reconstructing’ the text with iterative substitutions of phrases.
- Exploring, with careful ‘reconstructions,’ the unexpected ramifications and in her entlimitations of minor policy changes.
- Using the limitations exposed by ‘reconstruction’ to explain the persistence of the status quo and the need for more ambitious change programs.

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\(^{15}\) In her article, Martin proposes using Derrida’s notion of ‘deconstruction’ for ordinary, daily texts instead of sheer philosophical texts, as she understands Derrida’s texts.
Boje (ibid.) abstracted the following deconstructive steps from Martin’s:

1. search for dualities
2. reinterpret the hierarchy
3. seek out rebel voices
4. look for the other side of the story
5. deny the plot
6. find exceptions
7. trace what is between the lines
8. re-situate a new perspective as result of 1-7

These deconstructive practices can be linked to the constructionist view that dualities and dichotomies are local and historical constructions, which can be constructed otherwise. Because one of my main issues is exploring soft Self-Other differentiations or soft differentiated teacher-student relations, dismantling hard Self-Other dualities provides me with a way to explore other, possible, Self-Other constructions. For this reason, I have drawn from the deconstructive literatures outlined above, to create my own set of de-constructive strategies. I used these strategies as inspiration to invite in other texts from a relational perspective. The set of strategies I have generated was:

- Dismantling dichotomy or duality, sometimes leading to contradictions, exposing them as a possible but not necessary distinction i.e. showing that constructions could be otherwise.
- Dismantling hierarchy, as a group or person specific quality.
- Tracing what could be in between the lines, silences, disruptions, contradictions, metaphors, alien aspects (mostly a metaphorical use of language), and double entendres, which could lead to a construction of other patterns.
- Tracing group-specific and more general sources of bias by ‘reconstructing’ the text with iterative substitutions of phrases as a means to trace stabilized relational patterns, and exposing them as possible but not necessary.

Tracing silences, disruptions, alien aspects, metaphors, iterative substitutions of phrases, and double entendre, I consider as ways to create traces of hierarchy and dichotomy. I consider the other strategies of Boje as problematic. They all assume a dominant interpretation of the text: denying the plot (is there one plot?), rebel voices (which voice is rebel and which is not?), other side of the story (what is the side?), and finding exceptions (something can only
be an exception if there is a story assumed to be dominant). From a relational perspective, assuming that there is a dominant interpretation of the text is not in line with the idea that a text has multiple possible readings. With these (de)constructive strategies and texts, focused on soft Self-Other differentiation, I seek to soften teacher-student relations.

Finally, for now, Critical Relational Constructionism

Research in critical relational constructionism focuses on ‘making’ or ‘bringing into existence something that is yet only intimated or implied in what is currently in existence’ (Shotter, 1986, p. 213). I see a relational construction and the associated interest in soft differentiation of Self-Other as an attempt to open up the discourse of teachers acting on students and vice versa. Teacher-student relations as a relational unity might be of help to make or bring into existence, what is intimated with co-directed learning. Entities of teachers and students, or of things like knowledge, are now storied as constructions of the relational moment.

While feeling struck is seen as a possibility to open up stabilized patterns, which I equate with learning or development, the meaning of education can be revised from transferring knowledge to creating possibilities to reconstruct. Learning occurs without a notion of the results of learning processes: it opens up learning moments, moments of being struck by differences that invite different text-contexts. Texts related to critical relational constructionism are placed here into context with texts that are often constructed dialogues, from the Living Environment Research Project, in an attempt to emphasize differences. Educating critical pedagogues, as I story my professional activities, asks for critical reflection. Critical reflection assumes openness to new text-context relational realities, an opening up of stabilized patterns, creating space for innovation, renewal and improvisation.

I see an educator or pedagogue as someone who tries to create learning moments. I, as a teacher, make choices in desiring some processes, although the processes I desire today are not the same ones I desire tomorrow. Acting from a critical perspective entails acting in contexts that assume all sorts of choices, including ethical choices, which I see as necessary from a pedagogical perspective. We may create proto-events or possibilities for being struck by differences, but we
can never know (for sure) what the effect will be. My ethical choice for direction is in my objective to strive for collaborative education, in which teachers can become learners and students can become teachers, or in a language of critical relational constructionism, with softer differentiated teacher-student relations than those of more traditional teacher-student relations.

In education, like in our Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy, we can distinguish between the curricula or learning landscape and the hidden curricula (Eisner, 1994). With Kincheloe, I propose that there are some serious questions to ask ourselves concerning the hidden curricula: What are the stabilized patterns of teaching? What kind of teacher-student realities are created? How do we co-create identities? What is the relationship between community and schooling? How do we co-construct knowledge and power relations? How does our relating, co-construct injustice and inequality? What do we teach each other through the way we organize the course and the way we relate? What is the performative value of our way of educating? (Kincheloe, 2004). Although from a constructionist perspective, answers to such questions must be seen as momentary constructs in interaction, asking them serves as an impetus to open up other possible relational realities. Asking such questions, pointing to stabilized educational patterns, opening up other possible relational realities on teaching, and researching through reflecting on my own participation, and opening up to feeling struck, is what I aim for. Critical relational constructionism is part of this Argentine tango of text-context, which is meant to create possibilities to learn about teacher-student relations and researcher-researched relations.
INTERLUDE

Tango of Self-Other Ethnography
A major part of this book, is composed of texts that are related to conversations with PhD supervisors, colleagues, educational institutes, and students. The written texts often contain dialogues constructed on the basis of field notes, transcripts of audio recordings, or on e-mails. I focus on relational experience or texts, experience that I am able to explore in depth and from within. The texts story multiple Self-Other relations, in an educational setting. The written texts are brought into dialogue with the texts in Chapter 2 Tango of Critical Relational Constructionisms (text-con-text or text-context). These reflective texts or contexts are presented on a grey background. This dance of texts is meant to open up reading of the conversations and to create possibilities to be struck by differences. The texts don’t proclaim how things are or how education should be, but strive to open up a moral and ethical dialogue with the readers about education (p. 17, Ellis, 2008). Therefore, differences between different narratives or readings of the texts are important. The reader is invited to dance with the texts: to add texts from his or her context and to create new stories with those differences. I regard these text-contexts or interactions of texts as Argentine tangoing; dancing a tango is in this respect a text-context construction of narratives.

The research might be regarded as a variation of autoethnography. However, I do not depart from an understanding of Self as an entity, but rather I identify with a description on autoethnography of Reed-Danahay that is cited by Dyer (2002).

[The concept of autoethnography] synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called in question and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question. The term has a doubled sense referring either to the ethnography of one’s own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest.]

According to Reed-Danahay (2001), autoethnography has many different faces. As Holt (2003) understands from Reed-Danahay’s publication in 1997, they vary in the ethnographer’s ‘emphasis on graphy (i.e., the research process), ethnos (i.e., culture) or auto (i.e., self)’. To emphasize the relational unity of Self-Other, I choose to characterize this study as a Self-Other ethnography. I understand Self-Other ethnography as not being wholly and perfectly unified, coherent and logically developed text, but as involving a mixture of differences,

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of cultures and subcultures, differences in language and idiom (Stacey cited by Dyer, 2002).

Just as autoethnographic studies can focus on, for instance the theme of gender (Reed-Danahay, 2001), the focus in my Self-Other ethnography is on the theme of teacher-student relations. Holt (p. 2, 2003) sees autoethnography, in line with my focus, when he writes ‘Whatever specific focus, authors use their own experience in a culture reflexively to look more deeply at Self-Other interactions.’ An a priori context of my texts is my wish to focus on the construction of relational realities of teacher-student relations. For that reason, I have created texts which are related to conversations in workshops with ‘students’ and to conversations with supervisors. I focus on examining our ways of relating through the use of language. The choice for focusing on conversations is prompted by the idea that ‘we are fundamentally and irretrievably dialogic, conversational creatures, whose lives are created in and through conversations and sustained or transformed in and through conversations’ as Sampson writes, following Bakhtin and Wittgenstein (p. 109, 1993/2008). I chose to focus on conversations in workshops with ‘students’ and not on other conversations the ‘students’ and I had together, like short conversations before, in between, and after the workshops. This choice is made because interacts in the workshops tend to create a more traditional teacher-student relation than the other conversations might do. The challenge to soften teacher-student relations in the workshops is more severe. For the same reason, I pay little attention to conversations with my supervisors and critical friends other than those more or less directly related to my research.

Carolyn Ellis is seen as an important author in the field of autoethnography but although she inspired me with her stories and understanding of autoethnography, I constructed the texts in this book differently². In her book *The Ethnographic I* (2004) she describes elements of stories as:

(a) People depicted as characters.
(b) An epiphany or crises to provide dramatic tension, around which events in the story revolve and towards which a resolution and/or explanation is pointed.
(c) A temporal ordering of events.
(d) A point or moral to the story that provides an explanation and gives meaning and value to the crises’ (p. 32, in reference to Flaherty, 1997).

² My choices in differentiating from the line of Carolyn Ellis are based on my reading of her texts in her books and on the workshop with her and Arthur Bochner at the University for Humanistics on March 16, 2009.
For a variety of reasons, I did not follow all of Ellis’s recommendations in constructing this text. Ellis deliberately wants to engage the reader with the text, and, more strongly put, she wants the text to touch the reader. An autoethnography, in the sense of Ellis and her husband and co-author Bochner, aims for therapeutic development of the researcher as well as the reader. My objective is to develop teacher-student relations in the daily reality of life, through bringing different texts in relation to one another as reflection in action (Schön, 1983). Next to that, I intend to offer readers the written texts as narratives of educational relations and to make these relations discussable. The texts aim at deconstructing the dominant reading by offering different, alternative interpretations of the texts, which are deliberately more messy than Ellis’s and Bochner’s texts. Untidy texts leave more space for readers to make up different stories; readers are far less tied up to a dominant interpretation. That is why I subsequently chose to organize most of the texts as conversations. These written conversations, based on transcripts or notes, are more open for improvisation by the reader. An epiphany or crisis is not brought into the text for reasons of dramatic tension, I intend that the dance of the different texts be a source of crisis, epiphany, or a possibility to be struck by differences.

Ellis and Bochner foreground the author in their autoethnography: the author, as unified entity, in relation to epiphany or crisis. In line with my relational constructionist perspective, I foreground multiple readings of texts as readings of a multiple-Self in relation to epiphany or crisis. From a dialogical perspective on Self and Other, I see these multiple texts as a Self-Other ethnography in which the relational unity of Self-Other is crucial. With this choice, I endeavor to disrupt the understanding of an individual and coherent Self, as objective observer telling coherent stories, and to explore possibilities of postmodern autoethnography with the dialogical Self.

Ellis constructs stories by arranging events around plots with crises or epiphanies. Without engaging myself in the endless debates about differences between stories and narratives, I decided to differentiate between story and narrative, as the differentiation between more or less polished sorts of texts. I use the word ‘story’ to refer to more polished texts, while I reserve the word narrative for less polished texts, that might be more open for the reader’s contexts. The texts of the Living Environment Research Project and the meetings with my supervisors in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are pretty rough and less polished in the sense that I did not construct plots, crises or solutions leading up to one specific dramatic tension. I regard the texts as narratives and try to balance on the edge of presenting the texts as roughly as possible. Presentation
of recordings that are directly transcribed would have been rougher than the way they are presented here. Most of the texts were written by me; some of them by students, supervisors, my friend and colleague Renée, and there are quotes from many other authors, however, my role also involved the selection of which texts to include and how they could best be organized, presented and formatted.

I attempted to enhance the pleasure of reading and to seduce the reader. Polishing texts is an inescapable part of writing; as the author, I deliberately chose to organize the texts in three chapters, following a timeline. It was a choice based on what I wanted the reader to understand. One might conclude that I took the male part of this tango, by organizing the texts in an order. I have in this way limited the space for my dance partners to improvise.

Next to not organizing the texts around plots, I also chose not to present the students as depicted characters, but left the formation of their characters to the readers' imagination. To compare this with the choices of Ellis, her researcher and researched are more or less presented as unified characters. For instance in her book *The Ethnographic I*, Ellis creates characters in an almost Dickensonian like way, depicting them as bounded into different classes, genders, or sexual inclinations. Description of characters as individual entities would not be appropriate for a critical relational constructionist perspective. From this perspective, defining characters is part of the creation of the relational reality, instead of the mirroring of the existence of an individual and bounded entity. Characters will be formed by the text and the contexts of the reader. This said, I did more constructive work related to several figures, the five persons I introduced in Chapter 1. These characters are described more as seemingly stable entities than other players in the texts. The creation of these characters is my selection and staging, which enables me to write in a more emotional way, emotions that I want the reader to engage in.

Another act of polishing occurs in zooming in and out on the workshops—which entailed a hard process of making selections attached to researching and writing. I chose to zoom in on the first workshops and several others, and I zoomed out on others, or even left other workshops out of the narrative. Not because they were not interesting or that nothing happened that would fit my

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* Kuiper refers in this respect to Barthes (Kuiper, 2007a, 2007b). Producing texts with the elements Ellis names, to engage and touch the reader, can be seen Barthes' doxa (retelling stories over again which results in inauthentic stories with commonalities). Staying within the commonality of told and retold stories with plots, solutions and characters, the common belief of what a story is, will create dead texts.
story, but because I want the reader to engage in detailed narratives as well as in the more over all narrative. An important context of selection is that I searched for texts that I see as focusing on the construction of teacher-student relations.

I intended to write texts in different speech genres⁴, in an attempt to tell a narrative of how different possible audiences or addressees are incorporated in the texts. In that way, I constructed different addressor-addressee relations. For instance, the texts that narrate workshops with ‘students’ or encounters with friends or supervisors are written in a much more lively style than the texts on the gray backgrounds and in Chapter 2, in which I relate to critical relational constructionism. This stylistic choice is made because I have different possible audiences in my mind while writing. These different writing genres can be seen as different Self-audience relations or a polyphony of a dialogical Self (e.g. in Hermans, et al., 1992; Sampson, 1993/2008). Differences among the various genres or voices can open up different relations with the reader and different understanding of texts of teacher-student relations. In Chapter 4, section Dancing with an audience, the author-reader relation is explored further. To add in some other voices, I included stories of several of the students that they wrote upon my request, as their comments on reading texts in the next chapters. Those texts are presented in the Interlude, Other Narratives.

I constructed stories with what could be read as a beginning, middle and end, in ongoing processes. I see two interdependent story lines, one is the story line of the Living Environment Research Project, and one is the story line of my research process. I chose to narrate the beginning of the research of the Living Environment Research Project via the first workshop with the ‘students’ on January 16, 2006. The first texts in Chapter 3, Learning the Alphabet, relate to this workshop. Defining the end of the Living Environment Research Project was more difficult. In November 2006, The Professor asked me when I would stop collecting material. At the start, I had the idea of following the processes until the participants finished their research, which seemed like a logical, but arbitrary end. The Professor suggested I stop right away, because I had enough material to make a book out of it, but pigheaded as I am, I decided to continue collecting material until we had completed one whole year, another arbitrary end. Lucky for me, I did not stop taping workshops, writing in my journals and notebooks, storing notes, letters and working them all out, after one year.

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⁴ Bakhtin relates the concept speech genres to everyday use of languages. In dialogue between addresor and addressee a speech genre develops. When I talk to a little child or to a colleague, I both make use of the Dutch language, but I will use a different genre (Sampson, 1993/2008).
This was because it seemed that interesting constructions took place right after I had stopped ‘officially’ collecting material. This resulted in the constructed ending of the research of the Living Environment Research Project being situated somewhere during May 2007. In Chapter 1, the start of Self-Other ethnography is constructed as threads that led to joining the PhD-program at the University for Humanistics. Although I might say that research is never finished, the conversations and dialogues with both my supervisors ran through the final stage of writing this Self-Other ethnography, an end that I construct in December 2009. The writing was finished during the summer of 2010.

Deciding to construct the texts on a timeline relates to the idea of development, the development of the main dialogical character in the book, the teacher/student/researched/researcher/reader/author Loes in relation to students, to her supervisors and to other texts. The narratives that might construct this story can be read in Chapter 3, Learning the Alphabet, Chapter 4, Feeling Struck and Chapter 5, Soft Differentiation. However, use of the term ‘development’ should not be read as necessarily implying getting better or, indeed, getting worse. I wanted to reduce the seduction of a dominant story, but I wanted to tell the reader something, otherwise, what would be the point in writing. The story I decided to stress, with the creation of a beginning, middle and end, is a story that emerged out of the dance of texts of the Living Environment Research Project with constructionist texts. An important difference that has struck me, is the paradox of the intention to come to collaborative or joint action, and the problem with joining in, when writing and doing research. The reflection on the Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are intended to highlight that story. Yes, the texts contain moral judgments and I did construct some sort of crisis, but in the balancing act between polished and unpolished, seductive or less seductive, narratives I deliberately have wanted to create the possibility to read different moral positions or dilemmas in the texts.
Overview of Workshops of Living Environment Research Project

The texts in the next three chapters follow the timeline of the workshops and appointments with learning teams of the Living Environment Research Project, from January 2006 through May 2007.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Who Attended</th>
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<td>16 January 2006, workshop 1</td>
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Anja (16 July 2008): To learn to dance the tango is like learning an alphabet, once you know the basics, there are endless combinations possible, but you need to learn the basics to be able to communicate with each other.
This chapter starts with narratives of the first period of the Living Environment Research Project and stories of appointments with my PhD supervisors during that period. The narratives of workshop 1, 2 and 3 with the ‘students’ in the project are based on my field notes. Other texts are based on audio recordings of conversations, notes in my research journal, or on texts written by ‘students’ or me, and exchanged with one other. These texts form the input for critical reflection, in the texts on the grey backgrounds. In the so-called Contexts, the first texts are related to relational constructionist texts, with a focus on soft Self-Other differentiation. Leading and following is the theme in five contexts, another context is titled: Silenced or Silence. In this context, I reflect on what is not said in the conversation during a workshop. The chapter ends with a reflection on the texts in Learning the Alphabet resulting in a narrative about the style of writing.

**Workshop 1: Meeting the Students**

The first workshop of the Living Environment Research Project took place on 16 January 2006. The texts of this workshop are organized under four headings: Meeting the Students, Introducing a Theme, Research Perspectives, and Agreement on Assignments.

16 January 2006, 6:00-9:00 p.m.
I walked to the classroom very early so that I could settle my things and prepare a video, but found the room occupied. While I stood in the hall with a video recorder and television next to me, I saw Guus and Marinus walking towards me:

‘Our two colleagues, Kurt and Dick¹ wanted to come too,’ Guus said to me, ‘but the one is ill and the other is too busy. It’s like a mad house at our school, with this new interim principle, and all the preparations for the school moving due to the upcoming construction of a new school.’

I was surprised that the former principle had already left the school and I thought about the first time I met Guus and Marinus.

¹ Kurt and Dick are two pseudonyms.
In April 2005, I met these two men who already had many years of work experience in secondary education. That was when the principal, had invited me to give an introduction of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy for some members of her team. She told me that she was reorganizing the structure of the school and that she had asked the six older men and two younger ones that were in the room, to consider applying for a middle-management function. The principal imposed a condition. Those who were applying for one of the management functions would also have to undergo the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy. The principal explained what she thought of the new structure and I explained that our part-time course requires roughly twenty hours a week. Approximately ten of those hours could be combined with the work at school. In April, I told the group and the principal, ‘If people are taking the course, they will need to have some space to develop ideas and work them out’. When the meeting was over, the principal escorted me to the door, ensuring me that she wanted all the middle-managers to apply, but that she would not be surprised if not everyone would complete the program.

At the start of the program in September, six of the eight men had applied and became a learning team. Right from the start, this group of students complained about all the tasks that accompanied their new function and the lack of control they had on their aims. Several times, we discussed how they could have an influence on the tasks and how they could get their work done in combination with the program’s requirements. This was an unworkable situation for professionals in my opinion. Hopefully the new interim manager would provide a positive change.

‘I’m sorry to hear that they are not able to come,’ I responded to Guus’s announcement of the absence of his colleagues.

2 They worked at a VMBO-school, Voorbereidend Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs (Pre-Vocational Secondary Education) in Utrecht. Utrechse Kansen was an agreement of the administrations of the secondary schools in Utrecht to provide teachers of those secondary schools in Utrecht with possibilities for further education for a period of two years. The administration and the local government payed the tuition fees and supported schools financially to give those teachers some unscheduled time for their study. The Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy was one of the possible programs that participated in this project because the administrators were convinced that in schools a larger pedagogical influence, in contrast to an educational influence, was necessary.
Guus continued: ‘It’s not a problem. I can tell them what is being said’.

I asked, ‘How do you experience this interim manager? Does it alleviate some of the pressure?’

‘We have to wait and see. I don’t know yet,’ Guus answered.

It was very annoying that the classroom was occupied right when I needed it. I wanted to get everything settled, try out the video, and configure the seating, but all I could do was to wait. Why did that bother me that time? It is a common occurrence that rooms are occupied when a classroom is booked. I felt a bit more restless then I usually do on other occasions. It felt as if the whole Living Environment Research Project that was starting that day was my party, my research party for my PhD, and that put extra pressure on me to make it a successful party, right from the start. It felt as if it was my responsibility. Would the program I had created work out the way I expected it to?

The classroom was ready just in time and the sandwiches and beverages I had ordered were brought in by a member of the cafeteria staff. We usually arranged to have something to eat when we have workshops with large groups of students during dinner or lunch hours. This is, in my opinion, part of being a good host. The students were often surprised by it, which was nice to see. While eating a sandwich, I absorbed the atmosphere in the disheveled classroom. Little groups of students talked to each other. Renée and Hans were engaged in a conversation together. At one end of the room, there was the entrance door. Opposite the windows, that were covered with Venetian blinds, there was a hydro culture ficus tree with a few leaves. There were tables and chairs all over the place, a whiteboard on one wall and several framed pictures, with left over pieces of tape on the other walls.

It was good to see Ellen, Bianca, Laura, Kim and Ivo, here. They were a learning team in my home city of Haarlem and I was their coach together with Ieke.3 We always met at Ellen and Bianca’s home, so that they didn’t have to get a babysitter for their eight- and ten-year-old children. We sat at the table in their cozy living room and they provided us with coffee and cookies. During this first workshop of the project, their laughter and talkativeness made them look like a group of friends. Two young women, whom I didn’t remember having met before, were watching them quietly.

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3 Ieke is a pseudonym for a new coach. As part of her initial period, we planned to guide Haarlem learning team together.
It was half past six, when I asked everyone to come and sit around the table. While I distributed the handout with the evening program, I explained that I organized the evening as a start up of the Living Environment Research Project.

‘I hope that by the end of the evening you will have enough information on what the possibilities are so that you can decide if you want to join.’ After I distributed the handouts, I sat down as I usually did in such a small group, otherwise I feel as if I towered above everyone with my height, which was slightly elevated by high-heeled-half boots I usually wear because of the resolute sound they produce in corridors.

I began. ‘We started a bit later than planned. I expected some more people to arrive from what was in the e-mails I have received. At first, I would like to start with a brief introduction round. Then Hans will highlight why we think that Living Environment is an interesting research theme. After that, we’ll watch part of a documentary and then after the break, there will be time to exchange ideas about possible research focus. Living Environment is the overall theme of research, but the intention is that you all develop a smaller research theme within this, either in small groups or individually. At the end, I will explain what the process will look like.’

Still a bit restless, I introduced myself briefly. I hoped the introductory round would not consume too much of our time, because everyone would eventually get to know each other along the way.

‘You probably know my name already from the introductory days at the start of the program. I’m Loes and I work as a coach for the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy three days a week and for the department of Innovative Methodology and Didactics, two days a week.’

‘And you are in the process of earning your PhD,’ Renée added.

‘Yes, that too. I already explained in the letter that I will study this Living Environment Research Project for my PhD. Renée, will you please continue by introducing yourself?’

‘Well, I’m working for the department as well, and I don’t work as a coach in the Master’s program, but I call myself program coach and I develop training in Digital Story Telling.’

Hans introduced himself briefly as the Professor Innovative Methodology and Didactics and explained that I had asked him to join the project. Then Ivo introduced himself to the other students

I’m a member of the Haarlem learning team of which Loes and Ieke are the

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4 Digital Story Telling is a short story, told in digital images (video or photographs), provided with text, music, sounds and effects (Jansen & van der Linde, 2006).
coaches and I have been working at the teacher training at this university for one and a half years now. I started working here right after my B.Ed. graduation. I currently live in Haarlem, but I’ll move to Utrecht in six months.’

I’ve known Ivo for a long time because he is Renée’s nephew and we had met at her home several times. I see him as humorous and as a boy with curiosity. While everyone introduced himself or herself, I kept up with my notes, constantly switching between attentive listening and writing. The other members of the Haarlem learning team that sat next to Ivo were ready to tell about themselves.

‘Hello, I’m Karen and I’ve been working as a teacher in primary education at a Montessori school in Amsterdam for five years now. My school is located in an area with many immigrants, but because our school is a Montessori school, it mainly attracts white children, which is something that I find disturbing.’

Ellen takes her turn and says, ‘I’m Ellen. Together with Bianca, I work at a school for prisoners in Haarlem. We both would like to work with children instead of adults, which is why we’re taking this program.’

Bianca adds, ‘And we’re raising two children together.’

The last member of the Haarlem learning team is a young girl with a surprised look on her face. ‘Hi, I’m Laura and I’ve been working at a primary school in Haarlem for a year now. I started at this school as a substitute teacher after my B.Ed. and one of my pupils was Ellen and Bianca’s daughter. I applied for the Master’s program because they were very enthusiastic when they told me about it.’

Then Joan enthusiastically took her turn. ‘I’m not a member of that learning team. Cees is my coach and there are no other members in my team that are willing to participate in this project. I work at a Regional Training Centre’.

I think, ‘nice to meet her now.’ Joan had already corresponded with Hans and me via e-mails. She explained that she wanted to combine researching in this project with an already ongoing research project at her school that was ‘looking for factors that influence the process of occupational choice’ as she described it. That seemed like modernistic research to me, so I had replied to her saying that the combination of research on the theme would be possible, but a combination of the two different scientific perspectives seemed impossible.

Then Eva, Femke, and Gerda introduced themselves as members of another of Cees’ learning teams (North learning team) and they explained that one more member of their team, Corrie was not able to come that night. Eva, a young woman, worked at the youth care council and Femke was a special education teacher.

5 Regional Training Centre: in Dutch Regionaal Opleidingscentrum (ROC)
The tired-looking Gerda said, ‘I just moved to another part of the country and am looking for a new job in primary education. I don’t know if I will be able to continue in this learning team.’

After her, Guus and Marinus finished the introductory round.

**Workshop 1: Introducing a Theme**

I was relieved by the rapid pace the introductory round took. I introduced the next part of the program and asked Hans, The Big Guy, to launch the theme of the project. In his passionate way, Hans talked about problems with youths and the notion adults seem to have about knowing everything there is to say concerning them.

‘We don’t listen to youth anymore,’ he said. He added to this that he did not mean, ‘We have to agree to everything...about the living environments of youngsters and children. We can lay down standards, but we have to do that while being connected with them.’ He continued, ‘Youngsters don’t like to go to school any more. It is not their world and we need to help them with making their voices heard as well.’

Some people wrote things down while Hans told his story, and when he told about laying down standards, I saw that many people nodded their heads in agreement. I experienced the Haarlem learning team being inspired by this story by The Big Guy and the North learning team being a bit more reserved.

Hans claimed, ‘We need to listen to children and youngsters in order to improve schools, to overcome the distinction between the school world and the outside world.’

After Hans had told his story, I was still pressed for time, which left no time for discussion, and continued the program.

‘We are going to look at a video tape and I would like you to note down what comes to mind and what you think you see.’

I pressed the button and was a little bit nervous because I always struggle with technology, especially the antiquated machinery at the university. Voila, there was sound and pictures and they were all the right ones, ‘thank God...’

In the probing documentary *Meisjes* (Girls) (Meijer, 2002), Meijer followed three boys, ages 13 and 14, for a few months and asked them to talk about girls. Meijer was not visible in the documentary, but you could hear her as she asked the boys questions. The documentary was filmed and edited as if you were looking directly through the camera that Meijer was holding. The ‘students’ watched the film with a concentrated look on their faces and from time to time,
I heard laughter. One scene that provoked laughter was when the boys were filmed in a pharmacy, timidly looking and talking about condoms. After the documentary, it was quiet for a while.

‘What do you think of this? What did you see?’ I asked for reactions.
‘Well, I recognize this,’ Guus started.
‘What do you recognize?’
‘Well the way these boys talk and the way they act in a group, acting tough. It’s different when you talk to them when they’re alone.’
Hans nodded, ‘We used to talk about girls in the same way in our time.’
‘Is that so?’ was the reaction of several of the women.
‘I think it’s different than when I was young, they seem to talk about sex much younger,’ Femke said. She continued, ‘Maybe because I grew up in a sheltered environment, but I see some precocious boys here.’
Some people agreed with Femke, others didn’t, some commented about how difficult it is to make a documentary like this and that it seemed very time consuming to get in contact with the boys the way Meijer did.
Because I planned to open a conversation on reality and perception, I asked what it means that each one sees different things.
With a pensive look on his face, Marinus said, ‘You bring yourself with you.’
The conversation immediately switched back to what the boys in the film had said and how different or similar this was from how it used to be. After fifteen minutes, I saw the conversation slowing down and no new things seemed to come up. The group looked tired and I suggested that we stop the conversation and have a break.
‘After the break, we will talk in our learning teams about the first ideas for own research,’ I continued.
I was pleased when Hans interrupted and said, ‘First we’ll start in the large group and talk about different types of research.’
Indeed, the conversation on reality and perception that I hoped to activate and planned to serve as a start up for some philosophy of science, hadn’t gone as expected, and it was too important to disregard the topic.

During the coffee break, Bianca, Ellen, and Laura had gone to the smoking area with Renée.
Guus walked towards me and told me, ‘I have the same kinds of conversations with the boys in my school. They always come to me to talk. I like to be among the pupils.’
I acknowledged his comment with a ‘humm’, and I then directed my
attention towards Joan who also stood next to me. She told me she was very 
enthusiastic about the introduction so far. I suggested that she seek contact with 
other people for this project, since she was there by herself and not with other 
members of her learning team. My plan for the organization of this project 
was that everyone worked in small teams, in order to make appointments more 
easily.

In the meantime, I saw Hans talking with Femke, Eva, and Gerda. I approached 
them.

They told me, ‘We don’t want to think about our own research projects. We 
first want more information about this process.’

‘Okay, then that is what we’ll do’, I said.

I was aware that this should not disturb the evening’s program for the other 
students. With unabated effort, I observed and imprinted the impressions in my 
mind so that I would be able to note down as much of it as possible afterwards. 
I thought that the program worked well so far, and feeling a bit more confident, 
I ended the break.

Workshop 1: Research Perspectives

After the break, The Big Guy started to talk, ‘Research can be done in many 
different ways and it is good to know what you are doing and why you make 
that choice. In this project, we intend to do critical ethnographic research, 
which falls under qualitative research.’

He continued by explaining the differences between quantitative and 
qualitative research6.

Joan interrupted and asked, ‘I am not familiar with what you call qualitative 
research and how is it possible that I have not heard of that type of research?’

I explained, ‘In the Netherlands qualitative research was quite often used 
within pedagogical research. The strong phenomenological school here at 
the Utrecht University made use of it, as you can read in Miedema (1997b), 
for instance. However, it is almost gone. Most research in pedagogy is now 
quantitative, maybe because of the influence of the field of psychology, which 
seems to have more authority.’

Hans continued his explanation on differences between quantitative and 
qualitative research.

6 Hans referred to literature such as Onderzoeksmethoden (‘t Hart, van Dijk, Goede, Jansen, & Teunissen, 1996)
He ended by saying, ‘Within this Living Environment Research Project we already made a choice for a kind of methodology, although ethnography is not a worked out, strict methodology. To summarize, ethnography is researching cultures mainly by observations.’

He also pointed out what can be seen as critical and to my surprise; he explained this as ‘to critically examine your own prejudices.’

A narrative running through my journal, 12 January 2006

Again, another encounter with The Big Guy that made me feel insecure, dumb and embarrassed because I had not understood something I thought I had grasped. Why? I experience this as not meeting his standards of sophisticated reading or his standards of thinking!

Yesterday, when I gave him the invitation letter to read to inform him about what was going to happen, he immediately concluded that the way I had specified ‘critical’ was not at all right.

Hans said that critical had to stem from critical theory, The Frankfurther Schule and the text in the letter did not refer to that at all. I fell silent!

I hate how I react to these kinds of remarks. I had just spent four weeks of reading about critical ethnography. I wrote a piece on it in which I had decided how I wanted to understand ‘critical’ for this moment. I thought, ‘Oh my god,’ when I heard The Big Guy’s reaction, ‘I have this other opinion and haven’t considered the relation with critical theory. I did it all wrong, although...no, I have my opinion.’ Those mixed thoughts, fill up time, during which I am unable to come up with arguments that I think Hans can listen to. Yesterday I could only say, ‘There are some other opinions about that. We need to talk this over sometime.’ It was so confusing. On the one hand, his challenges and direct questions or remarks inspire me and make me want to be in his company; the uneasy feelings help me to think, rethink and to reflect. However, on the other hand, they increase my sense of uncertainty. I will return to my books, reread some of them, and look for more literature on critical pedagogy and critical research, trying to form a reaction to his remark!
During the lecture and conversation, all of the students wrote in their notebooks. I assumed they considered this important information. After twenty minutes, when The Big Guy took time to take a breath, I ended his talk, because time was running out.

I said, ‘This explanation is very brief. We’ll return to it later on in the process.’

I continued elaborating on the set up of the process. As part of this, I repeated that I was doing my research, for my PhD, by following this project, which raised a question from Laura.

‘What are you going to do with the observations? Can we read them? That will be fun.’

‘That’s an interesting question. You’re all going to deal with these kinds of issues in your research, it’s about confidentiality and ethical codes. I’ll take notes and share how I’ve worked them out with you. Sometimes I’ll take photographs and ask for your approval to use them in publications. I won’t use your full names in my report, but I can’t guarantee that you’ll not be recognized by acquaintances. From time to time, I’ll ask you for some information or for parts of your research journals. These kinds of things you’ll notice that are coming from my research. It is not going to be research at a distance. It will be associated with all of you.’

The students nodded and listened quietly. I wondered if they were a bit overwhelmed by all the information.

After this explanation, as planned, I asked everyone to split up into learning teams and to talk about their first ideas for research. Joan sat by Femke, Eva, and Gerda. I turned towards this group and sensed some dissatisfaction.

Femke, Eva, and Gerda expressed their displeasure. ‘The whole program is vague. We don’t know what to do. We aren’t getting started.’

‘Maybe we will leave the program. I don’t think I can study in this way,’ Gerda told me.

‘We thought that we could get some directions tonight, and now we have to search for our own ideas again,’ Eva said with a sigh.

I said, ‘Let’s skip that and talk this over. I know what you’re talking about. I have heard this type of thing before. It’s very hard to get things going, and to get used to other kinds of learning. We coaches have struggled with this, we try to soften the transition, but I don’t know, I think you have to take the step to do it, and there’s not really a way to make that transition smoother for you.’

I saw that the women were listening to me, and then Joan started to speak. She compared her difficulties with the difficulties she saw her pupils having at the ROC.
'They don’t know what to do either, we have to help them to find projects to work on and to get started. “Each pupil is different and has different learning strategies”, my supervisor at school told me.’

I was pleased by her remark. These kinds of parallels are interesting. We think for children and design education based on our logic, instead of on lived experience. Experiencing education and making use of our own experience is one of the intentions of the program. Femke, Gerda, and Eva affirmed Joan’s observation. Then Joan turned towards Guus and Marinus, who were talking together about what they could do at their school within the context of the research project. I glanced through the room and saw that the other five students were busy talking and laughing, on the other side of the room. Hans and Renée were having a conversation at another table. I thought the others seemed to be doing well, and I turned to the dialogue that the North learning team was having.

I asked them, ‘What do you want to learn, what were your intentions when you joined the program?’

To my surprise, Gerda reacted as if this is the first time she heard this question, ‘Well, hum, I don’t know.’

Femke told, ‘I always get inspired when we meet, when Cees tells us stories or when we talk to each other about our work, but when I am at home it flows away. When I plan to study for an afternoon, I sit at my computer and don’t know what to do.’

I rehearsed my question, ‘What were your intentions? What are some examples about your work that make you curious? I think that you need to find your inspiration for this program in your own life, your own work, and develop your own questions. A coach can help you to find your questions or inspiration, but cannot give it to you.’

After some seconds of silence, Eva started to talk, ‘I work with divorced parents and I’m curious about why parents have difficulty making decisions for the benefit of their children. I know that it is hard when you are mad at each other, or when you have financial problems, but I’d like to know how these factors influence their thinking about decisions for their children. I don’t understand why it’s so hard. They’re your children and they have nothing to do with your arguments with each other.’

‘That is interesting, and you can approach it in different ways. For instance, you can divide the problem into all kinds of little pieces, look for similarities or potential connections, and then make some generalities about “parents in the process of divorce”. Another way of dealing with the question is from what you see happening. You can choose to look in depth at some situations, holistic: those are different ways of doing research.’
Femke said, ‘I am interested in a lot of things. For instance, how the lives of children are influenced by the transition to a special needs school.’

After a conversation on topics like these, I asked, ‘How often do you meet each other?’

‘Well, once every three weeks or so. It’s hard to make appointments. We all have different schedules,’ Eva told.

‘I know we’ll have to meet each other more frequently. That would help. We hardly get to know each other this way. In other programs, you have to come to the institute every week or sometimes even two times a week. It’s hard to make time for the course now that you’re on your own,’ Femke said.

‘Although you can make your own appointments with each other and with your coach, which is probably different than what you’re used to, it means that you have to make time in your schedules. I usually make appointments with my learning teams every two weeks, and sometimes, when we start, every week. After we get going, I reduce my presence.’

‘We need to see each other more often. That’ll help,’ Eva concluded.

Gerda was silent.

Workshop 1: Agreement on Assignment

After the conversations in small groups, I asked the students to tell each other what had happened in their groups, which led to an exchange of their first research ideas.

After this I said, ‘Well, we are at the end of this workshop. I hope you found it interesting and you got enough of an idea about how this project is going to be, in order for you to decide if you want to participate.’ I continued, ‘Let me explain the agreements for the next workshop.’

‘Agreements,’ Renée interrupted, ‘aren’t those just assignments?’ Everyone laughed.

I was caught in a classical pedagogical mistake, with parents and educators, discoursing one-sided assignments as two-sided agreements.

I corrected myself, ‘Okay, assignments.’ I immediately continued explaining, ‘You can regard this as a kind of start up for a research journal. With this type of research, it’s very important to keep a journal. You think you’ll remember things, but believe me, you’ll forget many things. I have my journal here, in this black notebook, and this red notebook is for taking notes during the workshops. I’ve written very few notes today.’ I sighed. ‘It’s hard to talk, act, and observe,
while taking notes simultaneously. I didn’t write enough down. As soon as I get home, I’ll write down everything I can remember. We’ll talk about this issue during the next workshop. Nevertheless, for now, I want to ask you to write down what you consider research to be, and what you expect from your research. This request is also for my own research. The rest of the assignments are in the handout,’ I said, while hoping they were going to take this seriously. However, I didn’t know exactly what I’d do with it, but I hoped it could offer me some points of comparison at a later point in my research.

‘I recommend that you start thinking about a research group. Try to make some contacts and start gathering information. You might want to start by taking photographs, or by making a video or audiotape, to name a few examples. Please bring that with you next time. In the handout, I also included some information about an exhibition I saw during my last holiday. It’s very interesting. This artist observed all kinds of people and made videos. It’s difficult to figure out if it is a play, or a recording of something in reality. The movies provide you with images in a very condensed way. I consider this research also. So if you are able, you may try to visit this exhibit. At the end of the table, you’ll find an article to take with you. I believe this article gives a beautiful example of ethnographic research in which the researcher takes the position of the learner and his informant is treated as a ‘teacher’, I love how Conquergood (1997) writes about this.’

‘Can I take that for my colleagues,’ Guus asked.

‘Yes, of course, please do. I hope they can come next time and if they have questions before that workshop, you know where to find me.’

Some students ran off, after we had finished, others kept on talking in the room while they were helping with cleaning up the coffee cups and the remaining handouts. After ten minutes, we all left the room. Hans, Renée, and I walked to the smoking area outside the building. I felt a bit exhausted, but also satisfied, the project was started and I thought it went well. We discussed the workshop, on our way to the car park.

‘How do you feel about it,’ Hans asked me.

‘Well, it’s a pity that there were so few. I expected more people to come in view of the reactions by e-mail and phone, but the evening program worked well, I guess. What do you think?’

‘There were only first-year students there. We need to consider that they have hardly had any information on philosophy of science, so far. We should pay more attention to that next workshop.’ Hans answered.

‘Yeah, I was glad you took up a part of that in this workshop and we sure have to talk about that next time.’

‘I think it was an inspiring evening for a lot of them, at least Bianca and
Ellen seemed inspired,’ Renée concluded. I agreed with her, ‘It is a pleasure to have them in a group, their enthusiasm is really infectious for others, and this is also the case in the learning team. Like the other students in their learning team, they tend to have difficulties in the transfer of enthusiastic ideas into workable plans. Frequently we have discussions in that learning team on why and how to use the activity chart.

‘What is the problem with that?’ Hans asked.

‘Well, they hesitate to fill them in, to plan their search in the domains. Ivo is the most outspoken in this. He says that he’s afraid to tie himself down to a plan or a time schedule, although he does understand that it’s just a plan that can be changed.’

‘Making choices and committing oneself to these choices is a hard job,’ Hans responded.

‘What I experienced with Gerda, Eva and Femke tonight seemed to be much earlier in the process than this. They seemed to be surprised when I asked them what makes them curious, as if they haven’t been asking that themselves, before!’

‘People are not at all used to that in educational settings, it is a big change for them to steer their own learning processes,’ The Big Guy concluded.

In the following text, I reflect on the texts above, in an attempt to open up the reading of the texts (text-context) with a focus on soft teacher-student relations. In this section, the centre of attention is on a further explanation of my relational focus, and the stories on leading and following that this perspective provides me with. Texts on leading and following are scattered over five different boxes.

**Context: Leading and Following 1**

Leading and following is an eye catching element of the ballroom versions of the tango; the man is the leader and the woman follows his directions.

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7 Matrix 8 (Jansen, 2007) was used in the program handout. Students were set to do research in every one of the domains of the program; starting with an orientation on the topic; choosing a theme, based on inspiration (adaptation of the topic); planning a research with learning goals; executing a research; evaluating it; assessing it; and grading the results. Some of these steps were supported by documents that could be used, like the activity chart for planning research.
The Argentine tango has a somewhat more open relational pattern of leading and following, the leader (often the male) is assumed to give the other, space to improvise and to dance unsurpassed.

In the Argentine tango you do not robotically do standard step patterns in standard sequences to a set rhythm. Instead you create new step patterns and combine them in ways new to you. Creativity and improvisation are valued more than correctness by the best tango dancers. (When beginning to study tango only the leaders improvise, but as you become more advanced followers also become able to do it.) (Carroll, 1997)

With the five contexts of *Leading and Following*, I explore how leading-and-following might be constructed in several of the texts which, taken together, I have called *Learning the Alphabet*. The discourse of critical relational constructionism does not focus on dance partners and their individual activities, but on the processes that construct the dance. In a relational discourse, the story about education, in general, and the workshops of the Living Environment Research Project, in particular, can be re-storied. Teachers and students, rather than being storied as entities, now are storied as constructions in educational moments—in the same way that the Argentine tango is danced in the moment. This shifts the focus from a relation or a ‘teacher’ and a ‘student’, to teacher-student relations as ongoing, co-constructed, relational realities. From this perspective—with the language tools of text-context, inter-act or act-supplement—the starting point is not that of describing the relations between ‘teachers’/‘coaches’ and ‘students’, but that of the relational processes that create what can be understood as teachers and students. A reader might recognize actors in the texts *Learning the Alphabet* as being teachers or students. This recognition is based on the reader’s social, local, and historical contexts of education: more or less stabilized patterns of teaching are recognized as such.

In descriptions of dancing the Argentine tango, the roles of leaders and followers are prescribed, although subjected to influences and they change over time. This might be understood as suggesting a hard differentiation of leader and follower in which a leader (as subject, with assumed characteristics or activities) executes power over the follower, as an object. As I wrote in the section *This-and-That Discourse* (Chapter 2), it is an oversimplification to describe teacher-student relations, and
relations of dance partners, in this way. A relational discourse of act-supplement leads to the following: when the action of one dancer (e.g., slowing down) is acknowledged and supplemented with, for instance a twist by the other dancer, this slowing down gets the significance of being a leading activity. The twist is an improvisation and not only a reaction to the action of the leader. The twist might surprise the leader, who has to improvise a supplement, simultaneously. Dancing can be seen as continuous inter-acts of the dancers, the music, the other dancers, and sometimes an audience. A dance is continually constructed and is led by all these influences, as are teacher-student relations. The way the ‘follower’ supplements the activities of the ‘leader’ will in itself lead the ‘leader’ to a new supplement, so who is leading?

Let me take a closer look at some of the teacher-student relations in the texts of workshop 1, to see what can be said about the relational realities that perhaps blur subject-object separations between ‘teacher’ and ‘student’. I start with the text that tells a story about the end of workshop 1, Agreements on Assignments. The remark ‘Let me explain about the agreements for next workshop’ was perhaps understood as the ‘teacher’/‘coach’ acting as the knowing subject, telling the Other (‘students’) what to do. Explained in this way, the constructed relation would be a stabilized pattern of interact of leading and following, with a hard differentiated teacher-student relation. Only Renée, one of the other ‘teachers’, is pushing that pattern by pointing at the one-sidedness of the ‘agreement.’ Although everybody laughs and I (the ‘teacher’) acknowledged that it is meant to be an assignment, the teacher is followed. The ‘teacher’/‘educator’ or ‘coach’ is leading and the ‘student’ is following, like in a ballroom tango. ‘Teachers’ can be seen to be attempting power over ‘students’ and ‘students’ can be seen as supplementing that attempt with some sort of compliance. Only another teacher is able to joke about this stabilized pattern. What happens next in that fragment can be seen as an attempt to soften the differentiation between teachers and students. I refer to my problems with taking notes. The ‘I’ in that text is not the ‘all-knowing’ and perfectly performing teacher. However, how is that supplemented? In this text, that remark does not get any attention and I continue by explaining the assignment, in combination with pointing at my PhD research. Finally, we might say that the excerpt ends with a traditional, stabilized pattern of a student asking for permission to take some of the articles for his colleagues.
Reflecting on the texts in *Learning the Alphabet*, I (which is not the same ‘I’ as the one in the texts, but the ‘I’ that is writing this reflective context) cannot let go of the idea that there is hardly any negotiation of roles, but roles are storied as fixed, beforehand. After Hans’s powerful explanations of research perspectives, it is hard to take on a different role. I even find it hard to interrupt him, let alone that students do so. Using jargon from critical relational constructionism, I story this as an inter-act with strong traditional contexts. Most participants are quiet and only speak when they are asked to speak (introducing themselves, responding to the documentary), the participants that take initiative are Loes, Hans, and Renée: the ‘teachers’. As one of the characteristics of a hard differentiated subject-object relation, Hosking (2005a) writes about the active-passive binary. We might say that the ‘students’ in the texts about workshop 1 are storied as rather passive, and the ‘teachers’, as rather active. From a relational orientation, the texts of the workshop can be read as ‘we create a situation in which ‘teachers’ are followed.’ It is not as if someone were doing something to someone else, like an act of a particular ‘form of life’ that possesses power over other groups (p. 5, Hosking, 2007). For instance, a teacher who manipulates students with a story, is rather an act-supplement producing power relations, in processes that are already ongoing (Hosking, ibid.). Contexts that could already be ongoing in the inter-act, might be texts such as:

- Teachers know a lot about these issues, more than students, Hans is a teacher, so he knows more, and/or
- Teachers should teach, and students should listen and only ask questions for more explanations, and/or
- Wow, they seem to know a lot, I cannot understand everything, I am too stupid for this, and/or
- I had it all wrong, if I don’t speak up, they will not notice, and/or
- You can only get into a discussion when you understand all these new words, and/or
- Students don’t know this and they should, and/or
- Maybe I will be examined on this, so I had better know it! and/or ...

The interruption of the people from the North learning team, asking to discuss something else than planned, can be interpreted as an important active act, which the ‘teacher’ has to supplement with a change in
program, for that part of the group. When these ‘students’ complain about the vagueness of the course (as I story in the section titled Research Perspectives), I am storied (by me, the author) as the knowing ‘teacher’, expressing her interpretation of her role, without any possible negotiation. ‘I know these kind of doubts,’ and ‘I know that the coaches have tried to soften these transitions,’ and ‘I know that you will have to jump in’. In this conversation with Gerda, Eva and Femke, the context of the ‘students’ and that of the ‘coach’ don’t seem to fit. Their expressed uncertainty, is supplemented by the certainty of the ‘coach’, the differentiation of ‘students’ and ‘coach’ is once again hardened.

Reflective Conversation on Workshop 1

At the end of workshop 1, I promised to send the ‘students’ my story of the workshop—but I did not do that until after the second workshop. At that time I sent the ‘students’ a letter via the intranet with my notes, all worked out, and I asked them to respond. Ellen, Bianca, and Ivo responded individually, by putting remarks in my text. I responded back to them, again individually. I rearranged these different texts (while sticking as closely as possible to the original Dutch written texts), as if it was a written dialogue between four people, for reasons of readability, and because some of the remarks address the same issues. Here, I refer only to the parts concerning workshop 1,

Reflection on the first workshops
17 February 2006

Loes: Hello participants of the Living Environment Research Project
Ellen and Bianca: Hello Loes.
Ivo: Hay Loes.
Loes: I made a summary because I want to spare you the long elaboration of my main notes and draft notes of the workshops. Any feedback or responses are welcome.
Bianca: I think it’s very pleasant (fascinating, significant) to be able to have a look at your reflections and have the opportunity to respond. I’ll give you my thoughts and or reflections on my thoughts (learning
moments). They’re about my personal experience that afternoon and my responses to my interpretation of your experience of what you are trying to say. I think that you can always do something with it on a content level. You can always ask for clarification if you need any.

**Loes:** My story as I experienced it is below. If you convey your different ideas about what happened during the workshops and between the workshops, that will make it possible for me to expand my ideas.

**Ellen:** My reaction to your story is finally to put something concrete on paper about what I think and how I think. I seem to need some sort of a footing: ideas and visions to which I can respond. I have to learn this, I have the feeling that I’ve had hundreds of thoughts and ideas to write down and work on these past few months.

**Loes:** I was hoping for more people to arrive than were actually there at the first workshop. It’s a pity. For many students who started the course in September, this offer might be too soon (one member of a leaning team told me so) and for the people who started in 2004 it is maybe too late (perhaps they already have another topic for their research). The moment to start is defined by my desire to do it now: i.e. my planning for my own research (this can be seen a hindrance for research).

**Ivo:** It is very special to read back what kind of ideas and intention you had with the workshops; you write about the workshops and the students from your perspective and that makes me wonder if some remarks are about me. Maybe I still have the idea that ‘I want to do it right for the teacher.’ Ha-ha, I’ve got to get rid of that as soon as possible. A bit overdone, but obviously, I want to understand the correct meaning and become an amazingly good researcher!

**Loes:** Indeed Ivo, get rid of that!

During the workshops, there were moments that things did not work out the way I wanted them to. I took that to mean that I was not doing the right thing or I only noticed it after it occurred. It says more about me, than about the group. It certainly shows that I had objectives. For instance, when we discussed the video, it was my objective to discuss the topic of ‘truth’ based on what we saw in the video. We could have discussed things like the different perceptions of truth or what these perceptions could mean for performing research, but this conversation never began.

**Bianca:** We talked about the different perspectives, didn’t we?
Didn’t we also talk about the influence and disruption of research? Or did you mean something else?

Ivo: In what way did you give us an ‘assignment’? How were you planning to reach your objective? I don’t remember this. In principle, I found the conversation about the video interesting at that time, because the tape invited us to talk. How can you get this thought process around ‘truth’ started, or is this a matter of labeling?

Bianca: I think that it’s important to convey your objectives and to examine if it’s understood during the workshop or afterwards, like we’re doing now with this reflection.

Loes: Well, we picked the theme up afterwards, in a more abstract way, with the story about different types of research and it will come up again later on; for instance, when we talk about philosophy of science in the next workshop. I realize that my fundamental assumptions about the philosophy of science colors the content of the workshops. This is unavoidable.

Bianca: Yes, it is unavoidable.

Loes: We coaches make our choices in the stories we present during the workshops. In the program, I choose to talk about ‘stories’. This means that we are not talking about ‘The Truth’. This addresses something about the idea of the ‘truth’. We plan to tell a story about paradigms and to reflect on the three paradigms of learning, in the book ‘Levend Leren’ (Jansen, 2005b).

Ellen: This discussion about education and learning within this course, the conversation you had with the North learning team, was also a subject during the workshop with the two other learning teams of Ieke on Wednesday, 15 Feb. I think that many students need more structure. Many of the first-year students MEP struggle with the problem of being used to having to meet the criteria that were set by others. We tend to prefer to receive a clear assignment with a due date so that we know what is expected of us. We must constantly meet end terms or goals. Moreover, there is a path laid out for us, and if you follow that path, you know you will reach the end. We are less accustomed to setting goals for ourselves, making our own routes. In our daily work, taking initiative causes a lot more work, and at the same time, it arouses resistance and mistrust. I can

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8 MEP is an abbreviation for Master Ecologische Pedagogiek (Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy) that came into effect during the first year of the course.
continue to elaborate on this, but I don’t know if this is the right place for it. This could be something for the forum.  

Loes: I see enthusiastic people who certainly want to continue and participate in the project. There are also a few people whom I hope will participate; however, I would not be surprised if they decided against it. It’s not a very concrete process with all the steps clearly laid out on a timeline. Some people think this is a delightful project. They experience it as something that provides space and possibilities.

Ellen: It’s delightful swimming! It feels as if I have permission to do what I want. At this moment, it means observing a lot, experiencing, surfing, linking, mind-mapping, discussing, discovering and doing that constantly. For others, a feeling of uncertainty will overrule everything.

Ivo: In itself, I think it’s attractive, but sometimes there is this lack of concreteness. At times I’m a bit preoccupied by this, and then all of a sudden I realize that I am doing research. Sometimes I want to make some sort of plan to make my work more concrete. It’s controversial to make a plan; like a time schedule with activities: I sometimes have trouble with this. I don’t do it because I tie myself up. It’s a peculiar contradiction isn’t it?

In reaction on the comments and remarks of Ellen, Bianca, and Ivo, I wrote in my journal:

Ellen asks for more clarity and structure and claims that other students ask for that as well, but meanwhile she writes that she enjoys the openness of the project. Can we ever get out of this tension? Ivo formulates similarly in his text, he recognizes the tensions in himself. We try to structure the course and design scaffolds for the way to work, instead of setting the content. The planning documents are an example of that. But somehow the students do not seem to see these as helpful enough.

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9 In the second workshop, Ellen suggested organizing a digital forum. The text that was worked out and the reactions to it were then sent after that next workshop.
Workshop 2: Paradigms

The following text narrates workshop 2, the second meeting with the participants of the Living Surrounding Research Project. Before the narrative starts, I will explain how I organized this text, which is based on my notes, and texts taken from e-mails from several ‘students’.

At the end of the first workshop, I asked the students to do some things, which I described in the handout as follows:

**Appointments**
Get acquainted with your research group. Start making contact and gather information using photographs, video, audio recordings anything you think would help you gather information. Take that information with you to the next workshop.

Request from Loes (and in the meantime a begin to your research journal): Write a small piece on:
- What do you consider to be ‘research’?
- What do you expect this research will provide you with?
- What are important elements of the Living Environment of the group do you want to research?
- What significance does the information workshop have for you?

Most of the students sent me a response by e-mail before the second workshop. From those responses I selected answers that addressed the issue of paradigms, or perspectives on research. This material is presented in various boxes interspersed in the following text. The organization of the texts is inspired by Coetzee’s book *Diary of a very bad year* (2007), in which he presents the reader three stories, one printed on the top of the pages, another in the middle, and a third one on the bottom of each page. While reading it, I was confused. Did Coetzee want me to read the stories separately or did he want me to read it page by page? I switched between those strategies and became aware that the stories influenced each other. Every choice in reading strategy, would result in another combination of texts and therefore other stories. I tried out a similar structure for my book, but found out that it was far too difficult. It is not just putting different texts underneath each other, there has to be some sort of relation between them to make it work, otherwise the confusion is too big. With the texts in the next section I opt to parallel Coetzee’s idea, I try to make
Let’s Dance

more explicit what I think happens when you read a text: It dances with the already ongoing contexts. You might say that some already ongoing contexts of what ‘students’ consider researching, as written up in their e-mails to me, are in those boxes. These already ongoing contexts, are part of the tango in workshop 2. Other text is based on my field notes.

8 February 2006, 2:30 – 5:30 p.m.
After a discussion on how to make field notes and on how to use a research log, I asked The Big Guy to tell his story about research paradigms as we had prepared. While students were listening and writing in their notebooks, he started to explain:

‘There are some major paradigm shifts going on in education and social sciences. I call the empirical analytic paradigm or the modern paradigm Paradigm I, the paradigm of control. It claims that we can know the world, that we can find truth if we search in the correct, logical way. Popper is an important figure in that way of thinking, and he claims that it takes hard work to find scientific truth, and that we will never really reach that truth. Research in Paradigm I is focused on finding nomological knowledge that can be verified and falsified, and within this paradigm, it is common to split issues on into small measurable parts.

Joan wrote to me:

Doing research comes from curiosity. For me, researching something is discovering its cause. I like to understand everything. To do research is to gather information, to learn and to understand youngsters’ behavior. I am looking for underlying causes. I like to see research that has societal relevance... And finally, I like doing research. I like to think about the results of a study. To analyze, interpret and to simply think about the results. This thinking is sometimes hindered by a lack of information. Examining the information gives you possibilities for continuation, for further analysis.

‘Wow, you are using many difficult words here, can you explain them?’ Bianca interrupted.

With the realization that it is difficult material just as it was for me the first time I heard it, I respond by telling her that she will find herself in a whole new area of language, with a lot of new words.

10 The hand-out for the students refers to Jansen, 2005b and Widdershoven-Heerding, et al., 1995.
‘I made copies of a chapter of a book about philosophy of science so you can read it at home. To give you an example, in research in *Paradigm I*, the researcher stays outside the situation when doing research about the Living Environment of children. Be aware that I am talking about doing ‘research about’ something. The researcher’s influence should be minimized. An example, is that you can look for the relation between the amount of hours of the day children look at violent television programs, and how many times they are in a fight at school. To answer these kinds of questions, you strictly have to define what you mean by ‘violent programs’ and you have to make ‘fighting’ operational. You’ll usually end up with written or oral questionnaires, and the goal is to make generalizations about a large population,’ I explained with the texts the students had sent to me, in my mind.

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**Guus wrote me:**
Here is my homework: For me, research entails getting a real impression of reality as it is for the greatest common denominator, by means of questioning. Research will provide my school with knowledge that can help it to respond to pupils more effectively.

If we know what keeps pupils interested, we can respond better, for example, by adjusting teaching materials or adjusting ways of conveying information. We will be able to serve the pupils more on their level.

What do you have to research for this?
- The situation at home
- Physical development
- Impression of the pupils’ future prospects
- Street culture and street language
- How youngsters are effected by societal changes

‘Okay, I’m beginning to understand, but what’s a paradigm?’ Bianca continued with her questing.

Hans walked towards the flip chart and started talking.

‘Kuhn’ is important in the use of that word *paradigm*. He used the term

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11 Chapter 3 of Widdershoven-Heerding, et al., 1995
12 Hans refers to Kuhn, 1976.
to indicate “agreements in scientific thinking”. Nowadays, you see a broader use of the word. Barker\textsuperscript{13} describes a paradigm as a collection of written and unwritten rules and procedures, which define boarders and prescribe handling within those boarders to be successful. You’ll find a copy of a chapter of Barker’s book in your handouts. Barker explains how a paradigm is a way of looking at the world that temporary provides solutions to problems, but that other problems arise subsequently. It is then impossible to find solutions for them within that same paradigm. Therefore a new paradigm is created. This is what causes paradigm shift. Such a shift is not made within one instance; you will have people at the front line who are ahead of the mainstream. There are the early followers and then the majority of people will follow.’ The Big Guy explained while he made a drawing of a bell curve on the flip chart. ‘Each paradigm will have its peak and decline and when the rules of thinking do not provide the desired solutions, a new paradigm will emerge.’

He drew another bell curve on the flip chart. The line of the second drawing started in the middle, of the decline, of the previous bell curve.

‘I see shifts from Paradigm I, the paradigm of control that provides us with a lot of technical progress, towards Paradigm II, which is the paradigm of developmental thinking based on constructivist visions of truth. Truth is constructed where people meet\textsuperscript{14}.’

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Ivo wrote to me:}
My lens: From investigating my constructs, it became apparent that personal contact is one of my main motivational fundamental assumptions in dealing with students. That makes it interesting for me to take the Living Environment of students as theme of research.

As I have already written above, I still see this phenomenon through the eyes of a student. However, I realize that through my position, I am becoming more and more detached from the time that I was a full-time student myself. I look at the Living Environment of students from my position too. How can I try to connect those two lines of approach, to benefit my position?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} In the handouts for the students is a copy of a chapter from Barker, 1996.
Learning the Alphabet

‘And then there is Paradigm III, what I call the Real-Life Learning paradigm. It’s a paradigm that leaves more space for contingencies and coincidences,’ The Big Guy continued. ‘This paradigm leans heavily on the philosophy of postmodernism and critical theory. Living and learning organizations, as described by Peter Senge\textsuperscript{15}, and other people from MIT, is part of Paradigm III, in which the focus is on possibility rather than predictability\textsuperscript{16}.

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ellen made a mind map and transcribed this mind map into a word document. She sent them both to her learning team (Laura, Bianca, Ivo, and Karen), and to me. In the written document she sees researching as:
  \begin{itemize}
    \item Gathering information using images, sounds, observations, conversations, and participation.
    \item Formulate questions
    \item Search for answers
    \item Determine a site
    \item Determine a research group
    \item Chart information
    \item Ask for permission
  \end{itemize}
  What do you expect from this research?
  \begin{itemize}
    \item More insight in the important elements of the Living Environment of young children
    \item More insight into the influence of ‘the big people’ (Which space, freedom and restrictions do they give and enforce?)
    \item More insight into the relationships between these elements
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{16} Although the explanation of the existence of paradigms assumes that views on science can change and that the perception of what is ‘true’ changes, the existence of paradigms is here storied as a reality. The word paradigm suggests that there are boundaries around solid and firm ideas. Hosking calls paradigms monolithic (Hosking, 2007). The ideas of Kuhn (1976) include ideas on incommensurability and of revolutionary paradigm shifts. From a relational ‘meta-level framework’, ideas of revolution and paradigm shifts don’t focus on the ongoing relational processes of constructing knowledge: ‘…a \textit{critical} constructionism does not centre the assumption of one trans-historical and trans-contextual reality. Instead, it is centered on the assumption that constructions of persons and worlds and their relations – including constructions of knowledge, truth and ethics, and including constructions of science – are local relational realities’ (p. 2/3, Hosking, 2007). Describing the history of research from a perspective of scientific revolution is a reality that exists next to realities of research from evolutionary perspectives or from ongoing relational constructionist perspectives.
The Big Guy continued lecturing about the three paradigms and learning. After twenty minutes, I was able to interrupt him, and to ask him to explore the meaning of Paradigm III for doing research. I was hoping that this would make his story less abstract.

‘Within Paradigm I, basically, the focus is on empirical analytic research strategies and is quantitative. In Paradigm II, you’ll find designs like interpretative phenomenological research, like the ones we talked about last time. Most designs are a kind of case study; action research, in which the researcher plans to change a situation is also used. In these methodologies, the steps are fairly prescribed. Research in the Real-Life Learning Paradigm is less strictly prescribed, there is space to see what is useful,’ Hans explained.

Bianca wrote to me:
I notice that I’m very occupied with research: gathering information, reading, sorting out, filtering, and making mind maps. I’m also discussing things with Ellen about our learning processes, about everything we experience, things we come across and about research. I wrestle with how to put this all on paper for myself and how to present it to you. I have the idea that I am unable to share it with my learning team yet, whereas I certainly feel engaged. I noticed this is probably because I think that when I put things on paper, they have to be a finished product. However, that is impossible because everything is in continuous development.

‘In this paradigm, methods are seen as tools not as an objective in and of itself,’ I added.
When I looked at the circle of students, I saw some fatigue and I realized that these kinds of lectures are hard work. I asked, ‘Shall we have a break now?’
‘I thought you were never going to suggest that,’ Renée jested.

Context: Silenced or Silence?
In the section Workshop 2: Paradigms, I presented a narrative, based on my field notes about the lecturing, in the second workshop of the Living Environment Research Project. In that text, I made some boxes in which I presented my translations of excerpts of e-mails, from the ‘students’. They
wrote these e-mails as an assignment I asked them to do: ‘Write a small piece on: What do you consider to be ‘research’? When I reread the texts of my field notes and the e-mails of the ‘students’ with the deconstructive strategy of tracing silences (see section Reflection, Learning and Deconstruction in Chapter 2), I developed the idea of the silence of the ‘students’. The texts on research of the ‘students’ did not seem aligned to the text of the conversations in the workshop. I noticed that the texts of the workshop and the e-mails hardly connected, although they were focused on the same topic: how to see research. In my notes of the workshop and in the story I created based on these notes (which is the text without the boxes in the section the Workshop 2, Paradigms), perspectives on research of the ‘students’ were not present. This examination of silence, revealed that the opinions of the ‘students’ were not heard in the conversation. The questions raised or remarks made by students17 were more focused on understanding the lines of thought of the lecturer, than on questioning them. I read the answers to the assignment before I made the program for the workshop, and they form the context of the program.

What stories can be created when using the trace of silence to dismantle hierarchy, as a group-specific or person-specific quality (see my construction of deconstructive strategies in Chapter 2, p.87)? When reading my notes of workshop 2, I became inspired to present the text of that workshop in the way I did, with the texts in boxes. Will these texts of ‘students’ be missed if the boxes were left out? Their voices are silent, but were they silenced? When using the trace of silence, for dismantling hierarchy, one might construct a story of ‘students’ being silenced by ‘teachers’. Within that discourse, the conclusion could be that ‘teachers’ silenced ‘students’, because of the position or characteristics of the ‘teacher.’ Examples of such power hierarchy are: teachers distribute the grades, teachers are assumed to have expert knowledge about the world. Teachers may overwhelm students with new insights and difficult words, and thus assume expertise (can we interpret Hans’ activities as such?). In a constructionist perspective of soft differentiation, tracing silences is seen as way to trace and dismantle hierarchy, as a group or person-specific quality. Silent voices are now related to contexts and are acknowledged

17 I deliberately did not use quotation marks around the word students, to indicate that in this text reflecting an interaction, we might see that a differentiation between students and lecturers is created.
as part of the act-supplement of the ongoing processes. For instance, the context—or already ongoing construction—of ‘Hans knowing more about research paradigms’ connects to the ongoing constructions of ‘knowledge as a possession of a person (Hans)’ and of ‘knowledge as fixed, stable and transferable’. I asked Hans, The Big Guy, to elaborate on research paradigms, and he supplemented that by doing so in a powerful way. The Big Guy took a very active role, which was supplemented in a more passive way, by the others. As I stated in the text, even I as the one who had invited him, had trouble intervening his lecture (see remark: After twenty minutes, I am able to interrupt him on p. 128). These constructions can be seen as contexts that influence the act-supplements in the text about the workshop.

With another context, i.e. that of ‘knowledge as ongoing construction’, another possible relational reality could be constructed, for instance, one in which ‘the ideas on researching of students is valued as a way of taking part in the processes of constructing perspectives on research.’ An explicit co-construction of what research might be, could have taken place when there had been more open conversation, in which students could have expressed their doubts or different perspectives on research. Obviously, the contexts or setting did not invite them to do so. In this search for soft differentiation, we might say, that in the text Paradigms, the ‘teacher’s’ opinion is more powerful than the ‘student’s’. We stay thus in the stabilized act-supplement of valuing the teacher’s opinion above the student’s.

**Reflective Conversation on Workshop 2**

The following text is written as if it was a conversation between some participants of the Living Environment Research Project. As with the reflective conversation on workshop 1 (page. ) , this is a constructed conversation, based on four documents: a summary of my story about the workshops 1 and 2 that I sent to the ‘students’, and the reactions of Ivo, Bianca, and Ellen on that text.

**Loes:** Since the information workshop, I’ve been wondering if it was a good idea to include the part of the program about ‘looking at what you want to do’ in this research project. It probably contributed
to the rather concrete plans that came up in the e-mails. The correspondence that transpired between the workshops, gave me the impression that people are getting restless, and think that they already have to choose a topic, whereas I wanted to convey that this is only an initial development of ideas, and that choosing a focus might take time, or maybe should take some time.

**Bianca:** I think that it’s important to convey your intent and to examine if it’s being understood during the workshop or afterwards, like through this reflection. I didn’t get the impression that I had to choose. I experienced the focus (children from our street and their free time) as being there on its own, but it’s all right if that changes. I was surprised by the concrete actions that the others carried out. I always want to get insight into the consequences of my choices before acting on them. I try to give myself time for that, if possible. I didn’t get the impression from you that I didn’t get that space.

**Loes:** During the second workshop, I wanted to give space to the philosophy of science because the students’ answers to the questions, and the plans they wrote down, gave me the impression that many students view science as something that will give them the right answers. The relativity of that, and the value of other opinions on truth, is something that I want the students to get acquainted with.

**Ellen:** Shoulnd’t that be something to discuss in the forum?18

**Bianca:** Yeah, interesting. Your opinion on ‘truth’ is clear to me and I find it fascinating.

**Loes:** We planned a story on paradigms, and on the three paradigms of learning in Real-Life Learning (Hans). After all, we offer a research process that is designed from Paradigm III, i.e. critical ethnographic. I hope that ethnographic research and what ‘critical’ means (in the workshop we stress the loosening of ‘common sense’ as a critical aspect) becomes somewhat clearer.

**Ellen:** I thought the discussion on taking notes was interesting. I have a lot to learn about that! I experience that I’ve had hundreds of thoughts and ideas to write down, and work out, these past few months.

**Bianca:** Yes, I make a lot of e-mind maps and notes on loose pieces of paper, or in a notebook. Joan mentioned that she recognizes the idea of paradigm switch and that people, like the managers at her

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18 Ellen suggested creating a forum on the intranet during the second workshop. We agreed that she would to find out if that is possible and would take the lead in starting this up.
school, say they act in one paradigm but still act out of another one. I think there’s recognition too. In my work situation, at the prison, and the school teachers from primary schools, and within my own learning processes, I realize again and again that I must get away from old hindering rules. I see that I have the space to be creative, not just directly productive.

**Loes:** I asked for a description of the material you brought and you all gave me your ideas for a research focus. We stayed with Laura’s experience for a long time, and considered the ethical questions that were involved in it. Again, this was a conversation about what it means to be a researcher, about ethical considerations and about the role you could have as an ethnographic researcher.

**Ellen:** I like that there’s space in the workshops to diverge occasionally from the track of purpose. I get the feeling that it generates trust among the research participants. Just to analyze as it is in a learning team; it entails probing and discovering each other’s worlds, visions, values, and norms. When the trust in each other increases, you feel respect and then the trust in yourself grows, so that you dare to speak more deeply at a more profound level. This ultimately allows abstract topics to become more concrete.

**Loes:** At the end of the workshop, my research came up and I indicated that I would like to share my interpretations with you. Again, this started a conversation about the confidentiality of information. I had the strong impression that being researched, brings these subjects out more easily. Once again, this parallel yields a great deal. For instance, I have to take a step to share my interpretations with you. Just do it, I decided.

**Bianca:** Recognition!

**Loes:** I genuinely have the opinion that exchange will enhance the richness of my research. What’s scary is that I cannot oversee the influence that my observations will have on you. Of course, that’s life, and that’s something that’s part of research.

**Ellen:** The idea to be researched myself is a pleasant thought. I have the idea that I’m being followed in a challenging way. You are going to observe and share your observations. This feels like an extra impetus to develop myself. I experience that I’m thinking about my development on a daily basis. I learn from this. I like it that you’re following my learning. You are my coach for the next few years and I’m going to benefit from that.

**Bianca:** The threshold to share my interpretations with you is passed
in this response to what you’ve worked out. I am not that far that I can share these with the other participants. I don’t have to.

**Context: Leading and Following 2**

In the reconstructed reflective conversations on workshop 1 and 2, Ivo, Ellen, and Bianca wrote reactions to my recapitulating text about the workshops. I invited the ‘students’ to respond to my text and they did. They followed my text and responded to my remarks. Ellen added a dimension: my texts set her to writing. In all these reactions, I am constructed as a teacher, for instance by Ivo when he explains that he wants to please the teacher with his performance. He constructs me as a teacher, who will and can judge his performance.

‘Teachers’ act from their contexts of what they assume a ‘teacher’ should do, and so do ‘students’. For instance, ‘students’ express that they expect the ‘teachers’ to say what needs to be done. Both Ivo and Bianca tell the ‘teacher’ in the constructed *Reflective conversation on workshop 1* that the ‘teacher’ has to give clear assignments, convey her intentions, and examine if she is understood. We might say that the local, social and historical contexts of ‘teachers’, as well as ‘students’, stabilize the fixed characteristics of teachers and students.

Another example is Ellen’s remark about being researched. She pointed at the distance between my research and her development, the distance I already created in the letter of invitation at the start of the Living Environment Research Project: I research them doing research. She could have supplemented my remark, of being insecure about sending them my interpretations, differently; for instance she could have recognized me as a fellow researcher.

At a PhD workshop in March 2006, I presented some material about the Living Environment workshops. This material was what I had sent to the students including their responses and was the basis for the dialogue format in the excerpt above.

Hugo, The Professor, asked, ‘Loes, what were your objectives in sending this text to the students?’
My response was that he was the one who had suggested it, and that it had sounded like a good idea to involve the students in the creation of the research like this.

‘Yeah, that’s the case,’ Hugo replied, ‘but what did you want to observe by sending them this text? How did you want to influence them, by sending a text and by sending them just this text?’

‘Mmm, I haven’t looked at the text in this way, but now that I take a second look, I realize that I used the text to explain my purposes in the workshop, to make right what I thought I did not accomplish during the workshop.’

### Encounter with Supervisors: Choose a Focus

In Chapter 1, I introduced my supervisors, Professor Hugo Letiche and Professor Dian Marie Hosking. I constructed nicknames, which I used alternately with their names, to stress that the way they are presented is not simply mirroring who they are. In the following text, I tell a story of an appointment with The Master and The Professor, in Heusden, 17 February 2006, as based on my journal entries.

I was caught in an enormous traffic jam, because I had forgotten that spring holiday meant going south to the snow for many people, rather than doing research. I wound up being more than an hour late at The Master’s home for the meeting with her and The Professor. I had already phoned them twice to report my delay, knowing that we had made our appointment before a dinner appointment that The Professor, his wife and The Master already had standing. This would disrupt their schedule very much. While I parked my car, I was amazed by the beauty of the old fortified city. I asked myself why I had never seen this before and I walked to the address.

The Master lives in one of the meticulously restored listed houses in the town. When I rang the bell, I heard two dogs barking and I contained my old fear of dogs when The Master opened the door. ‘Am I still allowed to come in?’ I asked. The Master nodded and opened the door to the warm living room furnished in elegant serene earthy colors where The Professor was waiting. We started a conversation in the living room. After a while, we continued talking in the kitchen, while The Master prepared the meal.

With a full head and an empty stomach, I drove home in less than half the time that it took me to get there. Unfortunately, I did not record this conversation, but
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I made notes in my journal. A lot of big names and streams of thought passed by, and I had written down: ‘Heidegger, Husserl, Levinas, social constructionism, Buddhism, Behaviorism, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, Jankélévitch on listening.’ Many notes contained differences between the ideas of Husserl and Heidegger. The day after the meeting, I wrote in my journal, amongst other things, that I felt that they had taken me seriously, ‘even though I was not able to participate in the conversation substantively, I was able to ask questions.’ I continued in my journal with, ‘the question that lies ahead of me is what I am going to focus on: the interactions or the organization of the learning. Earlier I wrote about my fascination with the relation between the group and individual.’ I also gave my interpretation of phenomenology in my journal. ‘What distracts me from phenomenology is that it is assumed that the scientist has more insight than the other.’ This is an ethical choice important to me.’ A few days later on 23 February, I wrote in my journal again about my focus saying that I wanted to undertake value-laden research and part of that is ‘refusing the hard differentiated subject-object relation and exploring the possibilities of dialogical research.’ I listed relations that could turn into subject-object differentiations: ‘me-student; me-groups of students; me-other coaches; coaches-student(s); student-researched; student-other students.’

Workshop 3: Be Critical

This narrative, of the first part of the third workshop with the participants of the Living Environment Research Project, is based on my field notes.

8 March 2006, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Today we had a slow start. Because of the bad weather almost everyone arrived late. The department that made the timetables and schedules for classrooms had decided that we met in a small room with a view of the traffic outside. Corrie came tonight for the first time. She and I had had a phone conversation during which she asked if it was possible to join the project after having missed two workshops. She told me that she was unable to participate until now because her mother had been seriously ill, and had died recently. ‘I want to continue with my masters without any further delay’, she explained, without going into any detail about her mother’s death. ‘No problem’, I responded.

19 With this remark, I limited phenomenology, unaware as I was of all kinds of notions of phenomenology that take another position on this, and unaware of phenomenology as one of the precursors of postmodernism.
The people seemed a bit tired. They had all worked during the day and made a long trip to get to the workshop. I had the feeling that I had to infect them with energy. While distributing the handouts, with the program schedule, I asked Corrie to introduce herself.

‘Well, I work as a teacher in primary education and I’m a member of a learning team with only Femke now because Gerda and Eva decided to quit the program. Cees is our coach. I couldn’t come earlier because my mother was very ill and recently died,’ Corrie explained. After a brief silence, the other students introduced themselves to Corrie and then I began.

‘We’re a small group tonight for a few different reasons. Guus and Marinus couldn’t come. Renée and I told Hans that he didn’t need to come because of the smallness of the group. And on our way here, Laura phoned to say that she was ill.’

Then I continued, ‘I asked you to take several photographs of children or youngsters in their daily context, but not in their school situation, which was a condition I had included because of the idea of that Living Environment Research Projects ought to focus on Living Environment outside the school. I asked you to choose one photograph and to make a poem about it. Before we do an exercise with that, I want to tell something about taking notes, like I had promised.’

Ivo asked, ‘Can’t I make pictures, instead of taking notes?’

I saw some confusion on his face.

‘You can keep records of what happens in various ways: you can make pictures, make video or audio recordings or take notes. Combinations of these techniques are also very useful. Each way of keeping a record will offer different information. We talked about ‘head’ and ‘scratch’ notes in the previous workshop, and I brought you a copy of a book chapter from A Vocabulary for Field notes (Sanjek, 1990). I want to ask you to keep scratch notes from this workshop, just as an exercise,’ I said, while looking at the circle of students.

Ellen asked, ‘Wow, how do you do that?’

Joan expressed similar uncertainty, ‘What do we need to write down?’

‘For now, just take notes as you think you should. Work them out for the next workshop and then we’ll discuss what works. We’ll split the group in two. One half takes notes during the first half of the workshop and then we take turns,’ I said.

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The terminology of ‘head’ and ‘scratch notes’ is taken from Sanjek (1990). ‘Scratch notes’ refers to the scribbling made during a participant observation. The term ‘head notes’ refers to the remembrances of the researcher. Head and scratch notes are combined (worked out) into what Sanjek calls ‘field notes’.
‘How is this different from keeping a journal,’ Bianca wanted to know.

‘In a journal, you write up all kinds of thoughts and experience. It’s wise to separate notes, like you’re now going to make about this workshop, from your journal notes, which are different. You can combine your observation notes or scratch notes, as Sanjek calls them, with what you remember, or your ‘head notes’, hereby you make your ‘field notes’. In your journal, you write what you think of those notes, i.e. about your experience and thoughts about your research. Some authors on research methods, make distinctions between data and information, or material. You gather information and by using it to develop specific concepts, for example, you make data out of it. You give meaning to the information, which authors then refer to as data.’

I continued, ‘There are different ways to gather information. For example, you can evoke the information, or it’s there for you to observe. For instance, when taking notes of a workshop, the information is already there. The workshop is not set up just to provide you with information. When you are going to interview someone, you evoke the material. There are several different sources of information: brochures, texts, notes, recordings et cetera.’

‘Let’s start with the pictures’, Renée interrupted my lecturing. ‘Who is going to take notes during the first shift?’

Did I see some relief on the faces of the students? Immediately the group split up in two and people were busy grabbing paper and pencils.

Renée explained, ‘The exercise is as follows: we lay the pictures down in the middle without the poem. Everyone writes on these post-its what comes up, by looking at the picture, and after that we take out the poems and place them by the pictures.’ Renée and I moved some tables into the middle area, to form one large table. I put the picture I had received from Guus on the table, bending the paper in a way so that the poem was out of sight.

Joan says, ‘Oh, I’ve done it wrong; I made a series of photographs.’

‘I didn’t do it right either. I took a picture from a magazine!’ tells Femke.

I responded to these remarks with, ‘It seems as if you haven’t done your homework right.’

After a while, everyone was walking around, glancing the pictures, except Joan and Kim, who were sitting aside, writing in a notebook on their knees.

Renée and I stepped back from the table in the centre, and she asked for my camera to take some pictures. When I handed it over to her, she said, ‘Let’s do something else, to give them some space.’ Then she told me that I had been lecturing in a traditional teacher’s role. Immediately, I recognized the trap that I had fallen into again. Preparing the workshop, as I had done for all the workshops.
of the Living Environment Research Project, thus far, made it more difficult for me to go with the flow of the workshop and the students. I remembered that this was the reason why I did not prepare for my encounters with children, when I was working as a speech therapist. Well, I did some preparation: I knew the child and envisioned what we should be working on, but how we would do that was something that occurred in the creativity of the moment. I realized, ‘I’ve lost it again’. While I thought this over, the group started to move; remarks were written on the post-its and placed by the pictures. No-one was speaking. At one point the writing stopped, a tricky moment, because I had to suppress my reaction to intervene. However, in the past I’ve seen that when I do nothing, someone will start writing again and that’s what happened this time. When the writing stopped for a longer period, I gave the next assignment, ‘take your poems and place them beside the pictures.’

Everyone was reading the poems in silence. I joined the group and read with them.

‘You may talk about it,’ I said.

This did not evoke conversation. Instead, everyone was quietly reading the poems and remarks. A lot of attention was given to the picture of the face of a young man and Guus’s poem. I started telling what I had noticed about the remarks and the poem.

‘There are a lot of different interpretations and I notice that your remarks differ from the text of the poem.’

‘Yes, Guus saw something different than what we saw,’ Ellen said, ‘I wrote down: insecure, that is not what I read in the poem.’

‘And I wrote: where is this? I got the feeling that it is at school and that this boy is just waiting,’ Joan told.

‘So the interpretation depends on what you know about the picture?’ I asked.

‘That’s also the case with my picture.’ Ivo pointed to his picture with a fat woman in a messy surrounding. ‘A lot of you thought it was a picture of a woman at home and then you see an awful mess. It’s still a mess, but when you know it’s in the pupils’ classroom at the university, you get a different impression of the woman.’

‘The interpretations of my picture are pretty much alike,’ Bianca noticed.

We all looked at her picture, with her son and his grandfather looking at each other.

Renée asked, ‘Can we see something totally different in this picture? For instance, you think it’s a loving grandfather but actually it’s a dirty old man!’

‘No, it can’t be that. Look at the way they look at each other. You can see that the boy likes it,’ Karen replied.
‘But look at his finger,’ I said, ‘it is as if the boy shoots the man.’
‘And we can’t see what’s under the table,’ Ellen added.

The remarks, which fill in this other story, tumbled over each other. Femke seemed amazed about the things that came up. Renée walked over to where the coffee was with Femke, and said to her, ‘Cool isn’t it?’ Femke nodded and with some fresh coffee, they walked back to the table in the centre. When we went on, to the other pictures, it became easier to make up different stories.

Femke said, ‘It’s easier to do this with my picture because I don’t know the people in it.’

Femke had brought a picture from a magazine of a girl in a white dress in a field of flowers. Both Bianca and Ellen were in form and made up stories at a quick pace.

Joan noticed, ‘We’re always laughing when we make up the other stories, and those stories are increasingly negative.’

‘That’s not necessarily always the case, but it might be a result of the positive pictures you have brought with you,’ I commented, wondering if our laughter would disturb Joan.

‘Isn’t it time for a smoke break?’ coach Renée asked.

During the break, I stayed in the room with Femke, Corrie, Joan, and Kim, while the others were in the smoking area.

‘Why are we doing this,’ Corrie asked me.

I responded by saying, ‘Well, you can see this as an exercise with stories about researching, about what research is. You might develop an idea about what you can do with material, and out of that, you can get ideas about what you are going to do in your own research.’

‘But when will we have to have our research question?’ Joan wanted to know.

To my surprise, Karen responded to Joan’s question, ‘Hey, I recognize some patterns in the way my learning teammates and I work in the course.’ She further explained, ‘Some of us develop a plan very quickly and others broaden things up.’

‘Yes, and both ways have their advantages and disadvantages,’ I added.

‘I started my journal this Sunday and it helps me to discover these kinds of patterns,’ Karen said.

Then the others came back into the room and Joan’s question remained unanswered.
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Joan’s Narrative about Workshop 3

The next narrative consists of two texts written by Joan, following my request to the ‘students’ to send me their field notes. Joan sent an e-mail to the group, together with her notes in an attachment. In the e-mail, she wrote:

Hi everyone,
My notes and head notes that I written out are in the attachment. I hope that they add something and reach you. I’m still getting used to FCC. Furthermore, I thoroughly enjoyed reading Bianca and Ellen’s notes. I can recognize myself in your interpretations. I recognize, so to speak, much of what you have written. By the way, I think it would be nice to do something together with the group just for fun, like have dinner together or something. I notice that I feel a need that we should get to know each other better, also outside of the research. The contacts are, as I see it, on the one hand deep, and on the other hand brief. It’s just an idea.
For now,
Best wishes,
Joan

Excerpt from Joan’s attachment

I notice that I nourish expectations concerning this workshop. I feel stuck in the research. I ask myself how to ‘enter’ the world of the youngsters. I notice that I want an answer and that I expect, that during the workshop, a kind of cadre or direction will be provided. In the meantime, I notice that this impasse causes me to forget the research. I have to do do many other things. It turns out that I’m pretty poor at dividing my attention between the different assignments or projects, and I realize that I have to work on my time management.

Concerning this workshop, I have my doubts about the benefits of the photographs. What can the discussion based on my story add to my personal question concerning research?

Afterwards, I notice that the discussion of the photographs has added to or solved my problem. It shows how hard it is to think from another perspective, it provides me with the reassurance that we are making a difficult switch. However, simultaneously, it shows how worthwhile the change in perspectives can be, how different the information acquired is. For someone who very much likes to observe, analyze, and interpret her surrounding, this is a huge revelation. At the same time, I have a lot of fun with these kinds of

21 FCC is the intranet system the faculty of Education used at that moment.
22 Both Ellen and Bianca made notes on the second half of the workshop after the break.
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'developmental processes'. I initially began with a question and expected that question to be answered. It turned out that I got my answer from an unexpected perspective. I have asked myself what the basis of this learning process is, and which type of learning is more valuable. Is a straight answer to a question or arriving at an answer through roundabout reasoning more valuable? Is this way of learning coincidental or based on my own way of interpreting? How can I teach this way of learning to my pupils? Do they think the way I do? Many more questions have come to mind.

In general, it teaches me something about the function of active learning processes. Actually, this is constructivism at large; making up your own interpretation and therefore supplementing your knowledge. It’s beautiful when you see theory’s value in reality.

[...]

Then, there’s a change in perspective. Renée, puts the cat among the pigeons, by adding a new element. We become giddy. This irritates me a bit. It doesn’t help with my personal question of ‘how to enter the living environment’. Will I get to the answer by looking at photographs from another perspective? Is Renée just joking? What does she want us to discover? How special it is again, to connect in the moment. In thought, my learning question on reality makes new insights come into being. Of course we aren’t doing this for nothing. I realize that it’s hard, not only for me, but for everyone. That is why we laugh when we look at the pictures from another perspective. We do take the change in perspective seriously, but it’s not easy to do. I think, but I’m not sure, that we laugh and become giddy by not taking ourselves seriously, because our task is so difficult to do. We might not be able to do it at this moment.

I notice two things immediately:

1. We act giddy about it. This makes me realize that it’s hard to take another perspective seriously. When we have to think from another perspective, we will have to take this other perspective seriously. No giggling about the perspective of youngsters; that’s not possible. Then you should stop your research, because then I am not taking them serious.

2. In addition, when we apply a shift in perspective, we keep on thinking in specific frameworks. We can fill them all up with different perspectives, make them grotesque, and work them out; however, we’re still limited in doing this by situating the perspective based on our own interpretation. Then the change in perspective has not succeeded. We think that we do justice to others, however, we still don’t crawl into other people’s skin. We put on different spectacles, but it will still be our own spectacles, not those of someone else.

Fortunately, Loes announces the break. I notice that I’m getting too tired to go on further.
Context: Leading and Following 3

Anja (16 July 2008): ‘There are different dance communities; some have strict rules about the male being the leader and the female the follower. In other groups, women can also dance the leading part. Basically, the leader decides what direction to take, provides the framework so to speak and the follower fills in the details, but that changes over time and also from one group to another. I love to dance both roles, but prefer not to switch roles during one dance, as some do. That confuses me too much. I need to know who is taking the lead and who is the follower, I am able to switch, but not during one dance. Some people find that playful, but I am not able to do it. I don’t like it.’

In previous contexts Leading and Following 1 and 2, I paid attention to harder differentiated teacher-student relations in the texts of the workshops. When reflecting on text Workshop 3: Be critical, I focus on softer differentiated relations. We might story the teacher-student relations in this text, parallel to the roles of leaders and followers in an Argentine tango, as teachers defining the framework and students filling in the details. This resembles an Argentine tango style of leading and following, a construction of a more soft differentiated relational reality. The photographs and poems in that workshop, and the reactions to them are spontaneous improvisations, but the frameworks were determined by the teachers. The students were asked to be critical in their first interpretations, the coaches welcomed alternative interpretations; expressions of trouble in finding other interpretations did not get much attention. The teachers took the Argentine role of a leader and the students that of a follower.

When we look at texts as narratives, in already ongoing contexts, contexts such as ‘students trusting the teachers’ could be at stake. All students took part in the exercise with the photographs. Although Joan, and also Corrie, did express their doubts about the exercise, they only did that afterwards. Joan’s remark ‘Of course we are not doing this for nothing’, might be interpreted as ‘trusting’ (what might be seen as constructed as) the teachers to know what is right for her. She explicitly stated that ‘to connect in the moment’ was special and delivered her unexpected answers. From a relational orientation, the texts of the workshop can be read as: ‘We

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23 I do not use quotation marks with the words teacher and student, indicating that I see the teachers as constructed in the inter-act by the supplement of the students, who fill in the details of the exercise.
created a situation in which the exercise of the teachers was performed.’ Contexts that could be already ongoing, in the inter-act of students doing the exercise, might be texts such as:

• Teachers should develop or choose exercises and students should do them, and/or
• The teachers know what they are trying to reach and know the best way to get at that, and/or
• I do not know if this exercise is going to help me, but I am sure they know, and/or
• You can only refuse to do an exercise if you can clearly express why not, and/or...

I would like to point at some other inter-acts in the conversations. Sampson (1993/2008) argues, indebted to George Herbert Mead and Mikhail Bakhtin, that: ‘We address our own acts in anticipation of the responses of real others with whom we are currently involved; imagined others, including characters from our past as well as from cultural narratives; historical others; and the generalized others’ (p. 106, emphasis in original). In the texts about workshop 3, the ‘Self’ seems to anticipate: the responses of imagined, generalized Others and previous experience with other ‘students’, for instance, by withholding to intervene when the writing stops. This anticipation of responses of imagined, generalized Others occurs in the preparation of workshops, as well as in the inter-acts during the workshop. Anticipating our acts, to the responses of generalized Others, creates Other as a text of characteristics ‘just like’, in this case other students. When I prepare a workshop or deliberately choose an action (non-acting in this example), I relate to those generalized texts as objects, in the sense that I am the active subject, acting on the passive Other. Relating with another as object, is an example of a hard differentiated Self-Other relation. This implicates that teacher-student relations are not always soft differentiated, neither always hard differentiated.

Anja compares the beginning, of learning to dance the Argentine tango, as learning the alphabet (see p. 101), with which endless variations in texts can be made. Considering the teacher-student relations in the texts about the workshops, hardly any other alphabet than that of traditional ballroom dancing, seems to be enacted. Ballroom tango has far more fixed roles,
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of leaders and followers, than the Argentine tango. We assume in our communication about the program that other alphabets are possible (see for instance the excerpts of the brochure in Chapter 1, and the discussion about the objectives in the course in workshop 1 with the students of the North learning team, in this chapter) but is that what we co-construct? Contexts of distinct characteristics of teacher and students, and distinct activities of teachers and students, seem frequently present in the inter-acts in the texts Learning the Alphabet. Whose alphabet should be learned before we can dance? Sampson (ibid.) sees asymmetries more often occurring in relations in ‘situations that involves social categories that are themselves based on power differentials (e.g. man/woman; black/white; civilized/primitive)’. According to the above analysis of the contexts, teacher-student relations do involve social categories that stabilize asymmetrical relations like who determines the alphabet. This involvement of social categories, implies that acts are more anticipated in response to generalized Others than to present Others. The text about workshop 3 might be read as telling about acts that relate to both generalized and present Others. Acts related to responses to generalized Others are the acts that define the framework; acts more responding to the details, are acts in anticipation of responses to present Others. However, the example in the text of withholding an intervention, takes the edge off this hard differentiation between defining frameworks and improvising.

March - June

In the period from March to June, there were several workshops with the Living Environment Research Project group, with the Haarlem learning team, and with North learning team (see overview of workshops on p. 98), and an encounter with my supervisors. Elaborating on all these workshops, as I did with the first three workshops, would be too much. I choose, instead, to create some snapshots of an encounter with my supervisors, to report on an e-mail conversation with Joan, to note an appointment with the North learning team and to comment on an appointment with Guus and Marinus. As in the other sections, I have selected texts to illustrate different teacher-student relations; texts that are brought to dance with texts on soft Self-Other differentiation, in the critical reflections in the grey boxes. Again, I do so in an attempt to open up other possible relational realities.
On 27 March 2006, The Professor and I continued our conversation on phenomenology, in The Professor’s office in the attic of the University for Humanistics. We talked about my critical reading of parts of Gergen’s *Realities and Relationships* (1994).

**Excerpt of my writing**

Gergen explains social constructionism as an epistemological stance. In reaction to relativism or nihilism, he sees morality as virtue constructed by social conventions and at p. 113 he says: ‘...But in this [floating between moralities, never embedded or committed] it is mistaken to presume that constructionist meta-theory is itself a ‘grounds for action’ or possibly a ‘Cognitive structure’ dictating behavior. As I have argued, constructionism is a form of discursive positioning, an action in itself and not a causal source of action...’ There can be a moral commitment, but no justificatory base for these commitments. Gergen’s epistemological position offers possibilities of change and different ethical positions, without giving a direction to that change. This gives me two ideas.

One of them is that action and morality are intertwined: an idea that I like very much. The other is that an ethical position is not a very important issue for Gergen, in that he does not want to take a position. However, on p. 131 Gergen talks about a renaissance of concern with values and ideology.

Hosking (2005a) gives her explanation of ‘critical’: ‘interest in dissensus—exploring how powerful processes construct dominance or facilitate openness and multiplicity—exploring how unitary constructions can be deconstructs and disrupts (for example, Deetz, 2000). And least, inquiry can embrace its relational/constructive qualities by shifting emphasis—to ‘opening’ up new possible identities and (local) worlds— to transformation rather than simply ‘finding out’ (Hosking 2004).’ When acting, we make choices, so in my opinion it is impossible not to take ethical choices in consideration.

The Professor’s first reaction at this encounter was that he thought it was a reasonable piece, although as he explained, he finds it hard to give positive feedback and rather makes comments instead. The Professor explained that
phenomenology is in essence a humanist perspective; consciousness and human perception of things and events are the focus, as for instance Merleau Ponty pointed out.

‘Because as humans, we cannot “study” humanity as it is, there has to be something of a “metaphysics”, or an attempted view from the outside,’ The Professor argued. ‘Dian Marie’s metaphysics is in Buddhism’, The Professor said, ‘while I tend towards Levinas.’

According to The Professor, Gergen stays within phenomenology because he claims to focus on how social phenomena are created. Confused, with again another understanding of phenomenology, and with the idea that I do agree that humans cannot do without some sort of metaphysics, I drove home. How to story my metaphysics? Do I need to do so? It sure has something to do with my understanding of human beings as non-static, but changeable.

In an e-mail dated 25 April 2006, Joan wrote:

Hello Loes and Renee,

Unfortunately, I have to cancel tomorrow and probably for the whole research. The cancellation of tomorrow has to do with the fact that my father is very ill. However, aside from this, I’ve noticed for a while that I’m finding this research difficult.

I notice that I lack knowledge that I’d like to acquire through following a module at the Special Educational Needs course. This, in combination with the tasks I have at school and my growing enthusiasm for orthopedagogiek\textsuperscript{24}, has made me decide to stop with this research. It is too early for me.

I would have liked to tell you this in person, however, the situation at home does not permit that right now. I will contact you when the occasion arises.

For now, have fun tomorrow and good luck with the follow-up of the research.

Best wishes,

Joan (translation LH)

Although Joan had chosen to stop joining the project, she did attend an appointment with North learning team (Corrie and Femke) and their coach Cees on May 18. From the transcript of the audio recording of that encounter I selected the following excerpt which I interpret as a conversation in which teacher and student roles are negotiated. We discuss the critical position of the Master’s Program in Ecological Pedagogy,

\textsuperscript{24} In the Netherlands, orthopedagogiek (as a distinctive part of the pedagogical sciences) is concerned with child rearing and education of children with special needs. This is often equated with developmental psychology.
Loes: The critical position we take in the Master’s Program in Ecological Pedagogy is that of questioning expertise. Our approach in education, and in youth care as well, is pretty much from the perspective we experts have. “Hey, that parent is neglecting his or her child or that is a parent who puts on too many demands on the child.” We as well educated experts, and as the largest common denominator in education, are white and female.

Joan: Yes and in menopause. (She laughs loud) And feminist, and, oh sorry, now I am crossing a line. (Laughs)

Loes: Well come on, don’t leave us in the middle of a sentence. Come on, say it.

Joan: Well, I think that we are all, I think, between forty and fifty.

Loes: I think you’re right, these middleclass, white, menopause women create a dominant perspective on education. Beating that dominance is our mean goal in the program—at least that’s what I think. We should try to become more aware of our unilateral perspectives. This Living Environment Research can be viewed in this light.

Joan: But when I am going to compare this with traditional research, I don’t have a research problem, like in traditional research. I don’t have a theory, I have a point of view; so my judgment is based on my point of view or perspective. Therefore, I don’t escape my fixed assumptions, so to speak.

Loes: No, but the difference is that in traditional research, you look at a point of view as something fixed, but as critical researcher you have to look at it as something that is in momentum. Then it gets interesting again.

Joan: Hmmm, finally I did develop a point of view, and now I have to doubt it again! (All laugh)

I wrote in my journal:

I am so sorry that Joan decided to stop with Living Environment Research Project. I always enjoyed her clever remarks. She stopped because, as she states in her e-mail, she thought she didn’t ‘know’ enough to get started. Although she indicated in her account of workshop 3 that joining in helped her to discover unexpected answers, she did not choose to expose herself to this anymore. Is she afraid? Afraid of what? The openness of the project? Does she want to work towards a clear goal? Doesn’t she want to join us, and were we, teachers, too determined and attached to our way of working

25 After this encounter, I did not have any contact with Joan. When I tried to reach her to ask her for comments on my texts for this book, her address and phone number were outdated.
to be able to listen to her doubts and fears? At least, she did not express them in a way. Is leaving the project the only option open for students who disagree? One issue, that students of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy often encounter, is the complexity of life, demands of work, parents, children etceteras. Although this seems part of Joan’s decision, it obviously does not seem to be the most decisive factor.

Context: Leading and Following 4

In the conversation during the appointment with North learning team, I see Joan making a cautious attempt to define our relation as a woman-woman relation, instead of as a student-teacher relation. I supplement her remark about menopause with assenting to it, but I immediately turn back, to the role of a teacher, representing the ideals of the program. When relating this conversation to the questions in the previous sections on leading and following, Joan’s remarks might be interpreted as playing on or negotiating teacher-student relations. She seems to question the intention of the program and the research project, but she seems not to experience herself as able to change both.

Her last remark in the conversation, about developing and doubting points of view, might be seen as a supplement of fear, for the uncertainty of the continuous and ongoing challenge I proposed. She supplements this with laughter, like the others, but that does not mean she accepts it, or that she embraces that perspective. The questions I ask myself in my journal are still important. We constructed a situation in which the influence of ‘students’ on the workshops was minimal, and we seemed to stick to our more or less predefined roles as teachers and students. Next to that, we opened up the dominant construction for most of the ‘students’ of what we were doing (researching), with minor perspectives on alternatives.

Appointment Guus and Marinus: Passion

The following section is based on a transcript of an appointment with Guus and Marinus. After the sixth workshop held on 21 June 2006, with all the students of the research group, Renée and I had an appointment with the two of them.
Learning the Alphabet

to talk over the progress of their work so far, and to discuss their plans in more
detail. The summer holiday was about to start and I thought it was good to have
a discussion with them. Renée and I had already had several appointments with
the other learning teams, but an appointment with Marinus and Guus hadn’t
occurred so far. Although I was aware of some of Guus’s ideas and plans, I
had no idea what Marinus was up to. I titled this section *Passion* because of
the passion of Marinus for his research topic that seems to grow during the
conversation. This made it an encounter I felt passionate about.

I opened the discussion after getting settled, and having tested the recording
device.

‘How are things going with your research, Marinus?’

Marinus started to tell, ‘I’m in a gathering phase and I will continue with that
during summer holiday. Then I think I can draw conclusions, based on reading
and sifting. I’m curious to know how wearing headscarves effects children. I
already did some interviews with children who wear them.’

Renée said, ‘That’s great.’

‘I have a research idea about looking for opinions about the group that wears
head scarves and those that don’t. I want to compare the opinions from the one
group or individual with that of the other and look for similarities or, yes uh,
discrepancies.’ Marinus explained.

‘Are you planning to observe girls wearing them,’ Renée wanted to know.

‘Yes,’ responded Marinus, ‘but I’m particularly interested in what happens
when they start wearing them.’

‘Yeah, there is this change from one day to another. You don’t know what
makes them start wearing them,’ Guus added.

‘I want to know if they are approached differently by the other pupils or by
my colleagues.’

Renée suggested, ‘You can start wearing something else yourself.’

‘Yeah, a *djellaba*,’ was Guus’s enthusiastic support.

‘Or something else unexpected,’ I added, while I saw on Marinus’s face that
he would not even consider these suggestions.

Then Marinus cut short our enthusiasm and said, ‘But that’s not about the
girls, I am interested in what they encounter.’

More serious, I asked him why he was so fascinated by this topic.

‘Well, I have the experience that the kids are forced to wear them, and that
they aren’t happy with it themselves.’

Then the conversation shifted towards societal norms, freedom of choice,
and possible down sides of freedom. Western ideas about choice taken from
another perspective looks very different. We discussed how to create research
that was feasible, interesting and at the same time, not too large. I asked him what the relevance of all this would be for his school.

While thinking this over, Marinus said, ‘Relevance is, yes, a better understanding of the person wearing the scarves. I notice that hardly any problem is made at our school. Those scarves are there, but a bigger deal is made about wearing a cap than a headscarf, and that, I think, is special.’

Guus immediately came with an explanation, ‘That’s obvious, wearing a headscarf is a religious thing, whereas a cap isn’t.’

Renée replied, ‘But isn’t that similar? It’s about showing that you belong to a group.’

Marinus said, ‘But there is much more pressure on the girls to wear the scarves. That’s different.’

In an attempt to bring the focus back to Renée’s point, I asked, ‘Isn’t there societal pressure to wear a cap?’

‘I think that the scarves affect the teacher as well, maybe it’s interesting to see how teachers at our school react to this issue.’ Marinus returned to his initial question.

‘What do you see as different from reactions to a cap?’ I asked him.

‘Well, there’s no problem with the scarves. Everyone seems to accept them, but I think that a lot of our teachers see these girls as being forced to do so, and feel sorry for them.’

Guus supported Marinus’s observation, ‘Yeah, girls that don’t wear them start wearing them, from one day to the next, and then start telling other girls that they should wear them as well.’

‘I can’t imagine that they change so drastically overnight. I had this girl that assured me she was not going to wear it, and now she does, and I’m not allowed to talk about it with her anymore,’ said Marinus.

‘The problem with caps is different. Boys can’t wear a cap on their head when they are having and appointment with their employer, for work placement. That’s why we should forbid them to wear them at school, as if they were on the street,’ Guus added.

Renée’s fire blazed away when she said, ‘You can teach them that! You don’t have to forbid them to wear a cap during the entire school day. You can tell them not to wear a cap when having those types of interactions, can’t you? They’re not stupid, are they?’

Guus responded, ‘Yes, but what to do with all the chains and tattoos?’

Marinus interrupted, ‘And we can go on and on with these things. It reminds me about a Gothic girl. What does such a child have to do to be appreciated by a future employer? Aren’t you discarding your identity? I can imagine that when you take off your cap, you take off your identity.’
I immediately recognized his story. ‘Yeah, I met this boy in the US who had to shave off his blue-dyed hair. I had similar thoughts about that.’

‘This reminds me of my own experience in high school. The headmaster did not allow me to take my exams if I did not cut off my hair. That was back in ’68. I tricked the teacher and did my hair up, so it looked as if it was cut. You should have seen his face the next day, when I had long hair again,’ Marinus continued to tell, with a smile on his face.

Renée sat poised on the edge of her seat and said, ‘That says something about the power of schools and teachers.’

‘Yeah, we have a lot of power,’ agreed Marinus.

‘Power to tell them what to do and what not to wear, a cap or not,’ I filled in.

Marinus concluded, ‘This research idea is probably a bit in line with those kinds of things, such traumas.’

Renée and I spoke simultaneously, both with the message that, ‘It’s fantastic to discover these kinds of things through your research, to discover that it’s so close to yourself.’

With twinkling eyes, Marinus told, ‘In the sixties, many rules were broken and at the same time, new rules were set. Things about wearing earrings, jeans, and the kind of moped indicated what kind of group you belonged to.’

We talked about kinds of mopeds and jeans that were important in those days. Marinus had the role of expert on these issues, because he is a few years older than Renée and me. Then I turned the conversation to the research focus by saying:

‘This is an interesting focus for your research, you can start up a discussion on what to do with scarves and caps from another perspective, from that of power relations in schools.’

Renée added, ‘You might want to look at work from Kincheloe and Apple. I’ll send you some titles on these issues of power in classrooms.’

‘As a start for your research, you can write down your own story, oh, and I have this article by Kincheloe in my bag; shall I make a copy of that so you can start right away?’

Yes please, that would be very helpful,’ Marinus replied.

When Renée and I drove back to Haarlem together, we agreed that it was a good workshop because Marinus seemed to have found motivation, and he seemed passionate about the relation with his own experience. We expected that he was going to read some of the suggested literature and start collecting material.
Can this text *Passion* be regarded a possible example of soft differentiation in teacher-student relations? At the end of the text, I concluded that it was an exciting encounter. I was excited because there was no predetermined goal but a conversation that developed in the inter-acts. When making and re-reading the transcript of my recording of that encounter, I was touched by the enthusiasm conveyed by Marinus’s active contributions to the conversation. The conversation seemed to become livelier when Marinus began supplementing my remarks about a boy with blue-dyed hair, by telling about his own experience with a teacher ordering him to cut off his hair. From then on, we seemed to develop a collaborative construction of a research project; a relation of subjects that improvise act-supplements, which I interpret as soft differentiated teacher-student relations. Up till that moment, Renée and I more or less seemed to have to drag answers out of him.

The next story provided me a second thought on this.

In an appointment with my critical friends Chris and Marianne, two fellow PhD researchers, I discussed a part of my transcript of the encounter. I directed their attention to the part in which we talk about the sixties. I asked them what they thought of the power relation in that part. ‘Something is happening there’, Chris observed, ‘a conversation started in which Marinus, Renée and you seemed to be participating equally, and Guus seemed to be on the sideline.’ Pleased with his observation I said, ‘yeah, that was what I noticed. I decided to prolong the conversation so Marinus would be able to notice and enjoy his own contribution as well.’ ‘Hey, hey’, Chris responds, ‘then you create a power-over-situation again, you are not in a conversation with him, but you chat along!’

With the remark of me prolonging the conversation, I position the student as the follower and myself as a leader again. Chris’s remark, about this text, influenced my reading of the section *Passion*. At first, I thought we switched roles for a moment, Marinus teaching us, the younger ones, about the mopeds and jeans in the sixties. The conversation with Chris and Marianne adds another context to this: maybe we did not switch roles
at all, perhaps I acted as a leader, who did intend to give Marinus the opportunity to show his best, and he followed by doing so. This context added to the fragment of the conversation implies the question, ‘With whom I have been dancing?’ Did I join in and dance with the present Others or did I dance with imagined Others, including other Selves (Hermans, et al., 1992; Sampson, 1993/2008)? Did I dance with Renée, Marinus, and Guus, or did I dance with my image of what is important for Marinus, and my image of a good teacher: changing roles for a moment, as long as I decided to do so. From this perspective, I still seem to be acting in a hard differentiated, teacher-student relation, i.e. acting on Other as object of imagination.

Reflection chapter 3: An Author Looking through a Window

All the narratives in this book are texts to relate to or to dance with. Reading entails the relational dance or inter-act of these narratives with local, social, and historical contexts of the reader. The reader will supplement the narratives or texts and create a new text. This puts an emphasis on the performativity of the texts in context with that of the audience. Because of that, I create a (con)text about the style of the texts presented in this chapter. The selection of fragments, the construction of texts, the organization of the texts, for instance with the boxes with silent voices, all these dance with already ongoing contexts. As writer, I try to take control, try to deal with what I assume are the contexts of the audience. In this section I explore how my style of writing might shape the relation with the reader (Gergen & Gergen, 2002). Next to the content of the texts, the style of writing does tell stories and in this reflective section, I focus on that aspect.

In writing this chapter, I made several choices. I chose to shorten some of the narratives about workshops, to elaborate and to dialogue in other parts. I made use of the voices of the students. In Learning the Alphabet, I chose to story the researcher as detached from what happened, or should I say that this style of writing chose me? In the five contexts, Leading and Following and the context Silenced or Silence?, I frequently concluded that the self is storied as an active self, differentiated from more or less passive others. The workshops are often
Let’s Dance

retold as workshops with constructions of hard-differentiated teacher-student relational realities. When I reflect on the narration of researcher-researched relations, these were also repeatedly storied as hard-differentiated. The researcher, the self, the one who storied the workshops, seems to look through a window at what is happening. The researcher is not in the workshop, as she would like to be (see for instance the story of preferring Conquergood’s (1982) dialogical research in Chapter 1). The invitation letter with which I invited the ‘students’ to participate, immediately shows a text with a hard differentiation between researched and researcher

Loes Houweling will follow the process of researching in a critical ethnographic way. That will become a research of researching. If you participate in the research of the Living Environment of children and youngsters, you will be researched yourself. Obviously, all the information will be treated as confidential. If you have any questions about this, you can contact her.

Although many texts in Learning the Alphabet are referring to emotions and the personal pronoun ‘I’ is used often, I do see many texts as containing a voice of someone detached from the situation. With descriptions like ‘while eating a sandwich, I absorb the atmosphere in the disheveled classroom. Little groups of ‘students’ talking to each other...’ I position myself as an observer of the dancing, not as one of the dancers. A detached style of writing was not something I deliberately created. I wrote and rewrote the texts on the workshops several times, and the continuous remarks of my early readers, Renée, Hugo, and Chris, were that they missed me, that they wanted me to be in the text more, wanted me to story how I felt, thought, experienced. For instance, Renée put questions in the margins of my texts, such as: ‘What do you think about this?’, or ‘You describe what you see. I would like to know something about the atmosphere’, which I tried to respond to in my next version of the text. I had difficulties with that. I tried to put in some texts about thoughts and feelings, but found that troubling, because I had not taken enough notes to be able to go back to those thoughts and feelings (at the moment things happened). I was still caught in a context of text as representation, as mirroring what happened! Why could not I see this as telling a story? Why couldn’t I make up a story that was a mixture of components of texts from transcripts and notes, journal-notes, and my reading of the texts at the moment of writing? Why was I having trouble with storying the life and soul of people and workshops? Did I stick too much to a context of research reports with a detached writing style? That context certainly was a part of it.
When reconsidering this style of writing, a style that I seemed hardly able to resist, I realized that my way of writing reflected the crux of my research theme. I decided, as manipulator of the reader, to leave the more or less distanced writing style in this chapter as it was. While entering tricky psychological grounds, I story this distanced approach, which is different from what I intended, as a result of my fear. My nervousness as I storied, in the first workshop, was not because of the ‘students’ frightening me, but because this project was going to be ‘MY RESEARCH FOR MY PHD.’ I wanted to convey how well and proper we did our educational work, in our Master course. This project had to be a success, regardless of the others participating. In an attempt to get hold on as many of the strings as possible, I distanced myself from me, so that I could succeed and carry out ‘good’ research. In effect, I danced with an imagined audience that would read my book, an imagined committee, and imagined supervisors. Put in other words: during the workshops of the Living Environment Research Project, the dance with me as researcher seem to have obstructed dancing with the participants.

During the process of writing the texts in Chapter Learning the Alphabet, a feeling of being struck by the paradox of what I stated as one of the drives for undertaking this project and the way this dance seemed to be danced, developed again. In my attempt to soften the differentiation between Self and Other, researcher and researched, teacher and student, I created distances. In the next chapters, this creation of distance and connectedness is explored further.
CHAPTER 4

Feeling Struck
In this chapter I present texts related to what I construct as the middle of the Living Environment Research Project. Again, this chapter contains different types of texts. There are texts based on notes, transcripts from audio recordings and e-mail conversations made from June on to November 2006, following a time-line. A second type of texts, in grey boxes, is constructed as contexts in which critical relational constructionism is put to work again. In these contexts, I critically reflect on the first texts by relating them to texts on critical relational constructionism in an attempt to open up other teacher-student relations. Two contexts are entitled: Talking about Dancing, one is called Building Identities. The other two are called: Dancing with an Audience, and Dancing Styles. I finish with a reflection on the construction of this chapter.

Appointment with Supervisors: Apples

On 22 June 2006 I discussed with Hugo and Dian Marie several texts. One is my descriptions of workshop 3, as presented in the section Be Critical, and the other is a text in which I described the different participants using metaphors. I invented the following metaphors while reading through my research material in May 2006.

The image of:

Joan     orchid
Ellen     hosta
Laura     Cinderella
Bianca    wind
Karen     girl
Guus      boy
Marinus   the thinker
Hans      the captain
Ivo       searcher
Renée     advice and deed
Femke     sorrow
Corrie    going to be fun
Loes      mother (of almost adult children, who are about to leave home)

The excerpt of this conversation with Hugo, whom I introduced in Chapter 1 as The Professor, and Dian Marie, introduced as The Master, also in Chapter 1, is based on a transcript of an audio recording.
Feeling Struck

**The Professor:** What’s interesting about the data is that we learn a lot about whether the people are willing to do that exercise with the photographs. We learn a lot about involvement, but we actually learn very little about the photographs and the people entering discussion about the photographs. What I often see when people start talking about photographs is that they construct a meaning collectively. You do a little bit with that, but not much. What surprises me is that the social constructionist activity was actually not explored very much.

**Student Loes:** Okay, I can see what you mean. The problem is that I did not record the workshops with the whole group, thinking it would not result in a useful recording. I only recorded the encounters with the learning teams.

**The Master:** You just take notes? Maybe someone can join you in that.

**The Professor:** I get the impression that you found yourself in a situation where you give homework and they do it. It sounds very engineered and I thought ‘Help’. I think you need to break open the construction rules with a storytelling approach, for instance. You need to get more out of the participants.

**Student Loes:** I know these are more or less traditional classes.

**The Professor:** Yeah, you make a lot of comments about people who are willing to please the teacher. No one actually does, but you expect them to bring an apple for the teacher on every page.

**Student Loes:** That is my struggle: the struggle with the idea of ‘this is my research, I am going to study and I have to do it right.’ I am pretty much aware that it is not constructionist at all.

**The Master:** That’s going too far. From a critical relational constructionist position this would be, of course, one way of constructing it. So let’s try another way of framing it.

**The Professor:** May I take it a little further? You need to separate what is happening in that classroom from what you are trying to write about it. You-writing-this is a critical awareness of constructionism, but in the classroom situation...

**The Master:** But it is related. This issue of processes is not theorized very much. That is where a lot of people have difficulties, because we are accustomed to thinking in terms of content. Therefore, it might be that your theorizing about processes is rather meager right now, because in your discussion and representation you are still drawn into some kind of substantive thinking.

**The Professor:** I can see all kinds of power structures, but you leave them implicit. Regarding the process and content in the workshops, process seems more important than content in this stage.
The Master: You use the content to see the process, of course, but the process and the sensitivity to the process is ...

Student Loes: That is my struggle, in being an educator or whatever, hmm, I started way back, focusing on the process of learning. I became aware that I also have to focus on, not the content, but on explicating my choices. I have to make clear what I think is important and that that is my choice. Nothing more or less than that.

The Professor: Why?

The Master: In your writing you mean, or with the students?

Student Loes: With the students. I am more and more aware that I have to be there as a whole person and not as someone playing the role of reflecting or mirroring what students say or do. Because I think that it is more interesting for students if I am more fully present and in the process with my ideas.

The Master: So they know when you are fully present, they experience that you are fully present!

The Master and I laugh; The Professor laughs half-heartedly with us.

The Master: Or do you wear a t-shirt *I am fully present today*. This has to do with your subject-object discussions.

While the conversation developed, I realized that I fell in the pitfall of thinking in fixed entities again: in the conversation as well as in using metaphors to describe people. With the feeling of being rapped on my knuckles, I considered whether I’d ever overcome this. I pulled myself together and continued.

Student Loes: I moved from being more focused on the process towards also focusing on content. I totally agree that this is a more designer like traditional education during this starting phase of the research. That is why I described myself as the mother of children who are about to leave home and need a last bit of information to do what I think is right.

The Professor: If I push that, it makes a fear driven impression on me.

Student Loes: That was what I tried to express in my metaphor of a mom.

The Master: Hmm, nice observation!

The Professor: As someone who has taught in the same setting as you do now, my hypothesis is that the students are trying to keep control over the entire setting. The most effective way for students to accomplish that in this situation—to assure that they determine the standards and that nothing happens that they don’t want to happen—would be to frighten the staff, the teachers. I don’t think they are very conscious about it, because it always leads to lower level of learning and activity on their own part.
While I drove home, I thought, Wow! This conversation is helping me gain insight into relational patterns. I don’t know how this will proceed, but I’m pleased with The Professor’s sensitive observation of the fear-driven processes. I don’t agree with his hypothesis on the reaction of students: we’ll see if that is the case. I’ve never thought of it as the students trying to frighten me. It seems to me to be a description of processes based on a hard differentiation between students and teachers. Although I fell into the same trap of hard differentiation again, I really want to learn to see this differently. This is a challenge I want to undertake.

**Building Shared Responsibility and Negotiating Relations**

In accordance with Dian Marie’s advice, I asked Renée to take notes during workshop 6 of the Living Environment Research Project. After the workshop, she sent me an e-mail, which aroused an experience of uncertainty.

> From: Renée  
> To: Loes  
> Date: 5 July 2006  
> Subject: My idea about the workshop on 21 June 2006

> It seems as if we start all over at every workshop. Don’t we dare to move on? There was what seemed more or less like an official round in which we all introduced ourselves because of a new participant. It had the appearance of an business meeting. The ‘distance’ was there right from the start. Topics were running through my head as ‘we should go on a benchmark trip’ with this group, have a dinner, go to a movie, or meet at each other’s homes.’ We’re in a very uncomfortable classroom and it seemed as if this workshop had nothing to do with the previous one. I felt uneasy with this and didn’t want to overrule Loes. Does she have a plan? What is this plan? I was looking for the people in the group and I experienced distance; it felt like people couldn’t show themselves. Corrie showed some of her fears (‘I don’t dare to put texts on the intranet’) and no-one picked up on this. Participation in this research requires guts and nerves from the participants. You must exceed your own frames of reference.

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1 Renée referred to an assignment in the former course, the HKP; students were invited to a benchmark research abroad. During those weeks the group cohesion between ‘students’ and ‘coaches’ develops a lot.

2 Renée quoted Corrie in the workshop.
In my opinion, the whole scene is too traditional to meet that requirement. I want to be part of the group and am not. I feel responsible for the atmosphere and see people move mainly cognitively (What will I say? Is what I say meeting the criteria?). The participants choose a role and in my opinion, it’s about getting loose from that role. Why are there separate workshops with different learning teams? Why can’t we do this in small groups, on site? This way, we wouldn’t break anything up.

(translation LH)

Renée commented more than I did in my notes on the atmosphere than on the activities of the workshop. Her judgment shocked me. In my notes on workshop 6 I wrote that I considered this workshop to be a workshop in which we discussed a lot of issues concerning the individual students’ projects. However, she seemed to view the workshop very differently. I had not considered that this was a cognitive approach, maybe because that fits well with my character. Is that why this is happening? Oh, I do need to make use of Renée’s approach more often. I am not as sensitive as she is.

On 5 July, Renée and I had an appointment with Femke and Corrie in Zwolle on a sun-filled terrace. We discussed Femke and Corrie’s plans while eating apple pie. Femke had not yet started her project and she thought about taking a very different direction. Because she wanted to apply for another position at the school for children with learning disabilities, Femke was considering focusing on learning diagnostics and the processes involved. Corrie enthusiastically told us how she had started her research, also mentioning that she had ample time for her study, working three days a week, raising two children and building a new home. During workshop 6, Corrie had explained that she wanted to focus on MSN\(^3\) because she was inspired by the rumor in the media about children using MSN to bully others and of youngsters’ eagerness to use this device. She gained access to MSN and started to use that medium for conversations with her nephew so that she herself could experience what MSN is like. She expressed her amazement about the different kind of conversations with her nephew that evolved out of that. She also organized group discussions in group 8 of her primary school. Renée and I had just visited the AERA conference\(^4\) in San Francisco and we were enthusiastic about the group of critical pedagogues we met there. This directed the conversation towards all kinds of power relations in schools.

\(^3\) MSN: the Microsoft Network. MSN support and discussion is offered through the MSN service, as well as information such as news and weather, basic e-mail capabilities, chat rooms, and message boards similar to newsgroups (Wikipedia).

\(^4\) Annual conference of the American Educational Research Association
On 7 July, I wrote in my journal:

Plodding along, thinking in processes, language, not the 'I' with thoughts being central, but the relation being central. How remarkably difficult! I blame myself. I think that I should be able to! How often do I use the word 'I' in this text?!

I am disappointed about my inability to offer something that differs from a traditional setting in the first workshops. I see myself as being responsible for maintaining subject/object differentiations.

The atmosphere in that workshop with Corrie and Femke made me feel uplifted and cheerful when we drove home. That was a workshop on more than one level. It was not merely cognitive.

**Context: Building Identities 1**

The encounter with Corrie and Femke was the last appointment of the Living Environment Research Project before the summer holiday started. During this holiday, I tried to develop some more relational understanding of my material by using discourse analysis inspired by the article by Forester (2003) that The Master suggested I read when I told her that I didn’t know how to reach a more relational approach. Forester made an analysis of a discourse of a small piece of transcript. At the AERA-conference, I had bought a book on discourse analysis by Gee (2005) and during the summer break I dived into it.

Gee indicates that certain building blocks or tasks can be recognized in interactions (as if they really exist) and gives some Discourse Analysis questions to discover them. He distinguishes

- Building significance: ‘How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?’
- Building activities: ‘What activity or activities is this piece of language being used to enact?’
- Building identities: ‘What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact?’
- Building relationships: ‘What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others?’
- Building politics: ‘What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?’
- Building connections: ‘How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?’
• Building sign systems and knowledge: ‘How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief?’ (pp 11-13)

According to Gee, these building blocks build the interaction. Although I saw the building blocks as constructions instead of existing entities, I tried out this analysis on Renée’s e-mail.

**A Gee-analysis of Renée’s e-mail, made August 2006**

**Building Significance**
Renée signified the atmosphere of the workshop of 21-06-06, by telling her experience. She added non positive notifications like: distanced, business meeting like, only cognitive. She said what she would have liked to see happening: cutting loose of roles, breaking through, extending frames of reference, showing fear. She made clear her fear to overrule me, and she questioned whether I have a plan.

**Building activities**
She was showing her feelings and questioned the organization with the learning teams. She asked for more connected interactions.

**Building identities**
She put me in an superior position by talking about not wanting to over rule me.

**Building relationships**
By writing this she demonstrated that she could discuss these things with me.

**Building politics**
She wrote about (not) taking initiative.

**Building connections**
She connected with what happened in the workshop and with her idea about what is important in workshops.

**Building significance for sign systems and knowledge**
‘Distance’, ‘business meeting’, ‘cognitive’ are not positive images. Showing fear, breaking loose of roles, extending one’s frame of reference are positive annotations.

This way of analyzing the construction of a conversation did seem to help me to focus on relational processes of constructing a conversation, although it was not feasible to do this with the large amount of material I have. I needed a less detailed kind of analysis, but practicing analysis-procedures helped to increase my sensitivity.
After Renée’s e-mail, we had many discussions about the project. One of them resulted in a question on the intranet in which we asked the students to write a short piece on what they would tell a good friend about the project so far. I explicitly asked Renée to design the evening program for workshop 7 with me. Up till then, I had done this alone. We concluded that students had very little contact with each other in between the workshops and that the students’ role was predominantly passive. In the seventh meeting, we decided we wanted to focus on the collaboration in the group as a whole. The digital forum that Ellen created in the protected intranet environment had not resulted in an outburst of interesting discussions and polemics. During the workshop with her learning team on 6 June, Ellen concluded, ‘it’s rather quiet on the intranet’. Because there seemed to be ample time to start up discussions during the workshops, the intranet could provide an alternative place for written polemics. We posed a question that might get things going. We asked participants to respond on the question: what is good research?

During the summer holiday, I had a very uneasy feeling about the prolongation of the Living Environment Research Project. When workshop 7, scheduled for 6 September, was cancelled because many people were unable to come, I doubted more and more about the project. I storied my uncertainty in a written document, which I e-mailed to Renée as an attachment.

IF I LOOK FOR PARALLELS, I WILL FIND THEM

12 September 2006
I started looking for parallels in my own process with the research project as a whole because of my unhappiness concerning how things are going. The search for those parallels will hopefully help me discover potential ways to get out of our current impasse. I know it’s a way of looking at things: patterns exist only if I want to see them. I have to think about whether those perceived parallels are helpful or not, which I will do at the end of this writing.

How I think about the project now
When I read my notes, the intranet conference, the material that I received from the students and considering what’s on my mind, I get a strong impression that the whole project is stuck. Karen quit the course because she wanted a course with a more practical approach.
Caro\textsuperscript{5} phoned me to say that her husband was very ill and she decided not to participate in the project anymore. Only Corrie has made a kind of plan to continue her research. I did not hear from Ivo, Guus, or Marinus for months. They only e-mailed that they were unable to come to the planned workshop on 6 September. They did not respond to the question Renée and I posed on the forum and neither did Bianca, Ellen and Laura. I don’t know what everyone is doing or even if anyone is working on his or her research project. Before the workshop on 6 September, Guus, Marinus, Ivo, Bianca, and Ellen informed me that they were unable to come. I cancelled the workshop because Laura had said she would be an hour late anyway and Femke responded that she had not yet started anything. Only Corrie thought it was a pity that it would be cancelled, but together we decided that cancelling was the best option. I’m under the impression that I’m working for them, but that they don’t appreciate it (thinking in terms of me - them). My pitfall is to take responsibility, to work harder and to make better preparations for the next workshop, but that is not what I want, it is not my party, it must be our party.

No-one replied to our question posted on the intranet on 4 July when we asked them to write about what they would tell a good friend about how they experience the process. It’s hard to get material from the students, which makes it hard to write a polyphone story. I only tell my story: I want to engage in dialogue about eachother’s stories. Without material from the students, it’s hard to do so. Fortunately, I asked Bianca and Ellen to make a discourse analysis on a little fragment of taped conversation between Ivo, them and me. That is one piece of material in which they explain a little about what they think takes place in that fragment.

I get the idea that this Living Environment Research Project is yet another thing that requires our attention. We’re so busy. We don’t have time and we don’t have energy. I too experience the lack of energy and it’s only because of my tenacity that I make time. This does not necessarily mean that I achieve all the progress I want. I seem to be walking around in circles. I’m not working energetically

\textsuperscript{5} Caro is a pseudonym for a student who only visited workshop 6 when she planned to enter the project.
and I’m not satisfied with the work. I stop too soon; it’s as if I’m not getting into a rhythm (whatever that might be). It’s hard work and that’s not what I want. I want to enjoy the work.

When I wrote in my journal last weekend, I suddenly noticed some parallels between my process with my research and all of our processes together. It’s my perception, and in this piece I don’t ‘support’ my interpretation by adding pieces of material. Initially, I write the story I want to tell. Then I’ll know if it is taking me somewhere. After that, the fine tuning of it is something I might do in my book. I know I can find ‘evidence’ for my interpretations. Nevertheless, what does that evidence mean?

**Parallel one**

Every student seems to be doing his or her research independently. Even in the description above, I write about ‘his or her project.’ I did my research on my own: I do my research on my own. Renée wrote about this in her story of the workshop on 21st June: ‘...I feel uncomfortable with it and don’t want to overrule Loes. Does she have a plan? What is that plan?’

During the preparation for the last workshop, it was the first time I had asked Renée to think with me. I take all the responsibility and that is reflected in the workshops. As a group, how did we create this? It wasn’t the intention that everyone does his or her research alone. Nevertheless, it worked out that way. How did this happen?

**Parallel two**

I had a conversation with one of my managers and he told me there is a new project in which I should definitely participate. He did not elaborate on what he thought I should do and he did not give me any idea as to why he had me in mind for this. I feel manipulated, as if I’m a dependent object, because he has only told me that I should trust him for giving me a role in his plans. It seemed I have no choice in the matter. I remain dependent on him.

Does this experience parallel the experience of students in the project? Do they experience that their only choice is to join or quit the project and do they have ample influence on the way it develops?

The students participating in the research are undoubtedly left with questions. I tell them to start with step one and to trust me about what
will follow. In the material there were several occasions in which I tell them to start, that there are many ways to continue the research, that I know several of these ways and that we will discover how to precede. I cannot tell them what the next steps should be, because I don’t know. However, am I conveying that sufficiently? I exude that I am the one who knows a lot about methodology to counter their fear of getting lost, something which some of the students have expressed. My own PhD might be examplary of this in the eyes of the students. This expresses confidence in my expertise and in me. We don’t talk about having faith in oneself.

Parallel three
Living Environment was a subject I chose because I found it interesting and important, but the real drive for me has not been the subject itself, but rather in the research process. I see a lack of spirit in the students. Why are we doing this? Several of them gave the impression that they joined the project because they wanted to study under Hans, Renée and me, not for the subject. I think that is the case for instance for Ellen and Bianca. Hans, Renée, and I have delivered several motivational speeches. In one conversation with Marinus, Renée and I tried hard to find his motivation. In that conversation I noticed a shift. Marinus was empowered while telling us of his experience. There were hardly any conversations with the whole group about drives to do this research topic.

Parallel four
I’ve been distracted by the problems concerning support (financial and use of other facilities) that I have not received from my employer. In my view, they have only paid lip service to the importance of my project and attaining my PhD. When it came to real support, nothing tangible had come of it. That had angered me. At least two students, Guus and Marinus, experience the same problems. Bianca and Ellen

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6 I refer here to a spoken agreement with the general manager. When I talked with him about my work for my PhD, he was interested and told me that if I needed some time to work on it, he would arrange that for me. At that time (December 2005), all my time was already scheduled with work that I did not want to put aside and he assured me that I could ask him later. When I finally did, sometime before the summer holiday, he told me that he was no longer able to provide assistance for PhDs because I could apply for an official arrangement called a promotievoucher, which allows a PhD candidate to work on his or her research at least two days a week over a period of four years.
are also in a difficult position at work. Due to the problems with my employer, I sometimes wonder why I even started this project. It wasn’t because of the organization, but for my own curiosity and enjoyment. Is this what’s happening to Guus, Marinus, Bianca and Ellen as well? Have we been paying enough attention to curiosity and interest? Or have we been talking about research as something that is serious and hard work?

Parallel five
I hope for approval, which I never get, at least not directly. I don’t ask for it because I know it is worthless, but I still want it. I don’t have enough faith in myself and I need approval from others. The students (not all of them, but enough of them) hope for my approval, but how can I give that? I don’t want to be in that position. I don’t believe that my approval is the only correct form of approval. We should give approval to each other.

Now what?
Focus on interest and curiosity. Why are we in this project? What do we want to get out of it? What is fun about it? I have to show and tell that I don’t know the steps. We have to search together. I don’t want to be the only one who gives approval. We have to approve or as I like to put it: we have to dialogue about the quality. We are in it together, we have to support each other, and I have to share responsibility.

It is interesting to search for the parallels between my process and the group process. It seems important to share part of my interpretations with the group. Renée and I reserved one part of the planned workshop that will be held on 27 September for a dialogue on how we could support each other in the process. We planned to make it a two-stream dialogue: one stream on the content of a question from one of the participants and one stream on what was happening at the moment, such as what was someone conveying when he or she was saying or doing something. How was that perceived or what meaning was created?

The workshops have thus far focused too much on the content of doing research, ways of researching, getting started, choosing a focus etcetera. There was very little on the process. We seemed to avoid
that or as Renée put it in her story about the workshop on 21 June: Participation in this research requires guts and nerves from the participants. You must exceed your own frames of reference. In my opinion, the whole scene is too traditional to meet that requirement. I want to be part of the group and am not. I feel responsible for the atmosphere and see people move mainly cognitively (What will I say? Is what I say meeting the criteria?).

The search for parallels is for me a way to connect, to open up possible insights. To be continued.

**Context: Building Identities 2**

The parallel-text can be seen as externalization of a plurality of perspectives and worlds or polyphony voices as Hermans calls it in accordance to Bakhtin (Hermans, et al., 1992). A Self relates to different worlds and different—real or imagined—Others. This dialogical Self with a multiplicity of positions creates different stories.

The dialogical self can be seen as a multiplicity of I positions or as possible selves (see Markus & Nurius, 1986). The difference, however, is that possible selves (e.g. what one would like to be or may be afraid of becoming) are assumed to constitute part of a multifaceted self-concept with one centralized I position, whereas the dialogical self has the character of a decentralized, polyphonic narrative with a multiplicity of I positions. This scene of dialogical relations, moreover, is intended to oppose the sharp self-nonself boundaries (p. 30, Hermans, et al., 1992)7.

Hermans’ construction of a dialogical Self relates to my ethical choice to focus on softer Self-Other constructions, like softer teacher-student relations. Although an understanding of Self as social or relational is visible in all the texts in this book, in this context I focus on the multiplicity of identities created in the text If I look for Parallels, I will find them.

In the text, I sum up several problems and construct a relation to the progress or lack of progress of the project. I start the text with

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constructing my disappointment about the process so far. Constructing a
disappointment is constructing a Self with expectations that did not work
out. Obviously, I envisioned what I would like to be, or what I would like
the project to be. In the parallel-text, I construct a Self that is disappointed
about the attendance of students in the workshops, and on the intranet, our
collaboration, and the progress of her research. In the text, I search for
reasons: I blame myself, for instance for taking up too much responsibility
and I construct contextual excuses for the students as well as for myself.

When I blame myself, I construct a possible, desirable Self, a Self that
acts on Others as objects—a hard Self-Other differentiation. In the
sections in which I explore the influences of contexts, I construct a Self as
separated from Other, not necessarily to be seen as a hard differentiated
teacher-student relation but as a hard differentiated Self-Other relation.
In some parallels I construct my hurdles as possibly mirroring those of
students, I construct a differentiation between managers and me (blaming
myself again in the parallel with students), and stress of life and me. I
construct students as having similar problems and in addition, I assume
these problems have a similar influence on their energy and attention for
the project.

Some remarks can be interpreted as building more soft differentiated
identities, for instance when I start using the pronoun ‘we’: ‘we’re so
busy’; ‘how did we create this?’ Experience of fear, curiosity, interest, fun,
and faith are made significant. All these feelings can be seen as relational
aspects. Relations with people, real or imagined, or relations to research
projects can provide those feelings.

What kinds of relationships are constructed with this parallel-text? To
whom is this written? As I stated in the beginning of the parallel-text,
initially I wrote it for myself, for my unsatisfied and disappointed Self
as coach of the students. Yet there are remarks in the text that possibly
assume other addressees. Parts of the text seem addressed to academic
readers or me as researcher. Remarks such as concerning the evidence for
interpretations, or ‘patterns exist only if I want to see them’. A sum up of
possible addressees of the parallel-text might be: coach Loes in relation
with students, coach Loes in relation to Renée’s e-mail, researcher Loes
in relation to The Professor and The Master.
Renée reacted on the parallel-text immediately with the following e-mail.

From: Renée
To: Loes
Date: 13 September 2006
Subject: Responsibility

Dear Loes,

Thank you for your frank letter. You make some beautiful parallels and it is as if you see your own process in the process of others. You talk about responsibility and I also see a parallel in this, but in the meantime, I think it is impossible to share responsibility on the same level. It is ‘your’ research and I consider myself a ‘learner’ in guiding research. To me, you have more experience than I have. It is true I make you the expert. I gradually begin to understand that I raised a mysterious cloud concerning ‘researching’. Of course, that says a lot about me and my perception of research. Obviously, my relationship with ‘research’ is laborious on a much deeper level than I thought and I do have to churn that theme forty-seven times over and over to gain faith in myself. The sanctity that the concepts of ‘science’ and ‘research’ have for me is persistent. I even feel disappointed sometimes because of the fact that research can be ‘different’. I feel very uncomfortable in the quantitative research world and most of all stupid. Now we (who: you, Hans?) are making the next move, in a sense that we can make our own methodology, I feel at home, somewhat unaccustomed and cautious. Unaccustomed and cautious means to me that I want to share my thoughts and ideas, although in dribs and drabs, I don’t want to seem stupid of course. Recognizing a hierarchy, (you, Loes, know more about research than I do) is no problem for me at all. Your ears and eyes are important to me. Are you able to hear what I say and can you project yourself in how I feel? I think to recognize these processes in students. You write, ‘I take all responsibility and that is reflected back’. What is the difference between responsibility and having access to information? I want to be supported by you, and I don’t want to lean on you.

The link you make about your manager (Parallel two)
I don’t recognize this in my relation with you. What I do recognize is your ‘it will turn out all right’ attitude. I cannot follow you then and I have learned to search for what you mean. Anyway, this has no influence at all on the confidence I have in you. I see it as a difference between people. I’m a control freak. I want to know what I am pursuing, to prepare myself with detail so that I can be in the moment. No overview, no start. That is how it works for me. Having faith in someone is not inextricable from experiencing dependence. I think that dependence is a nice quality in relationships and in the meantime, it is vulnerability. Leaning can be comforting...

What would happen if you tell the students what their next steps can be? You say that you don’t know…and that is where I lose you a bit. You know what you should do or have done, don’t you? I like to get more clarity on that. What do you think? Where do you stand? That is for a good listener.
Inspiration or rather the lack of it (Parallel three)
You are researching research processes and students research Living Environment. These are two different topics, aren’t they? Why did you choose your topic? What is so important about that? Where is your connection with your personal experience? With Marinus, you were able to tune that volume pitch so beautifully. What was the basis for asking Hans and me to join in?
I said yes to this, just because I think you and Hans are nice people. I know you and I trust you. I often choose for people, because I know then that our mutual and personal goals get the best opportunity. I seldom get inspiration and passion from the topic. They usually trickle down through my contact with others. My passion and inspiration grew in the conversation with Marinus, in the conversation with the Femke and Corrie in Zwolle and during our preparation for the workshop that got cancelled.

It’s true; I’m entangled in a fight with my employer, just as a number of students are. I have to express my disappointments and humiliations and it’s often Hans who ignites my pugnacity again. The system I work in is humiliating and suppressing and I’m part of that. That means that I often have to fight with myself. I recognize this in the whole business around the facilitation of your research. It’s absolutely scandalous and it tells me everything about the institute where we work. Your way of getting your PhD does not fit the traditional way and therefore all kinds of excuses are being sought not to speak up about ‘earning a PhD in another way’. It seems like a political game to me. From a fresh breeze to dangerous storms, I choose the way of resistance and get resistance. To me, this perspective fits in with the importance of learning and educating and that perspective does not conform to the order of the University of Applies Sciences Utrecht. The typical Dutch way of looking-for-consensuses is my battle in this. It’s clear to me that the UvH is the only place where I want to get my PhD (absolutely inspired by you) and not at another university that is ‘appropriate’. It’s against the main stream, I know. However, even without external help, with full conviction and using one’s own strength, which is the conversation I am having with myself. Have you ever considered not getting your PhD because the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht does not help?

At the end, dear Loes: ...I hope for approval.... I don’t ask for it because I know it is worthless, but I still want it.... What poetry! I would like to add something, namely, ‘because it feels so good’. This might diminish the poetry immediately.

To be continued.
Workshop 7: Let’s Talk it over

As a possible way out of the uneasy feelings concerning the Living Environment Research Project, Renée and I suggested to talk about the processes of collaboration. Workshop 7 is the workshop in which this was planned and in the contexts Talk about Dancing, this idea of talking about as solution is critically discussed. The next text is a text concerning a part of workshop 7 on Wednesday 27 September 2006 and based on the audio recording of that workshop and my notes. This workshop was originally planned for 6 September. The postponement of that workshop had started the correspondence between Renée and me as presented above. So, Wednesday 27 September, a new opportunity to have a workshop with the ‘students’, as Renée and I had planned: to discuss the collaboration in the group so far.

My phone rang at 11:30 a.m. It turned out to be Guus who wanted to know in which classroom we would meet and then he said, ‘Marinus is not able to come this afternoon.’

‘That’s a pity. How are things at school? You sound a bit tired?’ I said.

‘Well, I told you about the hectic situation because of the moving of the school and along with that we’ve got this problem with our time for the program. It’s a strange situation, while our manager ordered us to follow this program in combination with a middle-management position, the school uses the extra finances of the project Utrechtse Kansen (see footnote on p. 103) that were allocated to provide us with some unscheduled time to do work for the program. Because we have fewer new students, there are some huge financial problems and all our spare time is scheduled for teaching. In addition, the Dutch government ordered the schools to keep the youngsters inside the building for the hours that are compulsory. The youngsters need to be inside the building from 8:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. and they need to be supervised all that time. Therefore, we need to be in school as well. When a colleague is ill or when pupils don’t have classes, we need to watch over them. It’s not a problem that they’ve taken our time for the program, because I understand that they’ve no other choice, but they should have discussed it with us all.’

‘Wow! That seems like a strange situation.’

‘Yes and I don’t know if we can come to appointments during daytime anymore because we have to be in school all day,’ Guus added.

‘I think it’s problematic that the school uses the money for something else than what it’s intended for. If you want, I can talk this over with the people who arranged the Utrechtse Kansen to see what we can do about this, or we can have
 Feeling Struck

a conversation with your manager together.’

‘Well, there’s no need for that. We’re discussing it with management right now.’

‘Okay, but let me know if I can be of help. See you this afternoon.’

I drove to the building of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht with many expectations about the workshop. Until then my experience was that the whole project was at a standstill. It was not a dazzling group of people who were concerned with each other, but individuals who were occupied with their own bit of research or not occupied with it at all. I wondered if that was the right feeling. My fear was that the project was at a stand still for a few people and that it was possibly not getting into stride. Was that justified? Strange that I didn’t know at all how things stood. I could only make presumptions based on the responses to the question on the intranet, cancellation of appointments, and that type of information. While I was waiting, the feeling that dominated was not one of fear, but of expectation. I was curious about how the afternoon would develop. It was a pity that Renée was unable to join in, but on the other hand, it was also an exciting experiment to work with Riki. Would it succeed in breaking open some of the atmosphere of being individuals occupied with their own separate projects? I hoped that the first part of the workshop would strengthen the cohesion within the group. Before everyone arrived, I opened the Venetian blinds to let some of the outside world enter the room. Was this a metaphor for my expectations?

I started the workshop and explained Riki’s presence. Because not everyone had arrived yet, I suggested not yet starting with the part of the program in which Renée and I planned to talk about the way we support one another, but to tell each other the state of the art of the research projects.

As an invitation, I looked at Ellen and she started to tell, ‘my research is about kids and gaming. I chose to focus on this part of the playing of children because I think, as a pedagogue, I have to have a role in this. I have some serious doubts about gaming when I see my son involved in it. He really gets angry when I try to stop him and after he has stopped, he seems so tired. What is this? How do you deal with this? What should I do as a parent? I planned to focus on our own children, Klaas and Nina and their friends. I see a huge difference in the influence gaming has on them.’

8 Riki is coach and manager of the program. During the introduction days, when the program started, all the ‘coaches’ had been introduced to the ‘students’. Therefore, the ‘students’ of the Living Environment Research Project knew Riki, also because of her position as a manager.
‘What do you currently do?’ I asked her, thinking that her story seemed well thought out.

‘I collect material by filming them when they’re gaming and I’m going to continue doing that. I need to decide for myself whether I restrict this gaming to games played on play-stations and game-boys and leave the games on internet out of this study. It’s amazing what I see when looking at those films. Beautiful things happen between the children, I’ll bring some next workshop.’

‘That would be great. Do you understand what Ellen is doing?’ I asked the others.

‘I’m curious about the purpose of your research,’ Guus said.

‘That I don’t know exactly, but roughly it’s about developing a view on gaming, as an educator and a parent.’

After Riki promised her to provide her with literature I asked, ‘Are you able to continue?’

‘Yes, I need to make an activity chart9. So far, I’ve written down where I’m up to and how I make appointments with myself and with the parents of the other children that come to play at our home. That piece on writing a research proposal you put on FCC before the summer holiday was very helpful.

‘So, you’re keeping your journal, that’s great... Who wants to be next?’ I asked after a brief silence.

Guus took his turn and told that he approached a pupil to ask if it would be all right if he accompanied him to his neighborhood.

‘How did he react,’ I asked.

‘Good. I asked him before and he said it would be okay. “Just let me know when you’re coming so I can make sure that I’m in the streets,” he told me. I’m going to follow him at school, see how he functions and I’m going with him to his trainee post. That’s all connected I think...he has a very problematic situation at home. Sometimes he lives at his mother’s place and sometimes at his father’s. All these guys with problems always come to me. That’s the advantage I have. This boy lives in two different areas, so that’s convenient. He can introduce me in two neighborhoods.’

‘Why are you going to do this? What is your research aiming for?’ Bianca asked.

‘How do I bring the pupils’ culture of the streets into the schools so they can feel at home at school? That’s my idea.’

Both Ellen and Bianca reacted with, ‘wow, that’s interesting.’

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9 An activity chart is one of the tools for students in the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy on which they can make a planning for their work.
Laura asked, ‘So, you want to know the street culture?’
‘Yes, in order to tell my colleagues that if he reacts in a certain way, it’s because that’s what he’s used to on the street.’
‘Are you going to follow one child?’ Laura wanted to know.
‘That’s where I’ll start. Then it will gradually spread. I just have to get into the scene first.’

Ellen started to tell about a television program she had seen. It was a broadcast of a whole evening with street language as topic. Meanwhile, I could not let go of the idea that Guus was going to use the boy, that he saw the boy as a convenient opening. Guus was planning to take information from the boy or through hanging out with the boy and then he was going to tell his colleagues about it. I wondered how I should address this. I had to be careful.
‘And the boy, how do you think he will experience you following him?’ I asked.
‘Well, I’ve got a very good bond with him, so there’s no problem,’ Guus answered.
‘There are a lot of experts on street culture inside your school,’ I tried again.
‘I don’t know, I think they know very little about it, that’s why I want to do this.’

I made it a little more explicit, ‘I mean the boys, your pupils. It could be of enormous joy to both the youngsters and your colleagues if you were able to organize the youngsters and have them teach your colleagues the street language, for instance. That would be a kind of shift in relations; like in the article by Conquergood I gave you all in the first workshop10.’

‘That’s possible yeah,’ was Guus’s half-hearted response.

Ellen came with support. ‘Yeah, like in that broadcast I was telling about. You might want to see that, you’ll find it on the internet. They were doing a dictation in street language.’

Guus ended this conversation by saying, ‘I’m glad to have a starting point, but I have to see how much time I can spend on it.’

Then he explained the problems and time restriction at his school.

Guus closed with, ‘Marinus is busy with his research too, and he asked me to tell you that he is able to continue. There’s also another colleague who’s going to join in.’

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10 I was referring to Dwight Conquergood’s article: *Street Literacy* (1997)
Without much trust in this and thinking that I don’t want a new member for this research group at this stage, I said, ‘I haven’t heard from that other colleague for a while, so he might want to ring me, before joining...Who wants to be next?’

Laura took her turn. ‘Before the summer holiday, it was my idea to see what changes in the pupils’ Living Environment when they go to secondary school. We discussed that this topic was too large and that it’s impossible to know their Living Environment, so you, Loes, suggested that I use the MSN conversations I already collected as material and see if there are some changes in the way they talk to me on MSN, not being their teacher any more. As you all might know, I started to give access to my MSN to my pupils as a start for my research on their Living Environment. I found that captivating then. But now, when I look at the way they react to me, I don’t see much difference. I seriously doubt if this interests me enough, it’s not appealing to me anymore. You know, I now work with preschoolers¹¹ and not with the same age group. The children are still on my MSN, but I don’t see any difference in their way of communicating with me. I chose this subject because I wanted to see what was going to change. What’s nice is that they are now going to e-mail me. I received a whole report of their holiday and they wrote, “Miss Laura, maybe you can use this for your research”, that kind of stuff.’

I laughed internally about Laura’s haste and impatience, but I remained quiet, because I saw others coming up with responses.

‘How long ago did you meet them?’ Ellen asked.

‘They’ve been attending their secondary schools for three weeks now and they haven’t seen me in nine weeks.’

A discussion developed in which Laura tried to clarify that she wasn’t satisfied with the restriction to MSN, and Femke, Ellen, and Bianca tried to convince Laura of the importance of her research project.

After a while, since all the students who were expected had arrived in the interim, I suggested, ‘We can continue with Laura’s story and take this to a meta-level by discussing how we support each other.’

¹¹ In Dutch, we use the term kleuters, which is translated here as preschoolers, to refer to the age group of children aged four to six. With the introduction of the Primary Education Act (WPO), all children from four to twelve years of age attend primary school. The word preschooler refers to the age group, not to whether or not a child attends school.
Context: Talk about Dancing 1

Unfortunately, the experience takes place on a primal, intuitive level. It is nearly impossible to verbalize and describe (although many have tried). (Fabiano, on the website ToTango)

The text about workshop 7 can be seen as a story of a workshop during which there is a discussion about processes of collaboration. Renée and I have constructed the collaboration in the project group as a relational problem and developed the program of that workshop as an attempt to resolve that. In the two contexts entitled Talk about dancing, I critically reflect on the texts of this workshop by relating them to a constructionist text of Hosking and Bass. In their article, Hosking and Bass (2003) analyze a story of two people talking to each other about a disagreement in the past. The discussion, as a means to resolve relational problems, is questioned.

Recent reconstructions of language as action (rather than representation) seem often to be accompanied by change tactics that emphasize talking ‘about’ things as a way to change them (e.g., Barrett and Cooperrider, 1990; Barrett, Thomas & Hocevar, 1995; Isaacs, 1993). However, constructionist premises offer some interesting reflections on such practices. For example, relational premises lead directly to the view that talking about e.g., poor relations between management and engineers is a social practice that reconstructs exactly those relations. (p. 66, Hosking & Bass, 2003)

The conversation in workshop 7 can be storied as a reproduction of relationships. Hosking and Bass (p. 66, ibid.):

So, for example, in answer to the question ‘what kind of relationship is this?’ a constructionist theorist might say ‘the kind of relationship in which we talk about what kind of relationship it is’; talking ‘about’ things is a bit of people and world making that may well reproduce the status quo.

Talking or writing about relations, like in the conversation based on an audio recording of workshop 7, is a way of relating in and of itself. Hosking and Bass indicate in their article: Let’s not Talk About it for a Change that talking about relations or previous events can often be seen as a reproduction of these relationships:
Key aspects of relationship that seem likely to be reproduced in talk about relations include: Self and Other as separated and opposed (I-you, we-they, inside-outside); hierarchy (boss-subordinate, knower-known, right-wrong, better-worse) and competition (for who is right, better, more knowing...)-(p. 66).

Reflecting on the texts of workshop 7, with the last quote of Hosking and Bass buzzing through my head, I ask myself, ‘What kind of relationship do I read in these texts?’ At first, I was satisfied with the workshop because I thought of it as a workshop with a pleasant atmosphere and some of the students became more active on the intranet afterwards (some Venetian blinds seemed opened). Both Corrie and Laura were sending more e-mails via the intranet, the responses to the e-mails were more substantive in that they incorporated more than just pleasantries. Corrie, Ellen and Bianca responded to the question and joined the discussions on the forum several times. Renée told the group that she could guess that something happened in that workshop from the internet conversations and that she was disappointed that she had not been there (e-mail 11 October 2006).

Something happened, but did teacher-student relations develop into more soft differentiated relations? Did we enhance collaboration? What created what I refer to as a moment of ‘being struck’, was the construction of the following story. Reconsidering the texts with a focus on performative quality of quotes recorded during the workshop, I hear us recreating distance between the stories of the students. I seemed to open every story by inviting someone to tell about his or her research and I then close off the story with remarks like, ‘Are you able to continue?’ Students ask each other for their objectives and make suggestions to other students. While it was my intention to mingle the projects and to expand the collaborative work, we seemed to close down stories and enforce the boundaries between the students’ research projects. Some of the remarks can be seen as building relations between students, ‘Didn’t you experience the same, how did you deal with that?’ or ‘What suggestions can you do for...?’ However, I read many more as constructing hard differentiations between the students’ projects. The development of a shared interest, a mutual goal is not helped by hardening the boundaries between different projects. We might conclude that in the workshop individual responsibility for his or her project is reproduced. Participants could learn from each other, from each other’s experience for instance, but we do not learn together.
After I suggested to take Laura’s story and to discuss how we were supporting each other, the conversation continued.

Bianca wanted to know from Laura, ‘do you also have these doubts because you work with those preschoolers now?’

‘No it’s not because of the age-group. This transition phase still interests me, but it’s this restriction.’

Then Riki tried to move the conversation to the topic of collaboration.

She asked, ‘How long have you had these doubts? What did you do with them?’

‘Well, not much, I thought I would wait till this workshop.’

Both Guus and Ellen told Laura that changes can still occur and that she shouldn’t give up so soon. We already made that clear, in my opinion.

I wanted to take it in another direction and said, ‘I think you have very interesting material with all those conversations and certainly there is something we can do with it.’

Laura didn’t agree with me and said, ‘But I have the idea that I already know what’s going to change (everyone laughs), well it hasn’t been that long ago since I left primary school and I still talk to a lot of children that age. When I hear Guus’s story, I think wow, that’s interesting.’

Riki repeated her question, ‘But what did you do with your doubts?’

‘Nothing, I thought I’d bring this in this afternoon.’

‘But you were excited about this when you started,’ Ellen tried to motivate her again.

‘I think I’ve already reached my goals,’ Laura replied.

I attempt to support Riki’s role, as we had agreed upon during the preparation.

I said, ‘Let’s go back to the conversation that Riki is starting. Let’s discuss how we are doing this together.’

‘What do you expect from each other? How are you using each other?’ Riki asked.

‘Well, everyone seems occupied with his own little thing. All our parts will be connected in a later phase,’ Laura filled in.

‘How do you experience that?’ Riki asked.

Corrie immediately responded with, ‘This is something I miss, working together. Also the steps you take, you can give one another ideas by telling them.’

‘To me, that’s only possible when everyone knows what they are doing,’ Guus responded.

However, Corrie did not agree with that. She expressed that exchanging ideas can also be helpful. Finally, we came to the point I wanted to discuss.
I asked, ‘How did this happen, that we all think that we have to do our own thing?’

‘I think that our plans differ too much, when we are together, we exchange, but we are not deepening it,’ Laura observed.

This made me wonder if I should have made the connections between the different projects more explicit.

Riki threw in something else, ‘Doesn’t it have to do with what you do together between the workshops? How do you want to do this with each other?’

Corrie responded immediately and said, ‘I had this question of how to approach the children for my research, and Loes said I should put this question on the intranet. That was right. I thought, “Yes, that’s just what I’m going to do,” but I didn’t. I then thought, “Well, is this interesting to others?” I think that sharing this on the intranet will be helpful, but I find it scary. I didn’t put that question on the net because I already made a decision.’

I responded by saying, ‘When you put that kind of remark on the net, it becomes livelier. Tell us, “Yeah, I took a decision”. I think that we are the outsiders on the internet. Our generation isn’t used to communicating on the internet. I think we regard text in a different way. We think something is fixed if it’s written down, but that isn’t the case. We can adjust and change text. It’s a turn in a conversation, just like when we talk to each other.’

Riki brought in some of her typical humor when she said, ‘And it’s a pity you have doubts, but you’re the only one. No-one else has these doubts!’

Laughter...

Bianca added, ‘I understand about the notion that a text is fixed. I find it very hard to write about my project. Every word raises new doubts. I don’t seem to get it done.

I disclosed something about my personal struggle with this issue. ‘I recognize this kind of experience. I run into similar ones when writing. My thoughts seem to change every time and I want to change my work repeatedly. However, I won’t find what I want to change if I don’t write it down. Therefore, I suggest you take a chance and write. Let us read your texts and don’t think of your text as static!’

After some silence Femke started to speak, ‘Well, about these connections, you are doing that because you’re still searching. I have my doubts too. You get ideas every time you get in a conversation about your topics, but when there is too much time in between, it blurs again and again.’

Ellen repeated that the internet could be of use, taking the broader contact with Corrie through this medium as an example. Corrie agreed on this, and added that she had to gather her courage to write. Nevertheless, Femke continued, ‘you’re very busy with finding out where your interest lies and then
I can’t see how this will be connected. I start up every time, but then my busy life and work take over. I’m trying to find out what I really want to do, what really interests me. I try to find a subject that I’m totally enthusiastic about.’

I can’t help but think that this is Femke’s same old issue of not choosing, not starting. Why is this? What is she afraid of?

During the next conversation the themes ‘contact in between the workshops’ and ‘the separate projects’ were repeated without coming to conclusion.

Then Femke said, ‘Lately, I read an article which I thought you would find interesting Corrie, but I didn’t put that on the intranet. I thought it would be meddlesome.’

Bianca added, ‘Basically, it’s the fear that the other thinks you’re meddlesome.’

Laura said, ‘This is almost like a déjà vu of yesterday when we had a similar discussion with our learning team.’

Bianca, Ellen, and I nodded. I thought, working together and learning together is tough. It seemed like we couldn’t discuss this enough because we are all teachers who would have to enhance collaborative learning in our classrooms.

‘You [people from the Haarlem learning team] seem to have these discussions more often than we do in our learning team,’ Corrie said. ‘We seem more focused on doing than on reflecting. I notice that I have to get used to these kinds of conversations.’

I responded by saying, ‘That’s an interesting observation. It might very well be the case that there are differences between coaches and learning teams,’ but then Riki redirected the attention back to Laura’s project, ‘Well Laura, back to your doubts.’

‘Yes, I understand that I have interesting material, but I lose my interest and I just don’t know in heavens’s name what to do with it. And aren’t there already thousands of books written about it?’

‘Well, we already discussed that we could do something with it, like do a discourse analysis, for instance. I sent all of you this material from Gee’s book (2005) and we planned to practice with that in the second half of this workshop after the break. If you send us a copy of a piece of your material, we can practice with that next workshop too. Then you can see how you think you could use it and then perhaps you can make a choice on continuing or not,’ I responded.

‘That sounds like a wise decision,’ Laura said.

After this conversation, we discussed Corrie and Bianca’s projects. Then we finally decided to have a break. Riki went home during that break after having
told me that she experienced similar problems with the continuation of contact in between workshops in other learning teams. After the break, we only had half an hour left and I briefly explained the Discourse Analysis that Gee (2005) had worked out and I illustrated that with my analysis of a piece of transcript from the workshop with Femke and Corrie in June 2006.

When everyone left the room, I cleaned up the last of the coffee cups. I looked through the Venetian blinds and I thought back on my expectations. I definitely had the experience that the group had come to know each other a bit more and that some blinds seem opened. It was a step in the right direction.

**Context: Talk about Dancing 2**

I continue to explore what kind of relationships are constructed in the texts of workshop 7. The story in *Talk about dancing 1* is continued. My colleague, Riki, and I invited the ‘students’ to talk about emotions and about making choices. We asked them to talk about their emotions and choices, and did not relate that to ourselves. We took the position of the outsider. This can be seen as a construction of a relationship in which ‘students’ were asked by their ‘coaches’ to talk about their fears and problems, and their relationships (we-they). The ‘students’ were invited to show themselves, to become more visible in a dialogue about the processes of collaborative learning. The two ‘coaches’ took up roles of organizing the conversation, directing attention to experience, and exploring problems in the past. In the conversation, (what we represent as) the past is reconstructed in the present, and we reconstruct a hard differentiation between ‘students’ and ‘teachers’ again. In their critical analysis of talking about relations, Hosking and Bass warn the reader for the possibility of reconstructing past in the present. They imply that it must be possible to act otherwise:

> The present [relational constructionist] argument is not that talking about e.g. some person or event is necessarily unhelpful. Rather, for example, a possible consulting methodology could involve attempts to coordinate with clients in ways that do not claim an outside and ‘above’ (superior knowing and influencing) position... Such an approach may be adopted, for example, to give voice to multiple, simultaneous, local construction processes and to new (local) social realities. (p. 61, Hosking & Bass, 2003)
In the texts, I read a reproduced teacher-student relation, in which the ‘teachers’ (coaches) decide what is significant to discuss, and the ‘students’ follow; a reproduction of you and me, Self and Other, of a hard differentiation of teachers and students, and a continuation of a hierarchy. In the texts, the ‘teacher’ is the one who decides that something needs to change (what’s good) (p. 67, Hosking & Bass ibid.) and the ‘teacher’ is the one who decides what needs to change (what’s real) (p. 67, ibid.). The ‘students’ are invited to show themselves, but the ‘coaches’ don’t do the same. A co-construction of what is real and what is good can be considered as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The underlying assumption that the ‘coaches’ know best which direction the workshop should take, is not discussed. In these texts about workshop 7, I do not see an approach that gives voice to multiple, simultaneous, local construction processes that creates softer teacher-student relations. The analysis again caused a feeling of being struck by the problems of creating more soft differentiated teacher-student relations.

In this respect, the written texts about the Master’s Program, such as in the brochure, construct realities as well. Terms as ‘personal learning arrangement’, ‘student responsibility’, ‘your journey,’ or ‘self-directed learning’ (see for instance Chapter 1) all invite harder differentiated Self-Other relations. Talking about, writing about, our use of words is in need of careful consideration. Again, it is easy to invite in patterns that are traditional.

Laura’s Narrative on Workshop 7

After workshop 7 Laura sent the group a written reflection on this workshop. She sent the text to the group with a covering e-mail and got many reactions on it. The next texts are my translations of the e-mails and other texts. Laura made use of italics in her original text.
Let’s Dance

Laura wrote, 2 October 2006, 20.25

Hi everyone,

Here is a brief report or reflection on the last workshop. I wrote this to make it a little bit more clear to me how I act during those workshops. I would be thrilled to see your replies to this. Please, if you have any questions I’d be glad to hear them!

Regards, Laura

Excerpt from Laura’s reflection on the Living Environment workshop on 27 September 2006

I felt tired at the start of the day. I’ve been very busy lately. I sleep less and I don’t feel up to this. On the way, in the car, I became enthused again, particularly because of the conversation with Ellen and Bianca about the study. I was amazed to see Riki sitting there when I entered the room, but I thought it’s cozy.

I poured myself some coffee and recovered. The room was not that hot this time. We opened a window for some fresh air. I flung open the Venetian blinds and tried to open the window. I didn’t succeed. Fortunately, Loes is handy and opened another window. She closed the blinds of the window I was busy with. I wondered why she did that and I was secretly a bit fed up with it. I was then unable to look outside. Funny, maybe that was why she did it. I am someone who gets distracted easily, so maybe it was better this way. I have to laugh at myself a bit. Does she know me that well already? Or is this just a coincidence? I concentrated on Loes, who wanted to say something.

Not everyone was able to be here on time today, but we just started. Riki seemed to be there to bring the conversations to a meta-level. I immediately asked myself what that was again. With music lessons at the teacher training, I didn’t understand much of those levels, which resulted in the music teacher being very annoyed. I tried to ignore these thoughts.

Ivo wrote, 3 October 2006, 9.14

Laura,

What an extremely frank piece to read. You give insight in how and what you think about, and what internally happens when you are ‘at the school desk’. How was it for you to write this and to read/relive this?

Regards, Ivo
Laura wrote, 3 October 2006, 22.00

Hi Ivo!

It was not so hard for me to write this down. I remembered a lot about what I thought at the time, because I think a lot and it hasn’t been a long time since these ideas first occurred to me. Placing it was more troublesome! It is indeed pretty frank to share this with everyone ... afterwards it was better than I expected.
I only read it over when you asked me about it. I think that I have very many thoughts like this during a workshop and many that have nothing to do with it. I’m curious to know how others ‘experience’ me during such a workshop and if the image corresponds or fits with the text or is it completely different. Anyway, it gives everyone a peep into my realms of thought.

Regards, Laura

Loes wrote, 4 October 2006, 9.41

Hey Laura,

Thank you for your insight into your thoughts during and after the workshop. My notes that I worked out will come soon and I mention the Venetian blinds as well, but in a completely different sense¹²... You indicated several times that you don’t know what something means or what we are doing. You tried not to show that during the workshop. What would happen if you did?

Loes

Laura wrote, 4 October 2006, 18.31

Hey Loes!

Honestly, I must say that I’m not consciously asking or indicating that. The meta-level reminded me of my previous study and I tried to get that out of my mind. Later I realized what it meant. So, there’s no reason to ask.

About not knowing what we were doing, I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to give the impression that I was not paying attention. In itself, it would not be a problem if I did. I think that you all would help me to reconnect.

I’m curious about your piece and especially the Venetian blind, ha-ha

Regards, Laura

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¹² The e-mail conversation with Laura took place before I sent my story about the meeting.
Let’s Dance

Renée wrote, 4 October 2006, 13.15

Hello Laura,

Thank you for your ‘thoughts’, how beautiful. I get a chance to ‘join in’ with you.
I experience you as a fresh thinker and observer and don’t know what you think, of course.
Why is it that I experience you as a fresh thinker and observer? Of course, I am influenced by the reflection you wrote and I have met you several times. Then I experienced you as ‘quiet’ (does not speak or respond quickly to my e-mails) and you’re concerned (when you say something and/or e-mail, it makes sense). That is the reason for my term ‘thinker and observer’, and especially ‘fresh.’ With that I mean: you speak and write from the heart, you’re authentic.
It helps me enormously when you speak your mind. That helps me to get to know you better and maybe you get to know me as well...I’m curious about your questions and thoughts.

Bye,
Renée

Laura wrote, 4 October 2006, 18.35

Hi Renée!

Thanks for your response. I’ve never looked at myself in this way, but it’s beautifully worded! I am indeed ‘quiet’ during the workshops. Is that because I observe and think? My thoughts mostly drift in any direction and I have to list them in my mind.
Funny, that isn’t the case so much in ‘normal’ life. Then I respond spontaneously and often say whatever comes to mind without thinking about it too much. Maybe it’s that I think more because it’s relevant or I can use it for my study. I recognize it when you call me ‘fresh’. I am not very good at hiding my feelings about something and if I say or write something, it comes right from the heart.

Regards, Laura

Context: Dancing with an Audience

Dance is someone and something that sees and is seen—it is spectacle. Of course it involves hearing and bodily awareness, but also viewing and watching, being viewed and being watched. In dancing there is (almost always) music and other dancers and a circle of persons watching the musicians and dancers. This outer circle defines the inner region of the dance floor, stomping grounds, or
Feeling Struck

the place(s) of dance. In theatres, the inner and outer circles are defined by the
curtain — on the one side there is the passively sitting audience and on the other
the activity of the dancers. The dancers look to one another and know that they
are being looked at. (Letiche, forthcoming 2011)

Where else are we especially encouraged, each time a new song begins, to
deliberately ‘be ourselves’, sometimes even by a partner we have never met
before! (Fabiano)

Tangoing and audience, education and audience, are the relations explored
in this context. Audience can be understood as a bunch of listeners or
spectators which don’t influence a performance. Anja told me (16 July
2008, translation LH):

Tango is like a conversation with four participants: two dancers, the music, and
the surroundings. With that, I mean the other dancers on the dance floor. Some
people add a fifth, the audience. Hmm, those are not my favorite dance partners.
They are not dancing with me, but with the public.

In Anja’s explanation, the audience influences the dancing, while Anja
refers to the audience as being people who are not participating in the tango
as dancers or musicians. From a relational constructionist perspective,
acknowledging the influence of listeners or spectators is inescapable.
Dancing with an audience entails showing oneself to an audience and
when it concerns tangoing, it concerns showing something of ‘your
personality’ or ‘authenticity’ as is expressed in many texts on tangoing.
Letiche defines audience similar to Anja: the audience is influencing the
dance by watching. Although Letiche acknowledges that the dancers
watch one another, he draws a boundary (curtain) between the actively
participating watchers (the dancers) and the passively sitting audience.
The dancer is assumed to show, to perform, or else there is no point in
watching or listening. This relational aspect of watching/‘listening to’
and being watched/‘listened to’ is what I call dancing with an audience.
An audience can take on many different forms and I like to extend the
constructed boundaries of both Letiche and Anja. This construction of
audience includes, for instance, an imaginary audience that is possibly
going to read some of my/your written work, the people I/you speak
with, a teacher, or fellow students; real, historical and generalized Others
(Sampson, 1993/2008), see Context: Leading and Following 3. Audience
can also include me, being both observer and observed (Dugal, 1999).
In the first part of the Living Environment Research Project, the part that is reconstructed in Chapter 3, I was strongly aware of the ‘observer Loes’ who judged whether the project was going all right, and during the process of writing, many imaginary readers already read, so to speak, my work. They have already peeked over my shoulder.

In the texts of the Living Environment Research Project, showing yourself to Others (an audience) can be seen as a re-recurring theme. In workshop 7, this theme is central, but this theme is also recognizable in other texts. For instance, in my journal I wrote on 2 May 2006:

When I divide the material per student (their e-mails sent to me personally or to the group forum on FCC [the intranet], their worked out notes of plans and responses to e-mails or questions and assignments), I notice that I have a lot material from Ellen. I have somewhat less from Bianca. There’s a reasonable amount from Joan. Ivo sent much at the start and later on it diminished. Karen does the assignments and nothing more. Corrie corresponds only with me and not with the group. I received one e-mail from Femke. Guus sent two e-mails that only concerned attendance to workshops. Laura and Marinus sent nothing. I also see that I respond to every e-mail. Renée reacts to several. We sometimes answer questions and give feedback etcetera. The students sometimes respond to other people’s e-mails, mostly by telling how cool it is that they share thoughts.

I story this attendance on the intranet as follows: Ellen and Bianca are very busy with the project, Corrie more and more (she stepped in later, because her mother had died). Ivo seems to show a decline in commitment, Joan’s commitment is declining, Laura does not put things on paper, Karen tries carefully.

In a recorded conversation with a part of the Haarlem learning team (Karen and Laura could not attend the workshop) on 6 June 2006, this topic of participation on the intranet was also discussed.

_Loes:_ So what topics do you think we can discuss in the next workshop? That is the question I posed on FCC.
Ivo: Oh yeah, we have this afternoon, don’t we? On the 21st?'
Loes: ‘Yes, on the 21st.
...
Loes: Yeah.
Bianca: And has someone responded already?
Loes: No.
Bianca: No, everyone would have seen that.
Loes: I consider this forum\textsuperscript{13} to be something you should get started with.
Ellen: Yes indeed, that is something that just has to get started. I can post a thousand questions, but someone has to respond to them. But right, that is something we can talk about anyway, on the 21st.
Loes: Yeah, in my opinion, because I also look who has read such a message with the FCC tracking system, and then I see that there are people that didn’t read it at all, or just after two weeks. That doesn’t work, does it.
Bianca: The people of the Living Environment Research are not checking it regularly; it is mainly our learning team. (excerpt of transcript)

In several conversations, for instance the one taken from workshop 7, talking about emotions and thoughts is constructed as important. ‘Showing’ to an audience is regarded as necessary for collaborative learning; when one does not tell his/her thoughts one does not show him/herself and one prevents Others from learning together. Taking the argument of this construction further, teachers or students who don’t show themselves, will not learn. However, what do we show? Can we not-show? From a relational perspective, what is shown, is part of an already ongoing construction. What is constructed as Self, is shown to what is constructed as Other, including multiple ongoing constructed other Selves. Next to that, the audience takes part in the construction of the Self, which is shown.

When looking at the e-mail conversation around Laura’s narrative of workshop 7, we might conclude that showing oneself was made significant. Laura’s thoughts were discussed, without paying attention

\textsuperscript{13} Ellen had suggested opening a forum as part of the communication tools on FCC for the members of the Living Environment Research Group. We (Ellen and I) agreed that she would organize this.
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to how we constructed her ‘thoughts’ as individual characteristics; You (Laura) thought these thoughts and we (Others, students and coaches), got a chance to peek at them. Laura had to deal with them herself, although all respondents signified that they wanted to know them. You and I, you and we, Self and Other are seen as separated.

**Fear of Audience**

‘Passion involves danger, risk, enduring motivation, deep emotional engagement, and extreme actions. Passion engages with body, mind, and emotions’, proposed Shrivastava and his wife, at the EGOS conference in Vienna (Shrivastava & Cooper, 2007). In their presentation, they combine passion, as related to Argentine tango, and the aesthetics of managing. As both Renée and I convey in our texts, risk and danger, fear and need for approval, are part of the process of developing collaborative learning. Our engagement with the concept of Real-Life Learning is the context for our choices to take the tough route and to fight the system of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht with its knowledge centers for storing knowledge (see Chapter 2) and its centralized systems of student assessments and grading. If passion involves danger and risk, which implies fear and uncertainty, this is what we have to take into account. In this section, I reflect on several relations with audiences in which I construct fear and taking risks as part of relations.

What one perceives as a risk to run depends on relations, like tango partners have to trust one another to explore new steps. Writing a book, which is literally taking a position and showing oneself to an (academic) audience, is also taking a risk. I regard writing this book, and writing other stuff as challenging and helping me develop my ideas. That’s fun. Writing seen as dancing with texts, in Hosking’s concept of text-context, is also dancing with an audience, including me, when I reread the texts. This notion of audience is sometimes very much present. Readers of the

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14 I tend to avoid these issues for the students and to keep them away from these uninteresting and confusing discussions. I like to ignore the demands of the central management as long as possible and only deal with it whenever I cannot avoid it, or when it would harm the students. Dealing with it is then restricted to window dressing and not showing to—or dancing—with that audience.
text, who context the written text with other texts, will make up other stories, judging the text and in the meanwhile judging me. I cannot let go of this idea of the text representing me and I am aware that a lot of people context it likewise.

Constructed elements of fear can be related to practice in the workshops as well. During the first workshops of the Living Environment Research Project, I seem to be aiming to get as much a grasp on ‘everything’ as I can. Trying to grasp might be regarded as defining ‘everything’ as objects, objects that I have to control. Striving for control can be seen as an attempt to diminish risk and danger (which was part of passion). Diminishing risk can be seen in the light of fear of negative project results; negative in the eyes of imagined audiences, for instance The Professor, who might judge that the work of the students was not meeting a standard of sophistication. Or negative in the eyes of The Big Guy, who might judge that what we did was not at all Real-Life Learning. This judgmental, imaginary audience was also present while writing. At times these imaginary audiences were so strong that I could hardly get anything on paper without asking myself: what would The Big Guy think of this? Would he approve? What would The Master think of it? Is this enough critical relational constructionist language? Moreover, there’s The Professor. Will he find enough ‘lived experience’ in it? Dancing for or with an audience is in this sense an act of willing to please an audience. Is that a neglect of my own story? Oops, my own story, I can almost hear The Master say that this formulation is viewing a story as something stable. And this ownership: who is this I? Not a very relational formulation, for critical relational constructionism views a story as ongoing constructed re-storying in relation with the audience. A story is not seen as static and I am not a static entity. I do subscribe to that view and yet, it seems impossible to escape this type of formulation. Will I ever beat this idea of pleasing Others?

At other moments, I tell myself, ‘Of course you’re not going to beat that idea of pleasing Others, why should you?’ Willing to please Others is an act of connecting to Others. Isn’t that what pedagogy and especially ecological pedagogy is all about, contact and connection? Isn’t this the tension between wanting to belong and being an individual as I suggested in the section Constructions of Learning as ‘Being Struck’ in Chapter 2? Isn’t this the tension that creates possibilities for being struck and
learning? When ‘my own story’ is this stable and solid as I sometimes want it to be, it’s no longer possible to dance (with Others, with dance partners such as an audience or with different music). Then I would only be able to invite Others to follow me. They can only dance my dance. It will turn out to be more of a ballroom tango than an Argentine tango: less tension, less excitement, less fear, fewer possibilities to get surprised, in my opinion. Writing is indeed looking for an audience, dancing with an audience. It’s a strong metaphor in this respect. When an audience is touched by the dancing, you could say that the audience changes. If an audience is not touched, well, maybe there is too little in common to dance with one another. Isn’t the writer the one who chooses with which audience to dance? As the author, I construct one audience as more important than another, based on my local, historical, and social context. Attempts to touch an audience, as I already wrote in the Interlude Tango of Self-Other Ethnography, can be more or less direct and steering. Yet, the inescapable intention to write is to tell a story, to touch audiences.

Dancing for an audience does not only entail the fear to show because of judgment. It also means that the dancer assumes that the dancing is important for Others. Am I narcissistic enough to do that writing? Occasionally, I experienced someone telling a story that I thought of as being obvious. Once was when Geoff, one of the tutors of the PhD process, told about the idea to see interviewing as a conversation instead of an act of getting the story of the interviewee. The second time was when Yanis Gabriel told about a co-constructed story on the Critical Management Studies Conference 5 in Manchester. Both stories made me think, ‘Hey, that’s so obvious’ or ‘That’s what we did when writing a paper together. Is that so special?’ Yes, for some people it was special and I need to think of what we did or do in the Living Environment Process as special. I cannot decide for Others what is special.
Feeling Struck

Building Shared Responsibilities

From: Loes
To: Renée
Date: 18 September 2006
Subject: Knowing and responsibility

Dear Renée,

As you noticed it took some time to react on your letter, not only because of business matters, but also because of the personal scope of your reaction. A minute ago I listened to the recording of the conversation I had with Diane-Marie and Hugo on my ‘parallel-piece’ last Thursday. One of the issues is the creation of some kind of authorial voice. I have to make a distinction between me as the author and me as the coach of the students. On the other hand, I want those two positions (should that be two or many more positions?) to stay connected.

One of the themes that I might consider in my texts is the construction of identities of the people involved. In your letter, you start with identifying me as a friend (dear Loes) and later on as an expert on research. In that part you create your identification as someone who starts to demystify science and research. For me, knowing more than others about methodology is not problematic and that is not what I was referring to in my previous letter. I can be of help and students (and you) can lean on me, which is in my opinion not at all the same as being dependent on me. What I was trying to say is that I want to lean too and that I would like to create a situation in which we all can lean from time to time.

I get the idea that the students are waiting for me to tell them what to do. They are waiting to start. I can help them discover that move and give information about how to perform that move, but they have to choose. We can help them by posing questions and trying to get at their drives and motivations. In the phase of the research that most students are in, it’s about finding drives. I think that I give suggestions about what can be done and most of the time I give more than one suggestion, which might be confusing. Is this explanation helping you in understanding my ‘not knowing’?

Not everything will work out fine, but in the case of research, I strongly believe that the students’ research projects will work out fine, without knowing the next steps. For me preparation in detail sometimes prevents me from being in the moment.

There are too many different possibilities for research, an infinite amount and I don’t want to close them off at this stage. The combination of content and methods that I like to get at and the experience of ownership like Marian and
Nennete had expressed are not possible if I tell the students what to do. I want to focus on thinking about next steps and deciding what to do and what not to do, rather than on knowing what to do. The inspiration of Femke and Corrie; I don’t know if their inspiration was generated internally or if it was a reaction to our enthusiasm. Especially with Femke, there is inspiration in every workshop, but it seems to disappear when we leave. The conversation seems to touch her, but what happens next?

It feels good, it feels good that you see the last part of my writing in a poetic way and that you tell me that.

To be continued,
Loes

From: Renée
To: Loes
Date: 11 October 2006
Subject: re: knowing and responsibility

I find the mood of your letter somber. In my opinion, you look at the things that are not there instead of what is there. You cling to images that don’t seem to be able to move. It’s my conviction that you will get what you believe in. To give guidance to a process does not necessarily deliver dependence, except when you think that and want that. The harder you try to avoid, the harder you will get just that. You make some mantra’s, which turn up in different forms (students are not allowed to be dependent and Hans) [...] Also, Nenette and Marian had to travel a long way before they could become owners of their research. How much time do these students ‘get’ to live through this process?

I am disappointed that I missed the last workshop. When I see the reactions to workshop 7 on the forum, it certainly provides responses: even Laura has checked in.

We turn in little circles: you write something, I react and you give me evidence and I react. I experience this as me giving you courage. I’m getting away from the notion that you know that I appreciate and respect what you are doing and initiate. Above all, you should know that I love you for who you are, even somber and tired...

With love,
Renée

From: Loes
To: Renée
Date: 12 October 2006
Subject: re: somber

15 Marian and Nenette were two students I supervised a few years earlier.
16 Workshop 7
Feeling Struck

It scared me to read that you see me as tired and somber. When I look back I see that it is very much the case. You placed your finger on a sore spot and that hurts. Those mantra’s, oops, that is what I want to break through. However, I seem to be holding on to them again. ...it feels as if I’m too wrapped up in my project, too much focused on a goal. I’m too busy with what I think is right or good in my writing, with my actions with the students and my colleague coaches of the course. I’m focused on what should be, instead of focused on having fun. I feel as if I am not open to stimulus. 

With a sigh, to be continued on better days,

Love,
Loes

From: Renée
To: Loes
Date: 19 November 2006
Subject: negotiating relations

Dear Loes,

It has been a while since I received your last letter...and much has happened since.

Let me look at the last Living Environment workshop on 7 November. In my notes I have some unintelligible scribbles from our preparation. I still find it remarkable that you can still trust ‘it will turn out all right’ when it involves a preparation. I mean, we were at the institute very early, almost by accident, and had ample time to contemplate the evening program. I left it that way and didn’t take initiative to make an appointment with you earlier. That’s a passive attitude. I look at you and follow...that doesn’t feel right for the structure fanatic in me.

On 7 November, a new variation on this theme appeared. No preparation and spacious time to discuss several things! Oh, how I enjoy those conversations with you. Within no time I got engaged in all sorts of thoughts on the notion of ‘critical’ like it’s formulated by the department. Critical, in the sense of critical on society (repression, humiliation), as opposed to the space and freedom everyone has. Who am I to judge that you (the Other) needs to be ‘saved’, ‘freed’ and/or ‘emancipated’? And who is saving whom? And oh...how I experience this urge in me. No, no answer or solution found. I don’t need to. This fight and conversation is fascinating and exciting...In short, a beautiful preparation! My fire is ignited again and I prefer to be ‘researcher’ above being ‘coach’. Why isn’t that combined? More conversations are needed.

About the workshop itself, I think of the beginning as slow and stolid and again I had the feeling that I didn’t want to ‘disturb’ you. I followed you and didn’t take initiative. Later I thought, ‘without a role, I cannot function well’. I wanted to hurry up. I got restless from all this rummaging around and I didn’t say anything about that. To turn to the topic of my role, some things became clear
Let’s Dance

to me, like ‘I am scared to be addressed, especially on content’ and ‘You want
to get as much out of the students as possible and I am leading more’. I think
of your behavior and convictions as ‘more beautiful’ and I want to be able to
do that too. I get away from myself and get confused. I don’t do that anymore.
That’s what I tell myself now. My internal experience shows externally. Both
Ellen and Bianca have asked me explicitly to give feedback to their research
plans. In both stories, they write: ‘Renée as guide?’ Yes, I understand that: I’m
not clear about my role...and in that way I become an ‘assistant-coach’!...
So, I decided!!! I have given feedback to both about their plans without
consulting you (a triumph over myself), just from myself, together with my vague
knowledge on the differences between phenomenology and ethnographic
research. Yippee! Thoughts of ‘Will I show Loes if I did right’ dance through my
head...certainly not! I go as ‘me’ and mistakes are there to be made. Moreover,
you don’t send me the feedback asking if it is all right... There is a difference
between you and me, an open door...but it’s alright for me to open that door
again. I am direct and over-simplifying. Why should I hide that?

Love,
Renée

Context: Dancing Styles

In this context I elaborate the construction of what is seen as style. This
section is related to the conversation on the teaching styles of Renée and
myself, and also an exploration of styles of writing in this book, which
I relate to different Self-Other relations or me in relation to different
created audiences.

In Buenos Aires and other parts of Argentina, tango is danced in a spectrum of
individualistic or personal styles and many tango dancers who are Argentine do
not accept a categorization of their own dancing by any broad stylistic name.
They simply say they are dancing tango, their own style or the style of their
neighborhood or city. A few confuse the issue further by identifying their own
style by a name that other dancers associate with a different style. (Brown,
2000)

Styles and differences in styles are a stabilization of certain characteristics
of something that is conceived as an entity (e.g. a dance, a style of
teaching of a teacher, styles of learning, writing style). With an emphasis

17 Renée refers to a name that a group of students once gave her when we were on a benchmark trip
to the United States. I was the coach of those students for their entire course, but Renée was also a
couch. She felt disappointed when they called her an ‘assistant-coach’ at that time.
Feeling Struck

on relational aspects of dancing, teaching, learning, and writing, these acts are seen as always being part of a relational context. The way I dance with someone depends on the music, the partner, our moods, our abilities to make certain moves, the audience, our previous experience with dancing, our stories—about how one should dance—and all kinds of other texts. When constructing ‘a variety of styles in Argentine tango’, certain differences between the dances or music are stressed, while other differences are disregarded. Tango style is a construction that obviously not all dancers agree on. Analogous to the styles of dancing, styles of teaching can be differentiated. Attention is then paid to differences in teaching as, for example, student-centeredness or teacher-centeredness. These are styles that are sometimes storied as basic to the anthropology of courses or educational institutes (Jansen & van der Linde, 2006). Within the texts from the programs or institutes, the similarity in styles is emphasized. For instance, the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht characterizes itself as providing competence-based education. Meanwhile, within those rough divisions, teacher-student relations differ moment to moment and from relationship to relationship, as every tango differs from moment to moment. Discussions about those differences in styles are processes of constructing a reification of ‘style’. Labeling aspects as style is constructing boundaries between what is seen as part of that style and what is not, as what is inside and what is outside. Making use of language is inescapable making differentiations. Focusing on style is focusing on stabilized patterns (repetition and similarity) and differences in patterns from other (stabilized) patterns, instead of focusing on ongoing relational constructed patterns.

The description of the participants of the Living Environment Research Project by using metaphors (see Appointment with supervisors: Apples) can be read as descriptions of styles, as characteristics of persons. Constructing ‘style’ as stabilized patterns of inter-act as characteristics of an entity, such as a group, a person or an educational program, is marking what is inside and outside. I like to see this tension between a need for marking differences between the acts of Others and Self, and the need to be seen as similar to Others, as tension between belonging and being recognized as an individual. The conversation on styles between Loes and Renée can be seen in this light. Paying attention to the stabilized patterns by acknowledging and recognizing them is a possible way to
create being struck, which opens up these patterns. This then invites other possible inter-acts, text-contexts, or act-supplements. Discussing styles of teaching on the edge of the tension of belonging and individuality is now seen as an act of ongoing construction of more or less hard differentiated Self-Other relations.

With the use of language, such as when writing about differences in teaching styles, the boundaries between styles seem to become more stable and fixed. Talking about something as style inherently excludes unacknowledged patterns of inter-act and is a simplification of ongoing inter-acts. Styles of dancing, teaching, and learning are not fixed and stable. That which is considered to be a certain style is limited for this moment in this specific context, for instance, with this interaction between you, the reader, and me, the writer. By discussing styles of teaching, wording, and negotiating about styles, differences and similarities in styles, stabilized patterns can become open for reconstruction. *Talking about* can have significance in this sense.

The relational contexts determine what is seen as patterns belonging to a style. In the contexts of the Master’s Program in Ecological Pedagogy and Real-Life Learning, one of the characteristics of the educational style that is determined is the responsibility of students. The constructed differences in inter-acts between ‘coaches’ and ‘students’, as expressed in the conversation between Renée and me, are in the typification of the style of the program less important. Meanwhile, the issues of responsibility, for example, or of how to prepare a meeting, which Renée and I discuss, can be regarded as part of the contexts of the Master’s Program in Ecological Pedagogy and Real-Life Learning and its focus on student-responsibility. With that said about the use of the word ‘style’, I see discussing styles, like the styles of inter-acts that are called ‘teaching’, to be helpful in recognizing stabilized patterns of inter-act. Discussing style is a possibility for critical reflection, for creating moments of feeling struck.

**Writing Multiple Voices**

[Genres are not simply ways of speaking but also ways of seeing, knowing and understanding. Different genres, then place us in somewhat different worlds,
or at least provide different accents for experiencing our world, including our
selves and others. (p. 119, Sampson, 1993/2008)

Patterns of inter-act entail the coming together of different texts (contexts),
which turn style into a relational quality. Writing style is an example of
this. Writing is a communicative act in anticipation of Others. An author
writes something for an audience (including him- or herself, for instance
when writing an appointment in the appointment book), a dialogical Self
in anticipation of the responses of various Others (Sampson, 1993/2008).
Again, it is possible to say that the style of writing is attached to a person,
a characteristic of a person. Rather, from a dialogical understanding of
Self, style of writing is also addressed to an audience. A style of writing,
of representation, is an act of relating in a sense that the author positions
him/her self towards (assumed) demands of certain imagined audiences,
a construction of audiences. While constructing the text of this book, I
came across some questions related to different contexts: do I meet the
criteria and to what extent? Which ‘group’ do I want to address? When
I represent this ethnography in a difficult text, do I separate myself from
my colleagues? If my writing is too accessible, do I meet academic
criteria? What do I communicate with the style of writing? Gergen and
Gergen ask: ‘[H]ow does our form of inscription shape the trajectory of
our relationships together?’ (p. 12, Gergen & Gergen, 2002). What do I
want to inscribe and can I know what the reader will read? To Bakhtin
(1981) language, as an expressive system, is stratified and heteroglot18.
He writes, ‘This stratification is accomplished first of all by the specific
organisms called genres. Certain features of language (lexicological,
semantic, syntactic) will knit together with the intentional aim and with
the overall accentual system inherent in one or another genre’ (p. 288).
Bakhtin continues, ‘In addition, there is interwoven with this generic
stratification of language a professional stratification of language...the
language of the lawyer, the doctor, the businessman...the public education
teacher and so forth’ (p. 289). Choosing between genres or writing style
is constructing Self-Other relations, relations of me and (images of)
communities of interlocutors (Gergen, 1994).

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18 Heteroglossia is a term Bakhtin uses to indicate the presence of two or more voices or discourses,
gen erally expressing alternative or conflicting perspectives (p. 1, Shields, 2007)
One context of my writing is the way I story an academic community:
• The audience expects an academic writing style, which I understand as making use of a lot of literature and theory;
• Writing at a distance (as not too personal) and in an abstract way;
• I must show the audience that I am able to understand difficult texts;
• From a more postmodern perspective, I must and want to make more than one authoritative reading possible.

Another context is the following: I anticipate that my colleague coaches, students and teachers read the text, a context that I story as if they:
• Expect solutions instead of questions.
• Want to be able to recognize him/ herself or the situations.
• They might not be very fond of difficult texts.
• Read the text as representation of that which happened.

In addition, the students that participated in the Living Environment Research Project would like to read the book. Moreover, what should be done if they don’t recognize themselves in the text? I know, from a relational constructionist perspective, it’s a false problem, because what you read is finally the narrative you create with the texts that I selected and put on paper, but still...

Finding a style of writing was a struggle, a struggle that has not ended. Writing is dancing with different partners/audiences, meeting different styles and constructing a style. Gergen and Gergen write in their plea for entering the realm of (dramatic) performance: ‘As we expand our modes of expressions so do we expand the number of people with whom we can join in the dance of understanding’ (p. 19, Gergen & Gergen, 2002).

Critical relational constructionism puts emphasis on writing style in attempts to open up stabilized patterns of relating, such as interpreting text as representation, for instance as a representation of ‘my experience’ or mirroring the ‘real world.’ The questions that critical relational constructionism raises, create space for the use of poetry as stylistic approach, for example (e.g. Ramsey, 2006). Nevertheless, I found myself
Calvinist Reflections

stumbling over the frequent use of conditional phrases like, ‘if we take this approach, then....’ Or ‘this can be seen as....’ Understanding Self and Other as relationally constructed in the moment and not as separate entities contrasts with stories of separate entities with all kinds of psychological dimensions. Avoiding that kind of interpretation, often resulted in a detached style of writing. As I am more familiar with psychological dramatized texts, the people in my texts often appeared as flat. In addition, I like the style of writing that is used in a context of phenomenology, a style that I story as: taking you into the situation, making the situation alive. That style does not seem to fit the questions of critical relational constructionism, but does meet my narrative of the characteristics of one of the audiences. In addition, I cannot avoid adding a narrative about my characteristics.

• I wrote this book in English, for all kinds of reason. The most important one is that I asked Dian Marie Hosking to be one of the supervisors and she doesn’t read Dutch. My English vocabulary has developed, but it’s not nearly as expansive as I want it to be.

• I don’t consider myself a juggler as far as writing is concerned. I think I’m reasonably good at explaining things in prose, but I am not very good at writing dialogue.

Finding a style of writing and writing about styles (of dancing, teaching or educating) is as much a narrative of the individual as it is of local, social, and historical contexts. What is the result of all these contexts, which can only be partially represented? I see the text in this book as one large jigsaw puzzle built out of many already existing and newly written texts. The narratives are as much in the texts as in between these texts and I hope that the texts will invite many different audiences to dance a dance of constructing new narratives.

Reflection Chapter 4: Calvinist Reflections

The title of this section is inspired by a remark made by Hugo, who frequently characterizes my work as Calvinistic, and turning back to the texts in Chapter 4, Feeling Struck, I context the style of this part of the book as constructing a Calvinist reflection. The reflection in this chapter can be regarded as exploring what is done rightly or wrongly. I am blaming myself for not doing the things right. This critical reflection on my acts and behavior, with the assistance of
reflective remarks or evoked by remarks by Hugo, Renée, Chris, and Dian Marie, is then a reflection that is more focused on closing down than on opening up: this is right and that is wrong; this is better than that. An example of this is my reaction to Renée’s first letter in which she made remarks about the atmosphere. My first reaction: ‘I did not consider that. I focused too much on the activities.’ I think that this kind of reflection can be part of creating moments of feeling struck, towards an opening up and creating new possibilities, unless these new possibilities are predefined and bounded to the opposite of what is created as wrong. In this example, the reflection provoked by a remark of Renée wouldn’t open new possible acts if I had wanted to copy Renée’s acts. If constructions of what is real and good (e.g. Renée’s acts) are stabilized, critical reflection is diminished to finding the most effective way and can result in protocols and best ways to act. That would ignore the contextuality of act-supplements and the relational construction of what is good or better. And not only that: predefined and stable constructions of what is real and good close down the possibilities of collaborative constructions of these.

Other critical reflections are provoked by texts that I have written myself, for instance in the section Context: Talk about dancing. All these reflections are in the words of Schön reflections on actions instead of reflections in action (1983, 1987). The texts can be read as narratives of a Self in relation to other (constructed) Selves, for instance the observer, the friend and colleague, the teacher and the uncertain student. The reflections in this chapter are dances with the texts of critical relational constructionism and dances with (texts of) Renée and my supervisors. It’s an opening or it creates a possibility for opening up stabilized patterns of interact through different dances. These creations of possibilities to learn through creating moments of feeling struck intend to open up what is framed as real and good. The idea of soft Self-Other differentiation serves to open up these frames, but is in itself a frame that defines what is real and good. This is an inescapable paradox: opening up frames or boundaries, by redefining new boundaries.

The Self storied in the texts of this chapter, the Self as the pitying, doubting, and uncertain Self, is blaming herself for how things work out. In this way, this Self is constructed as the subject acting on the ‘students’, the objects. Again this

19 In Jos Kessel’s work out of a Socratic conversation (Kessels, 1997), he writes about the feeling of elenchus, of feeling ashamed, ‘the purification of elenchus does not only free you from pretences, it can also force you to find out how it really is.’ Apart from the last addition on ‘how it really is’, I sure think that elenchus or shame can be seen as examples of feeling struck which rouse finding out.
narrative constructs hard-differentiated Self-Other as subject/object relations. The possible relational aspect of blaming the students for being manipulative—as Hugo suggested in *Appointment with Supervisors, Apples*—and being the subject acting on the ‘teacher’ as object is not considered. I see the conversations of Renée and Loes and with myself (as in the text *If I look for Parallels, I will find them*) as helpful possibilities to coordinate with each other ‘in ways that do not claim an outside and ‘above’ (external superior knowing and influencing) position’ (p. 61, Hosking & Bass, 2003). The relations of Renée and myself might be constructed as more soft differentiated than the relations with the ‘students’ in the texts of workshop 7. What keeps us, participants of the Living Environment Research Project, from having these kinds of inter-acts with each other? Which threshold can be taken?

In this chapter, more space is given to texts about dances of Renée and me, my supervisors and me, and relational constructionist texts and me. The texts of dances of ‘students’ and me are presented as input for critical reflections, which seem to result in texts about me dancing with the other people (e.g. Renée, The Professor and The Master) more than with the ‘students’. As I pointed out in the *Reflection on Chapter 3*, the narrative of me distancing myself from the process is relatively strong. In that section I stated that I was looking through a window at what was happening because of the fear of not succeeding. I end this Chapter 4 with the narrative of me distancing myself from the Living Environment Research Project by critically reflecting on what I did wrong as an actor acting on the ‘students’. Is my research still preventing me from joining in? The act of critically reflecting on act-supplements might be constructed as creating distance and creating boundaries between me and the other participants in the Living Environment Research Project. I must admit that the dances with the ‘students’ did not inspire me in the way the dances with the —real or imagined—Professors, Renée(s), Masters, or the (meta) theoretical texts inspired me. In the texts about workshop 7, I seem to address my acts in anticipation of responses with a desired Self, in relation to these Others, instead of addressed to the students. The context me-researching-this-project seems very influential, next to numerous other contexts that build up our teacher-student relations.
CHAPTER 5

Soft Differentiation
In this chapter, I construct the end of the Living Environment Research Project as part of my PhD process. Although I frequently thought to stop collecting material for my PhD research, I continued making audio recordings and journal entries for a long time. I had the uneasy feeling that we did not reach kinds of softer differentiated teacher-student relations. Opening up our more stabilized act-supplements through critical reflection kept on offering new possibilities. The last text from the Living Environment Research Project presented in this book is a collaborative constructed paper on critical pedagogy. The project continued after that and created more texts, but I decided not to use these in my research. There had to be some end, and I like to construct that end at what I assume to be an example of softer differentiated teacher-student relations. In this Chapter 5, I narrate about how I think I was able to take the threshold to join in. The first section of this Chapter Soft Differentiation consists of texts about constructing a harder differentiation between me as teacher and me as researcher, texts of workshops 9, 10 and 11 with the ‘students’ and of excerpts of a collaborative construction of a paper. Again, the grey boxes contain critical reflections from a constructionist perspective on impediments in constructing softer teacher-student relations. In this chapter, these contexts are entitled: Creating Otherness; Rhythm; Inviting to Improvise; and Soft Differentiation and Sameness. As in the Chapter 3 and 4, I also present a reflection on this chapter called Joint Action.

Construction of Differentiation

I was struck by the processes of researching, as I have narrated in Chapter 4. During the workshops it was as if I was looking over my own shoulder. It was as if I was judging what I did or said before I even spoke or did it. These judgments were related to the conversations with The Professor (Hugo Letiche) and The Master (Dian Marie Hosking) as well as to the conversations with Chris about the material of the Living Environment Research Project. I experienced the same related to Renée’s reaction about the workshops and our ongoing conversation. The reflections on the texts seemed to have a paralyzing effect on my relating with the students.

In the PhD workshops at the University for Humanistics, participants were asked to bring in some work for discussion. The text included below was written for this purpose. Even though The Professor mentioned that the research would be aided by separating what is happening in the workshops,
from researching the workshops more than six months prior (see section Appointment with Supervisors: Apples in Chapter 4), it took me some time to get to that point. In February 2007, I wrote a text for a PhD workshop in which I considered the trouble I had with that. I wanted to tell about a strange schism that occurred in me. Although I felt in need of constructing a differentiation between researching and working with students, at the same time it felt as if it was inconsistent with relational constructionist meta-theory and my attempt for soft differentiations. Sitting in the circle with other PhD candidates (all except one who started later than I did) and some of the tutors, I read my text aloud, hoping for recognition and maybe for some further understanding of what I constructed as inconsistent.

**Excerpt of text for discussion:**

I realize that I have to separate my two roles, identities as it were: that of the researcher and that of the coach. In my relation with the students I have to connect with ‘Coach Loes’ and act in my usual way. I have to be ‘Researcher Loes’, who is able to look at the process as if it was not about me.

This seems to be an easy cut-off between those two identities, but it is not because I cannot split myself in two. ‘Loes’ is the connecting bond in both the identities. Obviously, I need to realize that these are two identities, both of which are needed to complete the work with the students and the work as researcher. Naming those two identities might intimate that they really exist, but they do not. I can devise or construct many other identities as well. It is a story about me, a story I tell myself and a story that has its usefulness for a time in order to complete the work. The differentiation of the two identities is part of my story of becoming a researcher and it is interesting to tell the students in the Living Environment Research Project, who are become researchers as well.

I do not believe in distanced research, objectively looking at what is happening, but I do need to stand at a distance and disconnect from what is happening in order to create another perspective from which to observe. Disconnection seems desirable, but is disconnection the absolute opposite of connection? I am not disconnected from myself. I create these identities of myself to help me out of any confusion, but it is temporary. When I create these two identities and look at my material through that mirror, I see students react to both
of them. ‘Coach Loes’ is the one who can help figure out what you want to do, the one who tells stories about her own research project and the problems she faces. She’s the one who knows about research methods. ‘Research Loes’ is the one who tells stories about what is happening during the workshops, who writes up every detail, which she is going to present in a book. Nevertheless, there is the connection too: as ‘Coach Loes’ I work together with the students in a project team; as ‘Research Loes’ I analyze the workshops and propose all kinds of adjustments.

Although the purpose of the text was to stimulate discussion, I encountered endorsing reactions from the other PhD candidates as well as from the tutors. I had the experience that the other candidates heard my story as something interesting, but that they were unable to respond to it because they were in a different phase of their projects. I noticed that this splitting up seemed so obvious to do. Why did it take me so much time to understand and to practice this? Was my attachment to the program, to Real-Life Learning and to my work too great to act critically? One of the distracting contexts was my wish to soften the differentiation between Self and Other. With the splitting of myself into two identities, I seemed to do the opposite, which was a conflict that I unnecessarily afforded myself. The endorsing responses made me realize this. As I see it now, at the time of writing this sentence, the construction of a differentiation between me as researcher and me as coach helped me to loosen up a bit and to release some of the pressure concerning the outcomes of the project with the students in relation to my PhD research.

Context: Creating Otherness

The quest in this book is for collaborative learning, with more softer differentiated teacher-student relations. In the words of Jansen (p. 94, 2007): ‘The learner becomes teacher and the teacher becomes learner in a reflexive permanently changing learning adventure’. For me, this collaborative learning is related with John Shotter’s ‘joining with’ or ‘joint action’, which he describes as:

...[W]hat is so special about joint action is that its overall outcome is not up to any of the individuals concerned in it; it is entirely novel; its outcomes are as if they have come “out of the blue.”(p. 15, Shotter, 1997)
In this context, I reflect on the text *Construction of differentiation* and relate this to joint action. I explore the ostensible paradox of soft differentiation through hardening a differentiation.

Becoming a learning team, carrying out a joint action or a collaborative action, learning collaboratively, building something entirely novel together, ‘become as one in the tango’, I construct as in need for leaving boundaries of roles and fixed identities behind us. If one is teaching the Other, and the Other is learning from the teacher, I see this as individual actions instead of joint actions. So if we stick to the roles of a teacher who teaches the student, and the student who learns from the teacher, a collaborative action cannot be accomplished. The implication is that we are willing to cross boundaries as boundaries between Self and Other, teachers and students.

In the text I presented in the PhD workshop, ‘Coach Loes’ and ‘Research Loes’ are staged as separate entities, two separate identities constructed for pragmatic reasons. I state this ‘creation of boundaries’ in relation with my relational perspective as problematic. However, I might construct it differently: I created a differentiation, a rough and simplified differentiation between Loes-in-relation-to-‘students’ and Loes-in-relation-to-research-material. In an attempt to cross boundaries, I created other boundaries, not boundaries around parts of me, but boundaries around me in relation to Others (people, stuff), a multiple dialogical Self. Creating boundaries is an act of simplifying the amount of complex relations, a simplification necessary for being able to talk or write about, and deal with. I constructed the boundaries between those two relational identities in order to get out of a complex confusion. In effect, this construction helped me to choose when to dance with which dance partners (see Context: Dancing with an Audience).

As Anja expressed in the quote on p. 189 some people dance with the audience more than with their dance partner and the music. To relate this to me being in the workshops with ‘students’: I was not dancing with the ‘students’, I was dancing with an imagined audience. That imagined audience included for instance The Big Guy, The Professor, The Master, and a Calvinist me. Next to that, I might construct a parallel narrative. I danced with other dance partners as well. For instance, when The
Professor suggested that the students were manipulative, I did not want to follow his line of arguing, maybe because I was dancing with the—imagined—students as well, and I did not want to have negative thoughts about them. From this respect I conclude that tangoing with the real, present people in the workshops, is disturbed by dancing with imagined people, including myself as Calvinist observer of the actions. With whom were the others dancing during our workshops? They must have brought in other dance partners that provide contexts for our dances during the workshops as well. For instance the image they have off themselves — ‘I am a person who wants to know what I am up to’, ‘I want to do it right in the eyes of the teacher’ —, historical teachers who have made them feel dump, the image they assume colleagues have of them, the demands of their managers or partners and so on. It must have been rather crowded on the dance floor.

All these different dance partners might have influenced joining with and softening the teacher-student differentiations. The different tangos with different imagined Others (Sampson, 1993/2008), imagined tango partners, seemed to enable positioning the ‘present’ dance partners as outsiders, for instance, as a researcher or as someone waiting for the final moment to join with. As an example, ‘I have to do it right’ was a paralyzing phrase in my head. But right according to whom? Right in relation to whom or to what? Right in relation to imagined people or in relation to the people present in the moment? What is right is ambiguous and this ambiguity confused me. Together with the idea of dividing Researcher Loes and Coach Loes, The Professor’s remark: ‘The Loes that is doing research, can accuse Loes the tutor, of making huge errors and still be a brilliant researcher’ (22 June 2006) helped to find a way through this ambiguity of right and wrong. It enabled me to construct right and wrong as attached to separated relational constructed identities. This separation is a discursive device and therefore creates boundaries. A separation that I saw as necessary to let the different Self-Other unities dance with one another. The narrative I construct for myself was as follows.

This division between Coach Loes and Research Loes enabled me to distinguish between the different dances and dance partners and I felt freed from the pressure of dancing with all kinds of dance partners at the same time.
Workshop 9: Research Goals

In between workshop 7 and 9, Guus informed Renée and me that he could not come to workshop 8 and after that we did not hear from him again until the completion of the project (see p. 248). He didn’t reply to my e-mails anymore. I never found out what happened to him and his colleague Marinus. Didn’t they want to participate? Didn’t they want to join in? Was the pressure of work in school too much? I gave the last reason the most attention and I left it as it was after having made several attempts to get in contact with them. A little voice in me asked whether it was the guidance of the ‘teachers’ that was too abstract. Did we need to take smaller steps? Were we expecting too much? On the other hand, I thought we were concrete with both Guus and Marinus. Didn’t they feel comfortable in the group or with us coaches? Did the demands of their schoolwork and the little support in finance and time make them decide to quit? Did they decide to quit or did that just happen? Maybe the tension between the lack of support form their management and opposed to that, the program demands for critical professional development became too noticeable. I was disappointed, especially because they ended without communicating with us at all. They did not want to involve us in this. Why not?

The next texts are narratives about workshop 9, a workshop which took place on 7 February 2007, 6.00 – 9.00 p.m.

At the start of this workshop, Renée asked Ellen how she experienced the review of her proposal she had received. Ellen was the only student of the Living Environment Research Project that had dared to send in a proposal—entitled Kidsngamez—for the first Dutch Educational Research Association-conference (DERA)1 in June 2007. The DERA also intended to offer the opportunity to present work in progress for round table sessions, for which Ellen had enrolled.

‘I didn’t look at it thoroughly. At first, I did not understand all of the remarks’, Ellen responded.

‘I think it was a positive review. You can be proud of yourself.’ Renée

1 Inspired by our visit to the AERA in San Francisco, the department ‘Innovative Methodology and Didactics in Teacher Training’ organized this DERA. On our way home from the AERA, Hans, Renée, Riki, and I developed the idea for this conference, which was initially intended to give students of the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy a podium for presenting their scientific research as part of their graduation. Initially, we organized several Special Interest Groups (SIG) with coaches of the program as members. Students were then invited to send in a proposal for a presentation. The SIG reviewed them and decided if the quality of the proposal was good enough, to ask the students to develop a paper. The first conference was planned for June 2007 and proposal had to be submitted before 15 December 2006.
complimented her, ‘and you did it. That is more than many can say.’

‘It was hard work, but it sure helped me to focus my research,’ was Ellen’s reaction.

‘Inspired by your proposal, I tried to write one before Christmas, but I am going through a bad time and my enthusiasm was gone; so I stopped,’ Corrie said.

What was happening, why did so many students express that they were inspired and enthusiastic, but that that flooded away when they were at home? Is it ‘just’ the busy life of studying, working and other private circumstances? For some it seemed that learning is something you do when in contact with other students and with coaches who ask you questions. Learning when in contact with others was easier for Ellen and Bianca to continue outside of the workshops because they live together.

After a while Femke told about her doubts concerning her research project on girls and horses and I said to her, ‘I see a pattern when I listen to your story.’

Femke replied, ‘yeah, I don’t want to do that old subject with the girls and horses anymore. Now I’m thinking of something like following children that are in a process of being taken into a children’s home because one of the children in my classroom is in that process now.’

Again another topic I think, does she notice what she is doing?

I said to her, ‘that is not what I mean. You never seem to get started. When there is a plan, you stop and choose something else. What’s happening?’

‘I have trouble in finding out where it is going,’ Femke replied.

Bianca reacted immediately and said, ‘a few weeks ago, I had similar thoughts about my research. I couldn’t figure out what my research on playing children was about. I felt blocked when I thought about the project and I didn’t understand why. What will be the benefits of it? That’s what I was occupied with.’

‘And now?’ I asked her, ‘since you are telling this in the past tense.’

‘Well, I sort of found an answer by thinking it out and discussing it with Loes. I now see some sort of value, the value of ethnographic research, uhm I think I have collected some nice material, like the little film I showed you in the previous workshop, and I want to show that material. What I was occupied with was that I decided what I would show and that doesn’t seem fair. What is the benefit of my choice? By discussing and reading about this issue of the position of the researcher, my view on this shifted. I now see the purpose of showing what happens and that others can discuss it...’
In an attempt to help Bianca to clarify her story I walked over to the white board and drew a circle with a tree in it.

‘This is your film of the two boys climbing trees. The one you showed us last time. All kinds of things are around this,’ and I drew some arrows pointing to the circle. ‘The tree is in a neighborhood. Adults react to the game the children play, parents, other children. You can show your film to several people and ask them what they see. You think this film is about playing and learning because you see one child explaining to the other how to climb. But other people might see other stories in it. Those stories can be very interesting. What would a teacher at their school tell, for instance? Would she consider this learning?’

Then Renée interrupted with a sharp analysis. ‘In my opinion, there are two different issues playing out. I hear you, Bianca, say something about the value of your research. And I hear you [she pointed to Femke] talking about inability to choose. That there is something in the relation between me and the purpose, the choosing.’

‘Every time I’ve chosen, I doubt its value,’ Femke replied.

‘So is there something in common?’ Renée asked.

Femke explained her confusion saying, ‘It is this idea of adding something important. Other people have to listen or read the story while I doubt its importance.’

‘What is more important: research about children on their way to children’s homes or girls and horses? Does it feel more important when it concerns sad children?’ Renée asked, with hint of sarcasm in her voice.

‘Well, I think that those children in these homes seem worse, so that seems more important,’ Ivo jumped in.

‘Yeah, and sad children on sad horses, that might even be worse,’ Renée magnified her point. ‘Aren’t you allowed to have fun with your research?’

‘I am a bit confused,’ Ellen said, ‘that idea of these horses, I was under the impression that you were very much attached to that.’

‘I was,’ Femke said, ‘and that ebbed away.’

‘And in the end you wind up doing nothing except choosing and trying to make a decision,’ I reflected, not knowing how to help Femke out of this confusion. It seemed like it’s a concealed personal issue and a discussion with the whole group might be inappropriate. As a way out I suggested that Femke and I make an appointment for this.

Bianca continued to explain that she really enjoyed reading everything she came across and said, ‘that will take as long as needed.’

‘Are you planning to finish your research next year?’ I asked.
‘I think I might make a proposal for the DERA next year,’ she said, much to
my surprise.
I thought about the initial plan of this research project and the invitation letter
in which I suggested eighteen months. We had already been working together
for over a year and Bianca ‘thinks that she might make a proposal’ for next
year’s DERA. She was aiming to start a process that would take another
eighteen months. This wasn’t the first time that I thought she was drowning in
her enthusiasm.

With surprise and impatience in my voice I said, ‘You are planning to make
a proposal for December next year?’
‘This year, I don’t know, the project is in my head all the time and I don’t
have a job just yet, but when I do, I don’t know how much time I can spend on
it,’ said Bianca. She continued with, ‘I’m thinking about using Ellen’s material,
hers films of the children gaming in our living room. I think I can do something
with it.’

‘What is that something then? Renée asked her.
‘Well, I see an overlap in what Ellen is getting at and what I want to do, but
I find it hard to explain.’
‘But you have some ideas about it, don’t you?’ Renée continued.
‘I want to explore what is happening in the communication between them
and how the children learn from each other. I made some appointments with
Loes about what I’m going to do in the research in the other domains. What
I’m reading gives me a lot of new ideas to consider. I am now reading about
post-modernism and I read the Real-Life Learning book by Hans again.’
During the conversation that Bianca and I had, my understanding of the plan
was totally different from what she was saying here. I listened with increasing
amazement to what she was telling. In her search for a new job with children,
she had worked with preschoolers for a few weeks and came across a program
that intrigued her.
‘I thought that you were planning to compare that Kid’s Skills program with
Real-Life Learning, weren’t you?’ I asked
‘Yeah, that started it,’ Bianca explained, ‘but in my searches on the internet
and in literature, I come across all kinds of other interesting stuff.’
‘I think you should stick to one topic at a time and make a plan for that.
There’s no punishment if it isn’t ready on time. I think you should focus on one
thing. I thought we agreed you would write a paper.’
‘Well, a paper, that sounds so official, a scribbling,’ was Bianca’s response.
I felt disappointed because I thought Bianca and I had really established some
goals and here she seemed to be distracted once again.
Following this conversation, the workshop continued with Ivo’s and Corrie’s projects. After the break we analyzed a part of a conversation of Laura and two of her former pupils, although Laura wasn’t present because she felt ill.

**In between Workshops 9 and 10**

In between workshops 9 and 10, I had a conversation with Ivo during which he expressed his uncomfortable feeling about his progress in the program. He could hardly find the time to work on it. He felt tired and decided to stop for a few months. When the course began, his initial concern had been that starting to work right after his graduation and also doing this master’s program was a bit too much. That seemed to become real. We decided to meet each other every six weeks just to discuss how things were going and to keep in contact. Femke, Cees,2 and I had a conversation in which Femke decided to stop with the Living Environment Research Project. She explained this in an e-mail to the group.

**Message**

From: Femke  
Subject: Re: Wednesday  
To: Loes Houweling; Living Environment Research Group

Hi Loes and Living Environment Group,

I’m a bit late with this mail, but anyway, I want to tell you that I’m stopping with the research. I took this decision after several conversations I had with Loes and Cees. I wasn’t successful in getting started. I didn’t really adopt the chosen subject of my research. For a variety of reasons, it didn’t challenge me. I will proceed with Cees to do something with all the information of the research so far. Corrie, Cees, and I will go on in some sort of reflective learning group and we might join one of Cees’ other learning teams.

I will miss you as a group. I always found the workshops to be inspiring and fun. But at home, the inspiration ebbed away.

I wish you all good luck and fun with your research. We will meet again somewhere.

Regards,

Femke

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2 Cees was Femke’s coach for learning processes other than the Living Environment Research Project.
Let’s Dance

Context: Rhythm

‘If you are leading the dance, when it feels right —not before— begin walking. If you are following, do not be anxious to start. Resist (just the tiniest bit) the leader’s efforts. Your resistance will actually help your partners lead you and make it easier for you to follow them.’ (Carroll, 1997)

Uniformity of the Crowd Rhythm: When we are all reacting with 1 – 2 step rhythmic movements, we start to build up a uniform “feel” to the dance floor. Each leader is able to figure out just how much time he had to avoid the people on all sides of him. (Stermitz, 1997)

Argentine tango has many different faces, for instance it can be danced on stage, in streets, or on dance events. The tango danced on dance events or Milonga’s is the kind of tango that is used as metaphor. At these Milonga’s the social aspect of tango is most strong. As Stermitz explains, dancing on these dance events asks for special abilities, on his website he writes about navigating skills and awareness. His advices were especially for the leader, because, as I explained earlier, it is the leader who is in charge of dancing with the crowd and preventing the couple from bumping into other couples.

Rhythm is important in the Argentine tango. Most tango music styles are characterized by the different rhythms in one piece. Poly-rhythms and poly-melodies add to the depth of tango music (Stermitz, 2006). These poly-rhythms and melodies are not presented in an alternating order, but do occur at once, for instance performed by the different instruments. Next to passionate and exciting movements, dancing is playing with tempi. The choice between the different rhythm lines provides tension which makes Argentine tango exciting to do and to watch.

As Stermitz suggests, during Milonga’s a rhythm of the crowd develops. To dance together, to become one with the crowd, to become passionate about processes of collaboration as intended by Real-Life Learning and the Master’s Program in Ecological Pedagogy, is like joining the crowd in its rhythm and pace. Entering the rhythm of ‘the crowd’ is an issue Stermitz, and other authors discuss. How to start dancing as a couple, while the crowd is having its own rhythm. Several remarks of ‘students’ can be seen as dealing with these issues as well. In Ivo’s and Femke’s stories about
leaving the Living Environment Research Project, they narrate their own rhythm and pace as being out of tune with the rhythm and pace of ‘the group’, which leads to their decision to leave. Almost a year before this, Joan had brought up this argument for leaving the project as well (see Chapter 3). Their questions and needs, as they narrate them, are not in tune with the dynamics of the others and they seem not to consider this to change. They construct the group as separated from them.

Rhythm and pace are aspects that needs consideration in collaborative learning when the aim is to experience dancing as one, as a group, as ‘crowd’. What is constructed as ‘a pace of a group’ which is distinguished from the construction of ‘the pace of an individual’ can function as exclusion and inclusion, as the actions of Femke, Joan, and Ivo might be understood as excluding themselves from the ‘group’. Differences in pace, differences in realities, can withhold us from dancing together. Dancing together implies some sort of harmonization of pace. However, in order to create a crowd rhythm, it must be regarded worthwhile to wait or to speed up, to adjust. In the texts of the Living Environment Research project, some participants are storied as being able to influence the pace and rhythm, others narrate that they are unable to influence this and that they see no other alternative than to leave.

From a perspective of rhythm and pace, it seems as if Femke did not join the dance, she did not feel up to start walking and wanted to start another project repeatedly. In the e-mails and conversations in the workshops, this seems constructed as a characteristic of her: not being able to choose. The construction of characteristics of an individual as cause for not getting a uniformity of rhythm does leave the responsibility for alignment at the individual. When after several attempts it does not seem possible to join the uniformity of the crowd, the only option is to decide to leave the project (the Milonga), and that is what Femke did. From a relational meta-theory this rather should be seen as a relational problem, in which dominance of a certain rhythm or pace is created. Stermitz writes about necessary leader skills for dancing:

Stermitz writes about necessary leader skills for dancing:

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Bakhtin’s term *Chronotope* can be related to an idea of simultaneous and multiple time-space relationships (Sampson, 1993/2008), which can be seen as underlying these differences in pace and rhythm. Sampson connects this with different perspectives on the world.
Vocabulary: some of your “moves” simply won’t work. You need to have the rhythmic vocabulary, in particular a quick, rock-step to get you out of trouble, and as you do a turn, sometimes the only place you can put your partner is the spot you just vacated (Stermitz, 1997).

The construction of a mutual pace is a shared responsibility, in which as I see it, the leader has some specific responsibilities. Leaders or teachers should have a rhythmic vocabulary, but also be aware of different rhythms. I think that educators should take up the role of the leader as in an Argentine tango. Leading entails awareness of differences in pace, differences in rhythm, and a rhythmic vocabulary is necessary to enable poly-rhythms instead of one dominant rhythm as rhythm of the crowd. Soft differentiated teacher-student relations and shared responsibilities do not imply that all participants have the same responsibilities. Responsibilities are part of the collaborative construction. Yet, within the local, social, and historical educational context, I do think that teachers do need to be aware of the differences more than students do.

A construction of Ivo’s withdrawing based on rhythm and pace might be as follows: Ivo seemed to have started dancing and then he got out of tune. Dancing an Argentine tango together needs concentration, as I experienced myself during my first tango lesson. Distractions can disturb your rhythm and in order to tune in again even more efforts are necessary, efforts one might be willing to do if the benefits of the joint action are valued enough. The implication of joint action or collaborative learning is some mutual recognition. When all kinds of other things of live demanded Ivo’s attention, the choice to join the dance of the Living Environment Research Project had to be reconfirmed, but was not. Sometimes it is a wise decision to stop the collaboration, to stop dancing together. We do not have to dance with everyone, always. In addition ‘coaches’ do not have to dance with all ‘students’, sometimes another ‘coach’ is a better dance partner. I would have loved to continue dancing with Ivo, but there were all kinds of other dance partners asking him to dance and we took a decision. Later on, Ivo finished his Master’s with one of the other coaches of the program.
Workshop 10: Parallels

Student-workshop 10 took place at 14 March 2007, 2.00 – 5.00 p.m. Again this next text is my dramatization based on audio recording, transcript and notes.

‘Shall I tell you something about my work, as a start up for today?’ I opened the workshop with Corrie, Laura, Bianca and Ellen. Renée was unable to attend.

‘Yeah, fun,’ was Bianca’s immediate response.

All others seemed to consent, so I started to tell about the agreement I made with The Master and The Professor to write thirty pages about what I thought was happening in the workshops.

‘I thought that the spring break would provide me with the two weeks I would need for that. However, I didn’t know what I should write. I thought that if I sat at my computer to try to write for two hours and nothing happened, I would then allow myself to stop.’

Laura seemed to imagine herself in my place and said, ‘Wow, that’s a long time if it isn’t successful.’

‘Yeah, maybe, but I have to give it a chance. If I stop after let’s says half an hour, then I’m not giving myself enough time to get into it. What I found out is that I came up with all kinds of ideas when I got into action. To that end, I went to the dunes for a walk and took along my iPod and microphone to dictate while walking. It must have seemed odd for others who were strolling by,’ I added to amusement of the others. ‘I find it difficult to choose what’s important, “How do I create data from my materials?” was the recurring theme during these days.’

‘Ha,’ Ellen said, ‘nice to hear you have the same problems we do.’

‘Yeah, that’s called researching. There are so many different ways of focusing. To name just a few: the design of the program and how it’s carried out, the differentiation between researcher and researched, learning together, learning in a team. That’s the same in your research projects. And what bothers me is that your influence as participants is in the practical, empirical part of research. However, now with the writing, it becomes my story, which is part of the reality that’s called taking on a PhD or graduation.’

‘I recognize that,’ Bianca said, ‘I have to choose now and I decide how things proceed. That gives another meaning to it. That’s exciting to have so much influence.’

‘You can’t beat that. Also when you do this research with the children, like you’re doing Ellen, you ask them to respond to the movies and to tell stories
about what they think they see. But in the end, you are going to write a paper for the DERA. You hold all the strings.’

‘You wanted to do dialogical research, at least, that is what you told some time ago. You wanted to do something with the relations between coach and student and between researcher and researched. How do you feel about that now?’ asked Ellen touching upon one of my main doubts.

I went on to add, ‘I wasn’t very successful with this. One of the reasons is that I planned it wrong from the beginning. You’re doing your research and I’m doing mine. I made that split at the start in the invitation letter and I did not dare to ask you to do too many things for my research because I thought it was a distraction from your projects. But anyhow, sooner or later I would get to a point at which it was going to be “my project” because I want to get a PhD and part of that reality is that I write a book.’

‘That’s the same with the DERA. How can we change this? Because nothing will change if we keep going along like this.’ Ellen continued.

‘I don’t know. You can’t change that instantly. It’s a deep tradition in academic worlds. We have to work from these traditions, change them slowly and the research that you are trying to perform is going in the right direction I think.’

Ellen did not want to put this aside so easily and said, ‘Mm, this puts a new light on my paper for the DERA. I’ll have to think about this. I’ll get back to you about it.’

Ellen’s determinacy to change things inspired me and I hoped she would take this further and come up with an alternative presentation on the DERA.

I continued the workshop by inviting Laura to do her presentation: ‘Laura, you agreed with Renée that you will present a critical book review on the book she lent you Girl Wide Web (Mazzarella, 2005). Do you want to do it now? It’s a pity that Renée isn’t here, but I don’t think we should postpone it. Do you?’ I asked Laura.

‘No, it’s okay. I want to do it now. Although I found it hard to figure out what I should understand about what a critical book review is. But Renée said that I must figure that out on my own, so I just started to read and write about how I see the text.’

‘Why did you do this,’ Corrie wanted to know.

‘It is a great incentive for me to get started. I have trouble reading an entire book. I usually lose my interest half way.’

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4 Renée had an appointment with Laura to talk about why she could not get started with her research. In that conversation, they decided upon this assignment for Laura.

5 As one of the first assignments for the PhD program, we had to do a critical book review. This idea is copied in the Master’s program.
The workshop continued with Laura’s story about the book and discussions about reading.

Workshop 11: Constructing Critical Pedagogy and Critical Research

In the following text, based on transcript and notes, I narrate about a workshop in which we discuss what critical pedagogy and critical research means to us. This narration starts with some contexts on reading literature.

12 April 2007, 6.00 - 9.00 p.m.

All through the project, Renée and I repeatedly suggested some literature on critical ethnographic research and critical pedagogy to the ‘students’ of the Living Environment Research Project. We pointed to the importance of positioning yourself towards some literature. However, to our disappointment, only Bianca seemed to have read some so far. Corrie articulated her problem with reading English literature and Ellen stuck to what she could find on internet. Researching and learning seemed to be understood as encountering other people, encountering ‘real’ people face-to-face or on the internet in forum discussions. It did not seem like something you do when in contact with, for instance, literature or by asking yourself different questions, inspired by literature. In March 2007, in another attempt to challenge the students to start reading, I suggested that everyone should read parts of different books on critical research or critical pedagogy and make a summary of their reading as input for a discussion on critical research. The summaries would be posted on the intranet and everyone would read all the summaries before the next workshop. Bianca, Ellen, Corrie, and Laura took up the invitation. On Thursday evening 12 April, we discussed what was read. A dialogue started to develop after a brief review of the summaries.

Renée opened the discussion by explaining her ideas on critical research. ‘Critical research is focused on power, control, suppression, and how one can know that they suppress or are being suppressed.’

‘In pedagogy that is the same question. How can I raise a child without knowing what is right for the other?’ Ellen added.

‘Some of this literature, for instance by Madison (2005), addresses a dialogue that is free of power. But, is that possible? Can we develop a dialogue like that?’ I added one of my personal questions.
'In my research I experience that my notion of what is right for the children shifts. At the start I thought our son’s gaming was something he shouldn’t do too much of. But that changed. I now see that my view on it was constricted. I saw it as something you do without communicating with others, without any creativity. However, my research and analysis of the movies made me understand that they do need creativity and they communicate a lot while playing. I also understood more about the games they play. It is also in my own interest that I now accept his gaming more because I like to do it very much. And there is something else important, at first Klaas helped me to know what I had to do and our relationship has benefited from that.’ Ellen explained.

‘I recognize that in my research as well,’ Corrie supported. ‘I started with this research on MSN. I was inspired by what is in the media about adults telling that it’s dangerous, their warnings against bullying, and all kinds of sexual abuse of children by this electronic communication device. Although that is all still happening and we should warn children about that, I now see how they enjoy what they do and how it adds to their social interacts. What inspired me, I think is something similar to your story [looking at Ellen]. It is the change in relationship with the children I interviewed. They love to explain it all and to help me out!’

Silently I was jubilant about these observations of Ellen and Corrie, this was precisely what I hoped students to experience by doing research. Being able to listen is so dramatically important for a pedagogue.

‘I hear you both say two things,’ I tried to wrap up. ‘You are telling that your projects changed your assumptions and you both tell something about the changed relationship in research. Your children are the informants. Can you say they are the more powerful, or is that overdoing it?’

‘Well, there is something changed in the power relation between the adult, the parent or the teacher and the child. It’s overdone if the child becomes more powerful, but it sure becomes a more equal relationship in that sense. At least that’s how I interpret it,’ Ellen said.

‘It is more balanced,’ Corrie added.

Bianca said, ‘you are trying to understand the other.’

‘That sounds like “going native”, the expression in much of the literature implying that you are identifying with the other more and more, and are no longer able to research the Other,’ Renée said, referring to the other side of this optimistic conversation.

‘Is that a problem?’ Bianca wanted to know.

‘Well, I think that you need to be critical about any assumption, including that of the Other. It’s not right to play computer games very much. We must continue to place question marks, shouldn’t we? You need to take distance as
well,’ I answered.

Laura expressed what she observed. ‘Ellen and Corrie’s assumptions shifted due to their research. Is that the benefit of critical research?’

Her remark and question resonated with something I had often read and I explained my insight, ‘According to this idea, as for instance what Thomas (1993) says, like you told us in your summary Bianca, “we must pay attention to our bias, our assumptions at the start.” However, from our stories, we can take this a little further: that bias must be able to shift. That’s nice, I haven’t read that in literature on critical research before.’

Renée pulled us back to the conversation about the understanding of critical, and asked, ‘can we know who is suppressed by whom?’

Ellen reacted immediately. ‘Does someone sound the alarm or do you establish that as either educator or researcher? Then you are back to knowing what is right and wrong; and what I think is wrong can suppress someone or something.’

Laura added, ‘Then you are going to save that person!’

‘Can you not do that? Can you raise, educate, or research without those ideas of who is being suppressed or what is right or wrong?’ I expressed my doubts as educator.

Bianca asked, ‘You mean as a person?’

I replied with, ‘is that at all possible? Can you raise children without knowing what is best for them? After all, knowing that someone is suppressed is also an act of suppression.’

Ellen tried to give an answer saying, ‘I think that you can do that without having a clear view on what is right for your child. I think that when your child is uncomfortable with this way of being raised, you as a parent need to reconsider.’

Bianca added, ‘What is right or wrong is something that you search for every day.’

‘That’s what I mean. You can bring up a child, but you can never say for 100 percent that you do it this way because you know for sure that this is right for you, that you will become a better person,’ said Ellen.

Laura said, ‘You do it in that way because you think that that’s better for the other at that moment.’

‘You mean that you don’t stick to the same ideas for ever,’ Corrie added.

‘That resonates with the ideas on critical research we created a few minutes ago.’ Renée concluded.
In reaction to the Thursday evening conversation in workshop 11, I write the following in my journal:

Critical research must contain an autoethnographic part! The conversation during the last workshop definitely underlined that. Ellen’s and Corrie’s story about their research providing changes to their own ideas and the idea of positioning yourself as researcher, makes an autoethnographic section in every research necessary. This shifting of ideas is in line with a dialogical position towards research. And not only towards research, towards pedagogy as well. If our knowledge isn’t open for reconstruction, we can turn into suppressors, even with our best intentions. Research and education as inter-acts as relational dances in which person-world relations are constructed or reconstructed and always open for reconstruction! This means that also your position as researcher is dialogical or part of a process of development. Positioning yourself as someone solid and unchangeable, with a clear described (theoretical) focus in the research project is neglecting the influence of research on you as researcher! The second chapter in my book should be read as a constructed starting point. I have to make clear how all the texts keep on changing as for instance my construction of relational constructionism changes.

I like these conversations, we all gain from them, we enter new grounds together, we learn together. We offer our contexts, our stories about researching and we combine that with other contexts, for instance what I learned about critical ethnography and making your bias clear. This combination results in new ideas! Who teaches who?’

At the end of the evening of workshop 11, something else important happened. I had sent the group the text from workshop 6 that I worked out and I asked them what they read in it.

Bianca responded with, ‘It feels odd to read about ourselves. Because the names are different, it makes me wonder, is this about us or not?’

Pleased with this feedback, I replied, ‘I have the same experience when writing it. It turns it into a more distanced piece of text than I would like it to be, although other readers will not notice that distance, it’s only for us and for some people that know us well.’

‘It doesn’t bother me if you use my name,’ Ellen said and the others nodded.
in agreement.
I thought, ‘Wow, what a vote of confidence.’ This demonstrated some of their commitment to my research and I gratefully accepted the opportunity to use their names as a reflection of this.

Context: Inviting to Improvise

Anja (16 July 2008): Both leading and following are fun. The leader determines the frameworks, the headlines, and his relationship with the music is stronger. The leader has to think about choreography and has to watch the traffic of the other people on the dance floor. The follower fills in the details. As follower, you can shut your eyes and you do not have to pay attention to the traffic. You react to the leader and adjust your own personality. A good leader invites you to show something of yourself.

Anja responded to my question about her preference for leading or following. After she told me that she is able to do both, she explained the relation of a leader and follower as one inviting the other to improvise and show something of his or herself. When relating this to teacher-student relations, we could say that a teacher invites students as well. In the section Dancing with an audience in Chapter 4, I already explored some issues concerning ‘showing oneself to an audience’. Inviting to improvise is the focus in this section.

To encounter is to encounter you. You can develop in an open encounter with the environment and the other. Experience, cultures, backgrounds, histories: out of the clash of elements, new personalities and qualities grow. Rigidity makes room for daring. The process of becoming starts with stimulation and social connections. Insight in one’s own emotions and those of others provides the student with handles for pupils of tomorrow. (Jansen, Evers, & van Straalen, 2004, translation LH)

From the unity of act-supplement, an invitation or an act regarded as an invitation depends on the different contexts of the act which constructs the supplement to the invitation. Supplementing an invitation with showing something of yourself, adjusting something, adding to co-construction, I understand as opening up to encounter. Openness for encounter provides possibilities to learn and to create moments of being struck: to create an Argentine tango.
Opening up, leaving the well-tread pavements, letting go of fixed goals, inviting the unexpected: that is what I expect from an innovative professional. Educating or raising innovative professionals is one of the goals of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht and The Dutch Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad), especially when it concerns a Master’s program (Leijnse, Hulst, & Vroomans, 2006). This goal can be seen as the framework for the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, the program and the ‘teachers’/’coaches’. ‘Determining frameworks’ can be supplemented in many different ways. A few of the possible supplements might be: ‘staying within these frameworks’, ‘looking for opening the frameworks’ or ‘abandoning the frameworks’. Innovative professionals, understood as professionals able to make groundbreaking changes in their professional context (Hogeschool Utrecht, 2007), are not professionals who are trained to follow rules or stay within frameworks. Innovation entails aiming for opening up other possibilities, open to encounter Others, embracing uncertainty, improvisation, questioning constructions like ‘we always did it like this’ or ‘this is how we are accustomed to doing this’. I regard creating space to encounter other possible relational realities such as other person-world relations to be beneficial and necessary in the education of innovative professionals.

Having this said, educating innovative professionals is not providing students with answers; it is helping and supporting them in raising critical questions and improvisations. ‘We have to say goodbye to trusted certainties’ as van Straalen writes in the foreword of Jansen’s book on changes in education (Jansen, 2007).

A possible reading of the texts in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 can be that it takes a while for something that can be seen as collaborative learning with open encounters develops. Collaborative learning, as Bruffee (p. xii, 1999) constructs, ‘...marshals the power of interdependence among peers.’ Bruffee writes, ‘with collaborative learning, they [?] learn to construct knowledge...’ (p. xiii). Unlike Bruffee, I include ‘teachers’ as well as ‘students’ in these ‘peers’. I see some elements of collaborative learning

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6 The HBO-raad focuses on strengthening the social position of Universities of Applied Sciences. http://www.hbo-raad.nl/english
in the texts of the workshops in this Chapter *Soft Differentiation*. There is interplay between different participants rather than mere dominance of ‘teachers’ transferring ‘knowledge’ or providing answers as in the first workshops. Mutual dependence is essential for this. As while dancing an Argentine tango, partners have to trust each other (is the other able to get me back on my feet, prevent us from bumping into others, can the other follow me in the variation I want to make and is the other willing to show oneself). Engaging in the learning (construction) processes asks for this trust and guts as well. Opening up for encounters, accepting invitations for critical reflection, for other text-context, relations creating possibilities for getting struck, all take some amount of daring and guts. As Renée addressed earlier, it is not easy to doubt local, social, and historical constructed certainties.

Many texts in this book can be read as attempts to open up the relational realities of teacher-student relations, attempts that are supplemented in many different ways. Sometimes, the texts can be read as students or teachers asking for frameworks and defined roles (for instance in the texts of the first workshop in Chapter 3, in the conversation with Femke, Gerda, and Esther, or as Laura did when she said she only started to work when she got an assignment from Renée in workshop 10). In other texts, the relational space seems explored, we wander around and enjoy the exploration (for instance this is how I read Bianca’s change of plans in workshop 9). Sometimes more space is requested, as I understand Ellen’s questioning the way the DERA will be organized in workshop 10.

Opening up for ongoing constructions of relational realities, accepting invitations for surprise and learning requires departure from trusted certainties and welcoming not-knowing or unknowing. Zhuangzi XXIV (as cited in Watson, 1968) provided me with a metaphor for *unknowing*:

> The foot treads a very small area of the ground, but although the area is small, the foot must rely upon the support of the untrod ground all around before it can go forward in confidence. The understanding of man is paltry, but although it is paltry, it must rely upon all those things that it does not understand before it can understand what is meant by Heaven.

In texts of critical relational constructionism on research, I encounter similar:
...this means that inquiry is now understood in relation to a changed range of interests such as, for example, not to ‘tell how it (probably) is’—but to ‘tell how it might become’, i.e., to be ‘world enlarging’ (see Harding, 1986). Similarly, interest might be directed to particular discursive practices to see what forms of life or ways of ‘going on’ are invited, supported, or suppressed. (p. 620, Hosking, 2005a)

Disruption and deconstruction can be regarded as expanding one’s world, as opening up, as learning and researching; although it is often seen as breaking down, as acts of violation and demolishing. I interpret disruption and deconstruction as constructing new texts, exploring the grounds not yet tread, exploring how things might become. Deconstruction as inviting the Other, inviting to encounter the Other. This view makes it unnecessary to build in a constructive phase after deconstructing, as Alvesson et al (2004) propose.

In many of the texts in this book, I read closing down and asking for frameworks as a supplement to invitations to open up. Fear and uncertainty makes us return to our well known grounds and to suppress disruptions and deconstructions. Unexpected acts, for instance a teacher doing different things than one is used to, can be supplemented in a more traditional way, inviting that teacher to supplement this in a traditional way again. It is possible to narrate several of the act-supplements in the conversations of the Living Environment Research Project in this way. These kinds of constraining act-supplements are more obvious at the start of project, when we have to learn to trust one another.

I see unknowing or not-knowing as the ability to encounter the Other or other texts to reconstruct text-context relations. I understand this unknowing is different from knowing nothing, which is ultimately impossible, unknowing might be more related to not-knowing-for-sure, open for learning, open for re-construction. In their research projects, both Ellen and Corrie tell us about this opening up, about creating other relational realities with the children with whom they do their research through open encounters with the children as others. Another construction of a relation with the children (a curious researcher instead of a parent or teacher) infected their relation with them, so they reported. They accepted the invitation to improvise.
I now return to the relational realities of teacher-student relations and combine that with the quote from Anja about the dance leader being the one that invites the Other. From the view on learning as explored in Real-Life Learning and in this thesis, I construct the teacher as the one who should invite students to open up, the teacher who should create possibilities for feeling struck through encounters with Other (texts). Another line of approach for a teacher would be to offer answers to students’ questions, thus providing certainty, which would close down possible relational realities. There are several texts in this chapter that can be read as one of the ‘students’ inviting the ‘teacher’ to open up or to deconstruct, for instance in the conversation about knowing right and wrong, ‘students’ constructed as teachers and ‘teachers’ constructed as students. Leading and following, inviting and supplementing the invitation with ‘personal’ improvisations, is a co-construction of a dance in which leading and following are not strictly reserved for the ‘teacher’ or the ‘student’. I repeat Shotter’s remark I quoted at the start of the context Creating Otherness: ‘...[W]hat is so special about joint action is that its overall outcome is not up to any of the individuals concerned in it; it is entirely novel; its outcomes are as if they come “out of the blue”’ (p. 15, Shotter, 1997).
Collaborative Construction of a Critical Paper

At the end of workshop 11, I asked how we could continue. I told I had promised to write a paper on critical research for the CMS conference and since they would have to write something about critical research for their own research reports, I suggested we co-write a paper. After some silence, I added that I could post an old unpublished paper I had written on critical research on the intranet. Everyone would be invited to respond to it. This suggestion was eagerly accepted. Below are some fragments of this co-constructed ‘Critical Paper 1’, which I regard as a written dialogue that took place within three days after the workshop. The responses arrived very quickly. In the following section, the Critical Paper 1 is formatted with the original text from my unpublished paper in the left-hand column and the response dialogue in the right-hand column. The original unpublished paper was written in English, the reactions in the dialogue were partly made in English, partly in Dutch and translated into English.

For me, ‘critical’ stands for critical or reflective of one’s own assumptions, critical towards common sense and awareness of rigidity of this common sense. I want to execute critical research because I want to develop my critical thinking. I want to develop my ideas, to make choices and to know why I make these choices, even when they are not rational. (If I know, it is rational). To make choices is to choose between different possibilities. I want to be able to see different perspectives. To make choices is to choose between different possibilities. I want to be able to see different perspectives.

Ellen: I think this (awareness) is a keyword in the forming of my notion of the word ‘critical.’

Loes: Is awareness enough or do you have to do something with it?

Ellen: I do not think that awareness alone is enough. I believe that in order to be able to develop critical thinking, one has to become aware of other possibilities. To become aware is sort of like being able to open up oneself, to wake up. As long as we are just acting as we normally are, just copying/reproducing ‘common sense’, we will never be able to change

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7 Critical Management Studies Conference, 11-12 July 2007, Manchester, Conference stream: Relevance and practice: What has CMS achieves so far?
8 In December 2005, I wrote an unpublished paper on critical research, in a suggestion of Dian Marie. This text is based on my reading of three books on critical ethnographic research (Carspecken, 1996, Madison, 2005; Thomas, 1993)
Literature and conversations are possibilities to get into dialogue. Literature within research is not used for designing a theory that can be tested empirically because that is a way to close down possibilities instead of opening them up and implies that (scientific) literature is more important than lived experience.

our situations or that of others. When I look at education or the way children are reared, we tend to agree quickly to the ‘systems’ we know or we are used to.... Only when we start looking through different spectacles will we be able to start accepting differences in approach. When we have achieved this, we start developing a critical mind.... We start seeing that there is no one single ‘right’ way

Laura: I agree with this, I think this is very well put. Another way of looking at things makes you think critically.

Ellen: This leaves me with the question, ‘What then, is literature used for within research?’

Loes: Challenging your assumptions, for instance, offering other perspectives.

Ellen: All right, literature and conversations offer the possibility to search for a relation of, for instance, my assumption towards others. It is a way to discover views and search for relations with those ‘other’ views.

Laura: Literature can broaden your knowledge. At school, you learn that what you read is true or you just have to accept that. I regard literature as a means to rethink and adjust your ideas, to broaden, to reflect, or to recognize. If you consider something to be true, then possibilities are limited.
Although many authors see critical research as an activist’s research: action in favor of releasing from oppressive powers is not my standpoint. I am not a scientist who has a better perspective on a situation than everyone else. I can only offer different stories, different voices. It is therefore impossible to make decisions for or on behalf of the one being researched. That would be an act of oppression too. Yet I do influence the situation by choosing which voices I will present to which audience.

Ellen: The influence I cannot deny is the position you have towards me, as the one researched, but also as my coach, my guide through a landscape which, in a way, is unknown to me, and as I see it, a bit more known to you. Together, we explore the parts that are unknown to both of us. Positions constantly switch towards each other between all the members of the ‘Living Environment Group’ because of the various relationships among individuals within the group.

Loes: I like this! I formulated this assumption with making a strict differentiation between roles, persons, et cetera. In your reaction, you narrate my knowing as knowing for sure, as a knowing that cannot or has not been doubted.

Ellen: I believe there can never (hey, be careful now...) be made a strict difference between roles, persons et cetera. The constant switches I talked about denote that the relationships and positions we have towards each other are constantly changing and moving. With this line of thinking, I regard your knowledge about qualitative research, for instance, as superior (hate this word but cannot find another yet) to my knowledge on the subject—just by the mere fact that I have never done qualitative research and you have. So, I accept your knowledge as a guide,

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9 In the Master’s program Ecological Pedagogy, a learning landscape is used as an alternative to a curriculum.
but I doubt your knowledge as knowledge for sure.

**Laura:** I do take your knowledge for ‘sure’. You know what you are talking about. I know only one person that knows ‘that much’ about this subject. That is why I take it for granted. Of course, I am open to other opinions and meanings, but for that I first need a basis on critical research. Indeed, you make choices about what you want us to hear or see. Maybe it is because you made a choice in what is ‘good’ for us to know. Doesn’t the one who takes up the role of a teacher/guide do that all the time?

Bianca wrote a poem in the paper in which she expresses her ideas:\(^{10}\)

A critical pedagogue is a human being who can show and be shown
by listening to all the voices
by telling stories
showing some ways that he or she has come across
and thinks is useful
or senses as valuable to mention
putting them in question
discussing them
putting them in perspective
of the environment
in order to
free us from judgement
about different opinions
in a loose framework

Renée was unable to participate during the first week of the co-construction of the text presented above, so was Corrie. When they were able to participate, both expressed their problems with joining in because so much had already happened. Renée finally entered the written conversation by adding comments

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\(^{10}\) Part of the text was originally in blue, all her text was already written in English.
that made us see our positions as being suppressed ourselves instead of solely seeing our role as pedagogues as suppressing others. Next is a translation of an excerpt of her text.

In response to Laura’s idea of being open-minded, ‘I am open to other opinions and meaning’: I often hear people say that being open-minded is a quality of being a ‘critical’ and ‘good’ teacher. To be frank, I am not open-minded. I am also not open to other opinions and meanings, although my historical social and cultural background (Western European, white female, born in 1958, middle-class upbringing) has told and taught me to be open to other opinions and intentions just for ‘being polite’. It is polite to say one is open-minded, but is not polite to act open-minded and/or to be interested in opinions and ideas of others especially when these ‘others’ have a different social and/or cultural background. For instance, as a child I was not allowed to play with the children who weren’t from our social class or neighborhood and at the same time I was told to finish my dinner and think of all the poor children in the world who barely have food at all. In all kinds of euphemisms, I was told that ‘we were better’. I learned my lessons in the power play from the day I was born. When my world became larger, I learned that there were people who are ‘better than we are’, which means they had more power. I think I developed my first notions about ‘why’ when I realized there was an ‘up’ and ‘down’ position, an oppressor and an oppressed. It formed my political ideas and actions. I think I got really worried when it became clear to me that I had to deal with both: an oppressor and an oppressed live inside me.

A month later at the next workshop, Corrie told the group that she had had trouble catching up with the written conversation. We agreed that she could make some kind of summary of the stories and inter-acts so far. An excerpt of her summary reads as follows (translation LH),

Audible meanings are necessary to change systems. Many teachers and parents stay ‘silent’ because they are afraid to change. The system works well: doesn’t it? So it can stay that way. Insecurity is a factor in this. Only when we are going to look from different perspectives are we capable of different approaches. We start with the development of a critical mind and learn to see that there are different ways...
Choices/action
They lead towards increasing knowledge or a change in hearing.
A critical pedagogue makes choices. The choices are in that moment, in that situation the best ...

Ellen commented in an e-mail to the group on this part of the work with the Living Environment Research Group and I could very well relate to her text.

This is fun...isn’t it? I think I can best put it this way: We all like it, in my opinion, this is fun...this way of working appeals to me, stimulating thoughts, writing, sharing, completing, questioning...I would love to share our ideas in a Digital Story Telling...what do you think?

After this, the written dialogue continued. Corrie made a summary of all the remarks again and we responded to them one more time. Then we closed the topic and agreed that everyone could use this document as a source for her own paper.

For the second time in this PhD research, I decided to stop collecting material. I was more satisfied with the idea that we finally succeeded in creating the workshops as tangos of fun in collaborative learning.

Context: Soft Differentiation and Sameness?
In the previous context, I explored uncertainty, complexity, and unknown inter-acts with Other. The construction of more traditional relational patterns is constructed as a possible supplement to the invitation of Otherness in relation to fear for complexity and uncertainty. In this context, I explore the fear for loosing oneself. I start with a quote from John Shotter on joint action again,

...[joint action is] a situation in which I feel I have made my contribution and in which you feel as if you have made yours. Unless this is the case, I may feel that I am having to live in your reality or you may feel that you are having to live in mine or both of us may feel as if we are having to live in a reality not our own. (p.15, Shotter, 1997)

11 Ellen works a lot with digital storytelling, a way to tell stories in a digital way, with images, sound and text.
Let me re-story the texts of Ellen and Corrie about their relations with the researched from this text of Shotter.

Ellen and Corrie started from a context of being parents (I read in the text that Ellen seems to connect this with a context of taking responsibility, which results in decisions about boundaries of right and wrong) or a context of being teachers (which Corrie seems to understand as knowing more than the children). During the process of researching, they both try to listen to the children and discover that children know more than they do. In both their stories, their contexts of ‘being a parent’ or ‘being a teacher’ seem to shift, as a part of ‘joining with’ or joint action with the children. For Ellen this literally created a situation in which she and her son Klaas could construct together their boundaries regarding gaming instead of the parent acting on her son (which can be seen in Shotter’s words as an attempt to have Klaas live in what Ellen thinks of as the adult’s world).

The co-constructed paper on critical pedagogy and critical research is our construction. Although I choose to use the names of the different contributors, one contribution built on another, one question led to a statement or another question and would not have been raised or stated if the first wasn’t there. Corrie and Renée were not able to participate in this process of collaborative construction and by their reactions in which they express that they had trouble joining in, I conclude that they see themselves as standing on the sideline and watching. They exclude themselves from ‘us’, the authors of the written conversation. When Corrie made a summary of this conversation, this resulted in a text in which the different participants and the different contributions were not recognizable anymore. It was our text and everyone could make use of it. I like to construct this as: we had been working on that text in a joint action.

For those, within a situation feel required to conform to the “things” within it, not because of their material shape, but because we all call upon each other, morally, to recognize and respect what exists between us. Thus, as neither “mine” nor “yours,” the situation itself constitutes something to which we can both contribute: it is ‘ours’. (p. 15, Shotter, 1997)
Soft Differentiation

The boundary around what is ‘us’ is not that sharp, ‘us’ might include literature, or conversations with other people that shaped our ideas. Does this mean that we all agree on every sentence in the final text? Did we become the same? The idea of soft Self-Other relations does not imply removing all differences. We were working in a joint action — all contributing to our conversation — but we were not one. Different contributions, from different people, all contributes to what exists between us and by that influences every participant. Exactly those differences enable co-creation and make the contributions worthwhile. The opportunity to contribute to, in this case, our social reality of critical pedagogy at that time in that setting, is what creates a joint action: making contributions, or not, in respect of what exists between us and without any ownership of ideas.

Ideas of ownership and hardening differentiations between Self and Other might be related to a fear for losing one’s identity. In Chapter 1, I constructed a story of significant moments that lead to my research project. A story that is less worked out, but might be present between the lines, is the story of me being afraid of being ‘just a follower’ of The Big Guy. My search for qualitative and critical input on our ideas of Real-Life Learning can be constructed as such. I entered the PhD program to create differences between The Big Guy’s ideas and mine. In my fear for becoming one with The Big Guy, I reacted by hardening the boundaries between his ideas and mine. For instance, in the introduction chapter, I state that one of my drives to start this research project was to develop my ‘own’ story, to ‘know in which I differ from The Big Guy’. In the section Fear for audience this is explored a bit further. In that section I question what ‘my story’ is and if there really could be something that I can call ‘my story’ when I — as I construct it there — am that easy to influence. I conclude that from a relational perspective, it is problematic to speak about something like ‘my story’ as distinguished from other stories, but meanwhile I state my inability to escape this kind of formulation. Another aspect is the question of what is left of ‘me’, when I am just a follower of The Big Guy, without a voice or story of my own.

I see my constructions of the more independently staged figures of The Big Guy, The Professor, and The Master in this line of thought. Writing about these characters, constructing boundaries between their ideas and mine, constructing what is different, this all can be seen as taking part in the construction of ‘this is me and I do exist independent of you’. My texts
on the influences of these characters, trying to define what these influences are and by that creating boundaries around them and me, are different from the texts of conversations with my critical friends. Their influences seem far more subtle and less defined. Like the conversations with the students in this chapter, I construct the conversations with my critical friends as joint actions in which we mutually contribute and construct or learn. There seems no necessity to define what is yours or mine. Although differences are explored, —for instance in the conversation of Renée and me about teaching styles— most of the conversations are not storied with elements of judgment, like in several stories of my conversations with The Big Guy, The Professor, and the Master. I construct narratives, telling that my contributions or I will be judged. I arrogated the characters these judgmental positions. Within a context of fear, you might say that I constructed myself as separated from them out of fear for being wiped out or overwhelmed by them. As I construct it in this context, I made reifications of frightening seeming stabilities. I cannot overlook the idea that similar might be happening with students, which might keep us from joining with, or joint action in which you do not have to live in my reality and I do not have the feeling having to live in yours. You and me, we both have our contributions in creating reality.

Reflection Chapter 5: Joint Action

In other words, in Bakhtin’s (1986) and Volosinov’s (1973) view\(^\text{12}\), our psychic life manifests itself in our practical activities as we body them forth, dialogically, out into the world; even what we call introspection is for them a dialogical process, in which we dialogically develop an initial, vague sense of a circumstance into something determinate, in a back-and-forth process between the sense and its specific formulation in the course of us giving it voice, or ‘voicing’ it. (p. 20, Shotter, 1997)

The texts in this chapter might be read as telling about an ongoing construction and reconstruction of boundaries, boundaries around different Self-Other relations, boundaries around what is constructed as ‘us’, and boundaries between supervisors and me. It tells about the continuous tensions of acknowledging Self as an independent entity and the wish to join with, to celebrate joint action.

\(^\text{12}\) Several authors contend that Volos(h)inov’s work is in fact authored by Bakhtin as well (Sampson, 1993/2008).
In Chapter 2, section *Soft Differentiation of Self-Other*, I explain soft Self-Other differentiations and derived from that soft teacher-student differentiations as dialogical conceptions of multiple Self-Other relations and distinguish that from hard differentiated relations of identities with fixed characteristics. In this Chapter 5, a chapter titled *Soft Differentiation*, and with many quotes about joint action, I made use of the article of Shotter, *Social Construction of Our Inner Selves* (1997): an article that explains about another understanding of Self and inner psyche. Shotter ‘relocates our inner lives in momentary relational encounters between people’ (p. 8), based on what he calls a rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism. Shotter derives his exploration from work of Wittgenstein, Volosinov, Bakhtin, and Billig. As Shotter states, the inner psyche with own thoughts is a construction that is not aligned with, what he names, a dialogical paradigm. Both Gergen (1994) and Sampson (1993/2008) support this line. They see the Western culture as focused on individuals with individual mind operations. ‘Individual minds have served as the critical locus of explanation, not only in psychology, but in many sectors of philosophy, economics, sociology, anthropology, history, literature study, and communication’ (p. 3, Gergen, 1994).

The texts in Chapter 5 construct all kinds of influences that enhance, enable, or obstruct collaborative learning or joint action. I construct my continuous conception of myself as a bounded entity as one of the obstructions. For instance, when I reflect on the Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I construct the following story: regarding myself as an actor with responsibilities and being especially responsible for this project (in Chapter 3) and in that sense an individual entity, prevented me from joining with/in. This is constructed as fear and feeling insecure, and is extended to other participants feeling fear and insecure as well. Fear of loosing oneself and fear of complexity are two approaches explored in this chapter. Fear has individual and psychological connotations, suggesting a private inner world. Narrative accounts of Self and Other are embedded within social action and products of social interchange (Gergen, 1994) and these accounts might create an inner world. This can be seen as in conflict with opting for what seems the opposite, a relational understanding of Self-Other and joint action. Chapter 5 seems to focus on the tensions between those forces, which might be seen as a binary.

Each person’s inner world and thought has its stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values, and so on are fashioned (Shotter, 1997, quoting Bakhtin, 1986, p. 86).
In this respect, the context *Creating Otherness* might throw another light on this suggested binary. In that context, I tell the story of playing with boundaries: in this case between *Research Loes* and *Coach Loes*. Considering boundaries as open for reconstruction, which is how that context might be interpreted, invites playfulness and openness, and enables to focus on what happens in a moment instead on what ‘always’ is.

I see ‘joining with’ as something that happens in a moment, just as dancing Argentine tango is ‘a living act in the moment as it happens’ (Wikipedia). Constructions of relational Self-Other realities are just in the moment. Sometimes helpful constructions are constructions of relations with local, social, and historical contexts, which can be understood as constructions of inner Selves. When we cross boundaries, we create new boundaries. Fortunate, I might say, because when there are no boundaries to cross, when we are as one, there are no possibilities to encounter Otherness or to feel struck by differences.

I understand Shotter’s descriptions of joint actions as meaning to say that you and I make our contributions to something that exists between us, and we cannot distinguish which contributions are made by whom. In Isaacs’s description of a dialogue, as an art of thinking together I recognize something similar. Isaacs (1999) writes about a conversation without sides, but with a centre. When reflecting on the narratives in this chapter, we can construct the co-construction of the paper on critical pedagogy and critical research as such a centre. Isaacs’s dialogue might be equated with joint action or collaborative learning. Thinking together demands respect and listening to yourself as well as the Other, as Isaacs proposes. We often speak from memory, Isaacs suggests, referring to individual mind operations, ‘but we are less experienced when we have to think in the moment, without a preplanned notion of what we should say’ (p. 170). When people are in-their-thoughts instead of thinking, thinking together will be hindered. ‘To speak spontaneously and improvisational requires a willingness not to know what one is going to say before one says it. Jumping into this void can be quite scary …’ (p. 170), Isaacs continues. When I read the texts in Chapter 5 with an emphasis on the representational quality of the texts, I construct the following story:

The creation of an object-like thing as the Critical Paper, a reification of ideas, served as an island in the void, something to hold on to and to build on together. Without being a prefixed and bounded ‘thing’, this island enabled us to define our temporary boundaries. To take this narrative a bit further, earlier in the process, the different research
projects were not perceived as islands. Maybe the boundaries around them were too vague or maybe the projects were perceived as different islands with too little connections to facilitate building together. A centre, as for instance critical pedagogy, is not the same centre for everyone, but at least it is perceived as something to build on together. Such a constructed shared objective can be seen as facilitating joining with or jumping into the void. The scrupulous focus on relations and attempts to centre relating, with workshop 7 as the most obvious example, prevented from tangoing together. A focus on relating might have worked as a focus on sides instead of centre or, might have centered what I thought of as important. Defining a focus as Coach Loes instead of as Researcher Loes, seemed to have induced a focus on the creation of a shared centre.

Joining-with instead of staying-on-the-side-line-judging is what makes critical research worth while. That is how I story my own development in this project: I had to jump in cold water, had to join in the conversations instead of observing the conversations, I had to throw myself into the relations with students in order to come to softer teacher-student relations. I had to jump into the void. A teacher should invite students to jump into the void or cold water, in acknowledgment of their different rhythm and pace. We have to organize some temporary and almost amorphous islands as centers to build on together. Maybe we have to make the water a little bit warmer now and then, or at least try to prevent students from drowning and on the other hand help them to learn to swim.
Interlude

Other Narratives
Invitation to React

I cannot escape reducing complexity and taking an authoritative position while writing. With this authoritative position, I reduce polyphony of voices: something that I half-heartedly try to overcome by adding some of the voices of students as in this Interlude. I asked the ‘students’ to respond to the texts about the workshops through a letter. Still in the authoritative mood, I dared to ask them for a reduction of their voice and requested a limited response, limited to approximately 20 lines, and I steered their responses with my questions. Several of the students were trained to use the alphabet of the teachers and did not let themselves be restricted. They wrote about different perspectives. What must be taken into account while reading these texts is that several of the students were still dependent of the teachers, they were still students of the course while writing this reaction.

To all students
Living Environment Research Project
Haarlem, 8 April 2009

To the participants of the Living Environment Research Project,

Suddenly, there’s a package on your doormat! It’s been a long time since the Living Environment Research Project started in January 2006 when you participated for a short or long period. As I mentioned then, I used this research project for my PhD research and now it’s time to update you about what has since happened with the narratives from our workshops. My text written in English is near completion and I hope to defend it in November. A PhD research takes time, as you may have noticed. It is a somewhat odd idea that I am still occupied with those workshops that are probably so long ago for you.

I try to ‘bring’ the reader to several of our workshops by means of written dialogues based on my notes and/or recordings. In this package you’ve received, I tell my story and give my perspective on the workshops. After all, I selected what I wanted to present and I did my best to translate all the texts into English. This means that I show some aspects of you as participant, but not all aspects. It is not a representation of you as a person. Nevertheless, I would appreciate hearing what you think about the narratives I created from the workshops, especially because it concerns a small group of people who could be recognized pretty easily. I would like to make room in the book for your point of view on the workshops and on the way I story you. With this, I want to provide space for your perspectives, on the workshops.

That is the reason for the following request. I would appreciate it if you would
Invitation to React

please write a short response to the texts (preferably a maximum of 20 lines). Except for your names, I will not change my texts based on your responses. Those are my texts; our texts will remain adjacent to each other. Supposedly, the reader reads my texts differently by reading the texts you add.

Every (critical) reaction about the texts is welcome, but to give you some directions, you might want to keep the following questions in mind. How do you see the texts in general? What makes sense and what doesn’t? What do you miss in the texts? What do you think is magnified too much? What do you think of how you appear? Do you recognize yourself in this image? What do you recognize and what not?

In addition to this request for a reaction, I have two more requests:
1. In May 2007, the students who still participated indicated that they preferred to use their actual names in the texts instead of pseudonyms. I used every person’s real first name, because while writing I used a combination of different names. The choice for using your actual names is thus for my convenience. My question to you is if you approve of my use of your actual first name. If not, I will change it immediately. Of course, if you approved my use of your first name in the past, you can change your mind about that now after reading the text!
2. In closing, I would like to know from you what kind of work you did when you started the Master’s program in Ecological Pedagogy. What do you do now? Did you finish the program? Why you decided to quit and if you did something else.

I hope that you are willing to respond as soon as possible.
You can send it by mail to: <Address>
Or by e-mail: <Address>

November seems far away, but I have to do a lot with the texts, so I look forward to receiving your reaction as soon as possible. For now, I would like to thank you for your effort and let you know that as soon as the book is ready, I will send you a copy and an invitation to the oral defense.

Without you this book would not have been possible.
With much curiosity,
Loes Houweling

Gertrud and Esther only joined us in the first workshop and I only sent them the texts of that one. The other participants received the texts of the Chapters 3, 4 and 5 (without the context sections).

Ellen and Bianca responded to this letter immediately by sending an e-mail in which they told me they were exited to read it and would reply after serious reading. Ellen added that they told their children that I had decided to change
their names and they both insisted that I could use their real names because otherwise it would be confusing for readers who know them. I received a reaction from Corrie after about two weeks.

I phoned Guus and he told me that he had read the texts and recognized himself and the workshops. He promised to write something, but did not find the time to do so. Marinus told me over the phone that he was amazed that he could suddenly speak English. He said that things were still very difficult in school and that he was too busy struggling with the overall attempts to regulate the pupils’ behavior. He added to this that he found it a pity that he had to quit the program, but the lack of financial and scheduling support from his school made him decide to stop.

I was unable to trace Joan and Karen, which is why their names are pseudonyms. Gertrud conveyed that she did not have time to reply so I used a pseudonym for her as well. Other responses are included here below, in the sequential order that I received them. I decided to leave out minor remarks, but I stuck to the main structures of their letters. All letters, except Bianca’s, were written in Dutch and translated by me.

**Corrie’s Reaction**

Hello Loes,

When I opened the package that you sent me and read that it was the report about our ‘Living Environment workshops’, a well of emotions ran through me. For a minute, I had tears in my eyes. Shortly thereafter, I asked myself why I reacted so emotionally. I thought about it and came to the following conclusion. The ‘Living Environment period’ meant a lot to me.

In September 2006, I started with the Ecological Pedagogy Program. I wanted to do a study, but shortly after I started I realized that the program was not as I had imagined. I was unable to find my way because I had this sense of ‘bring it on’. But nothing came! Something had to come from me and I had not learned that. It seemed like a good idea to participate in the Living Environment research to give my education some structure. Meanwhile, my mother was very ill. She was terminally ill with stomach cancer. It was a heavy period. I wanted to be with her often. I could not participate in the first workshops because my mother died. When I read that in the report, I sat up, wondering why I did not tell you about that. It was because I did not know you. I thought, ‘I did not want to bother Loes with that’.
I read the texts you wrote about the first workshops. I did not participate in them, but it is pretty clear to me. I think that was because the process was explained and I lived myself through the things that might have been vague for the students. The struggle to find a research theme, the content of the research, is so recognizable.

Critical ethnographic research—what does that entail precisely…? The uncertainty… which direction am I taking? What I did not know is that you had your doubts and uncertainties. I did not notice that and I didn’t think about that for one moment. I was occupied with myself. Especially during the workshops, I had the idea that I stood on a sideline. I do not know many of the others in the group. I thought they all knew it. I felt like an auditor at the workshops. Was I able to reach the level (there was my insecurity again)? I expected to read that in your account of the workshops, but maybe I was so quiet that my presence went unnoticed.

Frequently, I drove back to Friesland and thought, ‘if my colleagues would see me like this, they would not recognize me. At school I always open my mouth and have an opinion about everything.’ That was not exactly my attitude during the Living Environment workshops. Still I learned a great deal during this period. Looking from different perspectives was totally new for me and critical pedagogy had little meaning before the course.

How do you deal with becoming conscious of the power you have as a teacher? I think the text about Marinus and you is extremely fascinating. I did not notice this during the workshops.

My impression of the texts you wrote is that it is a clear report, in which I almost experience the atmosphere coming back.

There was also a period in which one person after another left. That influenced me a lot, especially because I doubted if I myself would be able to complete it. These doubts were particularly about the proposal, the research report, and the presentation. I was struggling with my grieving and living in an old, small house (we were also occupied with building a new house). This alternated with periods of pleasure, doubt, and inspiration.

It was nice to have more contact with Ellen and Bianca during that last period because we were ‘going’ for the same things. It was a valuable and inspirational period.

I started the program as a teacher in primary education and I still am. I am working on my specialization and will finish around the summer holiday. Anyway, I want to finish the program in August 2009.

Loes, lots of success.  
Greeting Corrie
Let’s Dance

Bianca’s Reaction

Haarlem
20 May 2009
Dear Loes,

It was as much fun reading about our workshops and your perception of them as it was fun participating in the project from 2006 until 2008. And just as it was fruitful to juggle and struggle with my own research, it seems it’s fruitful to reflect on these dialogues that you sent me. Questions arise, like: What do these stories tell me? Which (other) views do I see? What do they offer me? In what way are they important to mention? It’s funny to see that these are the same questions I used to ask during my research on children playing together outdoors.

I remember that back then I got stuck because of this last question I felt uneasy about the idea that I didn’t know who would read my paper and what could be learnt from it. What would it contribute? What value would it have? To whom? Who would the audience be? This amounted to questions of what to focus on, what style to use, what words to choose and what metaphors to use.

I started and plunged into several projects at (primary) schools to experience how children and people learned. It took me a while before I noticed that doing the project and my own research was first and foremost very valuable to me. For example, it changed my attitude from being disappointed about the system into feeling that I am a part of the system and that I can make a change for the better if I commit myself to what feels right to do. While beginning to notice that my changed attitude and my development in listening and questioning made things work, I decided to return to my profession of teaching Dutch language at a secondary school. It was something I gave up doing seven years earlier because of the school system in which classical training on reading and writing based on logics had seemed essential and obligatory. Now I had experienced how collaborative learning was greatly inspiring and how a critical attitude towards my own assumptions was creating possibilities for change. I was really longing to make a fresh start and work with the children in an atmosphere of collaborative learning.

This school year, ‘my’ 100 children (who are twelve, thirteen and fourteen years old) and I have been very creative. Our classroom functions as a lab, a theatre, a cinema or as a playground and a building site. My employer has noticed our actions and shows faith in my colleague’s and my ideas. We are now going to abandon all method books for Dutch, ICT will disappear and the focus changes from Dutch language training skills into creation of Media Literacy, by plunging into topics of one’s own interest. I am now in the middle of writing a proposal to get money for 60 laptops and other handy tools that will
be ours if we can show that our pilot can also benefit other schools. I am sure that your book will help as well. I celebrate every move we make.

Bianca Moore

*Students do not need to be tamed, controlled and/or rescued; they need to be respected, viewed as experts in their interest areas and inspired with impassioned spirit to use education to do good things in the world (Kincheloe, Joe L. (2008, p. 8), Critical Pedagogy).*

Ellen’s Reaction

Hi Loes,

I was wondering how I should respond to your story. Should I write in English, format it as a chapter, cast it in a Digital Story? From the day I found your package on my doormat, I reread the stories several times and each time, I discovered new stories. When reading it the first time, I had a sense of curiosity: what is Loes writing about us?

While reading, I realized that the stories are written from your perspective and I noticed that I had to let go of the idea that your stories represent reality. I had to chuckle at first when I was looking to see 'is what Loes writing correct?' What else happened?

I started to question what you could want from me, about what you want to hear from me. I searched in the stories for what you wrote about me and if I could agree with that. With that, I came across the metaphor you invented for me, the hosta. I know very little about flowers and I started to Google-search to get an idea of what you might have meant. While I searched for information on the hosta, I realized that you saw me as searching on the internet for information a lot.

With this exercise, I thought about the metaphors you invented for all participants and stopped to think of you as a ‘mother’. In my stream of thoughts I depicted you as ‘master’, in the sense that has to do with guide/counselor in which your execution of your ‘mastership’ reminded me of what I have read about Zen masters who make things happen for others through non-action. Now that I have read about the Lily of the Heart, your description of your image of me and my description of you, I realize how the way we related to each other had made me grow and develop during the course. A small example to make clear what I mean: you write that you see that I am not afraid to share my thoughts and ideas and have much confidence in you. I think that at the start of the course I was very much afraid to share things and to show myself. By your non-action (returning questions, giving space for uncertainty and experiment),
I started to believe that my ideas matter, that I can be of importance for the development of others.

And further?
While reading about the creation of energy during the workshops, which seemed to ebb away in between them, I recognized what I struggle with in my learning team at the moment. As a coach of a learning team and working together with students during the training Digital Story Telling, I continuously look for signals from which I might conclude what makes energy rise and ebb away. I constantly link your story to my reality now. Your stories make me think about my role and actions in the learning team. How much freedom do I give students, how much patience do I have? Is it my job to motivate students? Do I demand too much? Aren’t my expectations too high? Is my enthusiasm overwhelming? Do I give students enough space to walk their own path? I recognize the passion you saw in me in the passion I have as a learning coach and the surprise I have when a student indicates that she is not working and learning out of passion...

I could write many pages about what reading your stories evokes in my daily thoughts about educating and guidance, but I am already on page two and realize that you asked for about 20 lines. I wrote a little more...see what works for you. Anyway, I want to say that while reading your stories, I constantly pick out things with which I could run and translate to my reality. I make up my own story in conversation with your story. During the course, I could hardly imagine something like that...

In reply to your last remark: ‘For the second time in this PhD research process, I decided to stop collecting material. I was more satisfied with the idea that we had finally succeeded in creating the workshops as tangos of fun in collaborative learning.’

Thanks for the invitation to dance! I had fun!’
Regards,
Ellen

Ivo’s Reaction

Hi Loes,

Here is my reaction to the text: The texts make me think about the workshops we had. I notice that I compare your story with my material and the things I worked out for the assignments as preparation for workshops. It’s funny to see if it was right. With reference to your text, I do remember some of the dialogues and some learning moments come to mind. In addition to that, I enjoy recalling the workshops. Initially, I thought that in the workshops I was more present, more actively collaborating.
Invitation to React

Your perspective on the group shows me that a lot of other things happened right next to me. Anyway, I can relate to the text and how you staged me. You can use my name.

I almost finished ecological pedagogy and basically, I am doing the same kind of work: teacher in higher education, teacher training.

Good luck with processing!
Regards,
Ivo

Esther’s Reaction

Hello Loes,

Wow, what a story. It seems to me a pretty tiring activity to transcribe all this so literally. I cannot recall what was said then. However, I would like to react to the last part. Especially on the impression our contribution had on you.

‘What I experienced with Gerda, Esther, and Femke tonight seems to be much earlier in the process than this. They seemed to be surprised when I asked them what makes them curious, as if they haven’t been asking that themselves before!’

‘People are not at all used to that in educational settings, it is a big change for them to steer their own learning processes,’ The Big Guy concluded.

Indeed there lies something before. That is right. What lies before, and this is something I remember very well, we tried to make that clear. It was proclaimed that the evening was supposed to be an information evening about doing (scientific) research. How do you do that? What works? Which kinds of research are possible et cetera? This info was not given. We did ask for that during the evening, but it failed to occur. Then you are left with an unanswered question that needs to be answered before continuing. It left an unsatisfactory feeling. It was started somewhere in the middle, without any framework. It was very unclear what this evening was about.

I was not surprised by you asking us what it was about my work that made me curious, but I was waiting for an introduction of what this would lead to and in what way. What are we doing here? What purpose does it serve? I wondered, because obviously it wasn’t an introduction to carrying out research. You cannot teach a child to read without knowing the alphabet...

‘There were only first-year students there. We need to consider that they have hardly had any information on philosophy of science so far. We should pay more attention to that next workshop.’ Hans answered.
Let’s Dance

So, it was noticed...
Further, I do not have anything to add to your account. Good luck with finishing your book!

With regards,
Esther

Laura’s Reaction

Reaction text:
When I started the program, I worked fulltime as a teacher in primary education with pupils in year eight (11 and 12 years old). I still work at the same school, but with pupils in year three (6 and 7 years old). I did not finish the program because I was unable to motivate myself for the full 100 per cent. Maybe this program, at this moment was too abstract for me. Eventually, I learned a lot, mainly about myself and the effects I have on other people. I also learned to plan! Altogether, still positive ;)

Texts workshops in general:
I find the texts fascinating to read. It is recognizable and I tend to see places and people in front of me again, as if I relive it. You take me back to that time, mainly through your thoughts. It reads like a journal. You write about the accommodation and the people, which gives a good impression of the atmosphere, how it looked, how the people looked. It creates an image. Your ideas and experience come to the surface and that makes it interesting to read.

In the beginning, I read that Hans en Renée support you regularly or fill in things. That I did not notice during the workshops. I also read you being insecure and that was never noticeable for me. To me you were ‘all-knowing’.

I think it is very well put and the English reads nice. Maybe it is because I was there...

What makes sense and what doesn’t?
Actually, I recognize myself in all texts. It presents a clear image of how we tried to reach a mutual goal with the help of our individual contributions. Experienced by me and read as a laborious process.

What do I miss?
I miss nothing in the texts. Overall, I am curious to read the result in the end. Your conclusions on how we walked through this process according to you.

What is magnified?
Some workshops are described extensively and are interesting to read, because I was there. That is why I think it is hard to find things that are
magnified. To me, nothing, but for the ‘reader who wasn’t present’ it might be too much information.

What do you think of how you appear? Do you recognize yourself in this image? What do you recognize and what not?
I am described as ‘a young girl with a surprised look on her face.’ I find it hard to understand what you mean. Do I seem surprised, by the way I look or because you are surprised by me? It’s funny to read that I tell that I entered the program because Bianca and Ellen spoke so enthusiastically about it. Obviously, in the end, my motivation did not seem to be the right one for me.

Right after the first workshop you mention that our learning team has troubles with planning and executing assignments. This is very recognizable for the rest of my study. Nonetheless I do have my plan ready just after the start and I do talk enthusiastically about it and ask questions. What I do find recognizable is the part in which you and Renée talk about me and say that I am so open and seem ‘innocent’ because of that, but meanwhile I ask important questions that are relevant for everyone. The recognizable part is being open and by that, I seem innocent. That is the effect I have on people. I did not realise the fact that questions are important and relevant.

You made a metaphor for everyone and called me Cinderella. Do I really come across that way? Do you see me as a little princess? I always think that people perceive me as a ‘tough girl’. I do not consider myself a Cinderella, but the emphasis is always on me being young, in this research as well as at work.

At a given moment you laugh about my impatience: recognizable! That is me: when I want something, I want it now. And when my interest is gone, I am finished with it in a minute. I was finished in a minute with my MSN-research; it did not have my interest anymore. We talked about it and I decided to continue. What is also typically me is that other people can ‘convince’ me and I follow even if I know it is not going to work out. As it turned out, I eventually stopped with the topic and could have followed my feeling right from the start. Like I read it, I am easily influenced but follow my own route in the end.

What I did find funny to read was my reflection on the workshop in which I clarified my thinking processes and what runs through my head at such moments. I still recognize that image. Actually, that marks my way of studying: a bit of this and a bit of that, while all kinds of thoughts back and forth are added. I seem to find it hard to focus and that is not ideal for a program, I assume.

Conclusion: I am described as a young, present Cinderella, who wants a lot, but loses her glass slipper and walking on one heal cannot find the right track again.
I hope that the prince will quickly return my other slipper...
Femke’s Reaction

Hello Loes,

Here with a reaction to your texts on the workshops of the Living Environment Research.

After reading your texts of the workshops, an experience of powerlessness overcame me again. Not being able to understand what was expected of me. I was inspired during the workshops, but at home, the inspiration slipped through my fingers so easily.

Nevertheless, I think it is seriously magnified in relation to me. I know that many of the participants struggled with this assignment to do research. I made myself vulnerable to this, trying to start up with research, but I also pointed out that I did not succeed in finding a topic that suited me. Fortunately, I did not disavow myself by doing research that I was not completely satisfied with. For this reason, I do not want my real name in the texts. I prefer a pseudonym.

Now that I think about it, I do think that I made the right choice to quit the Living Environment Research during the first year of the program. I had too little knowledge about the body of thought of the program and too little of a foundation to start with research. Nevertheless, looking back, I benefited from the workshops while carrying out my research. With much pleasure, I finished this research in the domain of Living Environment with the title ‘What is the perception of sport for children with a backpack’”. Along with other factors, the information from the workshops of the Living Environment Research inspired me to work on that research.

When I started the program, I worked as a teacher in primary special education. Now, I work as a ‘special educational needs coordinator’ in the same school. I try to use the ecological aspect of the course by bringing together all relevant partners around a pupil and make them work collaboratively. It’s a nice job in which I can make use of my ideas.

Loes, I wish you a lot of strength and luck in finishing your PhD research.

Many Regards,
Femke

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1 Femke referred to a financing system for children with severe learning handicaps who attend general education with extra finances, more commonly known as: backpack.
Chapter 6
Self-Other Ethnography as Reflection
Let’s Dance

July 2010

How will I finish the book? That question has been on buzzing through my head for a while now. I find myself more and more taking distance from the texts. Did I write this? What are all these texts telling me as reader? Why did I choose to select these fragments? Every time I reread the texts, another story develops as in a never ending tango of texts. Much has happened since I wrote the last texts and since the ‘students’ responded to my texts about the workshops. Some students have finished their Master’s, others have just recommenced, after a pause of two years. I have partly changed jobs, having become a colleague of my critical friend Chris, and I have collaborated with The Professor in a research project. I draw a boundary between my personal and my professional life, although friendship exceeded that boundary many times. I have left out my family life, just to draw one key line. However, in retrospect, in my family life a lot has happened as well. In this final chapter, I reflect on the text, and I do not include all sorts of new narratives, although from a relational and ongoing perspective, all sorts of new texts really are included in my writing. I cannot but reduce the complexity of the tangle of ‘...the experience of a self studying a self studying selves studying (them)selves studying education’ (p. 99, Rasberry, 2001).

With the question in my head, of how to finish my book, my interest was caught by an article of Klasien Horstman in the newspaper. In this article, which is a short version of her public oration (2010), she describes healthcare as a domain of professionals knowing what is best for other human beings. The problem Horstman, a philosophy Professor, describes is that of evidence-based-knowledge in healthcare and of evidence-based-work by healthcare professionals. The general public is not reached by most messages about healthy living. More precisely, the public knows what it should do, but does not change its behavior. The professionals act top-down, instead of bottom-up, and do not take the public seriously. The article reminded me of a speech by Huib de Jong (2009), a member of the Board of Governors of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht at the start of the college year 2009/2010 on the identity of the professional university. In reference to Argyris and Schön, he proposed we focus on educating reflective practitioners, instead of scientific researchers. Science was reserved for the traditional universities. Educating the reflective practitioner, he claimed, bears at least two marks: students need to be challenged on a content level and they deserve to get the attention that they need. He continued, arguing that theory is very important: ‘there is nothing as
practical as a good theory’. In the year following his opening speech, events around the theme of the reflective practitioner were organized by the central management of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht.

Although health care might differ from education, reading Horstman’s article helped me to frame my texts. Both de Jong and Horstman advocate the professional as reflective practitioner, just as Schön did more than 25 years ago. What had happened in the meantime? I started my PhD research as a reflective practitioner basing my work on the ideas of Schön and on Kincheloe’s ideas on the teacher as researcher as I wrote in Chapter 1. What can my texts add to Horstman’s story, to de Jong’s suggested focus of the University of Applied Sciences, and to the development of critical teacher research? In this final chapter, I reflect on my stories about reflective practitioner, and on reflective practice from the perspective of Self-Other ethnography.

The earlier chapters offered narratives about educational relations in two specific and intertwined projects: the Living Environment Research Project and my PhD. As I storied, in Chapter 1, I started these reflective research projects out of a passion for learning, and more specifically for collaborative learning with Master’s students. In Chapter 5, section Context: Creating Otherness, I introduced Shotter’s description of ‘joint action’ (1997) and concluded that his description provided a helpful frame to explore collaborative learning. Shotter describes joint action as a situation in which all contribute without knowing which contribution came from whom. Here we are right in the middle of a key paradox to my work: I wanted to construct something out of joint action and the students were the victims or objects that had to undergo this passion of mine. They had to live in my world. To reduce some of the tensions, I endeavored to do collaborative ethnographic research, which turned out to be Self-Other ethnography. This might be seen as an attempt to deal with the paradox, to live through the tangle (Rasberry, 1997, 2001). In this final chapter, I will highlight several other paradoxes as well. As I promised in the first chapter, I will return to Schön’s concept of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983, 1987), Argyris and Schön’s framework on learning (Argyris, 1962; Argyris & Schön, 1974), and Kincheloe’s teacher as researcher (Kincheloe, 2003). Subsequently, I will propose a different form of reflection.
The Reflective Practitioner, Teacher as Researcher, and their Knowledge

In Chapter 1, I briefly described the ideas of Argyris, Schön and Kincheloe. Schön’s reflective practitioner is conceptualized as a person who reflects on the outcomes of activity. The single-loop learner of Argyris and Schön, focuses on the solutions to problems or on solving puzzles, and the double-loop learner attempts to solve problems in a more effective way by adapting their behavior. Exploring differences between espoused theory and theory-in-use supposedly should result in behavior that is more effective. Deutero-learners, and teachers as researchers, ought to be able to make fundamental changes, through questioning dominant systems of thought, and by asking whether, what we regard as effective, can really be seen as effective (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Kincheloe, 2003; Schön, 1983).

In Chapter 2, I described that professional universities, following the ideas of Argyris and Schön, intend to ‘store’ the practitioner knowledge in knowledge centers with a focus on the accumulation of knowledge, all of which can be related to the exogenic knowledge tradition (Gergen & Wortham, 2001). Practitioner knowledge, about solving problems, becomes stabilized and solidified in protocols; while, on the other hand, the contextuality of that knowledge is stressed. Solidified knowledge entails a reduction of complexity and overlooks contextuality. In this way, the reflective practitioner is restricted to single- and probably double-loop learning. Deutero-learning seems to be neglected.

Kincheloe’s ‘teacher as researcher’ differs slightly from Schön’s reflective practitioner. Kincheloe stresses that the teacher should research power and socio-economic structures that shape and confirm systems of repression. Research needs to be focused on how different social categories (such as class, gender, and race) are enacted, and how this enactment influences the sustainability of injustice in education, by privileging particular practices. He assumes that teachers become aware of their own socio-economic biases and the biases of the educational system, teachers can then become agents of change (Kincheloe, 2003). Kincheloe’s level 1 researchers, focus on solving problems; level 2 researchers reflect on their way of gathering data and analyze the mistakes that can be made; while level 3 researchers adopt a progressive view on knowledge and explore epistemological considerations. The level 3 researchers reject certainty.
Reflective Practice from Relational Perspectives

The reflective practitioner is seen by Schön, Argyris, and Kincheloe, as an entity acting on the world, which reflects a separation of Self and world. The world outside of the practitioner is to be known and has to change. Argyris and Schön reduced deuto-learning, originally formulated by Bateson as behavioral adaptation of patterns of conditioning in relationships in organizational contexts, to the individual and cognitive level (Visser, 2007). The separation of Self and world, not only produces a language of individual agency, which implies seeing the Other as object; it also centers our attention on knowledge outside of the knower, instead of on processes of knowledge creation. Practitioner knowledge becomes more important than practitioner learning (seen as relational processes of knowledge creation).

Although Schön wanted to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and practice, the reflective practitioners, with their practitioner knowledge, become a self-aware ‘elite’ (Horstman, 2010). The practitioner has access to practitioner knowledge, while the general public does not. Change and learning are not dealt with at the level of context and relationship. The practitioners protect themselves, when they claim they act according to professional protocols. This positivist tradition, which the reflective practitioner seems drawn towards, protects the practitioner not only from legal claims or from being accused of making errors, but also protects the practitioners from having to deal with personal issues, emotions, and relations. Responsibility is put outside of the relationship and outside of the people interacting.

By championing individual agency, Kincheloe also creates a separation of Self and world. The reflective teacher of Kincheloe in his 2003-publication, is told to analyze practice via predefined socio-economic categories, even though Kincheloe acknowledges the postmodern epistemological crisis of these categories. Nevertheless, teachers researching their own biases could supposedly, diminish the possibility of practitioners becoming new elite.

Professional universities claim to accept competence based education, which relates to the endogenic knowledge tradition in the terminology of Gergen and Wortham (2001). Competence based education seems to center on the practitioner, but is often restricted to strategies of solving problems. Moreover, the competences often described in protocols have to be measurable indicators. The fear of professional universities, which supports the positivistic
knowledge tradition, seems to be a fear for relativism (see also Chapter 2, section *Constructions of Knowledge*). However, the damage the positivist view does to education, is that it results in elite or solidified knowledge, which is out of contact with most of society. The problems related to not reaching the general public, for instance with warnings about unhealthy life styles, can be compared to not reaching children and youngsters in schools. The gap between traditional scientific knowledge and society is replaced by the gap between practitioner knowledge and society. Having access to knowledge implies sending or transferring knowledge, which might disregard listening to Others.

The fear for relativism is recognizable; at least, I have experienced the dangers of relativism while struggling with relational constructionism. Yet, we have to find a way out. According to Kincheloe, ‘Foucault argues that truth is not relative (i.e., all world views embraced by different researchers, cultures, and individuals, are of equal worth), but is relational (constructions considered true, are contingent upon the power relations and historical context in which they are formulated and acted upon)’ (p. 59, Kincheloe, 2003). A relational truth, as Gergen and Wortham (2001) point out, does not merely evoke epistemological considerations such as the ones Kincheloe proposes in *Teacher as Researcher*, but it evokes ontological quandaries; constructions of true knowledge of the world entails constructions of Self and Other as well. Also Kincheloe acknowledges this in his Chapter *Autobiography and Critical Ontology: Being a Teacher. Developing a Reflective Persona* (Kincheloe, 2005).

**Reflection as Inviting Other to Dance**

The concepts of the reflective practitioner and of the teacher as researcher originate in the ideas of Dewey. Dewey’s insight that development is mutual to learning and researching, underlies Kincheloe’s teacher and student as researchers, and my research project as well. ‘The “end” [purpose/soul] of human life is moral and intellectual growth, and growth can only be achieved in a context that nourishes growth’, writes Dewey (1934/1958). Such reflective practice diminishes the boundaries between teaching, researching and learning. In his 2005 publication on autobiography, Kincheloe directs the attention of the

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1 A focus on ontological quandaries also implies a focus on epistemological ones. A relational perspective departs from the idea that ontology and epistemology are interconnected. I make use of the word ontology to create a distinction from a merely epistemological perspective which does not necessarily imply ontological perspectives.
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teacher as researcher to the Self, when he writes: ‘postformal autobiography’s thinking about our own thinking induces teachers and students to reexamine their personal constructions of the purpose of schooling’ and he explains ‘teachers and students are encouraged to reflect on their past lives in schools and their interactions with teachers, books, the symbol structures of schooling, and other education-related artifacts’ (p. 6). As I intended to do, Kincheloe blurs the line between knowledge production and being, which provides an ontological turn to reflection. I want to take this one step further by enhancing the ontological aspect via Self-Other ethnography. Kincheloe misses the ongoing relational aspect of knowledge construction when he writes about the personal constructions of teachers and students as many constructivists do. The relational unity of analysis of Self-Other as proposed by relational constructionism, is intended to be an example of another ontological perspective. This ontological perspective departs from an interconnectedness of Self and world. The relational unit of Self-Other as constructed in this book, does not disregard Self or Other, but focuses on how Self and Other are created in relation. When truth is regarded relationally, reflection has to be relational as well. Learning is positioned within the various Self-Other relationships. Reflection and researching are presented as aspects of learning or knowledge construction that supposedly are imbedded in relations.

Kincheloe proposes a critical ontology, which he constructs as ‘attending new levels of consciousness and more informed “ways of being”’ (p. 8). This critical ontological awareness helps to understand how dominant cultural perspectives, such as the person’s political opinion, gender role, and so on, are shaped. Exploring different Self-Other relations, focuses on social, local and historical contexts. Reflection is seen to bring something that has not yet been into existence; whereby one becomes the Self open to other Self-Other relations. I propose a relational dialogical ontology with a focus on how relations might become, instead of trying to understand how relations have become. Kincheloe and I can find each other in the exploration of stabilized patterns and the questioning of these stabilized patterns. The stabilized language patterns of individualism, with free will, true Self, core Self, and autonomy, are socially induced and therefore can be subjected to critical reflection, and opened up for reconstruction. The word ‘reflection’ often refers to an aspect of cognitive rethinking. An ontological turn of reflection centers on learning and becoming, instead of on being, understanding and finding the right procedures. From a relational perspective, reflection involves developing new stories about how things have become and in that sense the stories take part in becoming (Leggo, 2001). My depiction of autoethnography as Self-Other ethnography, can be seen as a step in the path of acknowledging the relational aspect to knowledge.
creation. Self-Other ethnography centers on being in the world, instead of taking a Self-world separation as the point of departure. It entails reflection through complexifying, instead of through reduction.

In a postmodern perspective, growth does not have a specific direction, because development and growth are not seen as becoming ‘better’ or ‘more mature’, because such thought would require foundations for what is ‘better’ or ‘more mature’. I see development as ongoing change, in any direction; but starting from the intention of becoming ‘better’. The intention to become ‘better’ is constructed in interaction, an interaction in which different local, social and historical contexts count. ‘Better’ differs from one context to another, and is therefore subject to change as well; change that is restricted by the local, social, and historical context. Learning, researching and teaching, are part of life and from the idea of ‘Real-life Learning’, these activities add to moral and intellectual growth. I emphasize that critical relational reflection is required that invites Otherness in as a possibility to enhance learning and researching in relation. Dancing with different dance partners, so to speak, enhances the complexity of the dancing.

Reflection, in this sense, is not focused on fixing errors, errors which might disturb the effectiveness of behavior, or modernist errors that were brought to the surface because goals were not reached. Critical reflection focuses on becoming, instead of being; by creating disturbances and by creating possibilities of being that are struck by difference. Aiming for moments of feeling struck, requires raising questions and doubting what seems obvious, in other words: the creation of Otherness. By relating this view on reflection to dialogical Self-Other relations, moments of feeling struck can create other, Self-Other relations. Within the metaphor of dancing an Argentine tango, we can see this as inviting other dance partners to the dance. As Hosking proposes, relational constructionist practices that are open to Otherness, including other Selves, construct soft differentiations (p. 670, Hosking, 2007). Soft differentiation is understood as playing with differences between teachers and students, an ethical position in line with a critical and humanist pedagogy and related to postmodern pedagogy. In addition, soft differentiation is seen as an ontological perspective. I have attempted to construct soft teacher-student differentiations by being open to Otherness with an emphasis on the other Selves. For instance, ‘me’ regarded as coach in relation to students, ‘me’ as student in relation to my supervisors, ‘me’ as researcher in relation to my research material and theoretical texts. I have made an effort to create possibilities for being struck, by exploring different relations and by bringing those different relations
into contact with one another. I have endeavored to create stories about the influences of different Selves that inform my relating to the students, as well as to my research materials and my supervisors.

In this research project, Otherness was created through bringing in relational constructionist texts on soft Self-Other differentiation. Texts, such as e-mails or transcripts of conversations, were explored from the perspective of the relational unity of Self-Other, and the ethical choice of soft teacher-student differentiation. Another element that was brought in, through reflection on these texts, was the element of time. Time can be seen as another way of bringing in Otherness: careful consideration, of different relations in the texts, slows things down. According to Bloch (in Hermsen, 2009), there is a need for a certain span of time, from the now to the past or future, to experience and understand something. An immediate experience of the now, as if the present put a meaning to something, is not a mediated now. From a relational perspective, I’d rather say, a span of time creates other stories. The ‘I’ in the interaction with for instance, students, is not the same ‘I’, reading a transcript. Moreover, the ‘I’ reading a transcript, for the first time, is not the same as the ‘I’ reading the same words for the second time, or the third time, or the ‘I’ writing about them. Time creates a multiplicity of Self-Other relations. Researching as critical reflection on texts produced in conversations, might be regarded as adding a span of time, slowing down and therefore creating another Self-Other relation.

Let me turn to a text about the Argentine tango, once more, to highlight that (moral and intellectual) growth, requires playing with Otherness.

There is no doubt that a man in tango is male and macho. Tango is a product of popular Argentine Culture...To be macho the Argentinean way is to be self confident, to be certain of where a man stands and where he is going. He is in charge, he is reliable and accepts responsibility. He cares for the well-being, safety and happiness of his woman...He is happy to be male, she is happy to be female. Both are equal in their relationship. They do not compete – but rather co-operate... The strength of the woman is in the femininity, something mysterious that the man treasures and respects. His strength is in his masculinity, something different that she also respects... It is my impression that they are some of the strongest attractions to the modern couple, a place where for an instant the man and the woman can still be masculine and feminine without further consequences. (Stermitz, 2006)
Masculinity and femininity are seen as elements of the Argentine tango, which goes against the grain of my feminist assumptions. I dislike hard demarcations between men and women, although, and here is a paradox again, I do like to be a woman. Hardened boundaries seem solid and not open for change. However dancing an Argentine tango, as Stermitz suggests, provides a possibility to *play* with the masculine and feminine roles. When it is possible to switch roles—as my partner and I were asked to do during our first tango lesson—I do not have the same problem with the roles anymore. Although...playing with boundaries, as boundaries between Self and Other, teacher and student, right and wrong, male and female, asks for guts and confidence, as I already explored in *Context: Dancing with an Audience*. Dancing with different dance partners and playing with differences, entails entering the untrod grounds of unknowing, and enabling the know-how needed to develop in that space of time.

**Solidified Dance Partners**

Disruption, feeling insecure, being moved, touched; it is all part of life and learning. Not all dancing is pleasant. Some of the dances with my intellectual dance partners, The Big Guy, The Professor and The Master, were not at all enjoyable when we danced, but often turned out to have a rewarding result in the end. In July 2009, I wrote:

How to deal with the intellectual images which I found so disturbing because I grant them a judgmental position? Do I want to silence them? YES. Often I think they are nasty and making me feel insecure in a way that I am unable to react. Partly it was possible to silence them by creating the differentiation between *Research Loes* and *Coach Loes*. But NO, I do not want to silence them; being struck by them enables my learning. Nevertheless, I want to get rid of the paralyzing effect they have on me and to make their disruptions work, to welcome their disruptions, so we can enjoy dancing together. Looking them in the eyes, facing them, and disrobing them of the mystical connotations I created for them might be a way to deal with them: to tell them my thoughts about them, not to belittle them, but to demystify and to create human-like characters or critical friends. For this reason, I wrote letters to the frightening stabilities, to point out that even perceived stabilities change as my relation to them changes. In the letters to my images, I keep on drawing boundaries
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around them and me, positioning myself towards them. This might seem paradoxical to a relational conception of Self-Other or of a dialogical Self. I think it is not. In these letters are stories of relations between my images and me. I do not story me. I do not story them, but I tell stories about our relations and the development of our relations, which includes them and me. Tangoing is not becoming one, but becoming as one. If there are no boundaries between you and me, Self and Other, we could not say something about relations or dancing.

Haarlem, July 2009

Dear Big Guy,

We’ve known each other for quite a while now and you have played part in many developments in my life in the last 13 years. I consider you a strong and passionate ideologist and a strong debater. This had at times aroused feelings in relation to my father, who was a debater drawing from a vast store of information. As a teenager, I was unable to make him understand my points and this often happened in discussions with you in a similar way. What I learned to see regarding my father and likewise regarding you, is that we have these debates because we have different perspectives, neither one being wrong. Right and wrong are no longer relevant.

I see your endless political perspectives as black-and-white, which make it quite clear who will come off worst. This does not align with my more relational perspective that we all take part in the constructions of the way we relate. However, I do see that some constructions are suppressed while others are welcomed. I do not regard power as a possession of privileged people who have the individual agency to execute those powers over others. Instead, I do see the power of how-we-are-doing-things-here, which I consider counterproductive to creating the future (on which we pedagogues need to focus). In this we can find each other, also in the struggles against powers that want to maintain the status quo (attached to people and institutions, as you see it; and power of the relational realities, as I see it). We both want to explore the future, make things change and develop, but we differ in making accusations to whom or what.

Although I might never be a debater in the way you are, I will not be knocked down again. I have developed ‘my own voice’, as you insisted I should. And it is precisely your persistent and obvious positioning that awoke me out of a naïve dream of a happy world and helped to position me towards your stories. I know when I make ‘my own voice’ heard, you will be the first to let me know what is wrong with my voice from your perspective. I know that convincing you of my perspective is fruitless and even unnecessary and undesirable. Occasionally at some of your famous parties at the opening of the academic year, we tried to dance together, but that did not work out. You did not want to be lead and I
Let’s Dance

did not want to follow as if we were dancing a ballroom tango. I do think that when we both are able to see the benefits of our working together and are able to celebrate our differences, we can benefit from each other, and dance along, which I think is in line with your critical pedagogical perspective.

There is one other aspect I want to discuss with you. Part of your political choice is to fight universities and educational institutes that use their powers to suppress people who do not have access to these institutions. This leads to a kind of anti-intellectualism with which I do not feel comfortable. I often do see those institutions and the people working there, as building Ivory Towers, something that I also oppose. But there is another story which might be a way to develop intellectualism that is related instead of distanced. Research, philosophy and literature from a more post-modern perspective opens up grand narratives of these Ivory Towers. These research perspectives can be used to disrupt and create other voices, as I experience in my research; not ‘better’ stories or voices, but other stories or voices. Reading, writing, acting in different communities (including what can be seen as scientific), helped me to develop a voice, to make me freer, a Free Agent Learner. All kinds of communities act and create worlds and several of them are intellectual communities. Intellectual communities that emphasize disruption and questioning are communities that I tend to feel comfortable in and I want to contribute to them. Moreover, I do want our master level students to be able to influence and create those intellectual communities as well, although, from what I have seen in the Living Environment Research Project, this does not have the same intensity.

Change from within, internally, rather than being oppositional, stems from the idea that we are in a world together, a world we recreate together. When we do not help students to enter these communities, for instance by forcing them to read literature, we deny them the choice to participate. We will do the same when someone advocates participation in the scientific community in a prescribed way! Look at you. You are like a walking encyclopedia. You know about many streams in science and are able to substantiate your choices and convey them to others in a convincing way!

I do hope that we can celebrate our similarities and our differences. Thank you very much for your infectious inspiration.

Kindest regards,
Loes
Dear Professor,

Will I ever be able to be a provocateur the way you are? Do I want that? It took me long to identify you as a provocateur. Every time we spoke, you came up with different questions, with different impressions about my thesis, and it took me quite a while to understand it was not how you thought it was, how it should become or whatever else it entailed. You wanted me to question myself or answer your questions for myself. On several occasions, you conveyed to me that it did not matter what I chose, but that I had to choose! You wanted me to make choices and point out the incongruities to me.

The one time I was deceived by you was when you said my thesis was not a Self-Other ethnography, but more of an evaluation research. 'What is your evaluation of this project? Obviously, it didn’t work,' you added. These remarks put me on the track of reading more on autoethnography and on evaluation research and it made me decide that I emphatically could not agree with your last typification because that would put more emphasis on the representational quality of text than I prefer. The outcome of your remark was fine and it was probably necessary to rethink this, although I cannot recall that anymore. However, in that conversation and in the car on the way home, I felt lost. I was struck by the idea that, obviously unnoticed, the thesis had taken another direction. At least that was what I understood from your remarks: the thesis differed from what I thought it was. What had gone wrong? Where did I miss something? Do I have to take another direction now, in this phase? I do not want to change anymore, but if it reads as if it is an evaluation research, I have two options: rewrite it as a self-other ethnography, or rewrite several parts into evaluation research. I lost heart again!

Your demands for clarity and defined boundaries seem opposed to Dian-Marie’s emphasis on softening boundaries. Of course, you are right. You cannot deal with unclear, covered voices, and your play with boundaries (sharpening these boundaries) is very helpful, although not always. The provocative part of this is that I cannot escape the idea that you know: that you have an idea about the direction I should take, which is something I did not have when we spoke. You play a role of someone who is helping me to discover my story by endlessly raising questions or dilemmas: being the provocateur. The difficult thing about this is that I had the feeling that you knew but did not tell: I had to find out. When I did not, when I discovered other directions, you kept on coming back to the issues. Did the provocateur only play his role? Where you only questioning the idea of a relational Self-Other unity for reasons of helping to uncover my boundaries or did you really have trouble with that line of thought when you repeatedly disclosed Self as an independent entity?

You were hard to understand. I constantly tried to figure out your position because I wanted to relate myself to your position. I assumed that your remarks related to your position. They often did, but sometimes they did not! That is what I did not quite understand. That is your role as a provocateur.

Haarlem, July 2009

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Provoking starts with observation and sharp analysis, and choosing an opposite position. I was aiming for soft differentiation, for reconstruction of differentiations or boundaries, whereas you took the opposite position of hardening them, frequently through framing issues in a binary, while my attempt was to dismantle binaries. You often played with boundaries of soft differentiation, questioned them, but I was not able to play with that in the way you were. I did not have the distance from my story to play along with that, and that caused me trouble and made me feel insecure! Meanwhile, your provocations enabled me to play and redefine the boundaries around soft differentiation and because of that became indispensable.

You acknowledge that you steer, that you lead the dance and prevent me from falling or bumping into other dancers (scientific communities), caring for my well-being, and that is what I experience as well.

Even though it might sound too cognitive, as I see it, relating to someone is in a way ‘defining’ how you interact with each other. It also involves redefining boundaries around what ‘you’ are and ‘I’ am and how those created entities relate. In a way, because you are so hard to grasp, relating to you when it concerns my research had been full of surprises and often discomfort. I thought, ‘what will come up today. I cannot foresee how he is going to react’. This differs from relating to you when discussing other topics, like holidays, art or people. Then care, respect and equality predominates your interacts.

I want to relate to people I think are interesting, nice and pleasant or whatever, I want to please them. When it concerned my research, it was hard to grasp how you could be pleased. As an aspect of this, I convinced myself that this is because you believe I could do better and that is a comforting thought as I think high of your academic and analytic qualities. Recognizing the provocateur in you helped me to demystify you and welcome the following provocations. I do hope to continue dancing together.

Thank you very much for your support and your belief in me,
Loes Houweling

Haarlem, July 2009

Dear Master,

Although I didn’t immediately grasp the impact of what it would mean to have you for my supervisor, you made it very clear from the start that you would be examining the texts as if they were critical relational constructionist. All of your remarks were heading in that direction, which made my stories more ‘relational constructionist stories’. Although critical relational constructionism is not defined and bounded, and even though you depart from the notion that constructionism is always under construction, the edges to walk on seem very narrow, which is what I experienced every time when you gave me feedback on my texts. You seem to be a knowing, unified voice, which means your
voice could work as a crowbar and could help me to find my own (temporal) boundaries in the moment of interact.

Although your remarks were often constricting, my sensitivity to the use of words has increased. In some of these experiences with you, I see resemblances of interactions with The Big Guy. You both seem to have strong, knowing voices that are inspirational, convincing, and seem to be uninfluenced by our interaction and which had very much influenced me.

In order to make relations discussable, which I regard to be an objective of this thesis, an emphasis on text as becoming (as I construct it) seems insufficient to me. The emphasis on text as always under construction and on ontology of becoming neglects the necessity of recognition and similarities of texts. Recognition, similarities and ideas of repetition are necessary to discuss and make relations visible. In the words of Bakhtin (1981), both centripetal and centrifugal forces need to be acknowledged: one cannot have one without the other. To me relational constructionism stresses ongoing processes of construction, centrifugal forces: every dance is a new dance. However, in order to talk about Argentine tango in its diversity, we need to look for what repeats, what is similar. I almost hear you say that that part is captured by acknowledging local, social and historical contexts and you are right. But it did not work for me that way. To be able to dance together, we need to agree on some elements. We need to have some similar expectations. These elements or expectations are part of the local, social and historical contexts that dance along. Every dance has both repetition and change. In this thesis, it was important to stress the construction aspect, the change-aspect. And along with that, during the writing of the thesis, it was important to acknowledge what was repeated and what remained the same, otherwise I was unable to put words to paper: every word requires explanation, which I can only do in words, which requires explanation again. This needs a focus on the tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces, instead of a focus on one of them.

Critical relational constructionism as ongoing construction might assume a less bounded voice than I experienced while interacting with you. You are The Master and that seems to produce a harder differentiated teacher-student relation than I would expect, based on what I understand of relational constructionism with emphasis on soft differentiation. From another perspective, I might see our relation as a relation without playing any roles, whereas the relation between Hugo and me is more complex in this regard. His way of discoursing and supervising relations seems more based on the idea of bounded entities with their own ideas. Meanwhile his endless attempts to influence can be seen as a soft differentiation.

It seems kind of strange. At the start I thought we had some mutual understanding in questioning teacher/student relations. However, we seemed to drift apart along the way. When we (the ‘students’, my colleagues and I) started the Living Environment Research Project, I intended to soften the boundaries
between ‘teachers’ and ‘students’. But I saw us doing the opposite because of all kinds of tensions, focus on outcome and other contexts. During the Living Environment Research Project, we focused on relational aspects and brought our relational realities to the centre of attention. It felt as if things got worse. I think we needed some other ‘content’ to get relating started (for instance discussing critical pedagogy), content that we teachers saw as important. I heard you give other examples, examples of educational relations with your students in which your role was more backstage and in which students and you together define the content of the course. This seemed like a bizarre friction with how I experienced you in discussing my thesis, in which I see you as steering me and not being affected by our interacting. I think that for the students in the Living Environment Research Project it was sometimes clear to them that they influenced me, for instance, when we co-constructed the paper on critical pedagogy. I know, text is text and it does not represent you, me, or our interacting. We cannot know who influences whom, what, when and how, but does that mean that we cannot talk about that?

I want to thank you for bringing me in contact with critical relational constructionism and endlessly questioning my texts, I learned a lot from that. Your relational constructionist voice offered me a possibility to relate that.

Respectfully yours,
Loes Houweling

Limitations and Paradoxes of Inviting Other

The narratives in this book explore the complexity of ‘me’ in relation to the students as well as ‘me’ in relation to other teachers, including my images of my supervisors. I made efforts to enter the untrodden ground of educational relations through inviting Otherness. The narratives can be seen as an example of a Self-Other ethnography and reflection. It was fun to do the research; it was exciting and often very demanding and tangling. I also felt satisfied about my persistence. I feel proud about that and I feel extremely happy with my experience of researching and learning. I started out because I wanted to get fresh new input about learning processes and I achieved that. At the start of the process Otherness had to come from someone else, from the PhD program for instance. That has not really changed; Otherness always implies someone or something else, i.e. other relations with other texts. I’ve experienced that the Other is not very far away; Otherness can emerge from one’s relations to the multiple dialogical Self, as well. I now feel more able to recognize Otherness and to keep on developing Otherness. The process has heightened not only my confidence in myself, but also my confidence in celebrating uncertainty,
self-other ethnography as reflection (rasberry, 2001). i have developed, without doubt a temporary, pedagogical insight on higher education and on my work as a coach and researcher. so, i have benefited from it. this makes me enormously grateful to all the people that contributed to the process. nevertheless, i experience some conflicts regarding the possibility to bring in otherness. when rereading the narratives, i question to what extent i succeeded in bringing in otherness and what kinds of limitations and paradoxes have emerged. i decided to share these thoughts with you, the reader, to expand on this example of self-other ethnography.

**critical relational construction as other**

what differences did i construct by using the meta-theory of relational constructionism? in chapter 1, i told why i chose to use this meta-theory. i was triggered by the reformulation, caused by the relational discourse of the critical pedagogical question: ‘who suppresses whom?’, into ‘how do we create inequality in the educational interaction?’. i wanted to see what would be the benefits of not using the linear action-reaction model and of not starting from constructions like individual, own voice, group, and community, as i was used to do. would a new pedagogy emerge? as i have storied, there were several threads that led to this curiosity. i was attracted to the meta-theory because it made sense to me, and i was spontaneously able to relate to the thought style. this invites the question, to what extent did i really invite other texts in for critical reflection? is it possible to transcend myself, when i selected which other texts i wanted to relate to?

critical relational constructionism focuses more on the performative qualities of texts, than on their representational qualities, as i already pointed at in the section writing multiple voices in chapter 4. however, is it do-able to stay in the text, in the situation, and to narrate about the processes, without a sense of reality and a belief that we are understanding one another? i attempted this by retelling the narratives several times, every time trying to open a new perspective on the text; and by trying to construct boundaries in different ways. but how is that possible, without assuming a relationship of the texts, to what happened? what is the benefit of retelling texts without a relation to practice, to what happened, or might be going to happen? relativism lures in wait. relational constructionism worked as the other, for me, in realizing that the relation between text and what happens, is difficult to text. it also destabilized the idea that relations could be changed just by talking about them, as explored
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in the contexts of Chapter 4 *Talk about Dancing*. However, did I manage to stay within relationship and/or text, instead of writing about or thinking about them? Have I produced knowing-with instead of knowing-from? Is it possible to judge, if we have managed to come to joint action? How do we decide whether this attempt is worthwhile? How do we judge if we have been able to bring into existence what had not existed before (Shotter, 1997)? From a relational constructionist perspective, we might conclude that we always do, every dance is in essence a new dance, never danced before. Nevertheless, what is the point in trying to write about these processes, if we cannot capture the moment and if every interaction is a new interaction? Every tango is a new tango, but can we try to define what a tango is, or when a dance is no longer a tango? Although the constructions of what is called an Argentine tango change over time, and differ from community to community, an (intuitive) idea of knowing about what is talked about, is a necessary ingredient for relating and interacting. The texts can be seen as an attempt to create possible and polyphonic stories, and on creating a relational judgment on collaborative learning and soft teacher-student relations. Processes of constructing judgment are ongoing in the discourse of relational constructionism, ongoing and connected to local, social and historical contexts. From this perspective the constructions of judgment, whether the texts tell about processes of collaborative learning or joint action, or whether they narrate an opening up our way of relating, are constructed in the reading of the texts.

**Language and Other**

A paradox I encountered is in the use of language. Writing ethnography makes use of written language, which is a mediated way of representing. It can be seen as a reduction of events; however, the texts create other complex narratives, through the dance of texts (text-context), as they are read. When using language to indicate a person or a role, I construct this person or role. When calling someone a ‘teacher’, I already construct the role and influence how the person emerges in the moment of reading. As an expedient solution, I used quotation marks to distinguish between formal roles and relational constructed roles. Nevertheless, because of the use of language, I did not escape the power of the author to define roles and to decide when one is regarded a ‘teacher’, or judging whether an interaction might be seen as ‘collaborative learning’ or ‘joint action’, as I did in Chapter 5. How can I say something about the text without using language? Making use of ‘ordinary’ words like ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ keeps the reader as well as me (as author, reader, and researcher) within the educational
setting, and limits the possibility to open up role definitions. Although different contexts can be opened through using words like ‘teacher’ and ‘student’, there is also some recognition necessary when you read my texts for relations to be possible. Otherwise, what would be the point in reading and writing? Therefore, ‘recognition’ is necessary for making the texts do something; while on the other hand, this recognition prevents me as well as you, the reader, from opening up many stabilized patterns. Use of language is an inescapable limitation to the possibility to open up stabilized patterns of interaction.

**Argentine Tango as Other**

Making use of the Argentine tango metaphor is an attempt to loosen up the relation between language and representation. Again a metaphor only works when the use of the language makes sense. The use of the tango metaphor emerged out of the first analysis of my research material and my exploration of leading and following. The possibility of the metaphor being the Other is limited. However, the tango metaphor revealed several themes that I have explored further in the Chapters 3 to 5. The dialogue between the research materials, this metaphor, and the educational contexts, led to themes such as ‘dancing with an audience’, ‘rhythm’, and ‘dancing styles’. The metaphor sometimes worked as the Other, throwing light on educational relations. For instance, the Context *Rhythm* was created by putting the metaphor to work on the texts of the Living Environment Research Project. Like in an Argentine tango, the metaphor and the material let me play with leading and following.

Sometimes, bounded rules enable a dance to develop. Sometimes the rules are boundaries that are to be crossed. In order to be able to play with boundaries, one has to acknowledge that boundaries are constructions that could be constructed otherwise. This makes the language of relational unity of Self-Other and of teacher-student with soft differentiated boundaries, so challenging. Where educational relations in the current educational setting differ from the Argentine tango, and where this metaphor is lacking, is in the realm of institutional consequences. We do not have to dance, and we can choose our dance partners; but in contemporary society, we do have to go to school, or to take courses. Not only were Guus and Marinus, two of the participants in the research, forced by their management to take the course; also the repeated discourses on ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘knowledge society’ forced them and others to take classes. We often cannot choose our students or our teachers. Teachers and students are all framed in this dance with rules such as teachers-grading-students, and students-
defining-successful-teachers. The rules of the dance, as for instance defined by
the educational institution, and our local, social, and historical contexts, have
consequences. The metaphor of a ballroom tango might have suited this aspect
in a better way.

**Soft Teacher-Student Relations as Other**

I made use the Argentine tango metaphor, with its masculinity and femininity, and
the distinct roles of the leader and the follower. The focus on soft differentiated
teacher-student relations does not imply that I opt for abandoning distinctions
between ‘teachers’ and ‘students’. I propose that both should be seen as equal in
the relationship, but not as the same, just as tango dance partners are not the same.
From a relational perspective, all participants are responsible for interactions.
With this, I do not mean to say that ‘students’ have the same responsibilities
as ‘teachers’. While recognizing the powers of stabilized practices (many of
which emerged in my research), I do want to suggest that educators have to
take up their relational responsibilities. However, we need to reconsider our
teacher-student relations, when we do want to see professionals as collaborative
constructers of the world in general and pedagogy in specific, professionals
who regard Other as co-constructers instead of objects of change.

In the texts, one student more than the other expressed that they experienced
having to live in the reality of the course, or of the teachers. Experience of
power or powerlessness, like for instance from Femke, Corrie and Esther (see
the *Interlude* between Chapters 5 and 6), might have something to do with
a failure to co-construct feelings of influence qua rules and boundaries. We
did not construct the program or the project as a social playground. Though,
I see for instance Laura’s reaction as joining the play, on the playground. She
notices that I constructed her as a Cinderella and questions that. Likewise, she
constructs me as knowing without competing, but as a part of our co-operation.
To be able to play with boundaries, you must not reify the boundaries. I would
not be able to tango the Argentine tango, if I had to take the masculine and
feminine roles too seriously and felt unable to change them. Power or lack
of power might be experienced as a personal characteristic: but it certainly is
attached to the social categories we enact with each other; i.e., the local, social
and historical context, we allow to stabilize. We, as teachers, as leaders in the
dancing, as researchers, do have to take care for the well-being, safety, and
happiness of our students. We also have to enable our students to take risks
and (perhaps) to leave the well trodden paths. I used to tell students, at the
start of the course: ‘This is a place to experiment and you can compare that with learning to swim. If you hold on to the edge or are held by the hand, you will not learn. You have to do it yourself, and that will often prompt a feeling of drowning, but you have to know that a coach is there to prevent you from drowning.’ I haven’t told this for a long time, but I am planning pick it up again, although, can I really prevent that? Coaching or teaching is a balancing act, of holding hands and of pushing others to do it all themselves. I am willing to take up the responsibilities of leading the dance, with the intention of enabling the Other to shine. Coaches or teachers need to have an extended vocabulary of rhythm to enable students to shine. They have to have the guts to dare to work on the edges of knowing and unknowing. They should research their ideals critically, and ought to question stabilized contexts. Coaches are obliged to take the lead and follow in the exploration of untrod worlds.

Self-Other Ethnography as Other

Letiche (2010) points at another tension concerning autoethnography and in line with that concerning Self-Other ethnography. Autoethnography, he claims can get stuck in what he frames as a ‘self-same logic’. A relational pattern, in which I regard the Other, for instance other students, as experiencing the same as I did, or as in need of the same as I felt in need of, which disregards the Otherness of the Other. For instance, the text If I look for Parallels, I will Find Them, can be read in such a way. Otherness of the Other is destroyed. My reflection on Chapter 4, Calvinist Reflections, invites a variation on the dilemma of ‘self-same logic’. In that section, I explored the way I wrote the texts in Chapter 4, which I describe as blaming-myself-for-doing-wrong. Based on this observation, and in line with the ‘self-same dynamics’, I suggest that Self-Other ethnography can get stuck in ‘self-shame dynamics’. In a ‘self-shame dynamics’, the Self is thought to be the responsible actor, acting on Other, instead of a relational Self, in a Self-Other relation, with shared responsibility in creating the relational reality. In ‘self-same dynamics’ and ‘self-shame dynamics’, the Other is created as an object of the action of the Self, which turns relations into hard differentiated Self-Other relations instead of the soft differentiated relations I strive to develop. Both dynamics tend to disregard the agency of the Other.

A weak signal that emerges out of this consideration is that many texts about the tango with the ‘students’ display this ‘self-same’ and ‘self-shame dynamics’. Texts about tango with my solidified images of supervisors and
critical friends often seem more focused on differences and on my criteria for
development. I created differences in the relations with the theoretical texts,
critical friends and supervisors; differences that offered appealing possibilities
to learn. I found myself searching for the more challenging relationships to
generate the necessary excitement and risk, fueling my passion (Shrivastava &
Cooper, 2007). Learning was my main perspective for taking on the research
trajectory, and this made me search for the most challenging dance partners or
Others, which I found in my critical friends and my supervisors, as I elaborated
in Context: Creating Otherness on p. 210

These tangos not only seem to disrupt
but also to avoid tangoing with the ‘students’.

The narratives of The Living Environment Research Project, tell a story about
a long and slow period of suspension; while the moments of joint action
are characterized by the quickness of reactions and as a wave of energy.
The difference between the constructed phases of Learning the Alphabet
(suspension, Chapter 3) and Joint Action (surge, Chapter 5) creates tension,
tension defined as another disturbance asking for careful consideration. During
the execution of the projects, I chose to define boundaries around ‘Loes in
relation to the research material’ as Research Loes, and ‘Loes in relation to
the ‘students’ or Coach Loes. Making use of language is an act of creating
boundaries. Construction of boundaries through language is related to other
acts (and texts). The creation of boundaries between two different relational
Loeses, as I already explored in Chapter 5 Context: Creating Otherness, was
not merely name-giving. It influenced my actions by helping me to select with
which dance partners I wanted to tango at a certain moment. I experienced this
as influencing my possibilities to join in and to create collaborative learning
with the students. Instead of being confused by all the dance partners I wanted
to dance with at once, I needed to focus. Before that construction, as I narrate
in Chapter 5, it felt as if I was at a Milonga (a tango party) and I could not
choose with whom to tango. It was a rather crowded dance floor with real
and imagined people (Sampson, 1993/2008), theories, opinions, and beliefs. I
danced with all present, sometimes with more than one dance partner at once.
Some dance partners wanted to dance, some did not. Often dance partners did
not even know I danced with them, for instance when I (re-)read and analyzed
my conversations. It was my intention to come to collaborative learning with
the students, but my relation with my research, and as an extension of that with
my images of my supervisors, felt like a tangling number of dance partners,
all inviting me to dance simultaneously. Careful consideration of my actions
seems to have lead to a prolongation of the phase of suspension.

Researching my own practice brought about some other tensions as well. For
Self-Other Ethnography as Reflection

instance, the tension expressed as: ‘One doesn’t wash one’s dirty linen in public!’ I feel strongly connected to the Master’s program, to the ideas of Real-Life Learning, to the students, to my colleagues, etcetera, which prevented me from washing all of my dirty linen in public. I felt more at ease when writing what I did wrong, than in presenting texts that could be understood as about what Others did wrong. By making my relations to these people and ideas important, my will to open them up to analysis may be paradoxical. Shotter (1999) warns us for breaking down joint action by analyzing how we might come to joint action and this might be the same with relations to people. Nevertheless, not only my loyalty to people I work with was preventing me from do any washing in public, I also wanted to keep my job. Some of the actions of management of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht were perceived by me as political. I want to be critical about my employer, but only to some extent. In university politics, the Other often refuses the invitation to dance. Soft Self-Other relationships are not a characterization of hierarchical power driven relationships.

Self-Other ethnography is limited by the (im-)possibility to invite the Other. I restricted myself in the exploration of me-in-relation-to-other-people, for instance I did not include my family with the excuse that they did not ask for me to research our relating. However, some untrod worlds might also be too scary for me. So my methodology and/or focus limits what I can look at.

In sum, although I attempted to open up relational practices in my practice with students as well as in writing, I conclude that this Self-Other ethnography is an attempt with limitations.
Perspectives of Self-Other Ethnography

Dear reader,

The book started with a description of the Argentine tango codes of inviting the Other to dance. Asking someone to dance with a certain glance, movement of the head or smile, when eyes were met, is very subtle. This thrilling way of starting a dance relation for the time of several dances, differs from the way I invited you to dance; you were just confronted with a book. As writing is a relational activity, I write in relation to an audience. Meanwhile, I am not able to know my audience. I cannot know what you, as a reader, want to read, or how you will relate to the texts. Writing an entire book, without being able to adapt to the reader is like inviting readers to a tango with the precise steps in mind, but that would not be an Argentine tango. Therefore I invite you to see the texts as turns in a conversation on learning, teaching, and researching. I hope it provides us with narratives to explore further.

If you have read the entire book, we sure created a lot of dances. I hope the narratives of adaptive change and learning in context, raised questions for you about the organization of learning and inspired you to research your educational relationships. Even more, I intend the narratives to be exemplary; I aim to show Self-Other ethnography as a critical reflection on relationships instead of just writing about Self-Other ethnography, and instead of proposing this methodology as something that is beneficial for Others. I see Self-Other ethnography with all its limitations and paradoxes as a possibility for relational, reflective practitioner research. In a variation on a quote from Kincheloe: ‘Self-Other ethnographers are on a quest for a humble form of wisdom about who they are and may become in relation to Others.’ Self-Other ethnography is a possibility for such a humble wisdom, which prevents us from becoming an expert or new elite.

I close the way I opened our dancing of texts, with a quotation taken from tango lyrics (translated from Dutch to English LH) (p. 126/127, Ferrer & Brave, 1989). Hopefully I invite you to continue to dance:

Bailar el tango es un hipnótico andar, Dancing the tango hypnotises,
Siendo uno el otro en un instante y, al fin, Suddenly you become one, and finally,
Espiritualizadamente bailar At departure, you dance together in your mind,
Sobre el pañuelo de adiós, al partir. On the handkerchief, you wave goodbye with.
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Let’s Dance


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Nederlandse Samenvatting

Let’s Dance

Een Self-Other Etnografie over Opleidingsrelaties
Deze etnografie laat een voorbeeld zien van reflecteren, reflecteren als relationele praktijk. Ik reflecteer op opleidingsrelaties vanuit mijn ervaringen als opleider, student en onderzoeker in een zoektocht naar mogelijkheden om samen te leren. Met dit boek wil ik opleiders en studenten aanzetten tot een kritische reflectie op hun relaties vanuit een pedagogische perspectief. Het onderzoek *Let's Dance* is gestart vanuit de traditie van de reflecterende professional (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Schön, 1983, 1987) en heeft daarnaast een relatie met de kritische pedagogiek en de leraar als onderzoeker zoals Joe Kincheloe (2003) beschrijft. Een leraar die zijn eigen praktijk onderzoekt, kan zijn handelen verbeteren en wanneer dit gebeurt vanuit een maatschappijkritisch perspectief kan een leraar, volgens Kincheloe, de praktijk van het onderwijs veranderen. Het was mijn intentie om te onderzoeken wat ik studenten vraag om te doen: reflecteren. Het onderzoek heeft zich van daaruit ontwikkeld tot een kritische reflectie op reflecteren van professionals en tot de ontwikkeling van het concept van *Self-Other* etnografie als vorm van relationele reflectie voor professionals in het algemeen en pedagogen in het bijzonder.


De titel *Let's Dance* verwijst naar de metafoor van de Argentijnse tango die in dit proefschrift met enige regelmaat aangehaald wordt. Een Argentijnse tango is een dans gebaseerd op improvisaties en ontstaat al dansend. Een tango kan niet volledig herhaald of geregisseerd worden; improviseren gaat immers steeds maar door en tijdens het dansen ontstaan telkens nieuwe dansen. De metafoor biedt een mogelijkheid om naar opleidingsrelaties te kijken als relaties die, net als de tango, ontstaan in het moment van de interactie en waarbij improvisatie een belangrijkere rol speelt dan vooraf bepaalde regels en danspassen. Ik gebruik de tangometafoor deels als illustratie van aspecten van opleidingsrelaties en deels als uitdaging om opleidingsrelaties op een andere manier te beschouwen.
De focus op opleidingsrelaties komt voort uit de idee dat zowel Zelf en Ander (en daarmee ook docent en student) in relatie ontwikkeld worden. Ook kennis en waarheid worden, zoals Foucault laat zien, in relatie geconstrueerd (Gergen & Wortham, 2001; Kincheloe, 2005). Opleidingsrelaties vormen daarmee een belangrijk onderdeel van leren en worden ook wel verborgen curricula genoemd (Eisner, 1994; Kincheloe, 2004).

Zelf en Ander zijn onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden (Hosking, 2005a). Definietie van de Ander houdt tevens een definitie van Zelf in en andersom. Door te bepalen wat de grens is tussen Zelf en niet-Zelf, bepaal ik zowel mijzelf als de ander; zonder een ander te zien als student kan ik mezelf niet als docent zien; zonder iemand als docent te definiëren kan ik mezelf niet als student definiëren. In navolging van Bakhtin leidt deze gedachtengang tot een dialogische of relationele opvatting van Zelf: Zelf is slechts te begrijpen in relatie tot Ander (Hermans, et al., 1992; Sampson, 1993/2008). Ik benadruk de relationele eenheid van een meervoudige Zelf in relatie tot Ander; Zelf in relatie tot promotoren, tot studenten, tot collega’s. In elke relatie acteer ‘ik’ anders, of ben ik een andere Zelf. Hoe we onze relaties construeren en hoe we elkaar en waarheid construeren is de focus van het onderzoek.

In deze Self-Other etnografie vormen transcripten van conversaties binnen twee met elkaar verweven projecten de teksten om te reflecteren op opleidingsrelaties: het Leefwereld Onderzoeksproject en mijn PhD-traject aan de Universiteit voor Humanistiek. In het Leefwereld Onderzoeksproject begeleidden een collega-coach en ik een aantal studenten van de Masteropleiding (Ecologische) Pedagogiek van de Hogeschool Utrecht. Deze studenten hadden de uitnodiging aangenomen om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek naar de leefwereld van kinderen en jongeren. Mijn reflecties op opleidingsrelaties in dit project, waarin ik officieel een ‘coach’-rol had, zijn verbonden met mijn reflecties op de relaties met mijn promotoren vanuit een meer ‘student’-rol. De verstrengeling van beide projecten heeft geleid tot polyfone (meerstemmige) verhalen over opleidingsrelaties.

De metafoor van de Argentijnse tango is in dit boek niet alleen gebruikt als illustratie van opleidingsrelaties, maar ook als een illustratie voor de dans van teksten en de voortdurende constructie van betekenissen. Tekst wordt opgevat als alles wat bijdraagt aan constructie van relaties. Niet alleen gesproken en ook geschreven woorden, maar ook handelingen en het gebruik van materialen zijn op die manier te beschouwen als teksten. Zo is bijvoorbeeld het schrijven op een schoolbord een handeling die bijdraagt aan de constructie van een relatie. Vaak
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zal een dergelijke handeling gezien worden als ‘iets aan anderen uitleggen’. Daarmee wordt een relatie gecreëerd tussen een schrijver die iets begrijpt dat de ander niet begrijpt maar wel zou moeten begrijpen, de één wordt geconstrueerd als docent en daarmee de ander als student. Dat er een schoolbord in een ruimte hangt, nodigt tot dergelijk gedrag uit. De inrichting van een ruimte is daarom ook op te vatten als tekst die bijdraagt aan de constructie van relaties.

De teksten in dit boek zijn een representatie van mijn onderzoek, maar vormen vooral een praktische uitvoering van reflectie. Het onderzoeken van de dans is in zichzelf weer een dans. Vanuit een relationeel constructionistische metatheorie begrijp ik reflectie als het creëren van nieuwe teksten door het toevoegen van andere teksten, waardoor andere betekenissen losgemaakt worden. Het onderzoek is gericht op het ontwikkelen van nieuwe mogelijkheden, het ontwikkelen van andere verhalen over opleidingsrelaties, of zoals Leggo (1998) het verwoordt: het uitdagen van wat voorgeschreven is. De dans ontstaat in het moment van dansen tussen de danspartners, de muziek en de muzikanten, de andere danskoppels, het eventuele publiek en de ruimte waarin gedanst wordt. Elk moment is anders en er ontstaan steeds weer nieuwe verbindingen die leiden tot nieuwe improvisaties en nieuwe relaties. Relationele reflectie zie ik als het telkens weer uitdagen van de regels en een nieuwe grammatica ontwikkelen, door het aangaan van relaties met andere teksten. De *Self-Other* etnografie *Let’s Dance* is een voorbeeld van een dergelijke relationele manier van reflecteren.

In het eerste hoofdstuk geef ik een aantal verhalen (teksten) die mij aangezet hebben om dit onderzoek te doen. Deze verhalen construeren mijn passie voor opleidingsrelaties als relaties waarin zowel opleiders als studenten zich kunnen ontwikkelen. Een samenwerking tussen opleider en student, lerende en leraar, waarbij zowel een student als een opleider lerende en leraar kunnen zijn, vormt het startpunt van mijn zoektocht. Voor mij is dit één van de belangrijke elementen van opleiden vanuit Levend Leren, het postmodern en kritisch pedagogisch opleidingsconcept (Jansen, 2005b) dat een fundament is van de opleiding Ecologische Pedagogiek waarbinnen dit onderzoek plaatsvond en ik als coach werk. Ik koppel Levend Leren aan kritisch relationeel constructionisme, een metatheorie die de onderlinge verwevenheid en voortdurende constructie van relaties als uitgangspunt heeft. In dit proefschrift wordt deze metatheorie gebruikt om aannames en ingeslepen (relationele) patronen te deconstrueren en zo openheid te creëren voor mogelijke opleidingsrelaties. Leidende vraag in dit onderzoek is: hoe construeren wij elkaar als opleiders en studenten en is het mogelijk om het onderscheid tussen opleiders en studenten te vervagen om zo tot samen leren of *joint action* (Shotter, 1997) te komen. Opleidingsrelaties worden


In de hoofdstukken 3, 4 en 5 staan de verhalen en deconstructies van het Leefwereld Onderzoeksproject en mijn promotietraject centraal. Deze hoofdstukken laten een tango van teksten zien waarin verhalen over de bijeenkomsten, veelal gebaseerd op transcripten van opnames of bestaande uit e-mail conversaties, herverteld worden vanuit een relationeel perspectief. Deze hervertellingen duid ik aan met ‘context’ en aan de eerste tekst (transcript) wordt een relationele tekst toegevoegd waardoor een nieuwe tekst ontstaat.

1 Context is te zien als een samenstelling van het voorvoegsel con- in de betekenis van ‘samen’ en ‘tekst’, ofwel het ‘samengaan van teksten’. Afgeleid daarvan is het woord contextualiteit te begrijpen als de inbedding in meerdere teksten. Omdat de betekenis van teksten altijd contextueel is en daarmee niet eenduidig, is ook een context niet eenduidig en onveranderlijk.

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Aan elk hoofdstuk wordt vervolgens nog een tekst toegevoegd in de vorm van een reflectie op het hoofdstuk als geheel. Met de verdeling van de teksten in drie hoofdstukken suggereer ik een begin, midden en eind van een verhaal over een zoektocht naar samen leren en de mogelijkheden van het verkleinen van het onderscheid tussen opleider en student. Hoewel er vele andere verhalen te lezen zijn, heb ik dit verhaal willen benadrukken.

Hoofdstuk 3 vertelt over het moeizame begin waarin opleiders en studenten elkaar aftasten en proberen tot een gedeelde taal te komen. De complexiteit en relationele eenheid van leiden en volgen worden verkend. Verschillende mogelijke lokale, sociale en historische contexten die wellicht meespelen tijdens de interacties (zoals eerdere ervaringen met docenten) laten zien hoe moeilijk het is om vaste patronen in opleidingsrelaties te doorbreken. Voorts wordt in dit hoofdstuk het element van macht in opleidingsrelaties gedeconstrueerd en bekeken vanuit een relationele perspectief waarbij macht niet gekoppeld is aan een persoon of rol, maar in de interactie geconstrueerd wordt.

In action research wordt gesproken over critical friends die noodzakelijk zijn voor reflectie. De teksten in hoofdstuk 4 zijn voor een groot deel gebaseerd op de geschreven conversatie met mijn kritische vriendin en collega Renée van der Linde. Met teksten die gebaseerd zijn op de workshops met studenten vertel ik een verhaal over mijn onvrede met het proces van het Leefwereld Onderzoek tot dan toe en hoe ik werd geraakt door de moeite die het blijkbaar kostte om vaste opleidingspatronen te doorbreken. Ik construeer in dit hoofdstuk angst als een belangrijk thema, angst voor het onbekende, angst voor het oordeel van andere en angst om op te gaan in de ander.

In hoofdstuk 5 presenteert ik teksten van het Leefwereld Onderzoeksproject die beleefd worden als momenten van samen leren, zoals het gezamenlijk schrijven aan een tekst. Elementen als verschillen in ritme en de druk van een groep worden in dit hoofdstuk nader verkend.

In de reflecties op de hoofdstukken 3, 4 en 5 benadruk ik het verhaal over de invloed van het onderzoeken van de eigen praktijk op die praktijk. Samen leren veronderstelt dat we iets met elkaar delen en samen construeren. Dit samen leren leek tijdens de bijeenkomsten met studenten belemmerd te worden door het onderzoeken van de situatie, doordat ik tijdens de interactie (dans) met de studenten, ook danste met mijn promotoren en theorieën. Dit resulteert uiteindelijk in een verhaal over het effect van het benadrukken van grenzen tussen de onderzoeker en de opleider. Het versterken van die grens leek de
zoektocht naar de mogelijkheid om grenzen tussen student en opleider af te zwakken positief te beïnvloeden. Ik concludeer hieruit dat grenzen vervagen eerder gezien zou moeten worden als het spelen met grenzen of durven veranderen van grenzen, dan het opheffen ervan. Vervagen of veranderen van grenzen houdt immers tevens de constructie van andere grenzen in. Dat geldt niet alleen voor grenzen tussen onderzoeker en opleider maar ook tussen student en opleider. Bewust zijn van grenzen relationele constructies zijn, geeft de mogelijkheid om te spelen met grenzen en nieuwe wegen te verkennen.

Na de reflectie op hoofdstuk 5 volgt een intermezzo met brieven van studenten die deelgenomen hebben aan het Leefwereld Onderzoekproject waarin zij reageren op de teksten over de workshops. Deze brieven voegen opnieuw andere verhalen aan de teksten over de bijeenkomsten toe.

Na een korte herhaling van het concepten van de reflecterende professional van Argyris en Schön (1974) en van de leraar als onderzoeker van Kincheloe (2003) bespreek ik in hoofdstuk 6 de beperkingen ervan. Een belangrijk element daarbij is dat de auteurs met deze concepten een scheiding tussen Zelf en wereld veronderstellen. Kennis, en ook praktijkkennis, lijkt als het ware buiten de kenmerk om te kunnen bestaan. Binnen opleidingen leidt dit naar mijn oordeel tot een te grote nadruk op kennis, waarbij de docent weet wat de regels zijn en de student deze moet leren, in plaats van een accent op leren. Samen een werkelijkheid of waarheid construeren, of wat ik joint action noem, is vanuit een dergelijk accent op kennis niet aan de orde. Hoewel de ideeën van de reflecterende professional reacties waren op de weerstand die elitaire academici opriepen, betoog ik dat met de uitwerking van het concept van de reflecterende professional een nieuwe elite gecreëerd wordt, namelijk degenen die toegang hebben tot de praktijkkennis. Kennis over de wereld en accumulatie van deze kennis versterkt tevens de gedachte van de mens met toegang tot de juiste kennis als individuele beïnvloedende factor op het geheel: een handelend subject waarbij de ander tot object van het handelen gemaakt wordt. Ik vervolg in dit hoofdstuk met een uiteenzetting over de noodzaak van een relationele manier van leren, opleiden en reflecteren, zoals ik in dit proefschrift heb getracht te doen. Met een Self-Other etnografie introduceer ik niet alleen een kentheoretische heroverweging van leren, opleiden en onderzoeken door reflectie maar veelmeer een ontologische heroverweging, waarbij bescheidenheid en samen leren voorop staan. Ik ontkom er daarbij niet aan om kritisch te reflecteren op het concept van Self-Other etnografie, waarmee ik een laatste reflectielag in het boek bespreek.
Reflecteren is een heen en weer gaan tussen verschillende teksten. Dit heen en weer gaan in tijd, heen en weer gaan tussen meer theoretische en meer praktische teksten, tussen gevoel en cognitie, tussen metafoor en conversaties, tussen teksten van mijzelf in relatie tot mijn promotoren en teksten van mijzelf in relatie tot studenten en tot kritische vrienden, ofwel deze dansen van verschillende teksten bracht tijdens het schrijven en brengt bij het lezen ervan verwarring. Deze verwarring heeft geleden en leidt tot andere inzichten en andere condities voor leren. Het uitgangspunt in het onderzoek was de verbondenheid van Zelf en Ander en de verbondenheid met onze verschillende contexten. Ik laat zien dat een simplificatie van pedagogische relaties (bezien vanuit een ééndimensionaal oorzaak-gevolg-structuur) ontoereikend en onwenselijk is, maar het onderzoek maakt tevens duidelijk hoe doordrongen mijn denken daarvan is en hoe moeilijk het is om vanuit verbondenheid onderzoek te doen en te schrijven over pedagogische relaties. In dit onderzoek doe ik een poging en ik hoop dat het een aanzet vormt voor verdere zoektochten naar mogelijke vormen van relationeel onderzoek en reflectie. Met deze tango van teksten nodig ik de lezer niet alleen uit tot een kritische reflectie op opleidingsrelaties binnen masteropleidingen, maar ook tot een kritische reflectie op reflecteren.

*Let’s dance!*
About Loes Houweling

Loes Houweling (1959) studied speech therapy in Amsterdam and worked at the Alexander Roozendaalschool, a school for children with severe speech and language problems for 20 years. Speech and language therapy was a rather unexplored area open for discovery and together with colleagues Loes developed trainings, theorized about language and developmental language problems and educated the teachers of the school. Loes approached speech therapy as something connected to the broader development of children and therefore worked to stimulate cooperation between professionals (teachers, physiotherapist, psychologist, speech therapist) and parents.

During this period, she married Jos and their two children, Hannah (1986) and Chiel (1988), were born.

Loes became increasingly interested in the organizational aspects of schooling and got a middle management position, which she combined with her work as a speech therapist. In 2000 Loes earned her Master’s degree at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht and Oxford University. During that program, her perspective on education broadened and she came to realize that her work, in which she saw herself constructed as expert, no longer satisfied her. She started to teach in Master’s programs in education, including the HKP (the precursor of the Master’s Course in Ecological Pedagogy, which provides the context for her study), at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht.

Inspired by the development of Real-Life Learning of Hans Jansen, and combined with her interest in qualitative research, Loes developed the idea of a strong connection between learning and researching. As a member of the research department of ‘Innovative Methodology and Didactics in Teacher Training’ of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht and in a project entitled ‘Een Spraakmakend Project’, which she ran for the research department ‘Participation’ of Rotterdam University, she strived to connect research in practice, with the ongoing development of (normative) practitioners. Thus bringing together her roles as practitioner, postmodern researcher and educator.

She was substitute Professor Innovative Methodology and Didactics at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, and is currently responsible for the
development of content and research lines of the Bachelor and Master’s programs in Ecological Pedagogy. Loes also works as senior researcher at Rotterdam University. In both settings she seeks to develop Mode 3-research; research that is driven by the ethical normative tensions of practitioners, as pathways for development. Let’s Dance can be regarded as an example of this.