

!mpulse to find out

*An encounter with innovating
teachers, utopia and ideology*

Marte Rinck
de Boer

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!mpulse to find out

An encounter with innovating teachers, utopia and ideology

!mpulse te (onder) zoeken

Een onverwachte ontmoeting met innoverende docenten, utopie en ideologie
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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Door

Marte Rinck de Boer

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Promotor

Prof. dr. Hugo Letiche, Universiteit voor Humanistiek

Co-promotor

Prof. dr. Jean-Luc Moriceau, Institut Mines Télécom/TEM

Beoordelingscommissie

Prof. dr. Christopher Day, University of Nottingham

Prof. dr. Thijs Homan, Open Universiteit

Prof. dr. Hans Jansen, University of the West of England

Dr. Bas Levering, visiting professor Universiteit Gent

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For Lennard Hubertus, Gysbert Konradin & Arriën Symon

*In remembrance of my beloved parents
Gijsbertus and Foekje de Boer-Bootsma*

“At first I resolved not to disturb you with such a useless piece of information,” said he. “However, our impulses are too strong for our judgement sometimes. I thought you might perhaps know something of it all the while.”

(Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d’Urbervilles)

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Introduction

Why do we acknowledge only our textual sources but not the ground we walk, the ever-changing skies, mountains and rivers, rocks and trees, the houses we inhabit and the tools we use, not to mention the innumerable companions, both non-human animals and fellow humans, with which and with whom we share our lives? They are constantly inspiring us, challenging us, telling us things. If our aim is to read the world, as I believe it ought to be, then the purpose of written texts should be to enrich our reading so that we might be better advised by, and responsive to, what the world is telling us.

(Ingold, 2011, p. xii)

Encounter, Correspondence, Otherness

*A room with a view.*¹ As I entered secondary education at the age of 12, my mother renovated my little sister's nursery and turned it into a study of my own. At the age of 50, I started my PhD project; again, I thought such a room would be suitable. I furnished it myself this time—partly with second hand furniture, which held interesting stories about other places and times. I put photos of loved ones on my desk, and bought a huge *Clivia*. The number of books on philosophy, research, complexity and education increased. It was a space where I found silence, and where I could reflect on my experiences in the outside world. Through the large windows I could see the Japanese maple tree—an *Acer Palmatum*. The colouring of its leaves showed me that my thoughts developed throughout the seasons: rain, snow, and sun touched my mind. Moreover, it continuously reminded me of a world full of opportunities for knowing. Thus, I left the room and encountered these opportunities: at Impulse, a secondary school in Leeuwarden; at the University of Humanistics in Utrecht where I found myself again in the role of a student; in the study of my supervisor prof.dr. Hugo Letiche in Den Haag with nice cappuccino's and inspiring reflections and ideas; in restaurants in Paris where I enjoyed the French language, nice food, and supervisor prof.dr. Jean Luc Moriceau's patient attempts to have my voice integrated into the text. And after I returned from other places, other rooms, and other people, my study indeed was a refuge for reflections on what I had encountered outside its confines.

The encounters with others and otherness shaped the PhD. Etymologically, encounter refers to 'meeting with adversaries and confrontation', and is rooted in Latin *in contra*, meaning 'against' (Harper, 2001-2014).² In a way, the research indeed threw down the gauntlet, as the encounters challenged me intellectually and professionally. Nevertheless, they were not a matter of opposition but of *correspondence* (Ingold, 2013). The anthropologist Tim Ingold uses correspondence in the sense of exchanging letters; he does not use it in the sense of expressing similarity, resemblance, or agreement. Throughout the centuries, philosophers, novelists, artists, scholars, queens, kings, lovers have expressed their day-to-day affairs, deepest thoughts and feelings in ongoing correspondences. In the writing of the letter, in the receiving and responding, they intertwined in thought and action. They expressed and sharpened their ideas, listened and responded critically, and were attentive to what was written between the lines.

¹ This is the title of a beautiful novel written by E. M. Foster in 1908. The themes presented in the novel have some resemblance with some themes in my PhD.

² All etymological explanations are taken from Harper (2001-2014).

Ingold transferred this correspondence in a metaphorical³ manner to relationships with others and otherness in the world—especially to research encounters in participant observation. It is, however, transferable to all those encounters with the unknown that have an educational quality to create opportunities for learning and transformation.⁴

When does a pedagogue have an opportunity for correspondence—to be educated and to be led out? This specific opportunity actually began in 2004, as Lennard, our eldest son, had to change from elementary to secondary school. At that moment, a new type of school entered my life. It interested me because of its innovative claims, as well as its opportunities for Lennard and for education in general. As such, the initiative was not extraordinary. Alongside the practice of education opposing pedagogical visions and supposedly better solutions had always existed; and, they had evoked public and professional discussion (Miedema, 2007). For instance, I myself started my professional life in such a solution. In 1987, I joined the Leeuwarden Hotel Management School pioneer team. Those days, the school’s social-constructivist Problem-based Learning approach to the curriculum was quite revolutionary in higher education (Otting & De Boer, 2009).

I can imagine that only a limited number of teaching professionals have the opportunity to engage in such an educational change. Perhaps only a few have the ability to see new horizons, can accept uncertainty and take the challenge and leave what is considered mainstream education. We read about their ideas and what was made out of their dreams. I had the privilege to engage professionally in such a change, and, as a mother, to come in contact with the initiation and development of a new school. It gave me an insight into educational renewal from two different pedagogical perspectives. Nevertheless, direct professional engagement and parental participation were not sufficient for comprehensive understanding; I needed the PhD to make sense of impulse and to expand my professional pedagogical awareness.

³ Lakoff and Johnson (1980) addressed the understanding of the world via the use of metaphors. Irrespective of the assumptions that metaphors are merely a literary poetical language tool, they argued that a “Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (1980, p. 3). Metaphors help us to explain situations with descriptions related to a different but comparable context. In other words, the metaphor is *what we live by*, and is used to make sense of our experiences.

⁴ Education is rooted in Latin *educere*, meaning ‘to lead out’; pedagogy stems from Greek *paidagogos*, ‘guiding and supervising somebody’.

!mpulse, Utopia, Ideology

!mpulse is part of the comprehensive school *Piter Jelles* in Leeuwarden; in 2015, the school celebrates its tenth anniversary. Its start was rooted in a striving for new forms of education in the Netherlands in the first decade of the 21st century that was known as *new learning*.⁵ The school's educational and organisational design challenged mainstream education. But, after a promising start, it faced severe problems. These led to an integration of processes and principles, which conform to conventional schools. As a result, the school could continue its existence, and is still warmly appreciated as an alternative for a conventional school by teachers, students and parents.

I studied the change and preservation of !mpulse with the sociological concepts of utopia and ideology (Mannheim, 1930/1936). Since Thomas More wrote his book *Utopia* in 1516, the term is understood as the imagination of a perfect world beyond time and space that transcends our social reality. It refers to a good place that does not exist or could not exist at all.⁶ !mpulse cannot be defined as a utopia in this sense—though it did transcend educational reality; it was a realised dream, and it existed in time and space. Utopia at !mpulse had a function as a hopeful mode of thought that urged for a change in educational reality. The preservation of the utopian idea, however, was in itself contradictory; and this effort to maintain its existence could be considered ideological⁷, rooted in a mode of thought that functions to stabilise a once opposed social reality.

Text and Chapter Introduction

The thesis *!mpulse to find out* is the result of a dynamic research process that lasted five years. It is difficult to convey this dynamic through words and sentences; nevertheless the static text should not be separated from its research and writing process—from my sense-making and gradually understanding a social reality, from my thoughts and actions. It might be easier to grasp its dynamics if the text is considered from its Latin roots in *textere* 'something woven', and in the process as the work of a skilled weaver. The sentences passed, like the weft threads, over and under the warp, gradually forming a tapestry or texture reflecting encounters, experiences, thoughts and emotions—"the material of life" (Ingold, 2013, p. 17).

⁵ In this thesis, I use the term *Millennium Innovation* to refer to *new learning* to emphasise the historical-social context of these specific initiatives.

⁶ In the book title, he allowed himself a pun, as he combined the Greek eutopia—meaning 'good place'—and *outopia*, 'no-place' (Levitas, 1990).

⁷ Etymologically, the concept is rooted in the Greek *idea*, meaning 'form' or 'pattern'. Ideology denotes a theory of ideas, the totality or system of objectives, assumptions, judgments and concepts; often, ideology is related to political and economic orientations.

Part I Encounters with Otherness

My research was framed by four different encounters, which are introduced in Part I. I remember the importance of the DBA community, which gave me room for thought and intellectual development. I give a sketch of !mpulse, as I encountered it in 2011; and I give a brief history and details about the learning community's pillars and organisation. I connect it with a *petite histoire* about the striving of my great-grandfather Jacob and his contemporaries for Christian education one century ago. Their efforts, embedded in a national movement, resulted in the unique Dutch law on freedom of choice in education—article 23. This law has governed the Dutch educational governmental policy and practice ever since. Furthermore, I portray the sociologist Karl Mannheim, whose book *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) I used to understand !mpulse from a sociological perspective. Finally, I explore Tim Ingold's approach to anthropological participant observation, which reflects my methodology.

Part II !mpulse

!mpulse formed the foundation of my research. It determined the sociological and anthropological orientation, and gave rise to my pedagogical awareness. The text presents me as teacher-as-mother and as teacher-as-researcher. In the writing of each of the three chapters of this part, I emphasised my three voices: mother, teacher and researcher. It is an illusion to think that I could separate one voice from the other—they are indissoluble and embodied in me. Nevertheless, they are not all heard equally in life's different spheres. Furthermore, my voices are coloured, with an anthropological perspective (in Chapter 1 and 2), and with a sociological point of view (in Chapter 3).

In Chapter 1, *Mother* is my main voice and I ask *Why !mpulse for me—and Lennard?* I recall the attraction that the school had for me and try to understand what had happened until Autumn 2009. For the first time, I reflected on the perspective and motives that were decisive for my enthusiasm for !mpulse. I have learned from conversations with the founders and pioneer team members what had motivated them, how they had shaped and 'lost' their idealist dreams for a better future. I speak and I let them speak in the narratives that I constructed out of their memories.

In Chapter 2, *Teacher* is my main voice and I ask *Why am I pedagogically perplexed?* From January 2011 until February 2012, I stayed with !mpulse as a participating observer among secondary school teachers; I learned from and with them. They were my colleagues in what they professionally did and said, in what they dreamed of and were anxious about. In this learning process, I, so to speak, entwined with them. I present my encounters in 'vignettes' narrating my presence in the community life, and in 'tendrils' discussing my increasing pedagogical awareness. More details about the concepts are given in the introduction to this chapter.

In Chapter 3, *Researcher* is my main voice and I ask *Why was !mpulse initiated around the Millennium?* I engaged in a documentary study, which turned out to be a Sherlock Holmes like discovery resulting in the creation of a network of important determining actors in the Millennium Innovation. In this network, all the lines are connected like a spider web; and when I follow them, I move from one 'node' to another: from the striving of a school principle to the Dutch conservative-liberal Minister of Education, to learning psychologists and education scholars; and from an educational consultancy organisation, to one of the former 'Big Five' worldwide accountant firms. This network wrapped itself around !mpulse, and it gave me the feeling of claustrophobia. Therefore, I wove 'interludes' with reflections into the network to provide some air.

Part III Thinking with Mannheim

In the third part, I present Mannheim's thoughts and my interpretation of !mpulse from the perspective of Utopia and Ideology. Its position as the third part of this thesis is related to my constructivist ontological and epistemological understanding. I understand myself as part of the world that acts upon me, and I act upon the world in turn; out of this action, my knowledge develops. Therefore, the !mpulse community was my point of departure for knowing, and the knowing could only occur because I was part of this special social reality. It led to a process in which I did not know beforehand which theoretical direction I would take. I walked a path with the people at !mpulse; and as I walked it, the awareness emerged that ideology and utopia were important components of the school's existence. Thus, the choice to turn to the work of Karl Mannheim resulted from the encounters in the anthropological participant observation process. This is visualised in its presence as the third part.

Part IV Reflexivity in Thinking through Making

In this part, I reflect on the ways that my participant observation and relationship to !mpulse developed, whereby my internally developed knowing has led to the central theme(s) of this thesis. Moreover, I reflect on my responses and teachers' possibilities to respond to my and their knowing.

Part V With Altered Eyes

In this last part, I draw the conclusion that the learning that evolved was a matter of transformation of perspectives based in intellectual growth. It is mirrored in an unsolved tension that meanders through the text. It offered the opportunity to develop consciousness and a different perspective on my teaching practice both essential for a teaching profession and pedagogue. Thus, I understood I had written a *thesis/antithesis*—a *thesis slash antithesis*: an antithesis alongside the thesis creates dynamic spaces for ongoing learning in its dialectic.

Acknowledgements

Doing a PhD is a lengthy and—despite all encounters—sometimes a rather solitary process. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it, and I will cherish it in the times to come. I would like to thank the persons whose presence, inspiration and support were essential.

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I would like to thank the 2011 !mpulse team. *Aljosja, Anneke, Claudia, Cora, Ernesto, Henrike, Ina, Jaap, Jan, Jenny, José, Leonie, Marco, Marga, Marja, Peter, Ralph, Roel, Sandra, Wabe, and Annemie*. When I arrived, you received me wholeheartedly. You let me join your team, and took me with you in your daily routine. First, I was quite surprised by your hospitable reception, but soon I learned that this was part of your culture. I could see your genuine pride about the community—of course, an eagerness to show it to other enthusiasts naturally followed. I will not go as far as to say that my prolonged weekly presence was completely clear to you. It is difficult to have someone in your midst who wants to get to know you and to understand you; who continuously asks questions and perhaps makes unwanted observations. I know, I stirred up hidden memories, which was good—but at times also painful and emotional. You showed me your vulnerability, doubts, frustrations, and insecurities about the future of !mpulse. I feel privileged by the fact that you let me take part in the daily life and learning; it was difficult to take leave of you after this special year. Without you, I could never had written this thesis.

Ida and Reinald, the founders of !mpulse, I truly appreciate your willingness to contribute to my PhD and understanding. !mpulse is founded in your idealism, and you gave me your precious memories and considerations.

I also enjoyed the inspiring conversations with students and parents (mainly Stenden colleagues) who shared their experiences with me. Furthermore, I would like to thank *Henk Tameling*, former director of the PJ Montessori College and !mpulse, and *Wabe Reinsma*, teamleader at the *Archipel* location who officially allowed me to conduct this research.

Dear Hugo, Cher Jean Luc, thank you ever so much for the space for learning and transformation you created for me. At a certain point, the writing of the very last sentence in a thesis is a kind of relief; nevertheless, it is with pain in my heart that this last sentence also put an end to our regular conversations.

Hugo,

In April 2012, I sat in your study with feelings of unhappiness. Two years of participation in the DBA community and my participant observation at !mpulse had alienated me from my university. I had not expected this confrontational experience. You listened to me, and as I had finished my story, you empathically, with a smile on your face, replied: *And this is what a PhD is about; now it is getting interesting because you got touched by your discoveries and entered a process of transformation; !mpulse just gave you a mirror!*

You supported me with your empathy, and you turned my attention to the critical pedagogues Joe Kincheloe (2008) and Henri Giroux (2011); the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler (2010). Moreover, you introduced me to Karl Mannheim and, later in the process, to Tim Ingold. Now at the end of the journey, I would like to express my gratefulness for your guidance; to this I will never forget your and Maria's hospitality—where ever we met.

Jean Luc,

The author writes a text and asks, "Where am I in my writing?"—Why should I be in my writing.

"You express yourself in the writing, thus you are in the text!" —Why should I be in my text?

"A researcher cannot be at the same time in and outside."

"Text is always performative."

I noted down your words and my thoughts during one of your presentations in my Moleskine. We explored Velázquez' *Las Meninas*, and you turned our attention to the fact that everybody of importance was presented in this painting, including the painter himself. He looked from his painting to us, the spectators, and challenged his and our position and role. You transferred the question to doing research and presenting the writer—me—in a text. Doing research means being inside, and being inside means being reflective about what is going on, including about one's self: "Thus, it is so logical to be inside our work." It might sound logical but it was not easy to weave myself into the text, to present myself to a 'gazing' audience—it made me feel vulnerable. Simultaneously, you were right: I could not have distanced myself from the text, as it was the result of the correspondence between "the material" and me (Ingold, 2013). I enjoyed your views on doing research and expressing oneself. I am grateful for your patience and for you challenging me to express my voice in the text.

Lennard, Gysbert, Arriën Symon, from the moment you arrived in my life, you gave me the opportunity to look at the world through your eyes as well. Schools, for instance, were no longer just my field of work, but also became places where you were educated; and like most parents I wanted them to be as good as possible for you. This drove my participation in your elementary and secondary schools, and it directed my research interests. During the last five years, the four of us sat in our rooms, and we were united in our study activities; often, we discussed your experiences and my new insights. In the meantime, you developed into independent young adults, started your studies in higher education and independent lives. It is my greatest wish that our world would remain your source for curiosity, responsibility and agency.

Konradin, to you, the field of Dutch education was and still is a world of wonders. Throughout the years, you have questioned the Dutch school system and my educational perspectives in many ways. It shaped my views on education, as my life with you changed my understanding of the Dutch society anyway. The start of the PhD gave us food for thought on new topics. I will never forget your face and ironic reaction when I started to talk about *Mandelbrot* and *Wiener*; fractals and cybernetics: you thought I was loosing my marbles. If it had not been for your love, patience, listening ear and practical support, I could not have combined doing a PhD with our family life and my teaching.

During these past years, I have often thought of my parents. They would have been a proud audience on the day of my defence. Their love for and trust in me are woven into this thesis. My mother's family roots and my father's genealogical research resulted in my membership in the foundation *Sint Christophorileen tot Oldehove*, founded in 1480—I feel honoured to be accepted as a beneficiary.

Part I Encounter with Otherness

*As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.*

...

*Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.*

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.

(C.P. Cavafy, Ithaka)

Entering the DBA Community

January 18, 2010. I leave the train at Utrecht Central Station and walk in a stream of commuters, students, and other travellers toward the exit—fog awaits us. I continue my way through unknown streets till I—suddenly—find myself between the Dom tower and its disconnected church. Here, I could turn right toward the academic building of the University of Utrecht. It is, however, the far-off destination for my defence. Now, I turn left and walk past the church to my point of departure for this future, the DBA/PhD program Meaning in Organisation, Room 122 at the University of Humanistics. Here I meet women from various places in the Netherlands, from Nairobi and London—and one young man from Teheran. We come from different professional backgrounds and connect in our curiosity and desire to do a PhD. In the years to come, we will form a social group that gradually integrates into the DBA community—we will share pleasure and distress. Two of our course tutors, Robert van Boeschoten and Peter Pelzer, are already there; Geoff Lightfoot and Hugo Letiche arrive just a few moments later. With Hugo, the course director, dynamism enters the group and my thinking. During this first workshop week, various scholars familiarise us with their outlooks on life, methodological issues, and research topics; and they bring me into an intellectual discourse that is not easy to follow at this stage.

This is a new starting point for a long, never-ending process of learning and developing consciousness. The decision to start a PhD preceded this moment; it was a combination of a long held wish and a facilitated opportunity. Opportunity, as such, does not make people move—a personal drive is needed; nevertheless, without it, it would have been more problematic for me to fulfil my wish. This wish went back to 1987, when I was offered a PhD position at the department of German Studies at the University of Groningen. A hermeneutic study project on female literature needed a researcher; for personal reasons, I did not accept the offer.

Throughout the years however, a feeling of ‘intellectual barrenness’ grew in me, which made me attentive to an article in the Stenden newspaper about a visit of a group of colleagues to the University of Humanistics—which had hosted an international part-time PhD program since 2000. This program was “modelled along the lines of the DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) and DEd. (Doctor of Education)”. It aimed at the development of “working professionals with interest in the field(s) of humanization of work, complexity theory, organizational anthropology, training and innovation, and ‘meaning in organization’; qualitative research methodology is one of the focal points (University of Humanistics, 2009, p. 6). The article announced my opportunity: a changed policy on the professional development of staff had stated a (10%) target for PhD graduates by the year 2017. This policy was implemented to make schools more appealing as they faced an assumed teacher shortage—due to aging and

to decreasing interest in the teaching profession. This supposedly would endanger the development of the Dutch knowledge economy (Commissie Leraren, 2007).

I decided to enter this specific DBA-program for two reasons. First, the focus on a professional doctorate allowed for research in my professional field. This research was not restrained to a specific discipline or field of interest. This created a more open perspective to the theme I had in mind. Second, the program stood in the tradition of qualitative research methodology, which suited my academic background in hermeneutics based German Studies. As a result, my research developed into an interdisciplinary project comprising a pedagogical theme researched with an anthropological methodology and understood through sociological concepts.

The DBA situated me in a non-mainstream world of scholarship. Its critical perspective on organisations and its openness to experimental forms of research challenged the commonly held approaches of understanding the world. In the program and in the people who I met, I recognised curiosity and ability to open up to the world and to wonder. In fact, it had a utopian character—it brought together in a non-common way novice and experienced professional researchers from different worlds while opposing a mainstream perspective on research. Its interdisciplinary practice-based and philosophical process of knowing and thinking offered me words and texts for a different understanding of the world and knowledge—one of a world in flux, and of knowing within social construction.

From this moment on, I was a member of two rather distinct realities: I continued my work life at the university while the encounters in the DBA community changed my perspective on my teaching practice. For almost two years, I travelled to Utrecht; and each time, I met new people with unexpected knowledge and experiences. They all shaped my thinking and contributed to my development as a qualitative researcher. I am indebted to David Boje, Asmund Born, René ten Bos, Steve Brown, Peter Case, Joep Dohmen, late Heather Höpfl, Dian Marie Hosking, Ruud Kaulingfreks, Chris Kuiper, Harry Kunneman, Joanna Latimer, Simon Lilley, Steve Linstead, Alexander Maas, Burkhardt Sievers & Rose Mersky, Adri Smaling, and Frans de Waal. Working with them felt as if I could spread my wings again .

A Matter of Complexity

Prof.dr. Jack Cohen, a renowned reproductive biologist (he decided to become a “kind of nexialist” 60 years ago) attended our first PhD/DBA workshop week in January 2010. Together with Ian Stewart, he published *The Collapse of Chaos: discovering simplicity in a complex world*. In this seminal work on complexity and chaos, they argue against the traditional reductionist scientific approach to analyse and describe the world in its separated parts (Tait, 2010). In the workshop, he explained, if we would understand the world from a model perspective, we would understand the model while not compre-

hending the real occurrence of phenomena. He gave us the metaphor of the hammer and the nails stating, “just because you have a hammer, that doesn’t make all your problems nails. Just because you can get a nice ‘thin’ causal story about life by thinking ‘physics’, that doesn’t mean that you can understand life in those terms.” (Cohen, PowerPoint presentation, January 2010). In an experiment with a simplified do-it-yourself Belousov Zhabotinski reaction kit, Cohen explained the relationship between order and disorder. He mixed chemical fluids in a glass and jiggled it; seemingly out of the blue, lilac concentric circles emerged in changing patterns and kept on growing and feeding each other.

Jack’s contribution was a challenging entrance to the DBA, and his workshop was in many ways an important moment. His plea for bridged disciplinary-based research perspectives introduced me to an unknown field of thought, namely the complexity perspective. DBA scholars saw this as an interesting ‘intellectual stimulus’ in organisation studies. I started to read about complexity and familiarised myself with concepts such as complex systems, self-organisation, non-linearity, emergence, order and disorder (Letiche, Lissack & Schulz, 2012; Morin, 2008; Urry, 2005). The many new insights into the natural sciences since the 19th century had changed the view on life; it was said that the old Newtonian worldview no longer sufficed for understanding the world. This also had consequences for the social sciences, which were influenced so much by commonly held scientific insights (Morin, 2008). This engagement with complexity thinking opened up a new window to the world. It gave me a refreshing opportunity to see the way my life and work was organised from a different perspective.

Moreover, once I started my reading, it seemed as if the whole world was engaged in the complexity discourse. I noticed complexity theory and thinking was no longer a matter of scientific interest but had also entered the field of politics, economy, management, and education. Especially, the reading of educationalists who applied the concepts of complexity thinking as metaphors into their understanding of educational processes (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008; Osberg & Biesta, 2010) inspired my initial idea to approach !mpulse from a complexity perspective. Therefore, I submitted a proposal to research !mpulse ethnographically as a complex adaptive system.

Nevertheless, as I entered !mpulse, I realised this was not the route I should take. It would not bring me to the understanding I was actually longing for. I have described this change process in the paragraph on my encounter with Ingold. Despite this change, the initial study had been advantageous because it led to a better understanding of the contemporary discourse in regard to the so-called information age. As a matter of fact, it made it possible to understand that the ‘text’ of !mpulse was embedded in this discourse.

Encounter with New Realities in Education

The Millennium Innovation !mpulse

Around the Millennium, the Minister of Education invited the field of education—notably school principals and teachers—to become educational entrepreneurs in their teaching practice. This public political call also addressed profit-based organisations to engage in necessary bottom-up change. The call was driven by international societal developments and a discourse on the knowledge society and economy. This resulted in many small-scale and a few large-scale integral initiatives. The latter initiatives entailed new educational concepts combined with innovative organisational models—the so-called *vernieuwende scholen* or innovative schools (Waslander, Van der Weide & Pater, 2011). These schools adopted the idea of the *redesign school* (Morssinkhof, 2003) and integrated a didactical concept called *new learning*, which was rooted in social constructivist learning theories (Simons, Van der Linden & Duffy, 2000). In this thesis, I address these initiatives as *Millennium Innovations* to connect them to their historical-social context.

In the year 2002/03, the board of directors of the public-authority comprehensive school *Piter Jelles (PJ)* in Leeuwarden decided to start a project to develop such an integral innovative school between August 2003 and August 2005. The learning community, called !mpulse, opened its doors in September 2005 for students on Vmbo-t, Havo, and Vwo level⁸, enrolling 60 students per year. My critical stance towards conventional schools in the Netherlands and my son's enthusiasm made us embark on an unknown but desired journey right at the start. I thought that the promising possibilities for educational transformation were advantageous for future generations in a complex society. In my involvement as a participative parent, I noticed the struggle team members had in bringing the learning concept to full growth due to internal and external disturbances: the constrained realisation of the *Bovenbouw*; the leave of the protecting chairman of the board in Summer 2008, and the sickness and absence of the founders and staff members. I was affected by the trouble and dilemmas that occurred, and was worried about the innovating teachers stepping back into ingrained habits.

Four years after its promising start, the school faced existential problems. In November 2009, the board of directors—with a newly appointed chairman—decided to continue the learning community; however, its innovative concept was aligned with conventional school principles. At the same time, the community was split up into two locations: the *Onderbouw* students stayed at the original location *Archipelweg*, the *Bovenbouw* Havo and Vwo students were transferred to the PJ Montessori College (MC). Here, they were integrated into the regular school program to prepare for their national examina-

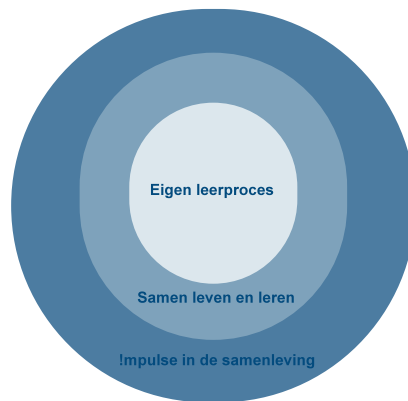
⁸ The meaning of the Dutch school vocabulary is explained in a glossary on page 28.

tions. It was also decided that the *Archipel* location would be relocated to the MC in August 2011.

Lennard studied between September 2005 and January 2010 at the *Archipel* location, and from September 2010 till June 2012 at the MC. Between January and September 2010, he and his peers were located at a temporary location. He graduated at Vwo level, seven years after he had started as one of the first !mpulse cohort students.

Foundational Pillars

The founders of the new school created a model presenting the three pillars of !mpulse —the model is still used in 2011. They reflect assumptions about the place of human beings in society; about school and society; about learning and knowledge; about relationship.



The inner circle, *Eigen leerproces*, addresses the individual learning process of an **I**. It addresses the individual freedom of students to design, to explore and experiment, to discover, to choose and decide; the student constructs his and her individual learning route.

The next circle, *Samen leren en leven*, addresses **WE** as a counterpart to **I**. !mpulse is a small learning community. Community learning or collaborative learning is a crucial point of departure for learning in the school. A student learns from and with others in shared responsibility; this includes responsibility for the community as a whole.

The outer circle, *!mpulse in the samenleving*, explains this school is part of a larger **Society**. !mpulse wants to take its responsibility in society; the school aims at taking from and bringing to the world knowledge and experience. The real world has to be for a great deal a source for learning and living.

Source: *Visiedocument (2004, p. 10)* interview IV (2012).

Organising the Learning Community in 2011

Life and learning at !mpulse in 2011 mirrored a regular day of work at the office: all of the students entered school at 8.30 am and were off by 3.30 pm; no bell announced classes or breaks, as bells belonged to a past industrial age. It all happened in a well-organised week rhythm with fixed components, some of them as old as !mpulse itself. Each component created a specific ‘biotope’ with its own objectives, composition (cross-age or age-based), and guidance. In most cases, the school level of students was unimportant. The largest biotope was the year group of around sixty students. Once a week, on Monday morning, all year groups met in the *Iedereenkomst* (assembly) to share general information and to strengthen the feeling of belonging together.

A year group was divided over two or three *kringen* (circles)—or coaching groups—supervised by team members. In the morning, the groups of 20 students gathered with their coach to start the day.⁹ The coach also met his or her students in individual study progress talks to discuss their portfolio and Individual Learning Plan. The coach also functioned as the school’s contact person for parents. The coaching groups were divided into classes for (integrative) subjects offered in designated (class) rooms. Here, students met subject tutors and worked independently and collaboratively with their supervision. A booklet with core objectives¹⁰, digital programs, standard textbooks, and handouts with assignments were at hand; 50% to 65% of the time was scheduled for pure subject matter lessons. The schedule also offered time for so-called *setting* or project work, as well as *free worktime*. The *setting* was based on the passion and interest of students. Every ten weeks, a new setting group started with a new self-chosen topic. On request, subject tutors gave content guidance, and a coach guided the group process.

Since the students were expected to support the community, they had to make a choice for a cross-age community activity based on their interest or learning objective: cooking, organising parties, public relations, publishing a newspaper, being a member of the *justice court*, were some of the possibilities; each community was guided by a staff member. Every Wednesday afternoon, students were off so that the team could meet and work together. Coaching groups, the subject classes, and most of the *settings* were age-based biotopes; community activities were cross-age-based. As a result of this learning design, a student could be a member of four or five organised biotopes in addition to his or her own group of friends.

In January 2010, I started my PhD and recognised a possibility to investigate what had happened and was still happening in the learning community. My initial enthusiasm

⁹ This differed before and after the summer break, and also depended on availability of the coach.

¹⁰ The Ministry of Education defined a framework for attainment targets. All students received a booklet, and were familiar with the requirements of the *Basisvorming* (www.rijksoverheid.nl).

for the new school and my commitment drove my curiosity and questions. This resulted in a participant observation project from January 2011 until February 2012. Originally, the research intended to study the relocation of the *Archipel* location to the MC. Nevertheless, by the end of January, this relocation had been postponed until August 2012. Consequently, my research followed the change process for the *!mpulse Bovenbouw*—the so-called *!mpulse 3.0*.¹¹ My research at *!mpulse* took place at the *Archipel* location; only to gain a better understanding of the situation, I did visit and observe school life at the MC location occasionally. It should be noted that the comprehensive school had started a second *!mpulse* project in Kollum in September 2006; I did not integrate this location into my research project.

Glossary of Used Dutch Education Vocabulary

<i>Vmbo-t</i>	Theoretical pre-vocational secondary education, four-year program; preparation for intermediate vocational education
<i>Havo</i>	Senior general secondary education, five-year program; preparation for higher vocational education
<i>Vwo</i>	Pre-university education, six-year program
<i>Onderbouw</i> or <i>Basisvorming</i>	Three year basic curriculum for <i>Vmbo-t</i> , <i>Havo</i> and <i>Vwo</i> followed
<i>Bovenbouw</i>	Second phase; last two years at <i>Havo</i> and last three years at <i>Vwo</i>
<i>Studiehuis</i>	Didactical approach for active and self-directed learning to be implemented in the Second Phase
<i>“Vernieuwende school”</i>	Innovative school. This description addresses those schools that were initiated from 2000 onwards, and which have a new curriculum and new school organisations (Waslander et al., 2011).
<i>VO, Voortgezet Onderwijs</i>	Secondary Education
<i>HBO Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs</i>	Higher Education, University of Applied Sciences

¹¹ *!mpulse 3.0* was a second attempt to establish a *Bovenbouw*, which was essential for the future existence of the school.

Freedom of School Choice

My great-grandfather Jacob was born in a Frisian dyke community called OudeBildtDijk (Nij Altoenea) near the Waddenzee in 1861. As a young boy, he went to the Protestant Christian school in the village St. Annaparochie—a half hour walk from his parental home. He was one of the first pupils after the school had opened its doors in 1865. A group of men—among them his uncle Jan—initiated the start of this school so parents could send their children to a school aligned with their religious beliefs. Up until this moment, children had to go to the regular ‘neutral’ schools or were kept at home. A national movement striving for confession-based schools supported this local initiative (Cuperus, 2003). In contrast to the public authority school, parents had to pay a fee for Christian schools. This, however, did not refrain them from enrolling their children. After Jacob married Adriaantje in 1884 and had nine children with her, he—for obvious reasons—was very motivated to set up a Protestant Christian school in the dyke community.

By the end of the 19th century, the number of pupils visiting the Christian school in St. Anna increased, which resulted in the decision to expand. Jacob—now chairman of the school board—and others took this occurrence as an opportunity to plea for a new school location in the dyke community. The first attempt, however, was unsuccessful because the required minimum number of 40 children was not reached. When the law on compulsory education was accepted in parliament in 1901, it was likely that the number of students would increase. Therefore, only a few years later, the community opened its own school. It was with satisfaction and pleasure that Jacob gave his opening speech in 1903.¹²

Door de goedheid Gods zijn we dan nu zoo ver gekomen, dat we de school van den Oudendijk kunnen openen, en als medebestuurder der school meen ik u iets van de geschiedenis der oprichting te moeten mededelen. De wet op het L.O. noodzaakte ons opnieuw tot uitbreiding. We moesten dus opnieuw aan 't bouwen. Het bestuur achtte nu het ogenblik gekomen om de school te splitsen en een geheel nieuwe school naar de eisch des tijds ingericht te openen aan den Oudendijk. Daarin meende het Bestuur de vele ouders tegemoet te komen die hunne kinders anders van verre stuurden. Maar ook, en hierom niet in het minst, om anderen de gelegenheid te bieden hunne kinderen Chr. Onderwijs te laten geven, die zulks nu niet doen om den verren afstand. De nieuwe school zal dus den bloei van ons Chr. Onderwijs bevorderen en den Naam van Jezus aan meerderen noemen. De opening dezer school is een daad van gehoorzaamheid aan het gebod van Jezus zelf als hij zegt: Laat de kinderkens tot Mij komen en verhindert ze niet want derzulken is het Koninkrijk Gods. De school moest er dus komen en zij staat er thans.

¹² The original Dutch text is presented without corrections in grammar and spelling.

Maar zal ze blijven bestaat dan heeft ze hulp nodig, ja veel hulp. In de eerste plaats vraag ik u: Gedenk haar in uw gebed voor den troon des Almachtige, wien het goud en zilver is. Gedenk de meesters in uw gebed, want God schenkt wijsheid en verstand. Onthoud haar uw liefde niet, want de liefde is vindingrijk en zal haar geleiden op allen moeilijken weg. De liefde, zegt Gods woord, draagt alle dingen. En wanneer gij ouders en wij bestuurders doen wat onze hand vindt om te doen, dan zal de school er wel bij varen en de Naam des Heren geprezen worden om 't werk dat Hij in ons midden voor onze ogen werkt. Het bestuur verwacht dan ook naast Gods uwen krachtige steun, uw steun in geld maar ook met het woord. Richt de traagen op om hunne kinderen overeenkomstig hunne doopbeloften te laten onderwijzen in de beginsel hun wegs in de waarheid die ten eeuwigen leven leidt. Zoo ga dan in het Chr. Onderwijs te St. Anna eenen nieuwe tijdkring in, mocht het zijn een bloeitijd die een rijken oogst voorspelt voor het Koninkrijk Gods.

En gij, kinderen zult voortaan niet meer naar het dorp gaan. En ge verheugd er u over want al wat nieuw is trekt u aan. Ge verwacht veel goeds van de nieuwe school. Ge hoeft niet meer zoo ver te loopen, ge kunt 's middags warm eten krijgen en dat is wat in de winter, ge zijt eerder thuis en behoeft 's morgens niet zoo vroeg weg. Dat zijn allemaal voorrechten aan de nieuwe school verbonden, en die zijn niet gering te schatten. Maar ik wil u nog wat anders zeggen. De Oudedijksters zijn de school niet gewoon en de stille rust van vroeger zal nu verkeren in drukke vrolijkheid. En dat is niet erg, maar zoo licht slaat de vrolijkheid over tot lastige luidruchtigheid en eindelijk tot kinderlijke baldadigheid. En dat schaadt den goeden naam der school die zich Christelijk noemt. Men hoort de vijanden wel eens zeggen dat het Chr. Onderwijs niets betekent, omdat de kinderen even slecht zijn als op de openbare. Welnu, laat gij dan zien dat er wel degelijk onderscheid is. Dan wordt de Naam des Heeren niet gelasterd om wat gij doet. Stelt u onder de tucht uwer meester die u het goede onderwijzen zal en luister naar hunne vermaningen, want alleen in den weg des gehoorzaamheid aan Gods geboden kan 't u wel gaan. Dat God ons dan allen een rijken zegen schenke in deze nieuwe school tot eer zijns Naam en tot ons aller welzijn.

Ik heb gezegd.

IN TRANSLATION

Thanks to God's goodness we have been able to open the school at the Oudendijk. As a member of the board, I think I have to share with you something about the history of the school's foundation. The Elementary Education Law urged us to expand once more and to split the school and establish a completely new school conforming to the modern standards at the Oudendijk. The board thought it would meet the wishes of the many parents who send their children to a school so far away. Moreover, and by no means the least important, to give those parents—whose

children as a result of distance do not attend a Christian school—an opportunity to enroll them in Christian Education. Hence, the new school will advance the flourishing of our Christian Education and will mention the Name of Jesus to many more. The opening of this school is a deed of obedience to His command when He says: Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. The school had to be founded and so it has.

Her lasting existence, however, depends heavily on help, indeed much help. In the first place, I ask you: remember the school in your prayers in front of the throne of the Almighty whom is the gold and silver. Remember the teachers in your prayers because God gives wisdom and wit. Do not withhold your love from the school because love is resourceful and will guide the school's existence on difficult pathways. Love, so God says, carries everything. And whatever you parents and we governors do with our hands, this will be proper for the school. And the Name of the Lord is praised because of the work he does among us and before our eyes. The board of governors also expects the help of God to strengthen your support—with money and with words. Raise the slow to educate their children according to the baptismal vows: teach your children the principles of God who is the Way, the Truth that leads to eternal life. A new era begins in Christian Education in St. Anna, which perhaps might be allowed to be one of prosperity, promising a rich harvest for God's Kingdom.

And you children, from now on there is no more walking to the village. You will be pleased by this because all that is new is attractive. You do not need to walk so far anymore, and can have a cooked meal [for lunch]. Moreover, you will be at home earlier and do not need to leave so early in the morning, which is pleasant especially during winter time. These are all advantages of the new school and should not be disparaged. Therefore, I want to remind you of something else. The inhabitants of our community are not used to a school, and the silence they are used to will be changed into lively cheerfulness. And this is not bad; but cheerfulness can very easily turn into annoying noise, and finally into childlike malice. Now, this would do harm to the good reputation of the school that calls itself Christian. Every now and then, one can hear enemies say that Christian education makes no sense because the children are as bad as the children in a regular school. Well then, demonstrate that there is for sure a difference, so the Name of the Lord will not be slandered because of what you do. Place yourself under the discipline of the school master who will teach you the good, and listen to their admonitions—because only on the way of obedience to God's commandments will you be alright. That this school may be a rich blessing given by God to us in honour of his Name and our well-being!

I have spoken

Source: Cuperus (2003, pp. 21-23); a copy of the original text is in private property.

While I was reading Jacob's speech presented in beautiful handwriting, I imagined how he sat at his kitchen table, collecting his thoughts and emotions while looking for words to express his dedication for the 'noble cause' of confession-based schools. His personal aim had a very practical reason: going to a school 'around the corner' meant that children could stay within the confines of the community. However, this intention was less important than his striving for a Protestant Christian education. His baptismal vows to raise children in the Christian tradition should not end at the front door. They had to be integrated into their entire upbringing; in this way, the "Word of God" would be disseminated. The regular public authority school system hindered him and other parents from keeping their vow; this social reality was unacceptable and had to be changed.

The opening of this school was the point of departure for my life. My grandfather Simon, born in 1891, left his birthplace to move to the dyke community to become a teacher.¹³ He fell in love with the chairman's 1893 born daughter Marte and married her. In 1924, he was appointed headmaster of the school with a growing number of pupils due to a new law on education. He moved with his young family into the schoolhouse next to the school and the church. Throughout his life, his physical condition was a delicate issue; he died at the age of 45 in 1936, leaving behind Marte and their five children. Three weeks after his death, she had no choice, but to move from the schoolhouse; and in the following years, she only received a small pension that with some of the savings was used for the education of the sons. She left her birthplace with her young children and started a new life in Leeuwarden to give them the best possible opportunities.

The love for education became a family trait. My mother was a teacher—as soon as she could pay for her education by herself. Nevertheless, my mother's main focus in life was her husband's career, the upbringing and education of their four daughters, and voluntary work. Our parents emphasised good education and stimulated us to use our talents and capacities; irrespective of gender, we should take our opportunities for university studies and make our own living. We grew up in a traditional family life based in the Protestant pillar. I went to a Christian kindergarten, elementary and secondary school—the Protestant Christian Free University (VU) in Amsterdam would have been the next step (for many years the famous '*VU busje*', a kind of piggy bank, stood on a bookshelf).

¹³ Simon was a son to Klaas Bootsma and Foekje Ykema, farmers in the Southwest of the province, both descending from old farmer families rooted in the area. They gave their son a family name honouring Klaas' great-grandfather, Sijmon Sjoerds Ypma, who graduated as a land surveyor, *landmeetkundige*, from the Franeker University in 1798 (Meijer, 1972, p. 129). Their farm was hit by foot and mouth disease, creating financial problems, and the estate was sold in 1896. Klaas hired himself out as a farm labourer; his children had to start working as soon as they left elementary school. Simon, however, had a weak constitution; and since he was bright enough, it was decided that he would become a teacher. He achieved his certification, '*akte van bekwaamheid als onderwijzer*', at the *kweekschool* (teacher education) in Leeuwarden in 1912.

By 1978 however, this was no longer the self-evident choice within the pillar. Times were changing, and the denominational separation—*pillarisation*—was placed under severe pressure.¹⁴ Consequently, the University of Groningen became my Alma Mater, and I spent fruitful years at the Ludwig Maximillians University in Munich—here I met my German (Roman Catholic) husband. For professional reasons we moved to Leeuwarden in 1990, which meant I returned to my birthplace and to the family roots my parents left behind in the 1950s. I started to work at the Christian University of Applied Sciences rooted in the *kweekschool* where my grandfather Simon took his exams. We started our own family of three sons—Lennard (1993), Gysbert (1994) en Arriën Symon (1996)—who like me would spend around 20 years of their lives in education. Although my sons entered education via a Protestant Christian elementary school, two of them continued in the public authority secondary schools. Ninety years after the school struggle was settled, my great-grandfather's striving was challenged.

School struggle and freedom of school choice

In the year 1848, a new constitution founding the parliamentary democracy in the Netherlands was accepted—the name of the liberal politician Thorbecke is forever connected with this constitution. The final separation of state and church was one of the issues regulated in this constitution. As a result, the national state no longer had influence on religious matters. The sole focus on one specific Protestant church—The King's Church—lost importance, and schools needed to be 'neutral' from this moment on.

This gradually increased the call for confession-based schools, especially from a Protestant minority calling themselves anti-revolutionary. They opposed Protestants and Roman Catholics who supported the liberal government in its striving for one public authority school. In 1857, it was decided that the government should carry regulative and financial responsibility for all the schools that were neutral. Furthermore, the law allowed anyone to establish new schools with its own denomination or pedagogical focus, as long as they were privately financed. In 1860, the anti-revolutionary movement founded an association to support the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools, the *Vereniging voor Christelijk Nationaal Schoolonderwijs*. The number of schools increased rapidly - especially in the province of Fryslân.

Throughout the years, the quality of schools turned out to be problematic, and liberal politicians wanted more control on what happened in public and private schools. A law (1878) regulating this was accepted at the cost of political support

¹⁴ *Pillarisation* or *verzuiling* is the term used to describe the structure of the Dutch society in the 20th century. It exists of segments of "religious and secular blocs and subcultures" (Dekker & Ester, 1996, p. 325), see part II, chapter 1.

from Catholic politicians; Rome also required the establishment of Catholic schools. From this moment on, Protestants and Catholics united in their struggle against the liberals in the school struggle. The influence of the leader of the anti-revolutionary party, the conservative Abraham Kuyper, was decisive. He entered politics in the 1870s, and stood at the cradle of a well-organised anti-revolutionary party, which he led from 1879 till 1920. Kuyper was a devoted striver for Christian education because of its shaping value for future citizens. He had already contested the 1857 law and had continued his quest (for instance by founding the Free University (VU) in Amsterdam in 1880). Before Christian parties took leadership in parliament, the liberals were able to establish universal suffrage, which had been long rejected by Protestant politicians. This issue was a kind of bargaining chip. It was accepted on the condition that the government would pay the teachers' salaries in Christian schools as well. Now, the law on compulsory attendance at school could be accepted (1901). These laws had already led to more equality between public and private schools (Boekholt & De Booy, 1987; Kuijpers, 2008)

A final step was taken in 1917 when a “constitutional amendment [...] unique in the history of Europe” (Naylor, 2012, p. 246) was accepted. As of the first of January 1921, all public and private schools received equal public funding. This meant, however, that all schools had to accept governmental quality control. From now on, a large variety of confession and non-confession-based schools were founded, where teaching occurred within the “context of their convictions” (p. 246); the number of public schools decreased. The original principle of “one school in one society, the starting point of the law on education accepted in 1806” (Boekhorst & De Booy 1987, p 221), had lost its cornerstone function for Dutch society.

This unique Dutch phenomenon was called the ‘freedom of school choice’. According to article 23 of the Dutch Constitution, the state has to provide equal funding for both public-authority and private schools, provided that the statutory requirements are met by the school. Anyone in the Netherlands is allowed to found a school based on their personal convictions or beliefs. Private schools can have religious or ideological principles and/or base their teaching on a specific educational ethos—for instance, Waldorf or Montessori. Schools of this kind may use teaching materials that underpin their foundational principles, and they do not need to accept children or teachers if they cannot work according to these principles. They are set up by private individuals, usually parents. To obtain government funding, the school must prove, among other things, that it will have a sufficient number of pupils.

Public authority schools are open to everyone—pupils and teachers—and teaching is not based on a particular religion or belief. They are set up by the local authorities (usually the municipality) who carry responsibility for the budget and educational

quality of public-authority schools. Basically, every school bears the primary responsibility for the quality of its teaching. The Education Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring the quality of education at publicly run and private schools. Every year, it presents an Education Report to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. The minister then sends the report to parliament. The Education Inspectorate does not intervene in school matters relating to religion or ideology (www.government.nl).

Encounter with Karl Mannheim

On a micro-level, my family story illustrated the origins of the Dutch pillarised society in the 20th century. It showed the growing concern of a Protestant minority about political decisions, the separation of church and state, and the end of financing confession-based education—they felt the urge to oppose the political status quo. This resulted in a long school struggle that gained political momentum many years after the first idealist initiatives to change the situation had begun. What on the micro-level looked like a private initiative was embedded into a historical-social context in which collective efforts resulted in political power and a new educational reality; this, finally, was a decisive element for the construction of Dutch society.

By the end of the 20th century, freedom in school choice was still very prominent in Dutch society—although the pillar structure had lost influence as such. My study made me aware of the fact that its initiation was related to this free choice in schools, and the idealist visions in which my great-grandfather was involved. It was interesting to compare his words with what I heard and read about !mpulse. The initiation of new schools was for the good of the children: they would get a better school life. Both initiatives opposed mainstream educational practice, and illustrated a deeply felt incongruence with the actual existing order that drove parents and teachers to engage in an already present movement to create change. The other side of the coin in both cases was an innate impulse to take measurements with the purpose of maintaining a newly achieved position. As a result, dream and action were turned into a new status quo.

My recognition of this matter of change and maintenance at !mpulse resulted in my acquaintance with Karl Mannheim and his knowledge-sociological approach to human action. It was not only his intellectual thought that connected me to this scholar—his life intrigued me as well. He was a contemporary of my grandparents—he was born in the same year as my grandmother—and he used to be a teacher like my grandfather was. Three people who were born in completely different parts of Europe; who had had different (religious) backgrounds and educational opportunities; and who had held differently shaped perspectives on life. Still, three lives rooted in this one world,

affected by ideological and utopian thought. When I read Mannheim's book, I, every now and then, had the feeling that I could better understand the life my grandparents had lived as well as their thoughts that had also shaped my upbringing. Furthermore, I was again touched by the destiny of Jews in our history of life, especially of those Jewish scholars that had contributed so substantially to German cultural and intellectual life—as well as its *Bildungstradition*, to which I feel so much attached.

Biography Karl Mannheim

Any description of Karl Mannheim's life (1893-1947) should reflect his personal circumstances, which were rooted in the socio-political and cultural-intellectual developments in several dynamic societies. It would show the tragedy of an intelligent, spirited young man born with the same life-threatening heart defect that became fatal to his younger brother who died at the age of thirteen. And it would tell the story of a promising young Jew, growing up in a wealthy middle class family in roaring Budapest, who studies abroad, and meets influential European scholars and artists. But it cannot hide the tragedy of a life spent as a 'political refugee' in exile due to aggressive anti-Semitism; a tragedy not only leading to geographical homelessness, but also to estrangement from language and intellectual thought. In his exiled existence, he adapted and reconciled the new context and his personal history, but he did not abandon his forced and chosen position at the margins of society.

Mannheim was born to a Hungarian Jewish father and a German Jewish mother in Budapest. By the end of the 19th century, it was one of the cultural centres of Europe, benefitting from its large and prosperous Jewish middle class. Despite or in reaction to their parents, Jewish middle class children developed into a "young progressively oriented intelligentsia", and rebelled against the conformity and economic success of their parents. They challenged the status quo while valuing the "revolutionary role of the intellect and learning", which many of them had experienced during their studies abroad (Loader, 1985, p.10).

He studied philosophy and literature (German and French language) at the Humanist University of Budapest between 1911 and 1915, and between 1912 and 1914 he studied with Simmel in Berlin and met Max and Alfred Weber in Heidelberg. During a two months' visit to a friend in Paris in spring 1914, he attended lectures given by Henri Bergson. Contemporaries such as Lukács, Simmel, Max and Alfred Weber, as well as Max Scheler influenced his thinking. Their rootedness in German Idealism connected Mannheim to Hegel and Dilthey. In addition, he felt himself indebted to Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Pareto (Mannheim, 1936).

Soon after he finished his doctorate study *Structural Analysis of Epistemology* in 1919, he was appointed as lecturer in philosophy at the College of Education at the

University of Budapest. He, however, left Hungary due to its increasing anti-Semitic climate and moved to Heidelberg in 1920.

He '*habilitierte*' (habilitated) with Alfred Weber on 19th century conservatism. Sociology seemed to him a direction to follow, as he understood philosophy as such did not suffice to understand and make sense of societal development. Max Scheler's publications on the Sociology of Knowledge caught his attention because it made a connection between philosophy and sociology possible. He published several essays in a series edited by Scheler. Between 1926 and 1930, he lectured at the Heidelberg University, and for that reason he took German nationality. Finally, in 1929 he published his seminal work *Ideologie und Utopia*, which would be among the most discussed—appreciated and repudiated—books in various branches of the social sciences, foremost in sociology. From 1930 on, he was director of his own institute for sociology at the Frankfurt University until the National Socialist Racial Laws led to his 'dismissal'.

He started a second period of exile in London, and he had to build up a new life and academic position for a second time. This time, however, he was confronted with an Anglo-American pragmatist sociology that was unfamiliar with his German Idealist perspective. He was appointed lecturer of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Between 1941 and 1945 he was also a part-time lecturer at the Institute of Education at the University of London. Finally, in the last part of his life, he became interested in education. The problems of human society in WWII and thereafter nourished his ideas that social education was essential in a democratic society in transformation. It is a pity that he did not get more time to develop his thoughts. He was appointed Chairman of Education in 1945 and an appointment as president of the European Commission of UNESCO followed in 1946. He could not take office as he died after years of increasingly bad health / heart conditions in January 1947.

Source: Loader (1985); Woldring (1986)

Sociology had never been a matter of interest for me. As a matter of fact, during my study at the University of Groningen, social sciences and *Geisteswissenschaften* were located in two different buildings. It was a challenging, though very interesting, turn in my research to study Mannheim's thoughts presented in his work *Ideology and Utopia*. As I started to read his book and the books about his life and thoughts, I returned to my own time at university. We 'shared' a background in German Studies, and I recognised much of his *geisteswissenschaftliche* understanding and his methodology. I had studied renowned German authors and philosophers with limited awareness of their social context. It resulted in a situation where sociology remained 'too broad an area' for me—*ein zu weites Feld* to repeat the words of Theodor Fontane, re-used by Günther

Grass.¹⁵ Now, I returned to my academic field, to the 19th and 20th century scholars, to Hegel and Dilthey, to Lukács, all of whom I had all left behind so many years ago.

After I had started my career at the Hotel Management School—a University of Applied Sciences—arts and humanities seemed to be a matter of less importance. In the readings of Mannheim, another light was shed on the assumed irrelevance of my subject. And it was with regret and wonder that I realised this reciprocal relationship between literature, philosophy and social context had been too limitedly discussed in my time at the university to contribute to my work as a teacher.

Connecting Philosophy and Sociology

For Mannheim the social world and human actions—the lived world—were the starting point for understanding. However, this understanding could only be complete if day-to-day actions were both combined with the thought and knowing that arose from social interactions, and at the same time influenced these actions. He prioritised the understanding of what knowledge does in society over the production of an ivory tower theory; interdisciplinarity and the reconnection of social sciences and philosophy was needed. Philosophy as such had a too limited focus and impact on social life, and social sciences lacked philosophical rigor. Moreover, both had a focus on creating distant knowledge purely within their own realms irrespective of what was happening in the public domain. This resulted in a constrained transfer of knowledge to the public domain, and hindered intellectual input into public thought. He was wary of collective unconsciousness among social actors. Thus, it was his intention to go beyond constructions of theory from an ivory tower perspective, and to connect the work of the philosopher and the sociologist without giving up their specific discipline-based orientations (Kettler, Meja & Stehr, 1984). He was optimistic that this collaboration would strengthen social scientists and philosophers in their function of morally supporting society in its development—not by means of grand narratives, but by dialectical dynamic thinking and acting. This approach considered change as a result of an antithetical dynamic relationship with an existing social condition that resulted in a synthetic new phase of social reality (Loader, 1985).

Flux of Life

Thought and cognition, so Mannheim stated, had to be considered as an *Organon* that continuously altered and transformed itself with historical occurrences; it was a texture in becoming through which humanisation was enabled (Mannheim, 1930/1936).¹⁶ To Mannheim, humanisation was a matter of becoming conscious or of developing

¹⁵ Fontane used this expression in *Effi Briest* (published in 1894); Grass referred to it in the title of his book *Ein weites Feld* (published in 1995).

¹⁶ “Das Denken, vom Gesamtzusammenhange aus gesehen, nie Selbstzweck ist, sondern ein stets sich neugestaltendes, mit den Wandlungen des historischen Geschehens sich neu formendes Organon: ein werdendes Gefüge, in dessen Element auch die neue Menschwerdung sich vollzieht.” (1930, p. 2)

awareness of all the influential elements in social life that resulted in a human's intellectual control over life. In this sense, he emphasised the necessity of human beings to think beyond social actions; any (feelings of) paradox or incongruence in both thinking and acting were points of interest for further development. Consequently, he appreciated the growth of consciousness among 'naïve' people, and supported and respected anyone who made himself vulnerable by reconsidering self-evident assumptions and embracing learning. In other words, he advocated ongoing intellectual development, which, translated to our times, would be defined as a matter of lifelong learning in its original meaning of a "personal good" that is important in democratic life (Biesta, 2006a, p. 169).

Furthermore, he invited researchers to approach life situations dynamically. This intellectual position has to be considered from his ontological understanding of life in flux. In this sense, his rootedness in German Idealism, historicism, and in Hegel's philosophy of dialectic thinking is visible (Kettler & Meja, 1995). Life had to be comprehended as a permanent state of becoming, irrespective of any human activity intended to stabilise the physical and mental world through systems and order:

The world of external objects and psychic experience appears to be in a continuous flux. Verbs are more adequate symbols for the situation than nouns. The fact that we give names to things which are in flux implies inevitably a certain stabilization oriented along the lines of collective activity. The derivation of our meanings emphasizes and stabilizes that aspect of things which is relevant and covers up, in the interest of collective action, the perpetually fluid process underlying all things. (Mannheim, 1936, p. 22)

Mannheim and !mpulse

My stay at !mpulse resulted in the perception of an uneasy paradox embodied in the words 'innovation', 'preservation,' and 'socially unconscious'. The origins of this community were rooted in a passion for education and change, and the team still understood themselves as innovative. Nevertheless, I saw that they put much of their energy towards the preservation of their existence. Moreover, a practice-based self-evident knowing, and a pragmatic orientation in their work that I thought entailed limited intellectual reflection surprised me. Apparently, this had developed throughout the years of teacher training and practice. I had the impression that this hindered an appropriate understanding of influential social conditions. For instance, I discovered that the initiation of this community had to be considered within the light of political-economical developments, which was fairly unrecognised. These discoveries created a perplexity that could be understood through Mannheim.

Understanding !mpulse from a Mannheimian sociological perspective is not a current approach in educational research. The Dutch Millennium Innovations (VO-raad,

2011), for instance, were not understood from a perspective of ideological and utopian components in the thoughts and actions of teachers combined with a historical-social reality. Nevertheless, this approach gave me an interesting perspective because it went beyond the Impulse reality and its 'facts'; it resulted in a sociological understanding of the pedagogical innovation that took shape in this community.

Mannheim (1936) used the concepts Ideology and Utopia to address the social function of thought in the construction of social structure. These two connected modes of thought include ideas incongruent with an existing social reality. He recognised in social actions two directions: one to maintain social conditions (ideological elements), and an other to transform a social reality (utopian elements). As a result of the bond between the two, it is hard to recognise whether specific actions in social reality are rooted in a desire to maintain a specific existence, or to change it. A call for change for instance could derive from both an ideological as well as a utopian mode of thought; nevertheless, only in the latter case can societal change be realised. Aligned with his perspective on the flux of life, Mannheim emphasised the need of utopian thinking for a vital society. Alongside his discussion of the utopian concept, he introduced the concept of *collective unconscious*—a state of mind in which an actor in society is unaware of the driving forces behind his and other people's social actions. In other words, the actor would not understand the *relationalism* between thought and action, the social position and related perspective that the actor holds, and the historical circumstances. This collective unconscious, however, made human striving vulnerable, endangering utopian will and constraining change.

The exploration of Mannheim's thinking and the interpretation of Impulse is presented as Part III of this thesis. This position is a matter of my constructivist ontological and epistemological perspective (Lincoln, 1990). My knowing occurs in relation to the world I live in, and in which my knowing in interaction and correspondence is constructed. It is from this understanding that theory followed from what the world taught me. In this sense, I differ from Mannheim in my research focus, as his hermeneutical approach of the world was guided by a specific interest, namely in the function of thought in the world.

Encounter with Tim Ingold

Introduction

In 2010/11, I defined my research methodology and decided to write an education ethnography based on participant observation. Soon after I entered !mpulse, I recognised the impossibility for me to act as a detached researcher because the team involved me in their community. I remember my first day. I sat in one of the open spaces and observed students and a team member. At a certain moment, the team member came over to me, asking whether she could join me. She started to talk about her perceptions and feelings about the community. Although this moment gave me an impression of her professional struggles, at the same time her openness created tension as her thoughts and emotions went beyond the 'cold' matter of data. Unexpectedly, this moment was the first of many more to come. My background with !mpulse and the feeling of trust led to talks with teachers about their way of working, their pleasures and concerns. In this way, they made me understand their perception of life at !mpulse. This resulted in the awareness that collecting data for later writings hindered what was actually happening between us. Moreover, I understood that I had ignored two influential factors while developing my methodology: my previous parental involvement with and commitment to the community, and my own teaching profession.

Team members unwittingly remembered me of my reason for coming back to !mpulse: there was a question mark here, and I had returned to learn more. The community was not an external object of study and analysis. From the beginning, it was also a reflection of my relationship to !mpulse. Additionally, I realised that I was with colleagues; and that despite the fact that this school was in secondary education, we were all part of the same 'field'. Thus, our being in the same world contradicted my external objectifying approach.

I had to reconsider my initial idea about participant observation in connection with data collection. If I were to understand both the life of others in this community and myself, an engagement in genuine and open encounters with the team and students was essential. More or less organically, I let go of the idea of collecting observational data, I did, however, continue writing as a mode for further understanding. Actually, this change made me feel more comfortable, as it allowed for natural encounters with people I was interested in. I enjoyed becoming in a way participant in activities and events, in conversations and observations—I could be a human being among others. Consequently, my research question developed into a concise, but provocative *Why !mpulse?*

Since my methodological point of departure in ethnography was not appropriate anymore, the encounter with Tim Ingold and the reading of *Making. Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture* (2013) felt like I had been understood.¹⁷ I recognised the issues I had read in his concern about the effect of the aims of ethnographic research on anthropology. Ingold's methodological approach to anthropological research was similar to what had happened in my research process. The red thread of his book shown in the statement, "making is a correspondence of maker and material" (2013, p. xi) is a plea for an ontology-based approach to research, and I think my process reflects or highlights its fruitfulness. It places the specific dynamic relationship between me—the researcher, "the maker"—and the !mpulse community—"the material"—at the centre of attention; and from this relationship learning and transformation occurred. Thus, after I had left the community, Ingold gave me the words I needed to understand the course my research had taken and the path I had walked with the community members. His approach to participant observation had been my process.

Striving for Transformational Anthropology

Ingold developed a non-ethnography based participant observation as what he calls the "art of inquiry" for anthropology. He wants to set anthropology free from the confines of description through writing about people in their state of being—the main purpose of ethnography. Such a description follows a set of criteria identifying the construction of the state of being, and results in a documentary work about people. A methodological prerequisite for the final product is the data collection via participant observation. In the moment of encountering others, an ethnographer, however, reifies the studied people as he understands them as objects for data; this hinders the opportunity to meet and learn with and from them. When he—retrospectively and out of place—starts writing, he actually meets them for the first time. The purpose of ethnography ignores contingency and freezes the possibilities for encounter. This is problematic for anthropology because its key objectives—learning and the possibility of transforming human life—need encounters. He argues,

anthropology is a critical inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life. It is to join with people in their speculations about what life might or could be like, in ways nevertheless grounded in a profound understanding what life is in particular times and places. (2013, p. 4)

He emphasises the flux of human life in which generations come and go. People engage with, learn from, and change what they received as they entered the world before they pass it on to a new generation. Therefore, according to Ingold, an anthropological study of otherness is future-oriented, but rooted in engagement with and learning

¹⁷ For reasons of readability, I will refer to Ingold by the year of publication only.

from the existing. From this perspective, an anthropological researcher has to understand him- or herself as being part of the world, (s)he wants to know. Knowing derives from being inside and being actively engaged in encounters. It is not just a matter of being, but being alive (2011). In this sense, Ingold takes an ontology-based approach. Coming from anthropology, he took a philosophical stance, possible because philosophy “has been pitched out of its traditional academic turrets and forced to do its thinking in and with the very world of which it writes” (2011, p. xi).

When I re-read my research proposal, I am surprised by my technical repetitions of what I had read in books and articles on ethnography. I recognised in the proposal a discourse on ethnography, which I took as self-evident though it was largely unfamiliar to me. At the same time, I notice my words reflect an apparent sense of detachment from the people I was interested in—as if I was not involved, although my choice of subject was rooted in emotional connection. Furthermore, the proposal conveys distance to my own existence as a researcher. I remember my supervisor’s advice, which he gave me after the scientific committee accepted my research proposal: “Since it was accepted, please leave your books on the shelf for a while and enter your community.” My attention for the community resulted in the changed research approach. He knew, this could happen, but it could not be communicated—I had to learn it for myself.

Ingold tells an anecdote about his early ethnographic fieldwork. He had asked his supervisors for help, but he was quite unhappy with the marginal support he received. In hindsight, he understood that learning and knowing arrive from only one source: “- that is, from the very inside of one’s being – through a process of self-discovery. To know things you have to grow into them, and let them grow into you, so that they can become part of who you are” (2013, p. 1)—words that make sense to me now.

Participant Observation and the Craftsman

In his striving to lead anthropology out of ethnography, Ingold wants to restore participant observation via the disciplines of art and architecture.¹⁸ He turns to these fields because of their orientation towards the process of making. In his research, he connects artefacts, humans, and the process of making from the perspective of “intellectual craftsmanship” (2013, p. 17).¹⁹ To define the researcher, he uses the metaphor of the craftsman at work with the material that the artefacts are made of.

A craftsman—an artist, architect, or anthropologist—works with material, observes what happens, perceives, and responds. I remember that my father sculpted a dove

¹⁸ Many of his publications have an interdisciplinary character combining anthropology with biology, ecology, environmental studies, history, architecture, arts and technology.

¹⁹ Ingold referred to Intellectual Craftsmanship coined by C. Wright Mill (1959) in his seminal work *The sociological Imagination* (Ingold, 2013; 2014)

from a piece of soapstone, and actually let the stone lead him to its final form. The now static stone dove on my window-ledge ‘absorbed’ the sculpting process of his skilful attentive work with the soapstone. Anyone can see this piece of art—this object—without paying much attention to its becoming; this ignorance, however, cannot deny the fact that once this dove was an artist’s material in becoming.

As soon as one is aware of material and the process of becoming, the flux of life is encountered. Ingold is concerned about the loss of awareness that life is flux; he approaches everything in nature and culture as a matter of “generative” material, either shaped into objects or still recognizable as material. A non-flux experience of life creates an object-subject relationship, whereas an experience of flux and becoming allows a self-other encounter.

Material is all the stuff a craftsman uses to make an object; it is what one starts with at the beginning of a process. A researcher in participant observation in a social context first encounters an object—a dove, a school community, a human being—that seems to be static and without liveliness. (S)he can only understand the actual state of being. It is for this reason that in the research I had to go back in time and recall memories and perceptions—constituents of making and entering !mpulse (in part II, chapter 1). Only from that perspective could I continue with forward correspondence (in part II, chapter 2). Ingold did not concentrate on encounters with human beings as material, although anthropology is a “study with people” (2013, p. 2). Therefore, I consider my work with !mpulse as an answer to him.

Thinking through Making

Ingold raises the question of whether the artist has a fixed image of the object in his mind, or whether he creates the image in the making. He assumes that the craftsman might have an idea about what could be a result of the work but does not impress it on the material beforehand. Thus, (s)he develops thinking and knowing by working with the material. Hence, (s)he is aware of what might be and could be, but stays with the material and is attentive; thus, the actual starting point for the making is the present moment, and not the future. A mental imagination together with a “sensory awareness of practitioners” (2013, p. 5) guides the work with the material. At work, “the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work. These materials think in us, as we think through them” (2013, p. 6). He calls this process “thinking through making” (2013, p. 6).²⁰ The craftsman gradually understands the material, and what (s)he can and cannot do with it. In the future,

²⁰ Ingold contrasts this approach with a “making through thinking” approach common among scientific scholars—researchers and teachers alike. He contests the idea of the application of “hylomorphic” models; the Greek *hilo* stems from ‘matter’ and *morphe* from ‘form’. With “hylomorphism” Ingold refers to the practice of remote theory development without embedding in the world, and only interesting for the validation of hypothesis.

(s)he will be able to use this new knowing. In this way, learning and possibly transformation happens. In this sense, theory emerges from engagement with the world.

The changed approach in my research explained above can be related to this approach to craftsmanship. The change is a reflection of craftsmanship. I had started with a *making through thinking* design that was transformed into a research process of *thinking through making*. In particular, the experience of emerging change was illuminative.

In addition, I recognised a continuous growth of awareness while being in the community. Nevertheless, at some point, I had to continue without Ingold. At the moment I entered the school community, I encountered people who were my material but were at the same time craftsmen in making Impulse. Thus, in my process of *making* research and understanding a community, I encountered community making people. In fact, two processes of human making and thinking confronted each other. I was involved in doing research at Impulse with colleagues who made a community; I learned from their way of making. In the teacher-teacher encounter, the team gave me a mirror in which I discovered myself in my own teaching practice. It is this type of self-discovery that Ingold neglects or at least does not explicitly address. As far as I am concerned, becoming self-conscious through the encounter with otherness is an essential part of “knowing in being”, learning and transformation. I missed this aspect of doing research in Ingold.

Furthermore, I experienced in my research the importance of *thinking through making* after leaving the encounter. Ingold argues that the ethnographer writes separated from the world, and that the anthropologist thinks in the world. When material thinks in me, I think through it and my knowing is a lengthy process of growth. It has to be acknowledged that material becomes part of a craftsman or a researcher’s life—and not just in the moments where he is present. After I entered Impulse, I internalised it into my thought system; therefore, I did not need to be present and could still make and think—a retrospective reflection on the encounters was essential for me in my learning and transforming. Coming to terms with the world was for me an act of both being and not being present, and encounters seemed to me to be not just a matter of physical presence.

Craftsman and Correspondence

One of the important craftsman skills is being attentive; it is an attitude of taking care of what one works with. Attentiveness enables one to stay connected with the material and to follow its properties. In anthropological research with people, this would mean, “To attend what others are doing and saying, and to what is going on around and about; to follow along where others go and to do their bidding, whatever this might entail and wherever it might take you” (2014, p. 389). Attentiveness and attend are rooted in the French *attendre*, ‘to wait for’, which is actually the attitude that the observant takes. It is not the craftsman but the material, it is not the observer but the observed people that

decide the final direction. Hence, the activity of waiting brings in the temporal property of making—making and thinking is a long-term process (2014).

Ingold connects attentive waiting with *correspondence* in the sense of writing and receiving letters (in the pre-email context). Elementary to each correspondence is the movement in time, in accordance with flux of life. The movement comprises not only the writing and sending of letters but also the gesture of a hand and arm and eye movement. It also entails the emotion—the perception of feelings reflected in the choice of my words, in my handwriting, or in traces left on the pages. In the waiting, time passes by; one thinks about possible answers, and perhaps reconsiders what was written. An invisible relation between two people exists, an invisible line of presence meanders between the two; the writer and reader engage in each other lives in speaking and listening—through letters—and move forward. Correspondence is not interaction, which is only one moment of contact. It is like a meandering line without a visible fixed starting point or end—the line simply emerges. Thus, it is a matter of relations. He uses the concept in a completely different philosophical meaning; it is not about similarity, resemblance, or agreement.

In the reference to letter writing, Ingold presents two actors—two writers, two receivers, two human beings. In doing so, he gives both a similar importance in the process of making, although he only addresses the craftsman position. Especially at this point, I wonder why Ingold does not address the special relationship between equal ‘entities’—two human beings—which is distinct from the relationship between non-equal entities—a craftsman and his clay, for instance. The metaphor of correspondence works very well for me in my relationship with the team members. Probably, an artist working with non-animated material experiences the same; but I wonder whether the work with clay has the same impact on the craftsman as the work with human beings had on me. At least, I noticed that I met people who—though possibly different—were attentive and responded to me. And I noticed that they thought about what occurred in our encounter. In this sense, the !mpulse team continuously influenced my making and thinking. And in doing so, they created signposts for new directions. These signposts led me out of the community and into the wider societal issues that were part of the composition of !mpulse as well (presented in Part II, Chapter 3).

At the same time, I suppose I shaped their world somewhat during my presence. But I had not integrated them into the research as “material” that would undergo some form of transformation. In hindsight, I think it could have been an opportunity for the team to learn with and from me, in the way I learned with and from them. Ingold argued that each encounter is an opportunity to create a relationship as a starting point for learning. In my research, however, there was an absence of reciprocity—it was not aimed at. I learned and I transformed, but the team hardly did. This could have been rooted in a general unawareness of their own state of being and becoming. Moreover, I had the

impression that it was impossible for them to recognise the benefits that correspondence could have for all of us.

Participant Observation in Education

Ingold emphasises that each encounter with otherness is to be understood as an educational moment. Therefore, he addresses his concerns about the absence of forms of participant observation in the anthropological teaching practice. Everything he had written about craftsmanship, correspondence, and the process of knowing in relation to the world and material seems to be common practice in his department with regard to research only. It actually is so obvious to develop such a relationship between students and faculty within the realm of teaching because of the educational character of anthropology. It would have been interesting to have his ideas about the craftsmanship of teachers in their encounters with students and colleagues. He only developed an anthropology methodology course for his students, during which they learned to become craftsmen in research. I liked the idea about the teacher as craftsman; my experiences in my participant observation gave me the notion that I could apply this approach in my daily work with students and colleagues.

Craftsman in Writing - Threads and Text

Ingold is quite outspoken in his argumentation against the ethnographic descriptions applied in anthropological research. He refers to the painter Paul Klee and his statement that the world is too busy with forms instead of “form-giving” (2011, p. 210). Nevertheless, the researcher wants the world to become knowledgeable and if possible, learn from her/his research encounters—thus text is needed. Ingold appreciates the work of Deleuze and Guattari who preferred to think in terms of drawing and of lines with open starts and endings that express movement (2011; 2013). Therefore, he presents the concept of *meshwork*—“a texture of threads” (2011, p. 13)—as an appropriate form to present ideas in loosely conjoined threads. A meshwork reflects an engagement with material, movement and objects, and gives a book the impression of being unfinished and in the process of becoming. He presents it in opposition to a closed *network* with connecting lines between nodes.

The process of writing and composing text is also a way of thinking through making. My thesis is a visible result of correspondence with material from anthropological encounters and sociological documentary study. And in addition, it is the reflection of correspondence with the many texts I wrote—resulting in the choice and the specific forms of the texts in this book. I consider it ‘text’ in the sense of the original Latin *texere* meaning, ‘something woven’. A texture entails the movement of filling a warp with loose threads to create a textile. Thus, my text reflects the weaving of thoughts—or threads—into written words and sentences. I have woven thought and understanding together from my encounter with impulse; I have woven together my thoughts in-

spired by encounters with scholars and books. The weaving also refers to the process of handwriting, typing, structuring, editing and printing. While weaving the loose threads—conjoining encounters—a pattern of knowing and knowledge emerged that could only occur in this warp and with these threads and with me as the weaver.

Part II !mpulse

*There a small winding road starts — it can easily be missed. This road finally leads to Impuls, a small village in a mountainous landscape.
Over the mountains the big metropolis Change shines.*

(Visiedocument, 2004, p. 2)

Introduction

It started with a dream that soon received a name: *!mpulse*. This programmatic name was discovered in the ‘Atlas of Experience’ (Van Swaay, Klare & Winner, 2000), an atlas that intends to inspire the reader to connect and play with ideas and emotions to make sense of life. When I open the Atlas, I see its cartography as being similar to any other collection of maps that I use while travelling through the world. It offers geographical maps with territories, landscapes, towns, villages, mountain ranges, roads, and rivers. In spite of this, I do not recognise their names as being constituents of a known world. The maps actually blend reality and fantasy, and present an imaginary non-existing world as its state of being. In doing so, it turns my attention from the external physical world to an untouchable inner world of ideas that relate to my every day positive and negative life experiences; it connects a physical and mental world, and it enables new perspectives. On one of the maps, I find the village of ‘Impulse’, situated in the territory ‘Creation’ in the landscape ‘Passion/Drive’ on the shores of the river ‘Subconscious’. I also discover smaller cities named ‘Connect’, ‘Invent’, ‘Form’, ‘Splurge’ and ‘Mess Around’ amid the ‘Forest of Curiosity’. The capital of this world of ideas is called ‘Change’—with its suburbs Revolution and Evolution—and it is connected to the important city of ‘Bloom’. Etymologically, the name of the village is rooted in Latin: *impulses*, meaning ‘stimulus in the mind arising from some state or feeling’. Moreover, when combined with another Latin root *impulsion*, ‘feeling’, the meaning turns into ‘a strong force or motive behind action’, an unconsidered desire (Harper, 2001-2014). In other words, the name of the village reflects the will to change an existing situation.

!mpulse was once a serious place for passion, creation, growth, naivety, disorder and curiosity—all the elements of human life and learning; in short, of becoming. It would be so natural for these to be part of education; but they are not, and therefore !mpulse contradicted the current state of affairs in school life. It had to gain momentum, and I was touched by the contagious passion that initiated !mpulse. I recognised my thoughts in their dreams, and I was fascinated by their will to change what already existed. Consequently, as its tragedy of broken dreams emerged, I lost a part of my idealist innocence as well. The !mpulse expedition, full of twists and turns, kept me busy.

This second part in the book presents the learning community !mpulse and what it taught me. It consists of three chapters, each of them with a specific perspective.

Gleaning Memories is an account of those who took the opportunity and went on a missionary-like expedition to create and engage in a new school. The expedition had no outlined trajectory or point of arrival, but was driven by a strong sense of possibility about new realities in education. The teachers shaped their dreams by acting passionately and courageously, using a different compass and map on their expedition; they

intended to walk their own pathway. Some denounced their ideas as mere flights of fancy although they had a vital strength and could have made a crucial contribution to the existing world. It is also an account of myself as a teaching mother who thought this was the perfect alternative to conventional secondary education. I brought the school to my son's attention and engaged in the school. However, the narrative is also the story of evaporating idealism, broken dreams, and personal tragedy. It was so difficult to have one's head in the clouds, and to keep one's feet on the ground. *Gleaning Memories* starts with a vignette²¹ reflecting my impressions of the June 2011 graduation ceremony. One last time, the present !mpulse was connected with its past. Next, I present narratives based on conversations with the founders and those pioneer team members who were still part of the community; these are alternated with my own memories.

Being with !mpulse reflects the actual participant observation of the learning community in 2011. I have selected four vignettes reflecting my experiences in the community and that illustrate the components that were considered essential to this Millennium Innovation. I have combined it with four reflective *tendrils*²² in which I present, with my teacher voice, thoughts and learning with and from the teachers and students.

For *A Network Appears* I returned to my room and carried out a Sherlock Holmes like discovery study that helped to position the initiation of !mpulse into the spirit of the times around the Millennium. This chapter presents an important part of the documentary study I conducted. A continuous rereading of the school's vision document and a selection of clues from the community brought me to a variety of publications that revealed an invisible and complex network of agents interested in educational change. I found national and international political documents about education in the 21st century—about so-called schools of the future; psychological studies on learning; school concepts published by commercial educational consultant companies or consultant scholars; and opposing voices. The search was a fascinating and sometimes rather shocking experience because of the intentions and perspectives that drove the interests of those involved. I present my findings in so-called *nodes* where the diverse trails intersected. In order to avoid a feeling of claustrophobia, I have alternated them with *interludes* in which I distance myself in order to not get too entangled in this network.

²¹ A vignette is a short description of, for instance, an event or an episode.

²² A tendril is a slender whip-like or thread-like strand, produced usually from the node of a stem, by which a vine or other plant may climb. Its anatomy may be of stem tissue or of leaf stalk tissue. Common examples of tendril-producing plants are the grape, members of the squash or melon family (Cucurbitaceae), the sweet pea (*Lathyrus odoratus*), and passion flowers (www.britannica.com).

Timeline

2002/2003	Decision to start the project for a new school
2003-2005	Preparatory Project Phase
2004	
<i>April</i>	Presentation <i>Visiedocument voor een nieuwe school. Volg een eigen Impulse</i>
<i>November</i>	Founding teachers visit Alameda Community Learning Center
<i>November</i>	Presentation Impulse to parents
<i>November</i>	Marte Rinck hears about the new school
2005	
<i>February</i>	Open Day, Marte Rinck and son visit the empty school
<i>March / April</i>	Pioneer team of tutors and coaches enters Impulse and continues the preparatory work
<i>September</i>	Start of first cohort students
2006 June	Presentation video triptych Impulse during annual BBQ
2008 Summer	Chairman of the Board leaves comprehensive school
2009	
<i>January</i>	Team days
<i>February</i>	Arrival new team leader
<i>August</i>	First founding teacher leaves Impulse with illness
<i>September</i>	Meeting mothers with second founding teacher, team leader & team member, students
<i>October</i>	Evening with parents and Impulse staff; second founder leaves Impulse
<i>November</i>	New chairman of the board and management and education consultant Ronald te Loo present to parents the plans about the future and relocation of Impulse

2010 <i>January - June</i>	<p>Lennard leaves Impulse Archipel and is located at a provisional location</p> <p>Marte Rinck starts PhD research in January</p>
2011	
<i>January</i>	<p>Decision to postpone the relocation is taken; start investigation for new Bovenbouw Impulse 3.0</p> <p>Marte Rinck starts Participant Observation</p>
<i>February</i>	Open Day
<i>May/ June</i>	Management communicates about Impulse 3.0 with team, and presents plans to parents
<i>June</i>	Graduation Ceremony
<i>September</i>	Cross-Age-Day
<i>November</i>	Two day team meeting
<i>December</i>	Final decision relocation per August 2012
2011 December	Marte Rinck in Vlieland
2012 February	Conversations with students, end of Participant Observation
2012 June	Lennard graduation

Gleaning Memories

June, 2011 Graduation ceremony

On this warm early summer evening in June, graduating Havo and Vwo students, their parents and friends come to *Impulse*. Many of them started as the first cohort students in 2005. My son is present as well, although he is not among the graduates; he has one more year to go. I experience a special atmosphere full of mixed feelings. The graduates and parents are relieved and excited, but they also have the sad feelings of a last farewell from a once promising learning and living community; I share the feeling. We, the parents, remember and talk about this experience of bringing our young children to a different kind of education that did indeed give them a wonderful learning experience, rich personal development, and warm friendships.

The air is filled with *hello*, laughter and tears, which are all witnessed by the silent colourful lizards woven into the carpet of the large *Aanbouw* where the graduation ceremony takes place. Former staff members are welcomed and the two school founders, Ida and Reinald, are warm-heartedly embraced—not many expected them to be here. The ceremony has to start, but the guests only slowly take their seats—chairs are positioned rather organically throughout the room. There is no strict order, there are no reserved seats for the graduates, there are not enough chairs for everyone.

The ‘music community’ starts to play a pop song as a kick off. The ceremony can begin. Two team members welcome us with warm words and ask for a big applause for the students. Proud but uncomfortable, the students rise and receive the praise; the ones who have not yet graduated and the few who failed this year are welcomed as well. The teachers take us back to the students’ first arrival six years ago. Some were shy and insecure, not knowing what to expect; others already seemed to be so self-assured and independent, yet in an endearingly childlike way. “And look at them now! Look how mature they are now, look how well they have developed into autonomous and independent young adults!” The teachers are proud and happy.

Now, one by one, each graduate is invited to come to the front for some personal words spoken by his or her coach. The sounds of the voices and gestures of the bodies mirror a close relationship between the students and the coaches. This leads to anecdotes that bring blushes to the students’ cheeks, and raise a laugh or a smile in the audience. There is enough to say and there is no need to talk about the future. Sometimes a voice trembles or eyes are teary; and arms are put

around shoulders. It feels as if the inevitable moment of separation is postponed through the sheer length of the speech.

The emotions get stronger, the room warmer, and the song of the blackbirds—singing in the trees in the schoolyard—makes me long for some fresh air.

Suddenly, time seems to stand still for a moment. The pioneers are invited to come to the front and the audience breaks out in thundering applause for their passion, commitment and sacrifices. Never before was there an opportunity for public praise. It seems as if we are all pleased with the opportunity to finally celebrate the passionate perseverance of the project leaders for taking the lead in the creation of Impulse and for inspiring and convincing us to embark on the expedition.

Ida and Reinald show mixed feelings of pleasure and pain, and they are heartened by the graduates who surround them; it was for these students that they had wanted their dream come true. In a trembling voice, Reinald repeats his hopes and dreams for a better future in education, which we have heard so often before: “The expedition started because we had the strong feeling that we could do better; and when I see all of you I think we were successful, although the expedition did not completely turn out as we intended it to be. Nevertheless, it was a great experience with many highlights and I am ever so grateful for the trust and commitment from all of you—we often stretched it to its limits—but it made all this possible. We overcame many barriers and we all learned a lot. Look at what you have achieved, I am proud of you. Impulse confirms our quest for educational change.” Speaking carefully, and with tears in her voice and eyes, Ida expresses her happiness in being part of this precious moment of celebrating the special achievements of the students: “I am so grateful to see all these beautiful and strong young people around me who, despite the difficulties, found their way, as I had expected you would be able to. I have always believed in your strength and capabilities!” Both are appointed honorary members of the Impulse community. One of the mothers expresses her gratitude for what the children have experienced and learned at Impulse in a poem—a last round of applause underlines her words.

Graduates and parents are invited to gather in the schoolyard for the circle ritual. Graduates form one circle, parents and staff unite in another circle around them. The graduates receive a compass which says, FOLLOW YOUR IMPULSE—a last pointer for the expedition ahead. Drinks and snacks are served; and for a while, the parents, staff and students enjoy the warmth of both the summer evening and each other’s company.

Follow your !mpulse: this call puts into words the tone of the evening. The bygone impulsion to start a new school and to enroll children expressed the hopes and beliefs of the team of teachers and parents for ‘better’ education—because children deserve a more propitious school experience. Our dissatisfaction with existing school practices and our belief in change brought us together. We believed children needed space to develop responsibility for and independence in learning; also, we believed children who felt the trust and confidence of their teachers and parents would be able to make their own decisions. Moreover, we were in favour of a safe and small-scale school environment instead of a large and anonymous one. Thus, we encouraged this promising project and enrolled our children. !mpulse would surely fulfil our hopes.

These early days are remembered during the festive evening. The happiness about the achievements of the graduates, and their experience of a really great time at school is called to mind. The personal attention, as well as the freedom to make their own choices while learning and living in the !mpulse community, is emphasised. It reaffirms the initial ambition for and belief in a different but successful approach to education. I see Ida and Reinald among their former students—it gives me goose bumps. This evening is not only a crowning point for the students receiving their diplomas and parents who trusted their children to succeed in an unfamiliar learning environment; it is also one for the project leaders who put their heart and soul into !mpulse.

This evening was a kind of mental farewell to a dream of different approaches to education and an innovation project that Ida and Reinald started in 2003. At the beginning of the evening I met Ida. We hugged and laughed about our red dresses with white polka dots; we seemed to have the same fashion sense not just in regard to education. I noticed her tension, as it was the first time since 2009 that she was going to meet a large group of students and their parents from the 2005 cohort. We put a lot of trust in her and Reinald as there was nothing more than ideas, stories, and spirit. We admired her efforts, and she gave all she could. To students and colleagues, she was the mother of !mpulse. Some still call her ‘the soul of the community’, which she accepts with great humility. She inspired teachers and parents with her words about trusting the strength and possibilities of children to choose other pathways. This is what made her so special for the students surrounding her tonight. We, however, failed to recognise the pressure that our high expectations and her love for our children put on her shoulders: the school absolutely had to become a success story. !mpulse was her life, her life was !mpulse. She made many sacrifices, and finally she had to let go and leave her dream behind. Every now and then she bumped into a student in town; these encounters and their stories made her sad, and made her feel as if she had broken their trust.

Her fellow founder Reinald took the role of external guardian, and after a while he was less visible in the community. He had to play the political games with the managerial, bureaucratic system and culture in an increasingly hostile comprehensive school and

social context. Continuously his own unpleasant school experiences and his belief in better ways of education drove his actions. Impulse Leeuwarden was special but just one moment in a large movement of educational change. In the end, he lost Impulse as he could not fight the system and so moved on with new dreams, promising to “make better mistakes next time”.

Building a School of One’s Own

Almost one year after this graduation ceremony, I felt the need to reflect with Ida and Reinald about their dreams and experiences with Impulse. Their thoughts and words are still so much alive in the community. Sometimes, I even rushed to their defence when a team member somewhat cynically considered their dream as one of wishful thinking idealists trying to make “utopian magic”. This judgment made me feel rather uncomfortable because in a certain way, it also disqualified everything I believed in. In spite of this, I cannot deny that I have my own images of the initial years, which sometimes seem to be at odds with what I heard and experienced in 2011. So I wanted to listen to Ida and Reinald and reflect with them about their memories of the early years of Impulse. I organised their reflections and created the following story—*Room for Idealism* and *Going Public*—with their words and from their perspective.

Room for Idealism

In the study year 2002/2003, Peter Nieuwstraten, the chairman of the board, told us that the school management was working on an idea to add a completely new concept to the already diverse palette of school types. Since he was aware of our criticism of the existing school practices, he made inquiries about whether we would be interested in participating in the initial thought process. We met with the management team, and a few sessions later, we had visualised the initial idea in a charcoal sketch—one A4-sized sheet of paper with words written on it.²³ It concisely explained the project’s purpose of creating a school for the future and included some preparatory remarks about the implementation. The following question arose: “Would you consider taking the lead in this innovation?” How could we say ‘no’ to such a once in a lifetime opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children—including our own! Of course, we had our doubts about the immensity of the project: building a completely new school. On the other hand, more initiatives had been started in the Netherlands, and so there was expertise. Moreover, the chairman of the board was a warm advocate of this initiative. Besides, we really wanted to move forward in this static school system. Our own school experiences had left us with the impression that a school’s focus on teaching and or-

²³ The initial ideas were informed by the doctorate dissertation written by dr. Ernst Marx (1975), professor in business administration and organisation. In *De Organisatie van Scholengemeenschappen in Onderwijskundige Optiek*, he presents an organisational model for schools based on a relationship between educational and organisational systems. His ideas are further developed in L. De Caluwé, E. C. H. Marx & M. W. Petri (1988). *School development: Models and change*. Technical report OECD International School improvement project. Leuven: Acco.

ganising teaching actually prevented learning and development—and it still does. School is about schedules; teaching, tests and results; about failing, and not motivating students. Moreover, we teachers are increasingly confronted with bureaucratic managerial processes and political rules and regulations. In this static constellation, neither students nor teachers can really move or develop. We so often see a student's talents and passion in a theatre club, music band— non-lesson related activity; but as soon as (s)he enters a classroom, all of this passion evaporates. Moreover, the system hardly acknowledges the differences between people. We cannot address the uniqueness of individual students because most of the time we have only one size for everyone. It is as if school practice fragments a student's life into a classroom life of cognitive development, and a non-classroom life with passion and talent—this is not human! In this way, we hold children back from flourishing, and beautiful talents are wasted.

It was chance indeed that got us into this undertaking; but in following our deep convictions, we were convinced of our strength to deal with constraints along the way and we took the bet. After the summer holidays of 2003, the two of us met a few days a week. We knew, we had two years between the charcoal sketch and the arrival of our first students, and we were able to spend about half of our time on the project. Happily, we found colleagues for the development team who worked one day a week with us. We set up office in a room in our service building—a bit remote from our daily educational practice. Although it was just a normal room furnished with a table, a few chairs, a flipchart, a, curtained, window to the outside world, it offered to us a space for possibilities. Here we dreamed “with our feet on the table” without anybody holding us back. We dreamed of a school where young adolescents could develop the competencies and independence needed for the future. And we dreamed of a school that gave teachers good opportunities to be part of this learning and development process. We had a vision of a dynamic, vibrant learning community of united and equal students and teachers, who shared a mutual responsibility for our mini-society—where students were free of boundaries and had the space to develop and grow; where they could explore, choose, make mistakes, and learn about themselves and about the world they lived in.

During these years, we lived in two worlds: in one we would like to leave behind, and in one where the future was unknown. In a way, we travelled back and forth between a physical and a mental place, between a room for change and a classroom—between two different worlds of thought. This experience was quite awkward: residing in the ‘old world’ was like being thwarted and held back from our passionate desire for change.

Since there was no project plan, a haphazard learning process started; creative thinking was essential in this initial phase. After a while, the empty walls in our room were decorated with large sheets of paper filled with discussed thoughts, concepts, questions,

colourful drawings, and models. An extended colourful mind map covered the basic elements of a new educational approach. LEARNING stood out in the centre of the map and the branches showed words like TALENT; COLLABORATION; SELF-DISCOVERY; INDIVIDUAL PATHWAYS; OWNERSHIP; RESPONSIBILITY; COMPETENCIES; LEARNING STYLES; ALL-DAY-LONG & LIFE-LONG LEARNING; LEARNING ORGANISATION; COMMUNITY; I, WE. This map was our creative starting point for all that was worth more exploration. If we had collected all the ideas and sources we had worked with in a small project library, it would have reflected the direction our expedition took. It would have resembled a travel guide, with interesting management literature: Peter Senge (1994) *Schools that learn*, De Caluwé & Vermaak (2002) *Leren Veranderen*; books on good school practices such as Sudbury Valley (Greenberg, 2000), Alameda Community Learning Center (Egol, 2003), and Slash21 (Morssinkhof, 2003); course books on didactics and learning theories written by educationalists in cooperation with pedagogical consultancy companies. And we would have placed Gardner's book (1983) on multiple intelligence on a prominent spot, next to Manon Ruijters (2006) '*Liefde voor Leren*'.

Our way of working was more or less happy-go-lucky on the surface: we read books and visited real-life examples. Occasionally, we presented our progress to a resonance group of teachers and students until the group disbanded due to lack of time. We had good conversations with consultants from the educational consultancy KPC group and with Paul Bentz, the Alameda Community Learning Center CEO (See part II, chapter 3). They encouraged us with their advice, content and moral support—especially Paul was very helpful. Nieuwstraten had met him during his study visit to Alameda, a visit that actually initiated his idea of adding a new school to the cluster of schools. It was he who suggested that we should invite Paul to Leeuwarden for a (pep talk) presentation. He perhaps could convince critical colleagues who did not believe in what we were doing. We just wanted to show them that the project was worthwhile, that we were not arrogant innovators spreading the news of having all of the solutions for education. So Paul told them about the self-directed independent students in his school. Some liked his story; others were more critical when they realised that his school did not have exam requirements.

In this period, we learned that change is frightening and that people oppose it because they are afraid of doing things differently. But as we said to each other, this was the fate of idealist forerunners; we were doing something special and we believed in it. We dared to take the risk and dared to explore what could be done differently without knowing the right answers—actually there were no right answers. It was a matter of experimenting, and of leaving the familiar behind while exploring what could be done better, more beautifully, and more completely. If nobody dares, nobody tries and nobody moves, nothing will happen and nobody will know what works and what does not. As time passed by, we became more and more convinced of our decision to look for

an alternative route towards graduation within the geography of the Dutch educational establishment, and we came to understand that we could do it. We had finished the vision document, which was approved by the board of governors and the participation council.

Going Public

At some point, our dream needed to go public. Thus, we commissioned a company to create a website, and we set a date for an information evening for parents. This, however, was also a moment for new hesitation. We strongly felt that we were doing the right thing, but there was always the likelihood of an unpleasant encounter with the outside world; we knew about this already from our colleagues. Nieuwstraten understood this struggle, and he also knew what was at stake. So he sent us to Alameda, where we stayed for one week in Paul's Community Learning Centre. Finally, we had the opportunity to experience the learning concept in real life. We connected in person with students who actually did what we thought students could do. These kids were so impressive in the way they behaved and talked. They showed responsibility for and the ability to manage their learning process, and they were obviously self-directed. This visit asserted our inner belief that this learning concept was great, and it gave us the final piece of evidence for our alternative education route.

This visit was really well-timed: a few days after we returned from Alameda, we hosted 500 parents and children who wanted to know more about our plans. This number was overwhelming, as we had expected 100. It was an unforgettable evening. Can you imagine what this did to us? After that first year of development and real life experience, we could now feel their enthusiasm—it reinforced our passion. We were doing something that people wanted! We did not really know what made these people come to us; we just assumed that they wanted change. It is possible that some of them just saw us as dreamers—who knows?

As soon as we knew we would really start the school, we started recruiting staff. Our community was meant to become a low functional hierarchy organisation in which everyone would have his or her own value; irrespective of individual expertise and experience, everyone would contribute equally. The number of applicants was amazing. At the time, work in education was under public pressure, but !mpulse seemed to appeal. We selected men and women whom we thought would be the right people to build the imagined learning community. We expected them to be able to learn and cooperate according to the !mpulse values of student responsibility, and equality between staff and students. Perhaps, we thought we could mould them into our vision of an !mpulse teacher. To be honest, we were very sensitive to the fact that the staff was a critical success factor and that traditional forces would intermingle with !mpulse—since both old and new were of course embodied in the team members.

For the building of !mpulse, our main focus of attention was to build a community spirit; we aimed at a 'WE' to frame individualism. Therefore, we explored personal matters and reflected on questions such as: who am I, how do I work and learn, what do I bring to !mpulse? We wanted the team to feel at ease, and to be familiar with what we intended to do, as the team would have to embody our vision; and thus, we spent much time reading and discussing how the ideas could be transferred to day-to-day practice. As a matter of fact, the end results were not fixed and this created a special dynamic. We experimented within the framework of the vision year after year. Actually, experimentation, dynamism, and movement were our state of becoming and being—this had always been part of our dream. These first couple of years were fantastic because of the opportunity to shape education instead of just being told what to do. The community was our family and we were !mpulse. Our existence was a matter of inexplicable magic.

!mpulse Enters my Life

"Marte Rinck, have you read about the initiative to start a new school in Leeuwarden?" "No, actually I have not". My colleague Margriet and I had taken a break to have a cup of coffee. We were busy, preparing a training course for new teachers who would have to work as tutors in the Problem-based Learning curriculum at our university. She knew I was looking for a secondary school for Lennard, so she told me about a friend of hers—also a colleague—who had recently attended the presentation for the new school, !mpulse. Her friend, Anita, was enthusiastic about the educational concept presented there and its focus on learning and community. I missed the announcement (our son's school did not inform parents) and I missed the newspaper article (I did not read the local news). I knew about similar so-called *new learning* projects in the Netherlands, which attracted my attention because of my concerns about secondary education. Margriet told me about the secondary school experiences of her children, and we were sad that much was still the same, as when we went to school. We thought it was about time that secondary education started to move away from rigid and less appropriate approaches. Therefore, the new initiatives sounded promising although we were not yet convinced—we returned to work.

The plan for the new school intrigued me, and thus I looked for the article.

NEW SCHOOL IN LEEUWARDEN IS POPULAR

Five hundred people came to the first informational meeting about a new school for Vmbo, Havo and Vwo in Leeuwarden. Piter Jelles Impulse, as the school will be called, works without schedules and fixed hours and will start next autumn (see page 23).

New school for 'free tomfoolery' attracts five hundred people

Yesterday, about 300 parents and 200 children attended the first public meeting for a completely new school in the province of Friesland: PJ Impulse. The school for Vwo, Havo and Vmbo-t (formerly Mavo) will open its doors in the Frisian capital in autumn 2005. At most, half of the program will be comparable to the program of regular schools. The pupils have to attend (a few) lessons, and have to be at school at fixed times; but apart from that, they have to decide by themselves what to do. "If this were a lesson, by now half the children would be staring out of the window," said PJ Reinald Gerbenzon, after talking for about 45 minutes.

Anton and his son Hans want to see where the wind blows them. Hans, a primary school pupil in search of a secondary school, is still uncertain about his next step. "He does not like the collective labour agreements," his father jokes. Hans: "I do not like to go to school from 8 am to 4 pm." "I am not in favour of this," says Jochem, Stephan's father, "these children are too young. They need structure. This free tomfoolery does nothing for me." Stephan has not made a choice yet. He wants to apply for the gymnasium. If he is accepted, he gets a computer from his mum. If not, Impulse might be an alternative. Ella's son is a first year student at the PJ Montessori but is not happy there. She advocates Iederwijs, a movement claiming that children are able to identify their learning needs. She would not mind if her son had to step down a class to start at Impulse, "then he can learn in an intrinsically motivated way based on his own interests."

"Yesterday's attendance was unexpectedly high. "It would not have been a positive experience for us if nobody had shown up," says Gerbenzon. "But five hundred people! That is a clear signal."

Source: Nieuwe school voor 'vrij gedoe' trekt meteen vijfhonderd man (2004)

And I visited its website. It showed four colourful photos of happy, laughing children: a girl laying on her back in a meadow with daisies dreamily looking into a blue sky; youngsters on a lawn reading books and having leisure time; youngsters standing arm

in arm in a circle; and youngsters with a globe in their hands. They all conveyed the impulse motto ‘love for learning’ (*zin in leren*) in a learning community.²⁴ The concise text briefly explained the idea of independent learning everything from talent, passion and curiosity. I recognised my pedagogical ideals for a school: a safe place where my son could learn in freedom and where he would find an inspiring environment acknowledging his interests and personal learning needs as starting points for learning and growth. Moreover, I fully agreed that schools should not be separated from society. I regarded school as a mini-society that should enable my child to exercise responsibility for societal living and to develop a healthy balance between individual and common interests. I drew Lennard’s attention to the website—“Is this a school?” he asked, surprised and interested.

Moments of Choice

In September 2004, Lennard started his final year at a Protestant Christian elementary school. This year would be decisive for his future in education and probably in life, as we had to find him an appropriate secondary school. Again—for the third time—my husband and I had to make a choice that would influence the course of his life. And again, our diverse social-cultural and academic backgrounds would play a role. Lennard’s father was born in a Roman Catholic, German family and studied mathematics; I have a Protestant, Dutch background and studied Arts and Humanities (German Studies). Our backgrounds created a mix of values and norms, opinions and assumptions—as well as a vision on life—that was reflected in the upbringing of our children rooted in two cultures. The German ‘*Bildungstradition*’ influenced their lives as we valued intellectual, social-cultural, and philosophical religious development. We wanted our children to recognise and unfold their talents and qualities, and to contribute to a global society. Our key values were open-mindedness, care for others and the environment, independence and critically distanced interaction with the social environment to avoid feelings of self-evidence and self-satisfaction.

Our first choice was made during my pregnancy as we had decided to combine professional ambitions and family life. I would take a part-time position—a common decision in our generation. We would bring our child to a day care centre with trained child minders. We expected benefits from pedagogical professionals, and a positive influence on his social skills from participating in a group with children of different ages. We invested in a good relationship with the child minders whom we saw as partners in his upbringing. After some years, we experienced an increasing tension between pedagogical aims on the one hand, and the economic objectives of efficiency and profit on the other hand—a tension that affected the quality of the care. Consequently, new child minders were less educated and had less time per child.

²⁴ This motto is also the title of the book written by prof.dr. Luc Stevens (2002), *Zin in leren*. He is a leading figure in Dutch educational reform, promoting natural learning since the 1990s.

Four years later, we had to decide about an appropriate elementary school. Our hometown offered a great variety of mainstream schools and those known as reform pedagogy schools; the latter appealed to us. We visited the Waldorf, Montessori, and Dalton schools and liked their focus on the learning needs of the child and on cooperation. The Waldorf and Roman Catholic Dalton schools were our favourites; and for practical reasons, we chose the Dalton school, which was located in our suburb next to the after-school club. The school's ideas of child-centred learning, openness, and collaboration developed from an understanding of the limits of traditional class learning matched our ideas on education. This school was quite popular among parents; and although our son was on a waiting list one year before enrolment, he was refused. Practical reasons finally overruled our idealism, and we enrolled our sons in the traditional Protestant Christian school located next to the Dalton school.

Elementary school put an end to a partner relationship between pedagogues by profession and parent-pedagogues. It seemed impossible to cooperate with teaching staff with a different vision of child development. This became embarrassingly discernible at the age of seven, when Lennard's dyslexia was diagnosed. For a long period, his needs had been ignored, despite my repeated questions about his reading and writing difficulties; finally, I had initiated and financed a diagnostic test myself. We found a supportive therapist who coached him for almost three years; she restored his love for books and addressed his fear of failure. Afterwards, his brothers also seemed to have learning difficulties, and we faced similar problems with the teachers. This made us very critical of the one size-fits-all approach in this school. Only after many attempts to connect with the internal counsellor did our relationship begin to develop. She gave support, when possible, and I started to understand the organisational constraints she faced. Nevertheless, the sidelined position and the limited interaction with the teaching professionals about the education of our children frustrated me. So I decided to participate in voluntary activities to improve this relationship. This helped me to appreciate the difficult work of the teachers, but it also strengthened my concerns about the lack of attention for the children at an individual level, and the perceived incapability of teachers to appropriately deal with the learning difficulties of my sons. Around the Millennium, the school team decided to start a project for adaptive education and to become a STAP school.²⁵ I appreciated the initiative since this school was a traditional classroom-based school with little room for individuality. I expected it to be an answer to my concerns, and the focus on learning seemed quite logical to me. A consultant from the commercial advice company connected to my university guided the team.

²⁵ STAP stands for Stimulating Adaptive Processes. Adaptive education is based on the research on children with learning disabilities by prof.dr. Luc Stevens. His ideas are rooted in the concept of Self Determination developed by the motivation psychologists Deci and Ryan. He argues, schools have to turn from curriculum to development, from teaching to learning. This would enable students to show competencies, learn in cooperation with others, and experience autonomy. Adaptive education is related to constructivist learning theory (Dijkstra, Van der Meer & Van der Hagen, 2000).

I attended a presentation about the project, and I wondered why the consultant and not the teachers presented the new plans.

With the transition to secondary education, we arrived at the threshold of another new world. Again, our choice was embedded in restricting conditions, which were even more complex than before. The information from the progress and results tracking system and the teacher impressions were more decisive than our knowledge about Lennard's potentiality. Only the elementary school recommendation was taken into account by secondary schools in their procedure to accept my child as student. Moreover, secondary schools increasingly considered the future school success of a child from the point of view of their own quality approval by an Education Inspectorate evaluation and accreditation. Thus, we would not be sure whether an application for a school of choice would be accepted.

At the same time however, the schools compete to attract as many students as possible through promotional activities. The annual battle for the newcomers starts early. From November on, glossy billboards decorate our town, advertisements in newspapers draw attention to information meetings and open days; first experience events are planned and brochures are distributed at elementary schools. The schools have learned how to apply marketing tools to position themselves within the minds of parents and especially children. Nonetheless, the promotional activities move along the boundaries of the societal pillarisation still visible in education. For instance, our son's school maintained a warm relationship with the Christian secondary schools in town. It co-organised an information evening for parents and only distributed information about these schools. Similarly, the public secondary school ignored the Christian school.

This time, the choice process was embedded in ongoing critical publications in the media about governmental decisions for secondary education. And we heard the remarks and opinions of friends whose children were already at secondary schools. This fuelled my scepticism; I got the impression that education in the Netherlands was drifting. Add to this my almost 18 years of professional experience, which influenced the third choice heavily.

Thoughts of a Mother Teaching in Higher Education

I developed my professional identity during my long career at the Hotel Management School, with its constructivist Problem-based Learning (PBL) approach; it emphasises constructivist, contextual, collaborative, and self-directed learning. I was one of the young teachers in the 1987 pioneer team that developed a unique curriculum and materials in isolation—as was told by our academic dean familiar with these principles: he knew what we were working on. It became my conviction that this approach would be more suitable for educating future professionals than the traditional teaching approach. Thus, I became an enthusiastic advocate of Problem-based Learning, student-

centred learning, and social-constructivism. Around 2000, I started to coordinate PBL and to coach and train teachers.

During the 1990s, I represented my school in several working groups initiated by a project—since 1997 known as Platform VO-HBO²⁶—aiming at a smooth and successful transition from secondary to higher education in the region. I participated in this project because in my daily work with students I saw how much they struggled to get used to the student-centred approach, to self-direction in learning, and to group work. Consequently, I was convinced that secondary schools could prepare their students much better for higher education—an assumption that turned me into an advocate of developments such as *Studiehuis*.²⁷ Nevertheless, my initial expectations about its effects on students did not run parallel with my experience. I noticed and heard from my colleagues that students would now enter with less knowledge and limited extra skills. The working groups I joined—and where I met different secondary education teachers—prepared workshops on independent learning and study orientation; I also advised a secondary school on their study-coaching program. I learned from my contact with secondary school teachers in the working groups that much criticism and many implementation issues besieged the *Studiehuis* introduction. Additionally, I heard negative stories from parents about this renewal in education. To conclude: it made me aware of the backlash towards didactical and content innovations introduced in a top-down fashion.

²⁶ The Platform was a result of the recommendations of the Committee Van Wieringen. It advised a stronger and more structural relationship between the Havo and HBO and explained that the latter should be more involved in secondary education to discuss its end-level requirements or study profiles (www.vo-ho.nl; HBO-raad, 1990). An important reason for focusing on a strong connection with and an influence of higher education on secondary schools is found in the circumstance that secondary education can no longer be considered the final stage in one's school career. Due to the political and economical considerations of the knowledge society an increasing number of students continue their studies after secondary education. Hence, secondary education has an in-between position, bringing students from elementary school to vocational or higher education aiming at professional qualifications. It has an increasing responsibility for the appropriate qualification of students entering higher education. The commission therefore advised to implement new subjects on, for instance, technology, management, and communication in secondary education to anticipate specific branches in higher education.

In addition, higher education underwent changes in regard to its learning approaches. The program of my school for instance illustrates in a quite radical way a huge difference between a teaching approach that is still common in secondary education and its learning approach. Higher education identified adaptation difficulties among its students who were said to have insufficient knowledge and skills—as well as disputable study attitudes and motivation. This resulted in an increasing number of drop-outs and long study trajectories with financial consequences (Bronneman-Helmers, Herweijer, & Vogels, 2002). Secondary education is required to develop activities that enable smooth transition.

²⁷ A school-reform in secondary education introduced in 1998. *Studiehuis* aims at the development of independent learning.

Furthermore, my concerns grew when I met students in tutorials, workshops, and personal coaching talks. My assumptions about intrinsic motivation were often challenged; I expected students to be highly motivated, as they had made a choice for a specific field of work. I was surprised and to some extent disappointed about their study attitudes and motivation. Many of them were perfectly happy if they achieved a bachelor's degree as an entry ticket to a future professional career as easily as possible; in the first two years, school was just about collecting credits. Moreover, I was astonished by their lack of motivation and 'waste of time' experiences in secondary school. These experiences nourished my critical opinion of what happened in secondary schools. Although I had my doubts about how elementary school affected the development of knowledge and skills, motivation, and the attitude of my children, I still had the impression that my son's pleasure in going to school and his curiosity about what he was learning was not really hindered. I knew that the period of adolescence changes much in the life and personality of the adolescent, but I could not believe that a twelve year old would lose interest within five to six years. I assumed secondary education and its traditional teaching concept had resulted in the change seen among our first year students. I related this disinterest to, for instance, mono-disciplinary subject teaching, a focus on testing, and a lack of opportunities for meaningful learning; to the separated conditions of school and society; to the limited interest of teachers for the personal growth of students and the development of future generations. I had seen the opportunities and benefits for students in our own curriculum and educational approach, and I dreamed of the same in secondary education.

Additionally, the issue of the large scale of many secondary schools influenced my opinion. Mergers between small-scale schools changed the landscape. Former independent small categorial schools were combined into large comprehensive schools to enable efficient managerial and organisational processes. Large numbers of students and teachers 'lived' in large industrial buildings located on the edge of towns or villages. Stories about fights, minor criminal acts, and anonymity created an unpleasant and unsafe feeling when thinking about my young son in the world out there.

A Choice for Impulse

A few months after the talk with my colleague, Lennard and I went to a school's Open Day tour in our hometown. We joined the procession of parents and children who were welcomed into recently cleaned schools by directors who shook our hands and showed us the coffee and lemonade corner. Students took us on a tour telling nice stories; teachers willingly showed their textbooks and reluctantly told us about their teaching approaches. "O, your son is near native German? Well, then he can support other children—no he cannot be freed from attending lessons or have any customised program." Actually, we encountered the same process in all of the schools—whether we

visited a more traditional type of school, or a Montessori school. What was the difference? In our hearts we were really not convinced about what was presented. The Montessori College seemed to have lost its orientation and made a conventional impression on us. In its early years, this school had had a good name, but during our visit we did not recognise much of its reformist pedagogical principles. I saw that renewal is vulnerable.²⁸

Then we entered !mpulse—an empty building without students and only a few prospective teachers. I understood they participated in the innovation project, and they conveyed their beliefs and idealism with shining eyes and inspiring stories—that was all they had to show. A future English teacher with a long background in education explained that it was time for new directions; and so she emphasised this concept as a good alternative to problems she had experienced in her daily practice. She received difficult questions, and I appreciated her honesty about the many open ends. Again, it was a case of gut feeling; her story and the impressions given by her colleagues resonated in me. I realised my enthusiasm was built on the sands of hope and inspiration. Somewhere I heard a voice in my mind warning me, “Remember what you saw at the Montessori, this could happen to !mpulse as well!”

Why should we choose !mpulse? Why should we give it the benefit of the doubt? Why should we take the bet? Indeed, my enthusiasm was intermingled with uncertainty and hesitation. Should we expose Lennard to an educational expedition, not knowing its possible destination? There were no comparisons, we had nobody to share experiences—we had no hold. Although we were used to doing things differently, my husband and I had different opinions on this point, and we noticed that my teaching experience and our different cultural backgrounds influenced our discussions. My husband argued from a rational point of view, whereas I took a rather more idealistic standpoint—he left the decision to Lennard and me.

So why did we take the bet? It was a matter of nothing ventured nothing gained. A team of committed teachers had developed an interesting concept, which had space for learning and personal growth, for community and society; the school management supported it. I was convinced by the idea that a learning community would be a guarantee for individual and social development. Moreover, I liked the idea that the small school building had been refurbished into a pleasant physical environment, and a positive staff-student ratio would allow for a more personal touch. And last but not least, I expected that the learning concept would create no learning difficulties related to Lennard’s dyslexia.

²⁸ In his doctorate research, Lockhorst (2002) described the problem of sustaining the Montessori principles after a merger in 1998.

A few weeks later, Lennard visited a ‘first impression afternoon’ during which he and many other children experienced the intended Impulse way of learning. When he returned home, he was absolutely sure this was what he wanted. The next step was the intake talk with the future ‘world cultures’ teacher. Both of us were asked for our motivations and of course we did our best to show we would be suitable candidates. I emphasised my commitment and intention to contribute to the school’s development; Lennard (and I) were accepted. During the following months, we heard from different people—for instance from several university colleagues—that their children would also start at Impulse; it already created a sense of community. Friends and relatives either admired how we had taken the bet, or had little understanding of why we were exposing our son to such a vague project. Hence, we had to defend our choice right from the start, and this was to become part of all of our talks about Lennard’s school career in the years to come.

On an early morning in September 2005, Lennard cycled to Impulse. He was so excited, he did not look back; he was off to start a new life. I remembered my own first day at secondary school in 1972. My mother also waved to me—did I look back? She also had to let me enter a new world on my own. Lennard’s world was a world without heavy backpacks full of books, without homework, without tests; without annoying older students; without anything familiar. He loved going to school and was even moody when he had a day off. For the first time he met boys and girls with similar interests, similar learning needs, similar foolishness. He felt at ease with his tutors and coaches. Of course he had his favourites, but they all belonged to the learning community.

Nevertheless, I experienced moments of hesitation. Despite the fact that I was an advocate for this school, I found it difficult to understand what Lennard was doing and to believe he was really learning. He was engaged in inspiring projects called *setting*—his first one was about graffiti. And what about mathematics and languages? How would I know that he was making progress? Old ideas and new ideas about secondary school intermingled and created tension. We were invited to parent evenings during which we noticed the enthusiasm of the staff, yet it was still hard to connect to this new world of learning. So I decided—again—to join a parental participation group. I would have the opportunity to meet the team in a different way and support their expedition. At the school BBQ at the end of the first year, we bought a video triptych about the school’s start and its first year. It was a beautiful recording of what had happened at Impulse so far; and as such, it was helpful in making me, my family, and my friends understand Lennard’s school life. It has now turned into a historical document of a once in a lifetime school experience beyond comparison.

Film Impressions

Project leaders:

“We have succeeded in bringing our dream and vision of education to life. Theoretically, we knew it would be possible, and we had seen appealing examples. It was uncertain if this could be achieved with twelve-year olds—there was no evidence. And now, we can walk around and see all these “shining eyes”, all these actively involved and self-confident students! We have invested a great deal in this learning climate, and it is just so great to see how stimulating this is for children. Of course, they have to make a mental switch. They are so used to external direction in learning, and now we expect them to become self-directed. Similarly, this counts for teachers; anyone who has been working in education for a long time has to make a mental switch because of their redefined role as a teacher. If you were used to deciding what students do and learn, it might be hard to tell a student now: “You decide what to do, and I will support you.” In addition, nothing in our community resembles mainstream education; all of the standard “building blocks” in mainstream education are interpreted otherwise. It is feasible! Our practice confirms our assumptions.”

Students in action:

A reflection talk between student and tutor or coach; a gathering with peers and the coach in the *kring* (circle), seated on a colourful carpet—a cuddly Winnie the Pooh toy left alone on a chair. Students cooking food and baking cookies from English recipes when training English vocabulary and grammar, then tasting and listening to English teachers who give feedback: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Giggling girls work together on a collage about hairstyles as a preparation for the grand gala—they want to make a dashing impression, it is the topic of their setting. Students creating a scale model of their Science lab to apply geometry. The *Rechtbank* (justice court) illustrates how students are expected to call attention to each other’s behaviour. Students take the roles of accuser, defender, and judge to discuss issues such as broken or vanished items - “You know, it works!” Joachim is surprised about the court’s effect on the community. And there is a student who withdraws from these dynamic scenes and reads a book on Greek myths somewhere in the corridors—it is just a matter of interest. All these students radiate vitality and sunny open-minded delight; their actions and words illustrate the founders’ impressions.

Teachers:

“I guide students and give them instructions when they ask, I do not tell them what to do. This means I do not prepare lessons at home, but try to encourage them to get involved in good activities (for instance, ‘adopt a shoulder,’ or joining the school band). We do not use methods that leave no space for a student’s passions. We or-

ganise subject matter around setting themes such as ‘design’ or ‘research’, and students can make their choice regarding content. I help students to recognise required learning outcomes—I talk with them continuously. Specific content discussions are scheduled, but it is the students’ decision to participate; they can decide not to come if it does not fit with their learning, and this is discussed with the subject tutor beforehand.”

“We want students to develop community spirit—community is very important to us. We think a lot about the kind of school we want to be, how we want to relate to each other, and what we value; this is very noticeable here—the atmosphere is good. Therefore, we expect students to engage in community time activities; students can sign up for instance for a library committee, a canteen committee, or a court session.”

“Really, every day I itch to go to work. I can dream here, which goes for the students as well. I am no longer constrained by anyone else’s thoughts on how education should be carried out. I think that not every teacher is suitable for this kind of teaching: one has to be able to respond flexibly to the unpredictable and to adjust constantly and develop oneself.”

Parents:

Prudently, they agree on the importance of developing professional skills for one’s future life in society, instead of solely focusing on the cognitive aspects. At the same time, they are hesitant about the experimental character and project status of the school, although they are positive about the initiative. Nevertheless, a single parent does not yet know what to think and comments solely: “Well, they do not need to carry these heavy backpacks filled with books each day!”

In January 2006 the school officially opened. The film shows that students were involved in the opening ceremony. They prepared and served nibbles and drinks; they welcomed many adult guests from the education field and the local government with a musical performance—a cute 12 year-old Lennard played the accordion. And finally, they performed in a theatrical opening act: a boy disguised as the Dutch queen officially opened the learning community—all the adults laughed and clapped their hands.

Source: Piter Jelles Impulse (2006)

Teachers Sliding into a New World

In March 2005, two huge billboards rose in front of an old bricks and mortar school built in the 1960s. They proudly presented !mpulse to the passing public:


Here the comprehensive school Piter Jelles—Eigenwijs in Onderwijs (Maverick in education)—is building !mpulse. Our partners are KPC Group, Microsoft, WoltersNoordhoff, NHL, Kennisnet. Our sponsors are Hewlett Packart, Expeditie Leeuwarden²⁹, Stalad.³⁰ (Piter Jelles !mpulse, 2006)

Had I walked inside, the smell of freshly brewed coffee and the noise of builders breaking down walls and wiping out all traces of the old traditional school building would possibly have welcomed me. This place was transformed into the future work environment of the !mpulse pioneer team.

All of a sudden I find myself in this school—I was asked to apply. There was nothing to start with, in my perception there was really nothing at all; we had to develop everything. I am supposed to support, to prepare, and to set up things; and nobody ever asks me whether I have any experience to do so. I have to learn and to do everything from scratch, which is actually quite unusual. Moreover, I do not know the people I am working with, with whom I have to cooperate. To me it is like sliding into a whole new world—it is a big change. (MS, interview 2011)

As we were talking, Marga stretched her arms to underline this sliding—her voice was still full of fascination. I was touched by this fascination, which I also recognised in my talks with the few remaining first team members. I saw twinkles in their eyes, I heard laughter about sweet memories; but I also encountered tears of grief and emotions. They built the school and took the opportunity to unwittingly show what a teacher team could accomplish. They showed the strength of people who follow dreams; the feeling of strong responsibility to realise dreams. And they showed me their struggle and their unexpected sacrifices.


A 'Dialogue' between Team Members and a Mother


 *We were invited by Reinald and Ida to share our passion about committing ourselves to !mpulse and to describe the talents that we could put to use in the community—résumé information was less interesting to us. We gazed at each other and looked puzzled, as we did not expect this unusual question. It brought us, however, right away to the essence of !mpulse—to passion and talent, and to the awareness that this was not only a matter for our students but for*

²⁹ City marketing

³⁰ Stalad is a company specialising in school interiors


us as well. We could not remain in the positions we were used to but had to follow the rules of a new game. Our resistance melted away as José shared her enthusiasm spontaneously. “The reading of the vision document was a pleasant experience,” she said. “With each page I became more inspired for the opportunity of working with students in such a different way.” The !mpulse ideas resembled her ideas about school as a place that should be full of dynamic interactions, where people could learn from and with each other, where students discovered the world and themselves. She wanted to contribute her passion for youngsters and her coaching talents. Her story silenced us for a moment until Anneke decisively argued that mainstream schools were indeed obsolete: a lifelong acquisition of knowledge and personal performance were what really mattered. We recognised our own ideas in what the others said. And our initial uncertainty was replaced by a state of wonder about this extraordinary opportunity to create our own school. We sat in the circle, we looked around; it seemed as if we had found each other in a passionate desire for change. Never before had we built a school from scratch; never before had we collaborated with colleagues so intensively. And this connected us: doing something with which we had no experience. Here, in this circle and in the months that followed, our ‘WE’ took shape and became strong—this sparkling collective that was more than the sum of its parts.


 I understand you will never forget the first year. You worked in that beautifully designed school interior with only 60 students, whom you introduced to your vision of the learning community; together you made it happen. I see you felt the importance of the initiative as you saw students with shining eyes, a motivation to learn, and a responsibility for the community. It indeed must have been a great experience to be a part of their learning, with its all day-long contact in that open building. I can imagine !mpulse really made sense to you, which is what made it possible to engage with it so intensively. You described your state of being as a kind of permanent euphoric state that blurred the boundaries between jobs and private lives. !mpulse was your dream. It made magic, and I think so did you.

 *We worked with the students between 8.30 am and 3.30 pm. As soon as they went home, we stayed and reflected on what had happened that day. We continuously asked ourselves: “Are we still in tune with our concept, is our practice still consistent with our ideas?” And if we felt uncomfortable with what we were doing, we looked for a quick fix or more long-term solutions. !mpulse was not our final destination, but rather an experimental journey. We had long debates on the use of different methods or textbooks, about the possibility of learning a language without the obligation of learning vocabulary lists, about integrating subjects into projects. We had to learn how to support the students in their learning process and to step out of our teacher role. We also experienced many difficulties when developing the ICT facilities for learning. Sometimes it really felt, as if we were way ahead of our times.*

Our flow, however, disguised this increasing tension. It was not easy at all to change our self-evident understanding and thinking, to change from a teaching to a learning perspective; we were so used to what was suddenly not acceptable anymore. Additionally, we started to experi-

ence organisational constraints, and parents and students became critical of what we were doing. This undercurrent nourished discrepancies between us, but we avoided really addressing them. Dissent was never there, discussions never ended up in severe fights. We were always careful not to break our unity, as if we were afraid this could endanger !mpulse—and our dreams as well.

 I noticed that your efforts for !mpulse to succeed turned into a matter of personal dedication and achievement. Nevertheless, your ownership of the community placed a heavy burden on your shoulders, as you did not want to disappoint the parents and children who had placed great trust in you. Thus, when team members said farewell, it felt like being abandoned. When a team member fell ill and returned after several months with a changed mindset, this created distance. You felt that the initial bonds of unity and shared beliefs were broken.

 *We were considered a kind of commune, a sect. We ignored this and tried to incorporate new team members and new students into our way of working, into our dominant culture. And at the same time, we were stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea. We felt a more or less moral obligation to start with a Tweede Fase with similar features; if we did not develop a Tweede Fase appropriate to !mpulse³¹, we would have to force our Havo and Vwo students to undergo a cold turkey experience in mainstream education after three beautiful !mpulse years. This was not acceptable for us. Nevertheless, soon we noticed that we had no answers for the discrepancies between our approach and the examination requirements. Moreover, we were unable to find appropriate solutions within the community that had started to fall apart. Somewhere, we got lost within ourselves. We tried to comfort each other by saying that the expedition was too hallucinatory, but we were too spellbound to really understand what was going on. In spite of this, the fight for our dream had exhausted us. Step by step, inadvertently, traditional elements entered back into our daily process. It was a sliding process, it felt like a loss and a defeat—we drifted apart and found ourselves back on small islands, no longer able to move.*

A Turning Point

September 2009, “Mamma, somebody from !mpulse called this afternoon. He asked about Lennard’s whereabouts, but he was not at home.” Lennard’s youngest brother, Arriën Symon, welcomed me with these words on a Friday afternoon. I was surprised. Why was he not at school? Why would he be somewhere else? Today, he was supposed to engage in an all-day cross-age learning event; and after school he was supposed to have a piano lesson, to which he did not show up either! So, rather upset, I called back. A team member answered the phone and, reproachingly, told me that he had organised such a successful cross-age learning day. Nevertheless, he had discovered that not all the students were participating as expected. Lennard and a few others had refused to be

³¹ *Tweede Fase* or *Bovenbouw* are the last two (Havo) and three (Vwo) years of secondary education preparing for the national examination.

responsible for the first year students during some activities in town. “They went to a pub and sent the first-years back to school without asking us for permission—so in fact they played hookie. You should know about this.” He did not hide his disappointment about Lennard’s attitude.

I called Lennard’s mobile phone (school could have called him, I thought). “I just had this phone call, where are you?” I heard loud music and voices in the background. “O, did they call? Well that’s their problem, we did not ask for this stupid activity—it made no sense to work with these first-years. I do not even know them. It was just a waste of time, which I could have spent on subject learning. Tutors warn us all the time: “You have to prepare for your exams next year, you don’t know enough so you had better do something!” I suggested that he returned to school to explain his reasons and to apologise—he refused and came home.

The new school year was only two weeks old and we had already faced several nasty surprises. After the first day at school, Lennard returned saying Ida would be absent for a longer period of time—and “we received a lesson schedule!” he added with annoyance. “The new team leader told us that the growing number of students no longer allows for the regular 8.30 am till 3.30 pm school day and that we need all these subject lessons to close the evident gaps in our knowledge!” He showed me his ‘UNTIS’ schedule, the metaphor for fragmented subject-based teaching in mainstream schools. Its introduction at !mpulse had a symbolic meaning, as it mirrored a crucial break with the past. The introduction of this schedule and Ida’s illness were not two separate events—I perceived the two as one signal of a community in disintegration.

It nourished my increasing anxiety about !mpulse. In the summer of 2008, the dismissal of the chairman of the board who initiated and advocated the !mpulse project was announced. A half year later, I received a newsletter—the first one for a long time—informing us about a two-day team gathering with the motto ‘Back to the Core and Reflection’. The letter conveyed a picture of a school struggling with its materialised dream. The day-to-day practice left little room for reflection, and so the team had to retreat and catch up. I wondered what had happened that would cause the team and core to lose each other? I had many more questions, but I kept silent—I did not want to show my dwindling faith. And of course, I was relieved when I read the report of the reflection sessions: it was communicated that the team still advocated for the concept, and new directions on how the team could align with the concept had been decided upon.

I wanted !mpulse to be successful, but now Lennard had shown me that I had to face the fact that !mpulse had lost momentum. He understood or merely felt that his beloved community was falling apart. He had entered a confusing double bind. For several years, he had been told to take ownership and responsibility for his learning, and now

new teachers said he was on the wrong track: “They just do not comprehend that we decide what we want to do, and that we are very capable of doing so! They try to impose their will on us, but we are !mpulse. If they want to work here, they will have to adapt to us! However, nobody tells them! On top of that, they tell us continuously that we won’t be able to pass our examinations because we lack important knowledge. They say that all learning should be focused on the final examination, and when we ask them how we should do this, they have no answer or tell us contradictory stories!” This situation was too confusing and withdrawal from the scene was his answer. I realised that he was still a 16-year old boy and that his complaints about new teachers were actually a cry for help, which we did not really take into account. And once he had heard that Ida was ill, he lost faith. The pace of change surprised me. In no time, Lennard showed a rather consumerist attitude. His attitude and words brought me back to earth, and I also realised that my dream about innovative education had been shaken.

It was difficult to accept the fact that !mpulse seemed to be facing a point of no return, and I was not the only parent to notice the problems. Halfway through September, four mothers of the parent participation committee arranged a meeting with the school director, Reinald, his new team leader, Wabe, and a few teachers and students to discuss the difficulties. What we heard and saw defied imagination: we saw a drifting school losing its sense of community, unity, and equality. My notes from this meeting read as follows: *vision problems, practical and physical problems, communication problems, management problems. Students have motivation problems and are losing faith; teachers feel uncomfortable; management has difficulties with the situation.* And despite this clear picture, we closed our eyes to the fact that this !mpulse had no future. We asked for a meeting with all of the parents to discuss the situation. One October evening, many parents, a few students, and the team gathered. We sat in an unfamiliar theatre arrangement of chairs—the colourful lizards gazed at us. We were reduced to a public viewing of a school's tragedy, which included ourselves. The emotional speech of an !mpulse inspirator and idealist left us—the audience—in a shocked and paralysed state. The man and the woman who had once embodied the hopes and ambition for this school of the future had lost their idealism. It hurt.

Three weeks later, we received an invitation from the board of directors, who wanted to present their solution for !mpulse; this time we sat in a circle. During the past weeks, Ronald te Loo, an education management consultant, had done a quick scan to understand the actual situation of the school—he had developed an action plan to solve the problems. We listened to his ‘diagnosis’, and to the words and promises of the new chairman of the board. The students would receive extra lessons to help them pass the exams; and the concept would be strengthened. The solution was a matter of damage control and presented a traditional teaching approach. It comprised a step by step relocation of !mpulse to the Montessori College. The *Bovenbouw* students would leave the *Archipelweg* after the summer break; the *Onderbouw* would follow one year later. The

consultant was appointed as interim-manager until Summer 2010. Of course, we were satisfied because the management promised to do the utmost for students to pass their exams and to sustain the concept. However, on the last December school day, we received a letter with an unexpected and unpleasant message: Lennard and his peers would not return to the *Archipelweg* after the Christmas break; there was no place for them anymore. Nor was there a place for farewells. This decision finally brought down the curtain on the promising Impulse expedition.

Quick scan summary

The school is confronted with the same question that all innovation schools face: does the school prepare students well enough for national examinations? And in this phase, we often see uncertainty among students, parents, and teachers. This is the moment to anchor enthusiasm and the efforts of people in the organisation.

This is not easy; innovators were successful because they left structures and were able to break through existing patterns, while also preventing a possible relapse into old structures and patterns. The success and strength of long-lasting change, however, is not only in the development of innovation, but also in establishing structure; without anchors, anxiety lies in wait. Often such a phase comes with an organisational crisis where valuable elements of the concept are endangered; people feel the need for another change, but the organisation cannot take the step. We believe the community has reached this stage.

Our quick-scan shows committed, creative, hard-working, loyal and driven teachers who want to do everything on their own. There was much freedom for the personal interpretation of the shared concept. We saw multiplicity, chaos, ad hoc decision making, lack of overview, inconsistency, confusion, and disintegration; many staff members with a small numbers of hours, and high staff absenteeism. Now, the school has a choice to make: further success requires both change and the maintenance of the original concept. Therefore, the community has to cooperate more with other schools and with the input of staff members from the initial team—as well as those who joined later.

Hence, people have to make concessions and things become less informal—more obligatory. This is unpleasant, for the community also, but it enables us to do justice to everybody who has engaged themselves with this community. We believe students, parents, and staff have all the opportunities to bring the school to ‘the next level’. These are: prepare students for the exams; commit an educational approach to paper, list improvements; describe the Impulse approach in *Onderbouw* and *Bovenbouw*; cooperate with other schools; formulate functions, roles, and tasks of team members; improve registration and schedule (for *Onderbouw*).

Source: PowerPoint presentation to parents (personal notes); Piter Jelles Impulse (2010)

Being with !mpulse

Introduction

This chapter presents encounters from my participant observation at !mpulse in 2011. The red thread in the text is *correspondence* between teachers, students and myself. I used the Ingold (2013) concept of correspondence as letter writing. Writing and receiving letters is a process of exchange in which an invisible meandering line exists between two persons. Through time and space, the line moves and gives opportunities for actions, thoughts and feelings. To Ingold, a line has no visible starting point or end—the line emerges. Correspondence is a matter of connection, exposure, and attentiveness that grows within specific circumstances. In this context, the decision to enter the !mpulse community and to start research is a moment in time that creates the circumstances for correspondence. Whether and when correspondence emerges remains unknown; in hindsight it becomes clear that somewhere and somehow a line came into existence.

I chose four vignettes that narrate a few moments from out of which correspondence emerged. A vignette is a short description of, for instance, an event or an episode; in my case, the vignette weaves my experiences and perceptions of the learning community into regular day-to-day activities. In the first vignette, I enter and become familiar with the community. I explore the building and the environment, and try to gain a picture of the way of living here; slowly, a connection with the !mpulse team members starts to grow. In the second vignette, my integration takes on more shape, and in a way I become a part of it when I present myself in the weekly community gathering. I chose to present the 'Circled Bodies-Talking Circles' vignette because it illustrated unexpected and confusing moments of interaction and contact between team members, including myself. The last vignette about the preparation of the Open Day and my visit mirrors the circumstances of my special position: on the one hand, I am part of the community; on the other, I remain a passer-by, a visitor—it gives me the opportunity to have different perspectives. At the same time, the vignette shows how !mpulse presents itself to its social environment.

Originally, vignette was the name for the decorative design of vine tendrils³² around the borders of a book page. Tendrils are lines or natural ‘threads’ that grow, climb, and twist around material to find a hold for their own existence. I recognised in this innate characteristic of tendrils the process of human correspondence that results in learning with and from others. The tendrils, which I wove with the vignettes into the text, mirror the correspondence with Lennard and his peers—as well as the team members—that emerged from my presence during the year. A fourth tendril, with the founder, is rooted in a relationship within and outside of the community.

I need to address one more thing in order for the reader to properly understand the tendrils. Ingold does not use correspondence in the sense of similarity and equivalence. I, however, have to consider one aspect of this element in the tendrils as I speak and write them in my teacher voice. There is some degree of correspondence in the sense of having the same occupation as the Impulse teachers. As a result, the correspondence defined by Ingold became even more powerful because the learning process created a mirror.

³² A tendril is a slender whip-like or thread-like strand, produced usually from the node of a stem, by which a vine or other plant may climb. Its anatomy may be of stem tissue or of leaf stalk tissue. Common examples of tendril-producing plants are the grape, members of the squash or melon family (Cucurbitaceae), the sweet pea (*Lathyrus odoratus*), and passion flowers. (www.britannica.com) Tendrils are prehensile and sensitive to contact. When stroked lightly on its lower side, the tendril will, in a minute or two, curve toward that side. As it brushes against an object, it turns toward it and the shape of the object permitting wraps around it, clinging for as long as the stimulation persists. Later, strong mechanical tissue (*sclerenchyma*) develops in the tendrils, thus rendering them strong enough to support the weight of the plant. (Tendril, n.d.)

Vignette Finding my Way in the Community

I am sitting in the Grand Café. Empty tables with fresh spring green coloured tabletops shaped like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle surround me; they stand out against the dark woodprint linoleum. I see a kitchen behind the transparent green topped bar. A lamp with yards of white strips hangs in the high and broad stairwell—each strip mentions a company name in big black letters. My eyes catch two pieces of glass art in the window to the schoolyard, one showing a Nativity and the other a Palm Sunday scene—two religious scenes in a ‘neutral’ school. A tall red-painted board with the slogan ‘*Klaag & Jubel*’ (complain & praise) stands forlorn next to the stairs. It hides the first stone inscribed with the foundation year 1965.

Large vintage radiators painted in the same light blue as the walls behind them do not have enough power to heat the draughty Grand Café. I cherish the sun that peeps through the stairwell window. I hear sounds from all over the place: humming young voices; approaching footsteps; the delicate tones of a violin playing ‘I will survive!’ A saxophone and drums tune in to enforce the song’s intense wish. It makes my flesh creep and brings back memories of those moments I sat here waiting in expectation, inspired, engaged, and disappointed.

Parents and their daughter enter through the front door. A kind, young woman welcomes them and offers them a cup of coffee. She also greets and serves me a coffee. The four at the bar drink their coffee and wait in silence. Another woman enters through the front door; she was being waited for—the four adults and the girl walk upstairs. A 16-year old boy starts talking to me:

Who are you and why are you here? I am the caretaker and I am replacing Peter who is ill. Actually I am a 4th year student, and I would like to become a ‘teamleier’ (team leader).

Apparently, he feels responsible and therefore addresses me, this unknown person in the middle of the Café. Similarly, he interferes with some peers who in his opinion are too loud. A young man in his twenties passes the Café and recognises me. He smiles and gives me a nod with an apologetic look on his face and continues his way. Then two men—one around fifty, the other in his early twenties—walk downstairs and look at me with a puzzled expression. I have not seen them before and they do not know me; our eyes meet and that is it. The older man remains near the bar. Voices come closer: laughing, friendly, colourfully dressed teenage girls jostling one another. They yell at the man near the bar: “Sir, Jaap!” He looks amused and patiently answers their questions. The girls leave giggling, obviously satisfied with his answers.

Humming voices come nearer; from two corridors and the stairs, boys and girls enter and gather in the Café for lunch. They settle on the stony stairs as if they are in the opera arena in Verona. Sandwich boxes are opened, empty juice cartons are thrown at each other, girls hug boys, boys hide behind their laptops: a lovely cacophony of sounds, movement, and life. The adults—teachers, caretakers, and the administrator—gather in the kitchen in full view of the students. They sit at a long narrow table parallel to a modern stainless steel cooker annex worktop and sink. A high placed window obstructs a view to the outside world. Orange-coloured cupboards divide the kitchen from a classroom. A huge number of different ownerless mugs wait for coffee or tea to be dispensed by the red Douwe Egberts coffee machine; sometimes, fresh filter coffee is brewed. The team members eat a sandwich with their coffee. The break provides an opportunity to share concerns about a student, to ask questions, to discuss private matters or just to joke. People listen and talk, pay attention, or daydream. Occasionally, students walk in and out of the kitchen with questions and remarks, or boil water to prepare a ‘cup a soup’ and instant noodles. They invite me to join them for lunch in the kitchen. I feel welcome, but also notice some reluctance about my presence. They know me as Lennard’s mother—now I am here for my PhD research. Hesitantly, several team members ask about his study progress and what my research with them will include.

At the end of the break, a few staff members take their mugs and go outside for a smoke. In spite of the weather conditions, they form a social circle of their own, they keep each other up-to-date and discuss the state of affairs—sometimes students join in. Here, they are part of the large roundabout that leads the traffic in four directions. A church, a garage, apartment buildings, detached family houses, an old water tower; lawns dotted with spring flowers, trees, some benches where old men relax. Squeezed up between the roads, all of them are silent witnesses of !mpulse on the *Archipelweg*. !mpulse, the name stands in bright coloured capitals on the façade; and a small red-coloured plate in the door window states: ‘This school is part of the public authority comprehensive school Piter Jelles’. Next to the door, a male figure representing the Biblical Faith-Hope-Love symbols carved from stone decorates the wall (although ivy hinders full sight). Generations of children expecting great futures entered and left the building, as did their teachers. The building used to be home to a Roman Catholic domestic science school and to a lower general secondary school (Mavo). It welcomed students from a public international transition class, and now it is the home to the ‘School of the Future’.

This school in no way resembles a building one would recognise as a school. It consists of colourful spaces without boundaries, decorated with trendy symbolic carpets and Phillip Starck design furniture. Each space in the building once received its own name, and carpets signify their functions. The main entrance leads to the *Grand Café*—the hub of the school. The *Verzorging* (care) is a part of the kitchen. The *Atelier* (art studio) pulls students into the experiences of the artists's world; the *Expo* (Exposition) with its stage and dance floor invites students to develop and show their specific (art) performance talents. The *Studio* (Electronic Studio) hosts music activities. The *Mediatheek* (Library) proudly shows its beautiful Middle Eastern patterned carpet that winks at the roots of the alphabet; the *Lab* enables science-based learning, and the carpet with woven chips in the *Repro* (Reproduction) refers to the importance of information technology; two smaller rooms called *Stilte* (silence) for language teaching; a *Lounge* for students to relax with friends; and finally, the *Aanbouw* (Adjacent hall)—with its colourful salamander carpet, study cabins and work units—creates places for projects, lessons, individual learning and community gatherings.

Learning takes place in open areas. Thus, I sit amid learning students who are engrossed in projects on psychology, computer technology and fashion; in group work on math and science assignments, and on reading novels. Girls and boys play a restaurant scene to practice French fluency, and film this with the Apple laptops to have a piece of learning evidence for their portfolio. I also see boys and girls continuously gaming, relaxing, chatting and having fun with friends. Adult team members move constantly through the spaces, interact and share their knowledge with the students, or explain difficulties and stimulate action. Peter for instance. He has been an educational assistant since 2005. In a mainstream school, his position is called caretaker. His small office is located under the stairs in The Grand Café at the heart of the school. Not only is he visible to all who need him, he also sees much of what happens at school; the openness of the building and his specific position mean a lot to him:

No, I do not desire a position as caretaker in a large school 'factory'. I have always worked in small-scale schools where I can have contact with the children—this is so important to me. And this is precisely what !mpulse makes possible, actually what !mpulse is. The building is so open. When I walk through the building, I see children working everywhere. I can join them and have a chat about what they are doing and share my own experiences. I also sit in for teachers, for instance for test supervision; students respect my role. I have contact with their parents whenever they are at school. I just belong here because I am a part of it. You know, !mpulse is a whole. One cannot remove a small piece without violating the whole. It is like a fire: to make it, I need

matches, paper, oxygen, name it. But if I reduce the oxygen, the fire extinguishes. This is what would happen to !mpulse as well: !mpulse would stop 'burning' if something were taken away.

If someone removes something—I wonder what he means by this. Is he saying indirectly that the future of !mpulse is at risk? The delicate violin tones and the lyrics of the song 'I will survive' resonate in me—do they perhaps illustrate a tour de force of survival?

Each time I enter the front door, I pass a huge piece of graffiti on the wall next to the entrance:

wats keburt ?!

op

!mpulse

The hip hop text says 'What is happening at !mpulse?!'. This piece of art was the result of Lennard's first school project. Now, six years later, the question has lost its innocence and has turned into an urgent provocative question. The school's expected bright future as an innovative school took another shape. It is reflected in emotions, words, and in the building itself. I notice various rooms have been turned into subject-based classrooms, and there are marks of deterioration and wear and tear all over the place. The wall colours that were once chosen with care have been damaged—a nice red wall looks like a mushroom with white chalk spots these days. Careless behaviour and a limited budget for maintenance is reflected in the dirt stains on the Middle Eastern carpet, the chewing gum on the tables, the forgotten red bookcases, the damaged toilets and piano, the non-functioning power points, and in the loose Venetian blinds. Could I draw a comparison between the decline of the interior and the likelihood of the loss of the promise !mpulse once embodied? !mpulse: A multi-coloured butterfly that intended to burst from a strong cocoon and to flutter light-heartedly around its environment, unaware of its possible transience and petrifying motion. I shiver.

Tendril Learning with Lennard and his Peers

☞ On a summer evening in late June 2012, you and your girlfriend wander through the empty rooms of !mpulse. You take this last opportunity to show her around your former secondary school; after the summer break, your !mpulse will be gone and the building will be dismantled. You go from floor to floor, as I went from floor to floor in my parental home one last time, after we sold it. “I want to show Tess my school”, you explained, and your words touched me. They told me that !mpulse was important to you because and despite of all your experiences. Tonight, you received your Vwo certificate. Your coach José spoke kind words about you referring to your first social contact, as she was one of the child minder at your day care centre. Your relationship was one of trust, equality, mutual respect, and humour, which was so essential for finding your path. You have grown taller, but are not too old to give her a big hug. Your words of gratitude on behalf of your peers—spontaneously, off the top of your head—made me proud; a few years before your dyslexia would have hindered this. This summer evening, you completed your secondary school expedition and—quite symbolically—after the summer break, your !mpulse will return to its initial state of being: a magical dream in thought and words.


I know that you did not really like the idea of me doing my PhD research at !mpulse. Sure, you were used to my participation and to the role of parents in your school; but my presence for a whole year seemed to be a bit too much. I more or less entered into the private space you wanted to keep separate. This was not too difficult because you were at the MC and I was at the *Archipel*—we only met once. Nevertheless, it was a wider issue, which I also encountered with your peers. It was intriguing to hear students talk about !mpulse as a second home—but please, no parents! Your tutors considered us as partners or as critical friends, but this opinion was neither yours nor that of your peers. I have to admit that the relationship with parents used to be stronger in the past, as active parents were more integrated into the community and learning processes. Now, the parents were welcomed in the same way, as they are in mainstream schools.

Right from the start, we had many talks about my and your experiences. As a matter of fact, it was not until I started this study that I understood what your !mpulse included and must have meant to you; I had always remained a *Zaungast*.³³ In terms of secondary education, we had lived in separate worlds. !mpulse was a conscious break with the existing, self-evident teacher-centred educational methods, which were what I was familiar with. Here, you were placed at the centre of attention, you were the defined owner of your learning, and you received shared responsibilities with the adults for the community. The big question of course was ‘how do I do this?’ A decision is easily made, but in your case without contemplating the consequences. There was no exam-

³³ *Zaungast* = onlooker, a person standing near a fence looking what happens behind

ple; there were no protocols, no guiding reader, no subject objectives booklet; none of the tools I see with your peers these days. You had to find your path together with your friends and the starting team that still had so much time, space, and attention. Their hand on your shoulder: this was the perfect metaphor for the ‘arm’s length distance’ relationship between you and your tutors and coaches. The hand followed your path, could push you forward or pull you back and could complement your journey.

For the first time, I heard them called ‘the magic years’ with abundant space for passion. One of the fourth year projects, the ‘Creative City’, was decisive for your choice of academic study: do you remember the wonderful presentations on the upper floor of the *Achmea* tower in the presence of the new mayor of Leeuwarden—and us, your proud parents? I know one thing: these years gave you the awareness of the importance of having dreams and idealism. You understand that they can come true and can be lived. At the same time, you had experienced the tension between idealism and reality, and the implications of this tension were overruled. During an !mpulse team meeting, the director compared—with a sound of regret in her voice—these magical years with the Biblical story of the hair of Samson. These years had Samson’s inspiring invincible strength. Nevertheless, ‘the hair’ was ‘cut’ and the strength was lost. She mentioned it as a side note; nevertheless, it made me think. As I encountered !mpulse in my research, I entered a ‘story’ of community and ownership that was embedded in the magic years, but could no longer be found in reality. In the Biblical story, Samson regained his strength for one moment, and he used it for an act of final destruction. It seems as if the director had forgotten this part of the !mpulse story.

 Being at !mpulse was being among your peers and former tutors. Once, I talked to two 3rd year students: Hugo and Yke. I had asked them to bring a picture to illustrate what !mpulse meant to them. The photo showed around 15 cheerful 3rd year !mpulse girls and boys and two team members, Jaap and Jan, on the central staircase. They are waving and laughing, and some have put their arms around each other—I imagine giggles and yells while Peter’s deep voice tries to arrange this ‘chaos’ so that he can take the picture.

!mpulse, a village or a second home; the place of togetherness; the place where students feel they can be as they are. I found it quite intriguing to recognise that the !mpulse community was not a matter of coincidence or organic growth, but was more or less institutionalised in its open space building and in its organised activities. I had the feeling that it was almost impossible to not meet somebody. Wherever people were, they could be seen; and whatever people were doing, they did it together. Cooperation in projects based on subject matter; preparing lunch for peers; gathering in coach groups and weekly Monday morning community assembly. And in spite of age and level, students connected and learned, respected differences, and took on responsibility.

For instance, I was really amazed to see how your peers prepared and conducted the School's Open Day on their own, and presented !mpulse in such a proud and self-evident professional manner. I remember your younger brother's remark after you presented your final project paper. He had noticed—as you had as well—your lack of factual knowledge; every now and then, this became a matter of brotherly competition. However, your presentation was an eye-opener: “Now I understand what Lennard learns at !mpulse, this is what none of my peers or I could do!”, he said full of admiration. At this point, however, something strange was going on. Your skills had become the !mpulse ‘business card’ and the ‘unique selling point’ in its external communication. The impressions you could leave behind in the minds of outsiders became important—positive ones had to be staged; negative ones were to be avoided. Rationally, I could perfectly understand this marketing mechanism. At the same time however, my motherly instinct told me otherwise; I did not want my child to be a show model.

☞ It occurred to me that Hugo and Yke told me a story about a school that was actually not like a school to them. Unwittingly, they referred to the original Greek word for school: *scholé* a combination of leisure time and learning without pressure or boredom (Hermsen, 2009).³⁴ In the case of !mpulse, it included considerable time for gaming, hanging out, and fooling around, relaxing, and then catching up in learning spurts at the end of a period. This was perhaps not the picture that we—the teachers and parents—would want to see in a leisure-based school; we might interpret ‘school’ slightly differently. At least, I was rather surprised by this aspect of ‘ownership’—even more so by the fact that this was allowed. Perhaps ‘to allow’ is not the proper verb in the !mpulse context since the students were in charge. Nevertheless, I would have expected more self-direction and a better balance of learning and leisure. And, you know, I felt a teacher-based need to intervene. At some point, I could not help asking why a group of students were hanging out at the moment of a coach meeting. They were honest as they explained that their coach was absent, and, as they guessed what I was really asking, they admitted that they should be doing some schoolwork, but had decided not to do so. Indeed, why did I bother? It was my picture of active, motivated learners that allowed no room for ‘normal’ adolescent behaviour. Nevertheless, I noticed similar feelings among the adults; I perceived unease in their criticism, and I missed their guiding hands. As a matter of fact, it recalled our unpleasant discussions about schoolwork and progress. When I wanted to know more in the past, you replied often enthusiastically, sometimes impatiently, “Mom, come on, you just do not understand, !mpulse is different.” What did I fail to see? Well, at least I had to reconsider my self-evident understanding of ‘self-directed learning’. It appeared to me that my students had to be self-directed as well, and I know from experience that even more mature students have many difficulties with this. How could I have forgotten this as we made the choice for !mpulse?

³⁴ The Greek word means ‘leisure time’ (holding back, keeping clear) and developed into ‘leisure time to be used on study’.

Self-direction, ownership: your peers showed me that the sense of belonging to a group was more important to them. It was important to be with trusted people who trusted them, who took them seriously, and among whom they could feel safe. I remember one of the students once arrived at !mpulse soaked through because of heavy rain. She changed clothes and walked around all day in her jogging outfit and socks; by the end of the day, her trousers were dry again. And I remember one of your coaches who often walked in her house shoes, while her wooden shoes stood in the cloakroom. For these two, it was possible to do what they needed: learning or working with wet clothes or cold feet is indeed unpleasant, so they found their self-evident solution; I think I was the only one surprised at this. Thus, you forced me to think about my relationship with my own students. Do I consider this element when designing our curriculum, developing learning outcomes, deciding on rules and regulations? Moreover, how do I work with my students, how do I acknowledge them, how do I meet them?

☞ I felt that the perception of belonging or togetherness did not automatically include shared ownership for the community. I discerned that you and your tutors lived in two worlds with different interests; despite togetherness, you could live life perfectly well in parallel. It seemed to me that you had entered a learning environment, which was made and partly still in the making for you, but not with you. Running the community and the learning process was a matter for the tutors and the management—I wondered whether this had been the case in the past as well because it was so apparent. I missed you in the staff meetings, I missed you in the discussion about the future of !mpulse, I missed you when the decisions were made about your learning. And it puzzled me why this seemed to be all right that it did not seem to be a matter of real concern. This community was built with the aim of preparing independent, autonomous, self-assured students for the ‘new’ future. Therefore, I expected you to be integrated into the running of the organisational processes as well. I was surprised to discover that you actually had no voice in the decision-making processes; your tutors determined a great part of your community life. Your responsibility had been reduced to preparing lunch, or to do the Open Days; and you understood this responsibility as ownership for the community. I was astonished that you accepted this situation. I experienced this paradox of ownership in the so-called Cross-Age event during the introduction week in August. Cross-Age-Learning was said to be an essential community principle, more or less the DNA of the school. Nevertheless, it had become—for whatever reason—a specific event that needed to be organised every now and then. This time, the event was used as a tool within the strategy to revitalise !mpulse. Thus, for the first time in more than one and a half years, all the !mpulse students and staff came together. Unexpectedly, it turned out to be a rather weird event for all of us.

That Friday morning, we sat at the breakfast table and I had to deal with your annoyance about the fact that you had to go to the *Archipel*; that the MC management had given

you a day off for an event you had not asked for; moreover, you had not been asked whether you wanted to join! Actually, you did not want to miss class because of your first exams—your priority was not !mpulse. Your words recalled your critique of only two years ago—same time of year, same event, more or less the same comments. I tried to convince you of the event’s importance for the future of !mpulse. This was not your interest, you explained. First, you were forced to leave the community and now you were told to connect again; and nobody involved you in the decisions—not now, not then!

I was already present when you, your peers, and the coaches arrived. At that moment, I discerned a similar attitude among your peers, as you gathered in the PE hall for further information about the program and its purpose. It was obvious that you had not been informed before; however, despite your mixed feelings, all of you reacted politely and cooperatively. So you formed groups and joined your *Onderbouw* peers who had planned and prepared activities such as watching movies, dancing, or playing games the day before. As soon as all of you came together, the unexpected happened: dynamics and movement froze, there was no sense of unity and community across the age groups. I wrote in my Moleskine:

I join the students in the Expo, it is turned into a dark disco with lights flashing on and off, the floor is empty, chairs are piled, tables are moved aside. A music installation is placed on the stage but seems to be out of order; some boys try to make it run. In the opposite corner students linger on a kind of couch, and seem to be bored already. Shy and hesitantly, the first year students enter; they bring crisps, bottles of lemonade and board games. MC students appear, position themselves near the darkened windows, and the music starts to play. The lights flash and nobody speaks. Nobody really knows what to do. The atmosphere becomes a bit uncomfortable—balloons get crushed.

Within half an hour, students start to wander around, some go out into the schoolyard. Some teachers also walk around and seem to be very surprised by what is happening. The Bovenbouw coach enters the Expo, sits down and observes what is going on for a while and leaves the room. A few minutes later he returns with an Archipel tutor. Both sit down on the stage in front of students and observe. The coach asks for attention: “Fine, if you planned a four-hour disco, something went wrong. You can’t do a four-hour disco in the dark and consider this an opportunity to meet and interact with peers. I want you to take responsibility, start all over again, and we will be back in 30 minutes! Create your Cross-Age-Learning event!” Students are silent. Some hesitantly make some suggestions; and through Twister and a chair dance game, fun returns and students really start to mix until the MC coach returns and tells them to stop. Students take a break, and the tutors sit together; I experience an atmosphere of accusation. The first time I have seen them in such a state. One holds the other accountable and another says the students are consumerist, irresponsible, and that they lack ownership. Result: the activity is cancelled, the students are sent home. Some students observe us through the window. What is going on here?

You were upset and you did not want to talk about it. You felt that you had been pushed around; this was the your only comment. I could imagine you felt like you were being used for something else, for the revitalising strategy. This event indeed showed me that something had to be vitalised, but I wondered whether anyone knew exactly what. Once, !mpulse was a statement against mainstream education. This Cross-Age-Learning event, however, resembled a scene from a world left behind. Despite the specific !mpulse type of activity, the tutor/coach behaviour had not changed. At the breakfast table, I had tried to defend the initiative; yet, now I shared your disappointment and anger. How on earth had it been possible that the adults were stuck in their own struggle with the !mpulse concept?

Moreover, it really worried me that nobody seemed to reflect on the event. The question ‘why did this happen as it happened?’ seemed to not be a matter of concern. My question, whether this event was evaluated, was a cause for surprise. No, there was no further need for reflection, the case was closed on the day of the event itself—I was left speechless. Despite the ideas of this learning community, despite the many reflective moments for students, reflection and feedback were uncommon in the team. I remembered a conversation with a coach on my very first day at !mpulse. She was worried about the absence of learning in the team. She had recognised the phenomenon, and she was not the only one. This awareness, however, could not be shared. Your peers showed me the importance of trust and safety in learning. I felt really sorry for the team that a lack of this feeling had probably stopped their learning.

Again, I had to hold a mirror up to myself. This event was not only about them but also about me. I saw similarities with my own practices, in which I work with a non-traditional educational concept. We have the same struggle with principles, and we also hardly engage in in-depth reflection. Thus, why do we – the teachers – do the things we do, in the way we do? Why do we not practice what we preach? Why is it so difficult to reflect?

A few weeks later, Barry, a 3rd year student, explained to me, “Look, the only difference between !mpulse and a mainstream school is the fact that we are allowed to draw blue mice instead of grey!” He smiled with a sad face and left me puzzled: for him, !mpulse was just a matter of a different colour, and he had accepted it. Thus, if this ‘blue drawing’ was called ownership over one’s own learning, responsibility for the community, and freedom, than this was it. Nevertheless, your peers gave signals of unease. A few tended to go beyond the controlled freedom and really challenged the current interpretations. Their behaviour and confessions reminded me of the fact that these peers entered !mpulse after the ‘magic years’, that they had been told the stories of magic freedom, but that they could not find it anymore. The tutors’ unease that I witnessed during the Cross-Age-Learning event could have been a beautiful and fruitful source for reflection on the current state of confused being. I guess it must have been a matter

of lack of attentiveness that these signals were not appreciated for what they were worth. Or should I consider it a matter of incapability?

📖 What I learned about ownership and responsibility puzzled me. In the beginning of !mpulse, the team was told to withdraw from the learning process. They were not allowed to direct, but could only follow. The project team was afraid of a teacher-like attitude that would endanger the concept of self-directed learning. The students were told they should take the lead. It seemed so logical; nevertheless, my encounter had changed my ideas. People are not machines: teachers cannot switch off responsibility, nor can students switch it on. Was it appropriate to put you at such a young age in the position of an adult? Was it appropriate to place the teacher in a non-adult position? We, the adults, the older generation, were engaged in a societal discussion about the appropriateness of education, about the function of schools in society, and we created something based on what we thought was useful, based on our assumptions about minors and adults and our relationship. !mpulse was so self-evident to us; but despite all of the good experiences, was it what you really needed? We placed you in an adult 'mantra' of independence, responsibility, entrepreneurship, and all of the other imposing vocabulary terms. We placed your future at the centre of attention of a societal debate revolving around our existence and your future contribution to it. And in the conventional adult-minor divide approach we placed a new approach of reversed responsibility on you. No doubt, you enjoyed the expedition; but now I think we could have been more pedagogical in our thinking. I now think that we were too narrow-minded in our ambitions—or at least I was. What else can my final words be than words of proud respect for you and your peers about the path you walked?

Vignette The Community Gathering

Students swarm into the open swinging doors of the *Aanbouw*. They pull at pullovers and bags; girls make eyes at boys and challenge them—mobile phones are their permanent accompaniment. In the room, a large open half-circle of chairs awaits the community members; Marco, the math tutor has already found a chair between two students. As soon as all chairs are taken, students take a place on the floor within the circle. Coaches Jenny and Henrike sit next to each other in the circle. I am about to take a seat in one of the Phillip Starck lounge chairs outside of the circle, but Jenny gesticulates that I should come and sit by her. She asks a student next to her to give the chair to me. Obedient, the student stands up and sits down in the circle. I see an unknown colleague next to Jaap in front of me on the floor. I hold out my hand and introduce myself to him. He replies: “I am Jan, and I teach ..., o no, students can come to me for physics; I am new here, I have worked here since August.”

When Ralph comes up front, he nudges my shoulder: “I will also give the floor to you so you can introduce yourself to the community; this is common practice here when somebody is new and stays for a long period with us.” The self-evidence in his message caught me unprepared. It seemed out of the question to refuse because I would immediately violate a rule: becoming a member of the community means one has to give up some independence whether one likes it or not.

The room buzzes with voices and movements; the students are full of stories about the weekend. Ralph stands and looks at all the seated students and colleagues; he raises his arm and forms a letter L with his thumb and forefinger. He moves his arm from left to right so that everybody can see the sign. A few colleagues and a student here and there adopt the signal. Jenny suggests that I also form this L with my fingers—so I do. I raise my arm and show the sign—it feels uncomfortable and strange. Students draw each others attention to the sign, and slowly the noise dies down. A few still too active students receive a reprimand from a team member. Then silence comes down on about two hundred students and staff, all stacked up in this circle.

“Good morning!” “Morning Ralph!” He thanks us for our attention; and with a big smile on his face, he informs us that !mpulse received the certificate for

'Innovation-school', "because we are an innovative school."³⁵

He earns a polite round of applause although I have the impression that the students do not really understand what this is about. Now it is my turn, and I introduce myself and my research project to the audience. I explain in !mpulse terminology that my research is like a super setting. I also talk about Lennard—his first name is unfamiliar to them. A student asks for his family name and replies: "No, I do not know him." Another student asks me to write a nice story about the school so that it can continue its existence. I promise I will do my best. I give the floor back to Ralph. He informs the community about the nomination of a fifth year student named Joachim for honorary membership of the !mpulse community: "Any student or teacher who made him or herself useful to the community is honoured with this special membership. And this particular student indeed did much for the community!" I am surprised: despite equality, some can be more special than others. Again, students look at each other with puzzled faces; I see them thinking: 'Do you know him?' No, like Lennard, his friend Joachim is no longer part of this *Archipel* community. Nevertheless, the audience claps for him, and noise and movement return.

Only with much effort, the students are calmed down because there is still one more message to give. Piter, a short man in his first year, talks passionately about the initiative to revitalise the newspaper. He is preparing the publication of a new edition and asks his peers for copy-editing help—applause! Around 9 am, Ralph rounds *Iedereenkomst* up and wishes everyone a nice week. Spontaneously, some students reorganise the tables and chairs so that the room can be used for learning; others leave for community activities. While the room empties out, Anneke enters and walks into her office. She wears her coat and carries her bag on her shoulder; obviously she has just arrived at school and did not join the *Iedereenkomst*. Her PE colleague was not present either, nor was a group of students—they had a scheduled class.

³⁵ The !mpulse team had participated in the VO-project *Expeditie durvendelendoen* (2007-2010); participating schools received a subsidy for their innovation activities. !mpulse used this opportunity to develop the *Tweede Fase*. The initiative, however, was not successful (see part II, chapter 1). Announcement on www.piterjelles.nl: Thursday, January 13, the Minister of Education Mrs. Marja van Bijsterveldt presented !mpulse with the certificate 'Innovation school'. The project was started in Leeuwarden and ran for several years. 16 schools in the Netherlands carried out an innovation project within the *Expeditie durvendelendoen*. The minister tweeted: 'Just received the end results of the Innovation project *durvendelendoen*. Inspiring innovation project in secondary education.' The innovation at !mpulse aimed at the implementation of the *Tweede Fase*, in which students could develop in the best possible way. The characteristics of this are: the possibility to strive for excellence, to continue to a higher educational level—from Vmbo-t to Havo and Vwo—to have an advantage, and to be able to make a conscious choice about continuing education.

Tendrils Learning with an Idealist Guardian

☞ According to students and parents, the community seemed to have only one team member who embodied Impulse in words and deeds. I am surprised that only one person was considered to be a kind of guru, although the community was a matter of teamwork. I would have expected all of the members to work according to the specific Impulse principles, and to convey the same message. The colleagues were aware of this, but it seemed to not be a matter of team interest. Nevertheless, to some it was annoying to have a kind of Impulse freak around who constantly reminded them of the basic principles and rituals. In a way, it amused me to see how they navigated the lines of this idealism, and how they played with or moulded the principles.

☞ I know this was not a pleasant position for you, the guardian, either; I saw that your efforts isolated you from several colleagues. Nevertheless, your genuine concerns about the current state of vulnerability of Impulse directed your actions as guardian. Sometimes, it occurred to me that this was perhaps the fate of an educational ‘Last of the Mohicans.’ I felt sincere compassion for you, as I could really understand your attitude. At the same time, I experienced its oppressive and uncompromising character. The side remarks—“she is here again!”—and gestures—a finger held to the lips—were harmless, though annoying; they actually concealed your anxiety about my research. It seemed as if you were trying to get a hold on my presence in the community and on my writing about Impulse.

I wanted to round off my research with conversations with students, so I had asked the team to bring this to their attention. Several students responded, and I enjoyed their talks and openness about their Impulse experience. In one of these conversations, Irma reminded her first year peers to not be too critical about Impulse with me—I was so astonished by this unexpected remark! Irma and Bram had been asked to participate in my conversations. They were supposed to participate like they did in their talks with the Education Inspectorate, and in the way they did during information evenings at elementary schools; the PR students were sent to me, thank you! Irma explained that it was important to be careful with Impulse because of its vulnerability. And to illustrate the reason, she told me about the ‘egg-game’ that she and her new peers did during a meet and greet afternoon for new students. In this hilarious relay race, students run with a non-boiled egg on a spoon; the winner is the team that arrives first with an unbroken egg. It is great at children’s birthday parties, so there’s nothing to worry about with this. However, this fragile egg was explained to be a metaphor for Impulse — all who belong to the community should consider themselves as its custodians. I was struck by her honest belief in her role as custodian. However, it worried me that I had heard this story several times before. Apparently, it was part of the common knowledge in the community—among students, teachers, and parents.

This time, however, the description of vulnerability made a quite pathetic and contradictory impression on me. It occurred to me that with this egg-story a self-referential defensive attitude was transferred to the students; and that it indirectly denied the community's purpose to create learning and to promote the growth of autonomous, self-assured, and independent youngsters. In fact, it reminded me of my great-grandfather's speech at the opening of the new Christian elementary school in 1903. He had also warned the children to watch their behaviour for the sake of the school's reputation. I can imagine it seems self-evident to think that a special place, for special people, needs special treatment; but this shifts the attention from the students to the community. Since the community was so different from what everybody was used to, it needed careful treatment to survive. As a result, with the best of your intentions, this care for survival was prioritised above the freedom of the students to learn and grow, so it seemed to me.

It occurred to me that a similar phenomenon was visible during the in-take talks; Lennard and I were invited to such a talk. The tutor wanted to make us aware of the special conditions of learning in the community, and wanted to check our commitment and support for the learning approach. Moreover, it was his intention to verify whether my son had the potential for this kind of learning. One could defend such an approach with the argument that it is beneficial to the student as the intake could prevent a wrong choice. Nevertheless, if the argument is turned around, it could say: we only want those students who will work according to our conditions. Thus, the community for the future could be considered as only being open to those who were more or less already suitable for this future.

I know you might consider this to be an intellectual game; but my concerns about the presence of the intake in regard to the non-presence of the intake starting from Spring 2010 emerged from my conversations with the students. The ones I talked to felt it was a great omission that the intakes did not take place anymore. Now, they were confronted with students who according to them should not be part of the community. They were very explicit in their judgments, stating that these students, indeed, were a threat to their learning community. I know this was also a matter of discussion in the team; the team arguments, however, did not go beyond the daily experiences of 'non-functioning' students who would negatively influence community life.

During my stay, I reread the *Visiedocument* (2004), and I recognised that this condition was already integrated into the vision. This school would be a school for a specific type of students—although differences were valued, and each student could walk his or her own path. Now, I understood the contradiction: this school of the future aimed at those students who already had the basic stuff for autonomous, self-assured, and independent learning. It 'targeted' a specific population—indeed in marketing language because this was very much a matter of attracting the right people. In this sense, I

started to question its democratic starting point and its self-understanding. I had to draw the conclusion for myself that Impulse was a rather elite community. This egg-story gave me the impression of a new kind of oppression: for the aim of its elite conditions, Impulse had to be considered vulnerable by definition.

With respect to this, I really changed my mind. I used to think that intake was indeed a good instrument; now I believe that it is rather biased—especially if a school pretends to be the solution for obsolete education. If schools change a pedagogical–didactical process, it must be the teachers’ responsibility to support their students in such a way that they develop the new attitudes and skills for success; it cannot simply be a matter of student suitability. Thus, if students give signals that convey their feelings of discomfort with these expectations, or if they are not able to meet them, the community must be robust enough to support them. It cannot be the other way round, that the community is vulnerable and needs suitable students only. I perceived the decision to reintroduce the intake and the intention to have an intake for the *Tweede Fase* as a failed opportunity to reflect on the thoughts behind this intake. It could have been possible to discuss it, several team members did vote against it; nevertheless, their considerations were overruled.

Dear guardian, one last issue. When I asked you about the egg-story, you turned my attention to the sentence that inspired the use of the metaphor. “*It is easier to fly to the moon than to reconstruct a broken egg*”—a sentence from a hip-hop song.³⁶ As I was looking for its sources, I came across a speech by the Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban in 1967.³⁷ He used the sentence to justify Israeli aggression in June Six Day War. I assumed without your knowing that this innocent sentence and the metaphoric use of the egg was rooted in ideological political rhetoric. It surprised me that subject expertise had not created awareness of its original roots. You know, to me this resembled the unexplored use of Impulse concepts like ‘self-direction’, ‘ownership’, ‘summative assessment’, and ‘formative feedback’, presenting nice ‘you tube’ films on education on the school’s website without exploring the thoughts of the film makers.

I can present similar examples from my own professional activities. I have noticed in my research project that it is indeed a time-consuming activity to enlarge one’s consciousness about the concepts and models we apply; but should we teachers not be intellectually more aware about what we offer students and what we are pedagogically responsible for?

³⁶ The song is from the hip hop group Elite Terrorist, Album: Mission Control Presents: Prehistoric Sounds. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcRZ9T-fXKA>

³⁷ Speech given to the General Assembly of the UN. www.mfa.gov.il

☞ Taking care of the community—it created an interesting paradox because maintenance included ‘killing’ or petrifying what was meant to be preserved. Learning was at the core of !mpulse, but the current initiatives to ‘unify the concept’ turned out to be contradictory: learning was movement, change and transformation; and it became constrained in protocols, code of conduct, and rules. At the beginning of my research, I thought this approach to create consistency in the work of team members and in the learning of students would be an appropriate direction. Actually, it reminded me of a similar initiative I had started within my university several years ago. In my responsibility for the quality of the tutor practice within our Problem-based Learning program, on the one hand, I noticed a broad variety of interpretations of PBL principles in practice. On the other hand, there was unfamiliarity with PBL, and uncertainty about the proper way to guide self-directed students. Since there was hardly any time for meetings, I thought it would be wise to make a ‘kit’ with theory and do’s and don’ts. I remember the happiness of my colleagues to have a hold on their practice. Indeed, I could recognise more alignment in the practice; but, at the same time, the ‘kit’ started to function like a recipe that needed to be followed strictly—and in this sense, it boomeranged the initiative.

Being with you, I observed guidelines, protocols and agreements that stabilised the school’s practice, but at the same time created even more ‘disorder’. Through the !mpulse mirror, I saw what I had failed to see so far: namely, that all these measurements aiming at a regulated daily practice were at the cost of sharing sense-making in the team. Practicalities and practical knowledge were prioritised above sense-making and intellectual exploration. Thus, it might be easy to step into the contradictory pitfall of cuddling a concept or a community to death—with all of our passion, ambition, and love—due to a misunderstanding of what we are actually doing. Is not this the paradox of our lives? In much of what we are doing, we aim at preservation in order to avoid instability and uncertainty. In doing so, we endanger ‘our life’, which is full of movement. Not so long ago, !mpulse opposed what was said to be the motionless bureaucratic status quo education; and now this willpower had gone, and was starting to show bureaucratic signs as well. It surprised me to discover that the critical and challenging attitude that drove departure had so easily accepted this managerial ‘take-over’ after the crisis.

☞ The playful circle moments at the beginning of our meetings were key moments for my understanding of the process. It was a wonderful idea to start meetings with a moment of shared impressions and experiences. I perceived these ‘talking circles’ where colleagues shared personal feelings as being something very special among teachers. I had never experienced such a practice except for training settings where a trainer wanted to energise the participants. Nevertheless, I gradually noticed something was missing. Sharing also means receiving something. So in this case, it means to

me receiving an impression, a part of someone's feelings. I thought this was a special gift and therefore I would have expected more room for exploration and understanding, more contact and connection. I thought community was about having things in common. To me sharing means not just giving something of me to somebody else in the community; but also to have an encounter and together make sense of what is given—this is not what a check-in is about, so I learned.

This confused me because of the fact that during the sharing signals of concern in regard to the community were consciously ignored. I had the impression that they could have been of great value in strengthening the community, but it seemed to me as if they had no other function than the mere expression of what was on one's chest. I remember such a moment when a teacher expressed her feelings. I sat next to her, and it felt too uncomfortable to continue; thus, I asked whether her remarks needed to be addressed. I received your reprimand; I had misunderstood the purpose of this circle talk. Her concerns were not to be addressed here, but when were they addressed? Thus, despite all of the playfulness, I found myself in a routine ritual that took place for the sake of the ritual. After a while, the nice circle event became constrictive, and I felt the need to break the confining circle with my elbows. My bodily experience made me aware of the rigid striving for unification—it took the oxygen and movement out of Impulse. Perhaps, this was what Peter was talking about.

I had loved Impulse because of its dissensus, of its 'disorder', and of the room for learning; now, in the process of unification, I encountered attempts to keep order and to 'control' tutors and students. Therefore, I was perplexed that the return to a conventional practice did not hinder from adorning Impulse with borrowed plumes from the past. Sometimes, I had the impression that your idealism did not allow you to face reality. Every now and then, I wanted to shake you awake! I wanted to tell you that you were beating a dead horse, so reinvent yourself! I suppose you would not have accepted my impression of an existing community as no longer being alive—or was I wrong? It was extra painful because you had mirrored me in my own contradictory actions regarding our educational concept.

I recalled my experiences at the Montessori College several years ago. During their open day, the teachers and management did their utmost to present themselves as a reform pedagogy school. Nevertheless, I had difficulties in connecting the conveyed message with my perceptions; the incongruence between the words of Maria Montessori and the school practices was obvious to me. These days, I came to understand that Impulse had taken a similar direction. I learned that the absence of knowledge and shared sense-making is a serious risk for any innovative movement.

Vignette Circled Bodies - Talking Circles

Normally, a bell would ring at the end of the day; this reminiscence of the past however, does not disturb the learning process at !mpulse. Nevertheless, the clock dictates. On every Wednesday at noon, the corridors and Grand Café are thronged with students throwing their backpacks on the floor, grabbing their coats, and getting stuff from the lockers. They pull each other's coats, and a cap flies through the air and is caught by an older student. The first year owner looks worried about what will happen next: "Hey, keep your hands off my cap," he says a bit helplessly, but the older boy ignores him. Decisively, a girl gets hold of the cap and returns it to the boy with a cheerful smile—he returns her smile gratefully. A girl takes a seat in the Grand Café and opens her lunchbox. She finds a whole grain sandwich and starts eating. Calmly, she observes her peers and she smiles when she sees me looking at her: "I have to wait for my bus." Anneke greets her colleagues with a quick wave, walks through the front door and takes her bike; she will spend the afternoon with her daughter. Her colleagues sit at the kitchen table and enjoy the empty quiet building: "This is the most quiet lunch moment in the week, and I love it. Do not get me wrong, but we are always amidst noise, movement, and turbulence!" Machteld explains.

After lunchtime, we move with our coffee to the *Aanbouw* for the team meeting; the caretakers clean the kitchen and do odd jobs in the building. We find two tables with chairs and a circle with chairs—Ralph already prepared this arrangement. "No, wait! We start in the circle," and he directs some team members from the tables to the chairs - "O, yes..." With enthusiasm, Ralph takes the lead: "Let's organise ourselves by shoe size. I have size 40. Anyone smaller sits on my right side, a higher size on my left, please." "What is your shoe size?" colleagues ask each other. One of them just takes a seat without bothering about his size. Last week, we were seated based on the distance between our homes and !mpulse. Similar games are played in the coach groups; !mpulse is about parallel processes, so they say. When I look into the faces of the team members, I wonder whether this circle is something they all appreciate—I see both pleasure and reluctance.

We continue with the next standard question, which is 'How do you feel today' [*hoe zit je erbij?*']—a moment for personal contact and sharing. We sit in the openness of the circle, no table or laptop screen in front of us behind which to hide. Legs are crossed, arms are folded, people hold back. "Let's do a check-in with food today!" "I choose *Gado Gado* because I have mixed feelings about the future of !mpulse, and because I love this food"; Ernesto's face shows distress. Last week, when we used songs as metaphors, Aljosja referred to Doris Day's

“Que Sera Sera” because of her feelings of uncertainty about the future. Ralph continues, “Sushi, when I eat sushi, I just have to trust the cook that the fish is alright; and sometimes the sauce can be rather hot! This is what Impulse is about.” Although I do not understand what he means, I cannot ask for an explanation—that is not part of the game.

“For me, shrimp. I am happy I lost some weight, which is good for my health!” a colleague fills the silence, and we all look happy for her. It is my turn but I pass—I just cannot connect feelings to food. The song was easier. I shared Lennard Cohen’s song “Anthem” because of its beautiful chorus: *Ring the bell that still can ring, forget your perfect offering; there is a crack in everything that is how the light gets in.*³⁸ It reflected my feeling of possibilities despite rigidity. The presented feelings and thoughts are left alone in the centre of the circle when we all move to the table to start the weekly team meeting.

³⁸ Source: www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/leonardcohen/anthem.html

Tendrils Learning with the !mpulse Team

☞ I see your faces and hear your voices when writing ‘team’ and ‘you’. ‘Team !mpulse’ is your self-chosen name for your collective of staff members, although it ignores the uniqueness of each of you and of your specific needs. I know some of you have a problem when addressed as a team. I know my remark ‘some of you’ is already imprudent. Thus, I am happy the English grammar neglects this issue—‘you’ has both a singular and plural meaning. This however reminds me of an issue I thought about while being with you. Your community is based on a relationship between I and WE; thus, the individual and the collective were emphasised. I wondered what had happened to ‘other’ and ‘otherness’—in other words—to the relationship between I and YOU. In this sense, although I was part of your community for a moment in time, I met YOU as the other, as otherness—not YOU as a WE.

I have experienced your kindness and variety: female and male; younger and older; energetic and tired; little and a lot of teaching experience; very and not so connected with and committed to !mpulse. I saw many people come and go: staff members who decided to return to mainstream education, who returned after a long illness, or who fell ill for a longer period of time; replacement subject teachers and caretakers; teaching interns; teacher training students to coach projects. You were the heart beat of !mpulse, you took responsibility for the educational process and the running of the community. I joined you in a year full of uncertainty, and you had to divide your attention between the day-to-day process and the future of the community. I remember my last team meeting with you in February 2012. Your director explained that she would look forward to reading my book although its story might not be so life-like, as this year would hardly illustrate what !mpulse is about. One of the teacher, however, corrected her by stating that “This year is like all other !mpulse years: turbulence is the story of our life,” and she sighed a bit tired.

☞ Your personal reasons and considerations to come to !mpulse had created a kind of bond between you—or perhaps it was only a common denominator. The community seemed a better alternative to what mainstream schools had to offer; to put it differently and not to criticise, !mpulse was a kind of escape. Despite all of the work pressure, teaching at !mpulse felt like being freed from a kind of oppression: from the dictates of fragmented schedules, of text books, methods, and tests; from dictating bureaucracy, and limited sense-making. Moreover, here you could do things differently; you could experiment within your subject matter without being confronted to critical colleagues, and you had more of a say in regard to the community processes. On the one hand, I understood very well the importance of fulfilling work; on the other however, I realised that if innovative teachers leave mainstream schools to develop innovative teaching approaches elsewhere, the majority of the students have no opportunity to benefit from it. As a matter of fact, I started to recognise that the ‘Laboratory’ school idea be-

hind Impulse was already constrained in its separation from mainstream education. Actually, I guess this escape and refuge character was a silent driver in your collective striving to save Impulse and to remain separated.

At Impulse, you were connected to the idealist revolutionary origins of your colleagues who for similar reasons had left mainstream schools. Perhaps it was even more than a link to the past; actually, you lived in the past. The building, the day-to-day process, the concept were developed eight years ago, were passed on and changed, and now you were the next 'generation' in charge. Due to the presence of a few initial team members and the life in the building, a physical connection was still possible—the story could still be told. Moreover, the concept focus on the learner and the learning environment had forced you to connect across subjects, classrooms and positions / roles—this is how you wanted me to understand your slogan, “contact before contract”. It reflected the need for mutual forms of connection before learning and working can take place. Although my school emphasises student learning, I have experienced that this does not automatically create a sense of connection among teachers. Therefore, the way you had shaped your contact felt like a warm blanket. I really enjoyed the time you took for coffee and lunch breaks, for connection in team meetings; and in all those moments you worked together to create learning on the work floor. I was not used to this kind of teacher community any more, and I rediscovered its importance. Especially at the beginning of my stay, the start of team meetings were special moments for me. They were intended to create a feeling of togetherness and recognition; it was a moment of playfulness in the day-to-day routine.

Since the founders had built a learning community based on the ideas of a learning organisation, you were involved in running the community as well as your own subject areas; this made life pleasant, but not easy. You were expected to develop a different attitude and a different way of working compared to the conventional school. At this point, I perceived the paradox of togetherness. On the one hand, we engaged in contact, connection and interaction; but at the same time, I experienced an isolated island culture and a lack of shared sense-making. At some point, I found your address—*Archipelweg*—to be a perfect metaphor to illustrate the actual Impulse culture, namely an archipelago. During one of the nice chats with the caretaker Peter about the future of Impulse, he had used the metaphor of a burning fire to explain the vulnerability of Impulse. He said, “If one reduces the oxygen, the burning stops.” His rootedness in the beginning, and his role, had made him quite sensitive to what was going on—I do not think you made use of his concerns, or did you?


Anyway, I like to transfer his metaphor to your heartbeat function in the community. A heart needs oxygen, nutrients, and movement to stay healthy. So I asked myself what would your heart need to keep Impulse fit? I noticed you just kept on pragmatically running and organising. You produced new ideas, repeatedly revised your way of

working, and became entangled in a mantra of change. However, my anxiety grew as I noticed a lack of connection, of healthy reflection, of thought and reconsideration. I missed a constructive !mpulse way of dealing with vital conflicts, disagreements, and concerns. I noticed a lot of talking and convincing and self-evidence about the day-to-day process that left only a little space for listening, exploration, argumentation, and doubt. Where were the fruitful debates on the concept; on the purpose of !mpulse; on its history as part of the future; on your own reasons to be here; on your doubts and your pleasures; and on the purpose of education in our society? There were so many opportunities; you could have benefited from them, but they remained unnoticed. You know, I allowed myself a few times to express what I saw, to mirror my perceptions. I realised you understood what I said and that my words could not really be of much help. I learned that this tension was felt—everyone felt in his or her own way—and this disquieted me even more; it signalled a sense of powerlessness in regard to your own existence as a community. Therefore, I perceived in !mpulse a petrifying dynamic, and I felt your body draining off its energy. Was this perhaps a reason why we drank so much coffee during the day?

☞ I rented a room in a hotel on the isle of Vlieland. It was only a few weeks till Christmas, not yet high season. Both the hotel and the island were empty and silent. Although I was on my own, I was not alone: I had taken your voices with me—around 12 hours of taped talks. You had left the community for a two-day meeting to discuss your future; and since I could not join because of a stay abroad, you kindly took care of my voice recorder and taped your talk—by the way, I was very pleased by your invitation; it gave me a feeling of acceptance. For days, I listened to a historical document about the future development of the community. I heard your voices and imagined how you were seated around a large table, figuring out who sat next to whom, who listened and who did the talking. I heard the sound of a coffee machine, the sound of cups rattling as they were placed on the table, the sound of a door opening and shutting; the sound of laptops; the sound of whispers, gossip and sighs; the voice addressing me when switching on or off the voice recorder just before and after breaks: “Hi Marte Rinck, we will be back in a minute!” Most of the time, I heard one, dominating, voice: the director steered your voices like a choir director. As a matter of fact, she had decided the text that should be sung in unison; I felt uncomfortable because I missed your autonomous voices in your own future.

I wondered whether knowing and understanding !mpulse could have resulted in authoritative voices. Perhaps, in this case, the existence of !mpulse would not have only been a matter of management strategy, but also a matter of pedagogy. The dominant voice used a past utopian rhetoric to promote maintenance. “A ‘new route to old goals’,” so the voice said, “we could have invented it ourselves—it perfectly fits our concept.” This implementation of summative assessment and formative feedback as a form of self-directed learning was ‘found’ in a workshop and used to “cook a new soup

with new and old ingredients.” No voices had ever asked to present the pedagogical considerations for what the dominant voice called a ‘driver’s licence model’. I heard all of the voices say ‘yes’ to the plan—though in several voices their ‘yes’ reflected a big ‘no’.

 While listening to the voice that spoke and the voices not heard, I felt both sad and irritated. I had to move and started to walk around my room. I imagine that my body resonated your emotions and frustrations and acted in a way you could not—confined as you were around the table, in the text, and on the tape. I took a long stroll on the beach and enjoyed the stormy sea. The experience of freedom on the beach set itself apart from the lack of freedom in your voices in regard to student grouping, schedules, activities, examination requirements, relationships between tutors and students, between you and external examiners. As soon as the round table was split up into smaller work groups, the tapes wandered with you—they recorded your protesting voices. I heard voices trying to break the given boundaries and to explore the topics a bit more broadly within the perspective of your daily community processes and your perceptions of !mpulse; I heard anger in the reminiscences of the past and critique about the present.

These tape recordings were a condensed illustration of what I had perceived during the year. Already in January, we were confronted with the management decision to postpone the intended August relocation. It created even more uncertainty. Your emotions were fuelled by the impersonal and unemphatic message that was sent via the hierarchy: via mail and telephone from the director to your team leader who then forwarded the mail to you and contacted the chairman of the board. All of you present at that moment shared a deeply felt disappointment. This distanced management approach ignored your dignity and your commitment to !mpulse. It was business as usual to them but it contradicted all of the values !mpulse stands for. I would have expected this managerial treatment as a possible point of departure for action. To my surprise, it had a Calimero effect and created room for passivity.

To be honest, this experience was not new to me. It opened my eyes to the circumstances in 2009, and I understood that I had witnessed a similar situation from a different perspective in those days. A few weeks later, a new director was appointed; she had gained your respect and trust, as she had been your saviour in 2010. She would for sure find a solution and save !mpulse again; and so she did in her way, according to her management strategy conditions conveying an impression of team involvement. To be honest, I found it difficult to understand and accept what I experienced with you. Each of you had so much to offer in terms of ideas, experiences, knowledge about the magical years of !mpulse, love for students, community, and subject areas; you all had your reasons to work here—and somehow it was of little importance in this process, and things just happened.

I walked for many hours and enjoyed the island's silence, the cold and the wind. Gradually and hesitantly, I faced my disappointment. I had to accept that you were confined to your own efforts to maintain a pleasant learning environment; and I had to accept that you had lost its idealist and utopian points of departure. It was unbelievable to me that you had—perhaps reluctantly—accepted your return to the mainstream education culture; moreover, voluntarily or forced, that you had subordinated yourself to hierarchy. I shivered in this unexpected experience.

This shivering, however, was an utterance of recognition: I saw myself through your eyes. Sometimes, someone needs mirrors to understand one's own whereabouts. Being with you confronted me to similar mechanisms and consequences in my own professional practice. I cannot deny that I worked in self-evidence and consensus; within collective unconsciousness and unknown motives; with speechlessness and subordination influencing my pedagogical responsibility. I believe it is easier and more comfortable to ignore difficult issues and confrontations, and to remain on a level of pragmatic orientation. Thus, I was placed in an unpleasant double bind: the experience no longer accepted my ignorance—I had to 'leave' a comfort zone; but the consequences of my consciousness gave me a hard time as well—and I did not really know what to do. Consequently, I had to reconsider my initial harsh feelings about you and consider your work and activities with mildness.

Vignette Open Day in the Community

January, 2011. Several students, mainly girls, have found their way to the *Repro*. Two students arrange tables and chairs in a circle while chatting about their weekend plans. I ask them what is going to happen here, and they tell me they are members of the Reception Committee (RC). This is a group of students that is responsible for publicity and organises, for instance, the annual Open Day; in a few minutes, a preparatory meeting will start—they continue their chat. Other students trickle in; a girl bangs her bag on the table and starts a loud conversation with a friend; hesitantly, a boy takes a seat, looks around and waits in silence.

The math teacher Marco enters. He gives me a smile, takes a seat in the circle, opens his laptop, and gazes at the screen. Every now and then, he looks from his laptop to the students and back to the screen. At a certain point, he becomes restless and shows anxiety: “Please sit down all of you,” he says with a loud voice to make himself understood. Hastily, he starts the meeting: “We have only three more weeks to go and because of the importance of presenting *Impulse* properly, we need to feel our responsibility, and we need to take the preparation seriously. I have last year’s scenario on my laptop, so let’s see what it says, and let’s start organising!” Again, he looks at the laptop screen; students look at him in silence, awaiting what comes next. I feel uncomfortable about his ‘teacher manner’, which seems to me out of place here. Suddenly, Floor runs into the *Repro* and heads for the circle. Her long blond hair tied in a pony-tail dances on her back: “I am so sorry, but ...”—“Indeed, yes you are late, so please sit down quickly,” Marco looks for a moment away from his screen to her. She raises her eyebrows, looks into the circle, and takes the only free chair, next to him. He starts to read from his screen; I guess he is summarising the scenario.

Floor looks around and cannot suppress her impatience. Rather annoyed, she interrupts: “Marco, we know quite well what to do, we have done this before, you know! So please let me explain what I think we should do!” Decisively, she tries to take the lead. Reluctantly, he keeps silent for a moment before he tries to retake the lead: “The scenario says ...” “I know what it says!” Floor continues not too shyly, finally establishing her leadership. She divides tasks between the students while asking who would like to do what. Moreover, she suggests that new first year students should be coupled with more experienced ones. Then she decides what should be done after the session and rounds off the meeting. Every now and then, she glances at the teacher—as if she looks for approval. He, however, has mentally withdrawn himself from the group of students, and unceasingly looks at the screen of his laptop. I can understand how he must feel—

a teacher lost amid students. Only when Floor rounds off, does he want to know whether everyone has understood what to do. His question evaporates in the noise of leaving students. He asks some students to reorganise the room and he takes his laptop. While we walk downstairs, he explains that he felt the need to support the students with his expertise because the Open Day has to be successful.

Downstairs, I run into Floor when she enters a crowded and noisy room. Boys sit together around laptops and play games. This time, it is Floor who needs to work very hard to attract attention. A supervising third year student raises his voice in a harsh manner. I am puzzled because I thought, the team wanted students to use a special finger sign to ask for attention. Anyway, Floor gets an opportunity to get her message across. Self-assured and kind, she explains that the RC needs peers who can assist during the Open Day. Some peers pay attention to her words while others continue playing. After she finishes her message, a boy asks: “Do we earn any study credits for participating?” Floor looks astonished and out of her depth. Had she ever heard such a question before? The supervising student replies that it could possibly count as credit for the so-called ‘social hours’—some students sign in, and Floor promises she will inform them at a later stage.

February 2011. I visit the Open Day in the evening. A red carpet leads me to the entrance; it gives me the feeling of being an honoured guest. As soon as I open the front door, I step into a warm and crowded Grand Café. Three students behind a table say hello to me and tally my visit—of course, success is based on numbers. A special host student welcomes me as if I were a parent without a child. She informs me about the possibility to join the school tour that starts in 5 minutes—meeting point below the stairs. Next to the stairs, team leader Wabe stands together with caretaker Charlotte and the school’s administrator Sandra at the information desk. They distribute glossy brochures and answer questions. Enthusiastically, Charlotte informs a mother and her daughter about the school. En passant, she gently pulls the ponytail of a passing girl to reprimand her for inappropriate loud behaviour; the mother watches the scene. It is nice to see caretaker Peter again. He had surgery and is at home—he misses his ‘family’ so he says. Suddenly, a tall girl runs from the other side of the Grand Café; “Peter!” she yells and she embraces him while tears run down her face. “I miss you, I miss !mpulse, I hate the MC!” He tries to comfort her—like a father with a sad child.

The students on duty show the children and parents around while talking about their experiences at !mpulse. On my tour through the building, I listen to a boy

presenting the subject *mens en maatschappij*³⁹ and his initial experiences and perceptions—he started five months ago. His openness and honesty about what he does or rather does not do and his skilled way of presenting brings him warm applause. The audience seems impressed by his presentation skills, his freedom of speech at his age, his self-confidence: all of which parents seem to find important for their child to learn. The subject teacher Ralph is present but he only gives answers to parental questions if necessary. He keeps tight-lipped when he hears the vague story his student tells about his subject and his learning attitude—but he does not intervene. In the science lab, students in white lab coats do all kinds of experiments with the young visitors—they have great fun. The team member talks to parents while talking about their subjects. The math teacher enthusiastically presents his computer program to parents, stating it really suits the self-directing approach. Despite his enthusiasm and his attempts to convince the parents, I hear and see verbal and non-verbal signs of doubt among the parents—this is not the moment to discuss them so it seems.

I am impressed by the warm-hearted, proud learners who so self-evidently and passionately connect with the visitors. Without hesitation, they tell frankly, honestly, and convincingly that their school is the place to be! Among the parents are several colleagues. I notice they are surprised by what the children present. Not only are the young children fascinated by what happens to them, even the doubts of sceptical parents disappear like snow in summer. I hear one of them say: “I know from my professional experience that diplomas are important, but I need employees who have a story, who know how to perform socially.” At the same time however, there is worry about the student’s implicit message that she hears in the stories: this is not a school, this is not about knowledge and knowing; this is like a second home, this is our family, here I can be who I am; and you are very welcome to become our new family member. I can imagine that this family feeling is emphasised by the fact that so many students came just to hang out with their peers and have fun. They do not go to school, but go to a place where they meet friends.

Strolling around, I am surprised by the school’s tidiness and cleanliness. All left behind jackets or PE-garments are out of sight; tables and chairs are nicely arranged; and spring flowers adorn the tables. Even the lovely red bookcases in the *Aanbouw* are well organised. Normally, the books and magazines leave an abandoned, orphaned impression on me; their usual messy state mirrors a complete lack of interest for them. Marga commented on my mixed feelings only a few weeks ago: “No, we don’t have a library community to take care of the

³⁹ A regular school subject that combines history, geography, and economy.

books anymore, no interest, you see.” Of course, I replied, the Apple-based !mpulse students are online non-stop; all they need is available under their fingers. And so why this library impression on the Open Day, I wonder? Of course, I remind myself that Open Days are a tool to attract new students—it is not necessarily an actual representation of the day-to-day life in the community.

When the Open Day comes to an end, staff members gather in the kitchen. They look tired, as it was quite a long day. In the morning, they had the regular activities, and from 2 till 9 pm they were continuously on stage. Now, they try to relax on chairs unsuitable for this need. Nevertheless, the air is filled with excitement about the number of visitors. The team leader shares his relief: “Well, unfortunately the counters can’t give precise numbers because of counting mistakes, but there must have been between 400 and 600 visitors!” He was afraid of bad publicity in the media about the 2009 crisis and the unpleasant experiences of students at the Montessori College. And, less interest would not have been a good starting position for discussions on the future of !mpulse.

His pleasure is countered by critical remarks: “I think some of our students did not really convey the more positive sides of our community! To be honest, I felt quite uncomfortable about the rather open and honest stories our kids told. There was this third year pupil who explained to parents that he was not at all on track because of his inactivity and lack of coaching in regard to his laziness. I think this will remain in the heads of the parents. Moreover, he also mentioned he doesn’t fancy my subject!” Ina, however, brings a different picture: “My first year pupils performed so well and perfectly explained the way we deal with foreign languages. I was really proud of them.” Marco is ever so proud about the work of his Reception Committee. Strange enough, nobody seems to miss these students and I wonder where they are. Obviously this ‘after party’ with drinks is meant for staff only.

One week later, the weekly newsletter conveys the gratitude of the team leader:

Thanks to you, but especially to the students, we could show what we are about: a learning community that stimulates youngsters and gives them an opportunity to be the owner of for instance Open Days; a school that enables students to show themselves as they are. This authenticity is especially noticed by parents and children and was addressed in talks with each of us as the positive power of !mpulse. We can be proud about how pupils represented the school during the Open Day.

Tendrils Learning with an Impulse Founder

☞ No doubt, our world would be less colourful and vital without people like you: women and men who do not just dream their dreams but shape and live them. Probably, we—both followers and opponents—did not really acknowledge your deeds and sacrifices properly. During the graduation ceremony in 2011, we gave you overwhelming applause. This moment, the present parents resembled an audience enthusiastically receiving a theatre play by thanking the actors. In previous years, you developed an innovative school and educated children with passion—our gratitude was expressed in the applause. I am appreciative of the experiences and idealism you gave my son. He learned about the value and importance of having dreams and of realising them. Moreover, he learned that institutions are not fixed and unchangeable, and that human beings can make a difference.

During my research, I recognised that I had not really understood that building this community had been such a hazardous and dangerous expedition. Recently, I ran into one of the former language teachers. He recalled his wonderful experience, which he regretted as being “insane”; he had left because it was impossible to stay healthy. I had witnessed team members falling ill; and like Lennard, I was shocked by your illness. Moreover, your tears in our conversation affected me again—sometimes I even felt guilt. Thus, why was I unable to understand your inner struggle in those days, although we—parents—were supposed to be ‘critical friends’ and partners in this expedition? Actually, I realised, Impulse had a front and back stage; and now that I had noticed it, I understood, I had been kept at a distance. Therefore, I had not recognised that your passion and dedication were needed to accomplish the dream, but did not suffice in building a school from scratch. It had concealed a level of innocence and limited teacher craftsmanship.


And, I think, we—the ‘critical friends’—could have been more critical; although, at the same time, I think such a critical approach was not what Impulse was wanting—at least, this is the impression I had gained in 2011. Throughout the years, messages were conveyed and stories were told; but at the same time, other stories and experiences were untold. It was with pain in my heart that I learned this year that ‘critical friend’ was just an empty message; in the minds of many team members, parents were not part of the community at all. Therefore, during information evenings where parents were addressed as such, I sat with curled toes. Actually, this was the moment I understood that ‘critical friends’ had never been of real importance in the existence of Impulse as a whole. Relationships between schools and parents have always been difficult; and in this sense, Impulse was hardly different. I guess our innocence was also part of the tension in the team. The conveyed messages created expectations—those days and now. The problem arose as the message was not consistent with the actual situation at Impulse; the emptiness of the concept of ‘critical friend’ was just one example.

Moreover, I was surprised by the fact that it had been possible in the community defined by 'WE' and 'contact' that team members were both unable to take care of each other and to prevent illness. At this point, I really need to question the role of the consultants who guided the process in the early days. Why had they not been more alert about the dangers? I mean they worked with you, but had a more sideline position and could have overseen what was going on. One of them was remembered: she had mirrored her surprise about the rather harmonious group spirit—this 'WE'—and the fact that there had not been any severe team conflicts. The company she worked for, KPC group, pretended to be the innovation expert; and their support had been asked and paid for—because you were not skilled enough to deal with the challenges on your own. They led you out of the mainstream school and you followed because you experienced its dehumanising context; you felt confined and restricted in your professionalism and existence. !mpulse had given you freedom to create your own school and to give content to your ideas. The consultants inspired and pushed you in a specific direction. They did business with you, but the team's well-being was apparently not part of the deal. The various forms of illness and the fact that people left to avoid illness signalled to me that !mpulse faced new forms of dehumanisation.

☞ What if the focus on 'WE' had not been so important? What if the team had allowed a 'Socratic gadfly' to be part of the community? In general, it is a matter of self-evidence to build a team with likeminded spirits when the realisation of an innovation is aimed at or when a status quo is to be continued—the critical voices might constrain. Moreover, in case of a deeply felt belief, this tendency to exclude critical thoughts might even be more obvious. Opposition is the fate of the forerunner, so you once explained. Either you were pitied as a wishful thinker, a utopian, a dreamer—which was acceptable; or you were fiercely opposed and even ignored. Colleagues disqualified your genuine belief in a student's ability to learn independently as coming from a lack of professionalism. Of course, it is interesting to witness that colleagues very much criticise top-down implemented educational reforms, while at the same time criticising innovative ideas developed by colleagues. I had experienced similar issues in my own work, and I had noticed in myself that it caused a tendency to withdraw from the critique instead of coping with and learning from it. This may be our passion; but at the same time, I think it is also a matter of pragmatism—since a goal has to be achieved, and dealing with criticism is considered time-consuming.

As I had the time to think over !mpulse and the criticism you encountered, it came to my mind that the project and the discussions about obsolete educational practices must have been quite confrontational to 'outsiders'. Is it not a reaction of self-protection to oppose someone who—right or wrong—declares a current state of affairs as being inappropriate and out-dated? Thus, in hindsight, I do have some doubts about your judgment that teachers do not like to move and do not like to learn. I started to become more considerate with them without, however, ignoring or disqualifying your experi-

ences. Actually, I now have the idea that both you—the innovators— and your disagreeing colleagues acted out of specific motives that remained concealed. Thus, I would say that the reactions were more or less the same: both parties withdrew from the dialogue. I think it was just too difficult to look beyond the scene. I know you tried to stay in touch. You informed everyone about what you were doing, and Paul came all the way from Alameda to illustrate your initiative with his stories. But, were these actions not mainly embedded in the wish to convince and create one-sided understanding? Of course, I was not part of the developmental process; nevertheless, I do wonder what you would have risked if a real dialogue with critical or opposing voices had taken place. Was not withdrawal an essential factor that actually hindered the Impulse expedition from being really fruitful in terms of making a substantial contribution to innovation in education? Moreover, to what extent do difficulties with innovation discourage new initiatives?

 Dear founder, the first time I heard you talking about the current state of education, you touched upon a sensitive subject for me. I shared your criticism of the one-sided focus on cognition, on the reproduction of meaningless facts in tests; it had more or less reduced children to brains. Moreover, I was really impressed that a teacher showed philosophical understanding. I mean it was not that often that I heard a teacher self-critique and express pedagogical beliefs in front of parents. Furthermore, I was touched by your belief and trust in children; this part in particular I had not experienced in school so far. Thus, I started to connect with your considerations and admired your initiative. I took your desires for adulthood, freedom and self-direction, as well as for democracy and community as being pedagogically rooted. In a way, I thought your own voice reflected the critical voices of those pedagogues who saw human growth constrained by political thought, economic benefits, and bureaucratic educational systems—I still believe this was the case.

It occurred to me that we had never reflected on our pedagogical ideas nor did we ever discuss our inspiration and orientation in terms of books or people. You once mentioned Luc Stevens and his focus on motivation and learning. As I took a closer look, his slogan ‘love of learning’ (*zin in leren*) was already shown on the Impulse website in 2004. This scholar was quite influential with his concept of adaptive learning as a didactical model; Lennard’s elementary school also started a project based on his thoughts. The project presentation sounded quite promising, but the implementation was not that successful—somehow the teachers could not connect. Nevertheless, scholars like him or consultants using their ideas seem to be popular among school managers and teachers. However, I wonder in what way these thoughts and concepts are explored and digested? It is my impression and experience that they are warmly welcomed and integrated into their initiatives—or just integrated as the best practice. And this brings me to the question, “Why do we educators rely on their work?” We often orient ourselves towards interesting and fashionable ideas or practices, and then?

This became an important matter to me because you also looked for the best methods such as Alameda CLC. Therefore, I found it quite fascinating to hear Ernesto say in the triptych that he no longer felt constrained by any one else's thoughts. On the one hand, I was touched by his happiness; on the other hand, I felt uncomfortable because he was—unwittingly—integrated into a dictating thought system and had not explored its principles and backgrounds.

I noticed that I had not really given an intellectual philosophical voice to my pedagogical awareness until my !mpulse research. My understanding was a matter of implicit common sense in which psychology and didactics were decisive. The personal growth of the students was one of the program's aims; and since this was a matter of pedagogy, I assumed that the pedagogical perspective was discussed. Nevertheless, I started to recognise that !mpulse was a matter of psychological learning theories and management thought about organisational learning. In this context, pedagogy was not the point of departure, although the community gave this impression. Thus, the issue of personal growth and transformation was integrated by or approached from the psychological perspective; !mpulse was a project that combined didactics and community life. And I had not recognised that my perspective on learning was informed by *Bildung*; and that pedagogy was distinct from the psychological and didactical perspective.


In addition, I started to learn about learning psychologists and management theorists; they do not engage seriously with the matter of knowing and knowledge itself. Probably as a result of a didactics orientation, you accepted the generally prescribed subject objectives due to the confines of the governmental conditions. I had the impression that a serious discussion on knowing and thinking was of little importance at the start of !mpulse. Moreover, I noticed this was not a matter of interest in the 2011 learning community either. I realised that the strictly held opinion that teaching needed to be replaced by learning had reduced the role of teachers from knowing professionals to coaches. This question involved my own professional understanding. I had interpreted your critical text about self, community and society from a progressive pedagogical perspective; but I had not placed the priority on learning as didactics over knowing and transformation.

This realisation disquieted me. For several years, I had trained university teaching staff without addressing epistemological issues. For the first time, I recognised my restricted view on Problem-based Learning. I decided I could no longer train tutors until I had sorted out this issue for myself. My major question was 'How could I lead students if I am not allowed to be a part of the learning process as a knowing teacher?' This was the question I could have asked myself when I started to work with PBL.

At a certain moment, I discussed my anxiety with my supervisors. At that moment, the self-confrontation had fuelled my anger and moral judgment about the responsibility

of innovators and teachers. The supervisors asked me, “Would you have made a different choice if you had been more conscious yourself?” To this day, I cannot answer this questions with univocal yes or no. My new awareness forced me to reflect on my consciousness about the educational concept of my university—for which I had advocated unreservedly for so many years. This is the most precious present that you and all the colleagues engaged in Impulse could have given me.

I was placed on a path of personal transformation from what I learned from and with the Impulse teachers. We were colleagues and had similar constructivist-based practices; indirectly, you enabled me to investigate my own professionalism. I think for the first time, I consciously experienced what it meant to be in the world and to become cognisant of others; to understand that knowing is a continuous process of critical curiosity, reflexivity, and self-criticism; of active engagement with people, their thinking, their context, and with the facts of the world. In this sense, it was a real life experience of ontological and epistemological matters—of theoretical phenomena I had read and heard and taught about, but not explicitly encountered before. Therefore, I was really upset with you when you told me that nobody in your comprehensive school was really interested in your story about the innovation project, and all you had experienced and learned.

 Another question you inspired was the matter of changing education. Your idealism and ideas inspired and brought about movement, motivated students, and satisfied teachers. You created an internal “dominant culture” with rituals, assumptions, and new self-evidence—and gave birth to ‘the story’ of the learning community. At the same time, however, ‘the story’ brought about uncertainty, failures, unforeseen confrontations, and weariness. This experience of disorder was ‘treated’ by one-sided founder storytelling. I was confused by these stories because they contradicted your anti-teaching approach. Storytelling had been of great importance because the ‘old’ invaded ‘the new,’ like a Trojan horse. The story had remained yours and had not really achieved a status of being for the common good. Storytelling seemed to have become a form of dictate instead of sense-making—distressed, you and Reinald stopped the telling. Reflecting on this, I wondered what the difference was from the managerial regulations in the conventional school left behind. In 2011, I could see how an alternative to storytelling was developed in the ‘unification of the concept’ approach. Actually, the need to keep the community alive led to counter-productive rigidity by focusing on ‘story’ and ‘concept’. No doubt, continuously telling the Impulse story is a burden that demands strength and resilience from the teller; however, in a way it also took the strength and resilience out of Impulse.

I have continuously asked myself whether the resilience and readiness of Impulse could have been stronger when Impulse had developed a real laboratory school character. I imagined that the aim of making a difference in the lives of students and education

would have required more awareness and reflection on the purpose of what you intended to do than the pragmatic approach allowed for. The dominant culture had not been very successful in integrating a critical investigative stance towards its own situation. You travelled forward on this bumpy road, but being on the road took all your strength—and it was hardly possible to look around.

A Network Appears

Introduction

I returned to my study. The *acer palmatum* showed seasons come and go. I heard the voices of children on the street going to school and home again. I heard the voices of the Impulse team on my laptop, I read my narratives, and I recalled bits of conversation. Or, I just sat in silence because a day at Impulse made me tired—sometimes, it resembled a beehive full of noise and movement. New questions emerged, for which I could not find answers with the people in the community. Here, the reading and Internet surfing began. For hours, I felt like a detective constructing a network of actors who seemed to have had a shared interest in changing education. Their connections had strengthened the discourse on learning. I think that normally these connections would remain undisclosed to teachers and parents. Yet, their influence on the work of teachers and the lives of children demand transparency. Only when we have knowledge can we cope with influence and—if necessary—counteract. The documents supported my understanding of Impulse as an illustration of the relationship of this innovation to a specific social-historical context ruled by a specific political-economical thought system that prioritised itself over pedagogical considerations.

I consciously present this chapter as a network with nodes; and in this, I again follow Ingold and his idea on networks. A network, so he explains, is composed of lines of connection (Ingold, 2013); lines that connect nodes, that are already present before the movement of drawing the line takes place. Moreover, these connecting lines do not allow for new movements as the connections create forms of introversion. They have created in themselves consistency and coherence in time and space.

Political Matter

Introduction

We followed an invitation from the Ministry of Education sent to the field. It was a call for bottom-up initiatives—we were supposed to become ‘initiative-rich’. The ministry insisted we should explore the boundaries of an assumed rigid system because we overestimated the legal limitations and underestimated the opportunities—this was explicitly explained to us. Of course, we were a bit reluctant; but as soon as we started the project and had talked to the ministry and the school inspector about our plan, it indeed turned out that much more was possible. We stayed within the legal scope with our new school: we offered regular examinations on three levels, and we worked with the given objectives of the foundational phase.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, we operated along the margins of the law and tried to stretch them a bit—the government allowed us to do so.

We discovered it is really possible to make pleasant schools where children have a good time, are intrinsically motivated to learn and develop competencies; and, on top of that, where teachers love to work. It all boils down to inventing schools anew, organising them differently, and having teachers take on another role. Impulse can be considered as a laboratory school where we can explore what is the best for students. (Piter Jelles Impulse, 2006)

Peter Nieuwstraten, the chairman of the board of directors of the Piter Jelles comprehensive school, explained the start of the school as not an idea in its own right. Bottom-up transformation of education was the result of the Dutch governmental education policy to further extend deregulation and to increase school autonomy in curriculum change. The minister gave the floor to school managers to find new and better answers for educational problems. In turn, Nieuwstraten embraced the call to realise a new management strategy and a new school. In August 1998, the comprehensive school Piter Jelles was launched after several mergers dating back to the late 1960s (Lockhorst, 2003).⁴¹

He was the first chairman of the board. Hence, he had to develop new ambitions and objectives to reposition the comprehensive school in the minds of parents—an innovation project indeed was an interesting opportunity. Then the board needed project leaders, teachers who were dedicated to students, who were critical about the existing

⁴⁰ Level = preparatory, secondary, vocational education-theoretical (Vmbo-t), higher general secondary education (Havo), and pre-university education (Vwo); Objectives = kerndoelen; foundational phase = *basisvorming* or *Onderbouw*.

⁴¹ Named after the well-known Frisian socialist poet and politician Pieter Jelles Troelstra (Piter is Frisian for Pieter). He used to be a student at schools that later merged into the comprehensive.

practice, and passionate about changing education. So the founders embarked on an ambitious plan and project—a dream was to be realised. He showed his satisfaction about the fact that the start of this new school was a good decision. Now parents had yet another choice; he had a satisfactory staff, which is welcome in times of teacher shortage; and his school got free publicity.

Node Entrepreneurship

I followed the clue word ‘initiative-rich’ in Nieuwstraten’s text. It led to a newspaper article reporting about a design contest launched in January 2001 by the Dutch Minister of Education Loek Hermans. Between 1998 and 2002, he was the second conservative-liberal Minister of Education to take office after the WWII. He aimed at transferring his party’s political ambition to the liberalisation of education. Schools were invited to compete with each other in the generation of innovative ideas for the future of education—the five most successful and inspiring initiatives would win a maximum of 100.000 guilders (Redactie politiek, 2001). This contest resulted in 433 proposals for changes in curriculum and school organisation (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap [OCenW], 2001).⁴² In 2001, a second project was initiated to stimulate the involvement of teachers, school principals, and other interested bodies—such as consultancy firms—in the debate on education in the 21st century (Hermans & Adelmund, 2000). Furthermore, this project aimed at the promotion of entrepreneurship in education, and therefore presented itself as the *Initiatiefrijke Scholen* (initiative-rich schools) project. The winning ideas would be integrated into pilots to modernise *Vmbo*, to innovate *Onderbouw* and *Bovenbouw*, and to experiment with more flexible examinations (OCenW, 2001). The minister emphasised his approach to stimulate bottom-up initiatives and implicated a different governmental attitude:

The creation of projects to experiment with policy freedom complies with our intention to be open to multiple opinions and pilots. Alongside creating space for such experiments, we accept the presence of different ideas about good education. The wish to realise tailor made education requires an open attitude as to what comes from schools, and who receive more freedom and direct influence over policy design through the projects. (OCenW, 2001, p. 5)

Interlude

When I listen to Nieuwstraten, I hear warm-hearted, sincere compassion for students and teachers; he seems really surprised to discover that fun is possible in a school setting—no doubt it sounds authentic. Nevertheless, the words he uses are not his. He recalls words from the discourse on educational entrepreneurship: intrinsic motivation, competences, student-centred, a new invented school; even laboratory school is

⁴² Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap [OCenW] = Dutch Ministry of Education

revived.⁴³ Words disseminated by politicians, management consultants in education, and educationalists in the Netherlands and worldwide who confusingly used thoughts from early 20th century reform pedagogues. As a matter of fact, I perceive a patronising attitude in this liberal minister toward school governors and teachers in his demand for them to become entrepreneurial. This approach might sound marvellous to those who see schools as businesses, but leaves the purpose of education undiscussed. For the first time, I realise !mpulse did not primarily emerge from the creative minds of passionate teachers supported by engaged managers. !mpulse was a result of a political demand to liberalise education, and is in its essence not a matter of pedagogical awareness but of entrepreneurship.

As a result, I have the impression that the board—and the minister—made use of other people’s passion and engagement; and that the project leaders (and especially the pioneer team) were to some extent subordinated to ambitions based on different and perhaps even contrasting interests. Simultaneously, their position was inherently dependent on managerial and ministerial ambitions susceptible to changing interests. For the first time, I recognise that a kind of oppression is part of the project. Consequently, the point of departure for the !mpulse idealists is incomparable to the pedagogical reformers of the 20th century—for instance Maria Montessori, John Dewey, Rudolf Steiner, and Paulo Freire—with whom the Millennium Innovations are often connected. These reformers were not organised by managers or politicians as they walked new paths from a different perspective. It occurs to me that in our conversations, the founders did not critically address the conditions in which !mpulse was initiated—they took the political context for granted, and I think they blindly accepted the opportunity as a chance to realise a dream.

Node Education as the “Cork of our Welfare”

Hermans’ and Adelmund’s policy letter to the parliament (2000) presented the direction education should go: individualised learning, participation, and social cohesion. The rhythm of the many short clauses full of ‘it is’ statements pulls me into convincing self-evident opinions and assumptions that are scarcely motivated. The text leaves little space for reflection on the line of thought underpinning the message. At first glance, it seems to be a positive message about young people and their future, but I gradually understand that the line of thought revolves around current economical and societal realities, a withdrawing government, and the increasing responsibility of educational institutions for economic growth. It is food for thought that young people actually play a subordinate part in these political thoughts.

⁴³ A reference to John Dewey’s experimental school in the 1920s – it might be taken from OECD Schooling for the Future, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/2634510.pdf>

Education “is the mainstay of our affluence and prosperity, and the key factor in our current knowledge society. Therefore, a maximum contribution to equip citizens for the knowledge society and labour market should be the focus of attention for the field of education” (Hermans & Adelmund, 2000, p. 5). Young people have to be approached as owners of talents and capacities that are crucial to meet, or even better, to exceed economic-societal expectations. Because of their importance, education should fulfil these specific needs. The requirement “to investigate what is best for a student” is directly coupled with what is best for a knowledge-economy based society. I realise that talking about what is *best for students* is not discussed from a human perspective, but rather from a human capital development one. This governmental “expectation” of the role of education is placed in the larger European context. The letter refers to the Lisbon conference in Spring 2000, where it was decided that the EU economies would give top priority to the role of knowledge.

Participation in society should be secured through schools meeting the criteria of accessibility, variety, and quality. Accessibility and variety are required to prevent dropouts and assure everybody’s contribution to the knowledge society; moreover, this reduces the risk of impoverishment. Hence, schools should offer learning opportunities that are appropriate to individual learning and knowledge needs, talents, and capacities to “manage [themselves] in a world where capital, labour, knowledge, and information can freely move around” (Hermans & Adelmund, 2000, p. 12). Life in such a world calls for a lifelong learning attitude and the ability to learn—each student should therefore ‘learn to learn’.

Furthermore, the field of education should acknowledge its responsibility for social cohesion to counteract an increasing fragmentation and individualisation—an immense menace to society. Schools (probably based on the results of the contest) have enough innovation power to create high quality *eigentijds onderwijs* (contemporary education) that is accessible and appropriate for all. Financial investments for this transformation will be assured via public funding; in addition to this, schools could also welcome private investors. Moreover, the department intends to transfer quality control to all stakeholders—parents, students, the workforce, and the government. The latter will have a special focus on schools meeting societal expectations in general—for instance, the issue of getting ‘the best out of the student,’ and educational customisation.

The !mpulse *Visiedocument* (2004)⁴⁴ explained the initiative’s societal backgrounds and the ideas guiding the educational and organisational design—the so-called !mpulse concept. It was developed to present the project to official bodies for decision-making regarding the realisation of the project; it was also used to apply for governmental subsidies and for the staff recruitment process. As far as I know, the document was not made available to parents, students, or journalists. I happen to have it because—for obvious reasons—the parents’ participation board wanted to discuss it in 2007.

It presented !mpulse as a school that provided what society requires—it would be distinct from conventional education. It stated, today’s schools were based in the outdated needs of the industrial age—to reduce illiteracy, and to raise the general knowledge level of large groups of children. Its features were declared obsolete for the 21st century society—a focus on subject matter and pure cognition; on linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence; on knowledge transmission, the external steering of the learning process, and root-learning; on objective testing based on average norms; on intelligence and age-based classes; on limited contact between teacher and student. !mpulse aimed to close a gap between what schools offer these days and what society actually needs.

The needs were analysed with the help of a so-called ‘societal scan’, resulting in the conclusions that society has moved from an industrial to an informational society; global information is available 24/7 and determines life itself. This demands lifelong learning from an individualised and participating workforce. Lifelong learning is needed to constantly adapt to new requirements. As traditional bonds diminish, people want to take ownership and responsibility for their own lives. The *Visiedocument* stated that as a result of demographic developments everybody is needed in the workforce. Additionally, it was mentioned, society faced increasing tension due to inequality and a loss of cohesion.

As a consequence, secondary schools should start organising their processes according to the future needs of professionals, where blended labour and learning is paramount. These schools should foster the motivation to learn and create a foundation for lifelong learning skills; therefore, schools need to be transformed into learning environments. Secondly, schools should create learning opportunities for all children irrespective of their potential and capacities. And thirdly, when schools develop a sense of community and humanity, so would people take care of each other and their environment. Thus, !mpulse will integrate all of these societal needs as it intends to be a “small-scale contex-

⁴⁴ The *Visiedocument* includes a societal scan, an analysed gap, and references to inspiring sources; references to theoretical sources; some points of departure for curriculum design, a description of the role of the teacher and school organisation, and ideas for the building. It does not offer a detailed description of the final components of the community.

tualised learning environment where students are at the hub of attention,” where students are enabled to go their own way and to “design their own development process” (*Visiedocument*, 2004, p. 7)—within the confines of governmental requirements for examinations.

Despite the fact that learning of young people is its point of departure, the *Visiedocument* does not give much theoretical clarification of the concept of learning itself. It briefly argues that learning is an innate human need like eating, drinking, and sleeping. It is generally recognised that the latter three are important for human living and growth—any activity hindering them would harm human dignity. Adding learning to the list of human needs suggested that being refrained from learning would be an act of dehumanisation. Consequently, anyone involved in pedagogy and school life should be convinced of and have trust in the innate capabilities of learners.

The presented learning model takes the intrinsically motivated independent learner as its point of departure. A student is empowered and has to take responsibility and ownership for his learning and actions. (S)he will develop creativity, problem solving, flexibility, entrepreneurship, and collaboration skills—all of which are needed for well-equipped professionals. The motivation to learn and opportunity for all is guaranteed in this space for passion, talent and personal interest. A teacher both acts as a role model in learning and remains withdrawn from any direct intervention. Moreover, the special focus on the development of a learning community supports the awareness for social cohesion. In this community, all students and staff are engaged in equal ownership and responsibility for the learning of all, the daily processes of the community, and the school’s rules and policies. The active interaction with a surrounding society offers learning opportunities.

Interlude

Rereading the document and comparing it with the policy letter (Hermans & Adelmund, 2000), I recognise striking similarities although the letter is not referred to in the *Visiedocument*. The political ideological statements about society on the one hand, and the education of adolescent human beings on the other, have been transferred without critical reflection. Thus, educational choices in the project are rooted in the political vision of a conservative-liberal minister. In this sense, the ministerial perspective had a strong influence on the so-called autonomous school initiative. Perhaps this was a strategical choice taken by the founders, necessary to legitimate the project and to get it publicly financed. Nevertheless, I am surprised by what I perceive as a limited critical intellectual exploration of thought by idealist educational professionals. So far, without knowing the political context in detail, I had a different perception. The first time I—and other highly educated parents—read the *Visiedocument*, the rationale for the new school was apparently self-evident to us because we only discussed the practical implications instead of the scan. My new insights, however, shed another light on the

founders' idealism; now I wonder whether I should have expected more reflectivity on the ideas underpinning the decisions to start a new school. At the same time, I hesitate about what I initially experienced as an idealist act; the existing school practice was left behind, not the existing political context. It worries me.

In the policy letter, I read about "What is best for students", an expression I had already heard from the chairman of the board (Piter Jelles !mpulse, 2006). It sounded very emphatic and indeed child-oriented when the teaching staff and directors focused on the student's pleasure in learning. But now I understood that the innocent expression had to be interpreted with greater care. The best for students had to be considered within the context of economical growth. This was self-evidently integrated into the !mpulse concept, and I failed or was unable to recognise this aspect. It can be argued that future economic success is the best gift from one generation to the next. Nevertheless, this is a matter of perspective—this is only a part of their life.

I never saw the *Visiedocument* at !mpulse in 2011. It was turned into a non-existing reified reality in oral history called 'the concept'. As such it 'haunts the house' with a dictating normative status. Despite the impossibility of a critical analysis and comparison between the past and the present (or even an in-depth discussion), it is used to legitimate the school's existence and to justify decisions on new ideas and its future; any 'innovation' is acceptable as long as it is said to be consistent with 'the concept'. I noticed the team accepted this interpretation without objection, and parents took this justification as correct. Consequently, this situation left room for random interpretations and practices. Nevertheless, it seems to me a common practice to publish a 2004 text in 2011—without references, however. Text fragments and images from the document are presented in newsletters to parents, in the schoolguides or on the website. In particular, the ongoing presentation of the original so-called 'building blocks' of !mpulse attracted my attention: the blocks recall the language of the Millennium discourse, although times have certainly changed at !mpulse.

!mpulse Building Blocks

The school enables students to learn in their own way: room for how, what, when and where;

The school acknowledges and supports the independence of youngsters in the process of acquiring knowledge; this means youngsters are **self-responsible learners**;

The school does justice to existing differences between students by taking the individual learning questions (learning needs) as a starting point;

The school creates an innovative **process-oriented** climate for learning. Genuine

self-actualisation requires a safe atmosphere allowing for experiments, discoveries, entrepreneurship, collaboration, and design;

Competence development, especially lifelong learning competencies, are at the centre of attention in this school;

Participation means that all community members are responsible for themselves, each other, and the environment. The school becomes **a learning community**, where students really have a say within the level of their responsibility;

The school also has a **pedagogical task** to prepare youngsters for their place in society: to develop humanity, reckon equality, acknowledge human rights, and sustainability;

The process of self-responsible learning is the starting point for students, tutors, support staff and other stakeholders in the school;

The teacher has to fulfil different roles to enable and support the learning of students. A teacher becomes tutor, facilitator;

Learning is connected to the direct real life world: **context-rich learning**. This means that all learning tasks need to be authentic and meaningful.

Source: Piter Jelles !mpulse website 2010/2011; Visiedocument (2004, p. 10)

As far as my experience goes, the blocks have lost their value. It is my impression that the unification goal undermines the original intention, and therefore the blocks are not appropriate to describe the current situation. Actually, the incongruence between the text and the !mpulse of 2011 are apparent to the community members. So, why are the blocks used to convey impressions of a non-existing reality? I imagined that the presentation is needed to position !mpulse as being different from mainstream schools. This works: !mpulse is perceived differently despite its turn towards a regular teaching practice. Possibly, only the ones who knew its past are confused.

Node Blurring Ideologies in Politics

Freedom of school choice—the self-evident feature of the pillarised society of my youth—has resulted in a variety of schools to choose from. Thus, within this societal context the start of !mpulse was logical: even without ministerial direction, the start of a new school would have been accepted; its ‘turn’ towards open-mindedness about different perspectives on good education and tailor-made schools is intriguing because this should have been common practice for many years. The same can be said about the

intention that stakeholders should have to take on more responsibility, and that the government will only control the achievement of societal expectations.

As a matter of fact, the initiation of *Impulse* was embedded in a general process of blurring ideologies—of Christian-Democrats, of the Social Democrats, and of conservative-liberal view points, values and interests.⁴⁵ I recognise in the policy letter that these three ideological lines of thought are blurred. This is nicely illustrated in the argument that “good education combines the classic values of solidarity and equal opportunities with variety and differentiation” (Hermans & Adelmund, 2000, p. 23).⁴⁶ Therefore, I consider the letter a significant public demonstration of a progressive turn in a long tradition of political and societal debate on ‘ownership’ and autonomy regarding education. For most of the 20th century, Christian parties and the Social Democrats dictated Dutch educational policy as they provided ministers for this department. Their particular interests—‘freedom of choice in education’ (Christian parties) and ‘equal opportunities for all’ (Social Democrats)—were increasingly embedded in a strong authoritative and regulatory top-down departmental government. Loek Hermans’ conservative-liberal intentions and actions to break down these structures, however, did not seem to be controversial; deregulation and autonomy had been congruous with a gradual turn towards neo-liberalism in Dutch society since the 1980s.

Karsten (1999) explains that during the 1980s the ‘neoliberal body of ideas’ oriented towards Anglo-American neo-liberalism gradually entered Dutch politics. This undermined the Dutch welfare state tradition that aimed at the realisation of a ‘great society’. Education in this welfare state was supposed to enable equally distributed knowledge, power, and income for all—with special attention paid to the socially underprivileged. The government had a leading role in bringing change and constructed an immense ‘system of support institutions’ during the 1970s. However, an economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s forced a cost cutting policy. Governments of both confessional—conservative-liberal and social democrats—conservative-liberal colours gradually adjusted their ideas to neo-liberal principles and practices that were increasingly influenced by Thatcherism and Reaganism. A discussion about profitable and efficient industries slowly permeated education. It centred on the non-efficient effects of an expensive educational support system in the development and implementation of educational policy. A possible solution to overcome the high overhead costs and low output was discovered in the deregulation and autonomy of schools—a process that had already started in the 1980s.

⁴⁵ The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) is the result of a merger between two Protestant and one Catholic parties in 1980; PvdA = the Social-democratic *Partij van de Arbeid*; and the conservative-liberal party is the VVD.

⁴⁶ “*Goed onderwijs combineert dan ook de klassieke waarden van gemeenschapszin en gelijke kansen met variëteit en differentiatie.*”

As a result, schools gained more responsibility for ‘low-profile’ components of educational policy—namely, human resources management, finance, and facilities (Onderwijsraad, 2001). A so-called lump sum financing, introduced in secondary education in 1996, enhanced school autonomy. Funding was no longer allocated to specific operational aspects; the lump sum format allowed school management to allocate money according to their needs. This contributed to the phenomenon of mergers between small schools—to reduce overhead, increase operational efficiency, and make money available for special ambitions; this was also a consequence of demographical developments. The reduction of costs for personell was another instrument used to settle financial issues.

Within this context of increasing autonomy, school governors received different responsibilities and roles (Hetteema & Lenssen, 2007). From the perspective of entrepreneurship, they started to organise schools according to organisational management principles and concepts as if they were for-profit organisations. Hence, they transformed them into management replicates irrespective of their specific purpose and culture. In spite of the afore-mentioned development, it was until the end of the 1990s that educational design (*onderwijskundig beleid*) in secondary schools remained the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. This situation was explained with the presumption that no effects on efficiency and quality could be expected from deregulated educational policy (Onderwijsraad, 2001). But the major driver for this situation was the notion that societal and economic development could be influenced via education (Hetteema & Lenssen, 2007). Government was still entitled to implement substantial curriculum changes, which resulted in substantial system changes (the *Basisvorming* in 1993, *Tweede Fase & Studiehuis* in 1998/99, *Vmbo* between 1999-2002).⁴⁷ However, these innovations evoked great disturbance and criticism among teachers and parents; moreover, the feeling of the decreasing professional authority of teachers in top-down curriculum change, as well as the negative perception of school management, negatively influenced the perception of the teaching profession.

This situation was the point of departure for the conservative-liberal minister. His political orientation saw only one solution: more autonomy for schools—thereby meaning that curriculum development should be transferred to the school. He started his “invisible revolution” (Van der Laan, 2001). After years of protest and dissatisfaction about top-down implemented innovations, now it was the teachers’ turn—or so politicians argued (Miedema & Stam, 2008; Simons et al., 2000; Van Oers, 2007; Volman, 2006). But there was something contradictory in this pragmatic self-evident solution: it was a top-down decision that demanded bottom-up initiatives to solve

⁴⁷ *Basisvorming* is the first phase in secondary schools; *Tweede Fase* is the second phase, and *Studiehuis* its didactical approach; *Vmbo* is the prevocational secondary education.

top-down created problems. This minister expected the market to do its work and to clean up the governmental mess by its own specific principles.

On a regular basis, the Ministry of Education receives reports from the Onderwijsraad.⁴⁸ These reports discuss the broad variety of topics that are or could be important for educational policies. In January 2003, the Council presented the explorative report *Leren in een kennissamenleving. Verkenning* (Learning in a knowledge society). This report was received by a new, Christian-Democrat, minister. She continued the lines of thought present in the ministry.

The report was a result of previous literature study and document analysis. It aimed at the construction of a framework needed for the further exploration of the emerging knowledge and network society and for policy decisions for education. Its point of departure was the circumstance that society had transformed into a knowledge society and the economy into a knowledge economy. It advised, the current educational system with its divide between formal, non-formal, and informal learning had to be removed; and more flexible learning arrangements should be created—this would enable lifelong learning.

Summarised Perspectives on Society and Education, presented by the Onderwijsraad (2002a)

The two perspectives explained below are essential for the political discourse on the knowledge society around the Millennium; they clarify a different understanding of knowledge and the rational behind learning as a leading principle for education.

Social-economical perspective & education

Key concepts for the 21st century economy are post-industrialism, globalisation, changing labour organisation and labour market relationships. In this economy knowledge is both input (production factor) and output (innovation)—innovation

⁴⁸ The Education Council is an independent governmental advisory body, which advises the Minister, Parliament and local authorities. It was established in 1919. The Council provides advice, both solicited and unsolicited, to the Minister of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs and the Minister of Economy. Moreover, the Council may be asked for advice by the Dutch upper and lower chambers of parliament. Local authorities can call on the Education Council in special cases of local education policy. The Council does not, however, play a reactive role only. It also operates as a think tank that provides analyses of current issues and formulates solutions to help develop new policy. The council uses for its advice various (for instance educationalist, economical and legal) disciplinary aspects and relates these to developments in the field of education; the international dimension of education is also acknowledged. The council advises on the broad range of early childhood education to post-university education and business training. The publications include recommendations, studies, and explorations. Furthermore, the council initiates seminars in website-discussions on topics relevant for education policy. (www.onderwijsraad.nl)

is the tool for competition in the new economical realities. The number and quality of innovations decide economical growth, hence innovation is important.

Know-how—the ability to apply knowledge—is of the most importance; therefore, employees should be embedded in a network-organisation and opportunities for collaboration allowing active participation. A globalised economy requires high education levels and all should have at least a so-called entrance qualification.

Labour market changes are related to marketisation, flexibilisation and responsibility for one's own labour opportunities. The employee is a “labour entrepreneur” (Onderwijsraad, 2002a, p. 31), who continuously invests in his employability. This is supported by competence development in the field of cooperation, communication, problem analysis and solving, ICT-skills, independence, creativity, reflection and learning skills, and career development skills.

Social-cultural perspective and education

Society is post-modernist, in which “the ‘grand narrative’—ideology and philosophy of life—and the ‘grand design’ that dictates society top-down” have lost their function. This creates space for “a liberal active welfare state” for autonomous self-directing people. This society is characterised by an increasing cultural diversity with a risk of societal inequality and deprivation—by individualisation, liberty of choice, responsibility for one's own way of life; by the decreasing importance of social connections—with the risk of increasing uncertainty and social unrest.

Education should focus on the competencies of citizenship so people can make the right choices and are capable of living in this society. Education should adapt itself to the critical customer who wants to have a choice as well as a customised education. Moreover, education should acknowledge the student's “real life” in his jobs (Onderwijsraad, 2002a, p. 34).

The sources used for this exploration are all related to the political discourse that aims at a turn in education towards learning: OECD publications (between 1996 and 2002); previous reports by the councils on topics mentioned above; to books / articles written by learning psychologists; many publications on lifelong learning and knowledge society and other related issues are listed in the reference list. Two books, however, seem to be out of tune: Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* and Ivan Illich *Deschooling society*. Freire and Illich (together with Husén) are relocated from the 1970s into the Millennium change to support the conclusions regarding blurring boundaries between formal and non-formal / informal learning. They knew already that this was going to happen, so it is claimed.

The report explains the different approach to knowledge in the knowledge society and economy. With reference to OECD (2000), Joseph Kessels (2001) and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)⁴⁹ four knowledge ‘variants’ are presented: traditional know-what and know-why—the so-called ideas or explicit knowledge that is now rendered obsolete⁵⁰; and know-how and know-who—so-called silent or tacit knowledge. This type of knowledge is personal (individual or team), practical and context related; it is a hidden knowledge layer (Stevens, 2002). This knowledge variant is connected to the mode 2 knowledge development and the mode 2 society discussed in the seminal work by Gibbons, Limoges and Nowotny (1994).⁵¹

A focus on know-how automatically places the individual learner in the centre of attention because know-how is embodied in human beings who ‘own’ the treasure, and he/she can decide what to do with it in life—for instance refuse to make use of it, or to use it in a way not seen as supportive for society. In this sense, human capital is less assessable compared to the natural capital for production processes. I learn that human beings have to become available for economical growth, and this includes a specific mindset and competencies to apply knowledge in combination with the learning skills to constantly update one’s self.

The presented learning direction for education relies heavily on learning and education psychology (constructivism) and organisation theory (formal, non-formal, informal learning; learning arrangements). Especially, the publication *New learning* (Simons et al., 2000) is often, and without critical exploration, cited. Content and opinions from previous *Onderwijsraad* reports are used as well.

The *Onderwijsraad* concludes first and foremost that policy makers should focus on learning. And secondly, that school is no longer paramount, and that the role of non-formal and informal learning has to be more emphasised, as the initial education will take a relatively short period in the learning careers. There is an urgent need to integrate ‘outside school’ learning—also addressed as non-formal and informal learning (*buitenschools leren*) into mainstream education. Outside school learning is connected with issues such as a rich learning environment, intrinsic motivation, real world and competences, apprenticeship, context-based mental

⁴⁹ OECD (2000). *Knowledge management in the learning society. Education and skills*. Parijs: OECD/CERI; J.W.M Kessels, (2001). *Verleiden tot kennisproductiviteit. Oratie*. Enschede: TU Twente; I. Nonaka & H. Takeuchi (1995). *The knowledge creating company*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁵⁰ The *Raad* emphasised that traditional forms of knowledge remain indispensable; but, knowledge rapidly becomes obsolete. In a footnote, this ‘fact’ is nuanced stating that this would count for technological knowledge, not for *alpha and gamma knowledge*. The focus on know-how however, asks for an integrative approach of the four variants.

⁵¹ M. Gibbons, C. Limoges & H. Nowotny, e.a. (1994). *The new production of knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*. London: Sage Publications. This book is a seminal work that introduces the mode 1 and 2 divide on knowledge production.

models, connecting to student experiences, practice based conceptual development. It is stated that school will continue to create an essential foundation for further knowledge construction in non-formal and informal settings. As to this, school should integrate the outside school learning into its own practice because its “learning efficiency is sometimes greater than school learning” (Onderwijsraad, 2003, p. 10).

Source: (Onderwijsraad, 2002a)

Interlude

I needed to know more about the blurring of ideologies regarding education because it had influenced my state of mind and decision-making process. The society of my youth was a pillarised society on the edge of destruction. Although Christians (Protestant/Catholic), Social-Democrats, and conservative-liberals still lived together in parallel worlds, the ‘frontiers’ gradually showed hairline cracks starting after WWII. Although I lived in the tradition of the Protestant Christian pillar, my growing up was characterised by looking beyond the borders and accepting or even embracing different opinions and lifestyles. My great-grandfather and his ‘*mannenbroeders*’ (kindred spirits) devoted themselves to Christian education and life, and had greatly influenced the rise of pillarisation and the freedom of school choice—their great-grandchildren blurred the boundaries. My choice in life reflected societal dynamics illustrated by a life in which I combined Christianity with politically green leftish orientations. Therefore, it is intriguing that despite my aversion towards the neo-liberalist market orientation, it did permeate my thinking and acting.

Somewhere and somehow, the knowledge society had entered education. Its economical framing decided thoughts on knowledge and learning, and initiated educational practices that contradicted conventional teaching and pedagogy. 15 years ago, without any hesitation, I used Peter Drucker’s⁵² ideas on self-management for the personal coaching program my university students had to participate in. And in 2005, as Stephan Coveys *Seven Habits of Highly Effective College Students* was integrated into our school’s curriculum—I became a trainer. Hence, this text and discourse used to be common sense and self-evident to me; and I used and introduced it without any critical consideration, as I thought it would be beneficial for my students.

The reading of the exploration by the *Onderwijsraad* helped me to understand the connections between the various isolated sources repeatedly used regarding the

⁵² *Managing yourself*, published in Harvard Business Review (1999). Drucker argues: “Success in the knowledge economy comes to those who know themselves—their strength their values and how they perform best”, that “knowledge workers must effectively be their own chief executive officers” (Drucker, 2005, p. 2).

knowledge society or knowledge economy. It presented a condensed overview of a Dutch discourse deeply rooted in a European drive for economic growth, which many—including me—benefit from. The language used, as well as the topics, are familiar to me. However, to me, this report reflected a thought system in which economic forces directed the educational system and in which teachers, students or parents had no voice. While reading it, I experienced this text almost as an assault. The text broaches subjects closely related to my personal and professional life, and to the life of my children and those who will still have to enter the education. And again I ask myself, how is it possible that I could have been blind to the fact that education had become an economic factor in the way it did?

In this sense, I was surprised that the report referred to Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. It almost felt like an ironic thought play, in which the thoughts—and the practice—of critical pedagogues (or reform pedagogues) were transferred into an incomparable context. It illustrated for me an interesting phenomenon that was seen again in the discourse on school innovation. In the reference to Freire and Illich, the editors chose two important opponents of the conventional institution school as instruments of power that suppress human beings. Although the report emphasised the creation of a new educational system to free students and to allow independent self-directed learning, it disregarded this system and had to reinforce global economical power. The ‘freed’ student needed to be turned into human capital; and in this state of being, (s)he would be even more subordinated than in mainstream schools. This was not what Freire had addressed when he wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000).

To conclude, I learned in these political nodes that the initiation of Impulse was embedded in a new grand narrative. Despite the arguments of the Educational Council reporting about a post-modernist society without a guiding story, the political and economic forces had created a new unifying worldview that decided or tried to decide many aspects of education. Without much consideration the educational idealists had conformed themselves to this narrative—and so had I. The insight gained through this exploration of political texts was a useful learning experience.

New Learning Matter

Introduction

The Impulse director's voice on the audiotape gave the impression of annoyance when she informed her team about a recent phone call:

It was a difficult moment when the *Trouw* journalists called me. They wanted to prepare an article on what they called the *new learning* schools. I immediately exclaimed: "Why *new learning*?" We are an innovative school, and that is something different than adhering to an *Iederwijs*⁵³ philosophy that seems to be associated with *new learning* in the Netherlands. (AP, audiotape 2011)

She was not amused by the intention of journalists to position Impulse as one of the Millennium Innovation examples in an article published alongside the annual school results monitor.⁵⁴ Despite her reluctance to talk to the journalists, Impulse and her words were published on the front page of the national newspaper *Trouw* (De Weerd & Obbink, 2011).

The rejection of *new learning* seems to me an attempt to conceal the Impulse rootedness in the ideas and opinions from the field of education and educational psychology that greatly influenced the learning concept of Impulse. The *Visiedocument* is quite explicit about this rootedness in social-constructivist learning theory, "a theory that receives more and more attention in education since the 1990s" (*Visiedocument*, 2004, p. 9). Simultaneously, this attempt hides its initiation within the historical-social context at the beginning of the 21st century—a past in which learning became the buzzword.

⁵³ *Iederwijs* was the radical exponent of *new learning* comparable to Sudbury Valley Schools (Greenberg, 2000).

⁵⁴ The article is part of the publication *Schoolcijferlijst 2011*, the annual performance ranking of all Dutch secondary schools, published between 1997 and 2013 under the auspices of *Trouw* (1979-2011) and *Volkscrant* (2012, 2013). These publications started as *Trouw* went to court with an appeal to the Freedom of Information Act (*wet openbaarheid van bestuur (Wob)*) to receive insight into school performance outcomes available from the Ministry of Education. On his personal initiative, Jaap Dronkers, a renowned Dutch education sociologist, cooperated in the research and publication. The ranking led to a ritual of annual debates between advocates and opponents of a ranking system. As a result of this 'trending topic' in the media, the Ministry developed its own system to make the quality of schools transparent for parents, the so-called *Kwaliteitskaart* (Dronkers & Veenstra, 2001).

INNOVATIVE SCHOOLS HAVE LOW EXAM RESULTS

School results 2011: New Learning suffers starter's mistakes. Trouw analysed eight schools that presented themselves as forms of so-called New Learning, although they have kept the term at a distance in the meantime. Despite this, they still give their students great freedom to follow their own curiosity and to learn independently. [...] In terms of percentage, the number of graduates does not really deviate from the average score; their grades however do. [...] Annemie van der Putten, the director of !mpulse in Leeuwarden, defines them – on request – as starter's mistakes. She sends her exam candidates to another location until “we have improved our own method. Luckily their exam scores are conforming to all requirements.”

All beginnings are difficult, she is aware of this very well. Two years ago, she started as interim director because the school management left due to illness: “There was too much space for passion and too little for regular subject matter,” so she explains. “This was fine in the *Onderbouw*, but for the *Bovenbouw* the method was not well elaborated. The beta subjects got only a little bit of attention. It was a miracle that the first cohort students had such good results.” She relates this to a focus on specific skills development: “Their learning attitude is unique. They are more self-reflective, are less consumerist and more critical. I am absolutely convinced they will be more successful in higher and vocational education compared to students from regular schools.”

Source: De Weerd & Obbink (2011)

Node Scholarly Educationalist Involvement

The term *new learning* was first introduced by KPC in the mid 1990s; similar ‘brands’ were launched by CPS (‘Love for Learning’ inspired by Stevens, 2004), and by APS (natural learning).⁵⁵ Oostdam, Peetsma and Blok (2007) argued that the use of the term (Dutch or English) was restricted to Dutch public media publications and could only be found in a very general meaning in non-Dutch publications.

⁵⁵ KPC, APS and CPS are influential Dutch educational consultant organisations. Their role in the Millennium Innovation is discussed in the next paragraph.

New learning was considered to be a container or umbrella concept for a variety of ideas and opinions (Oostdam et al., 2007; Ros 2007; Volman, 2006; Waslander, 2007), which complicated an appropriate general—let alone academic—understanding. Its ambiguity resulted in an examination of what actually belonged to *new learning*. On the one hand, system innovations since the 1990s aiming at more active student learning were considered its exponents. On the other hand, it was coined for specific initiatives starting around the Millennium. The vagueness of the concept, however, contributed to uncontrollable overgrowth—apparently the result of the combination of various developments or assumptions: the students had changed, brain research had begun to have an influence, society had changed, the government focused on deregulation, and constructivist learning theory was now emphasised. This all gave room for innovations (Kok, 2003; Van Aalst & Kok, 2004; Volman, 2006). And it should not be underestimated that parents also welcomed the developments (Teurlings, Van Wolput & Vermeulen, 2006). The important common denominator of the initiatives was the effort to distance themselves from conventional teaching-based schools, and their rootedness in cognitive theories like constructivism or social constructivism (Oostdam et al., 2007). Teurlings et al. (2006) identified that innovations all aim at an active learning environment that includes independent learning, meaningful contextualised learning, and collaborative learning.

Educational psychologist prof.dr. Robert Jan Simons was one of the scientific instigators in the emergence and dissemination of *new learning*. He edited the book programmatically titled *New Learning*. It was presented as, “the word we use for: new learning outcomes, new kinds of learning processes and new instructional methods,” emphasising “that [these] are both wanted by society and stressed in educational and psychological theory.” This definition reached an iconic status due to multiple citations in scientific and political publications. In their work, the authors did not contest the standardized offered school knowledge but rather the traditional didactics used in schools to transmit this knowledge. “Politicians, parents, teachers and company representatives” expect different—transferable—knowledge outcomes; knowledge needs to be “*durable, flexible, functional, meaningful, generalizable and applicable*” (Simons et al., 2000, p. 1); fact-finding is more important than fact knowing.

The didactical process leading to transferable knowledge should integrate the development of “learning, thinking, collaboration, and regulation skills”. This would support the need to properly respond to the challenge of an immense flow of information and to direct one’s own learning processes. Consequently, an appropriate educational design should include a well-balanced mix of “guided”, “experiential”, and “action learning”. Moreover, this learning should be offered in processes and strategies “described in the literature about constructivism, in educational and instructional psychology and that are found in the thoughts and the principles of design about powerful learning environments,” featuring “active, cumulative, constructive, goal-directed,

diagnostic, reflective, discovery oriented, contextual, problem oriented, case based, social and intrinsically motivated kinds of learning” (Simons et al., p. 6). This long-list aimed at a gradual transfer of responsibility from an instructing teacher to a self-directed learner.

The societal climate gave way to the dissemination of scientific psychology-based theories from the 1980 and 1990s on learning and teaching. It was argued that societal needs reinforced research outcomes and that the outcomes justified a society claiming educational change. For instance, Van Hout-Wolters, Simons and Volet (2000) explicitly argued in favour of active learning (for instance, self-directed learning and independent work) as an appropriate preparation for work in the learning organisation and for life in a learning society. While referring to Marsick and Senge, they addressed the increasing focus on learning organisations with flexible and adaptable (non-formal and informal) lifelong learners—because of the importance of the strength and pace of development of the learning workforce for competitive positions.⁵⁶ Hence learning to learn had to be prioritized over learning knowledge.

Apparently, *new* was an important adjective in various discussions around the Millennium. As expressed above, the core issue of *new learning* was the focus on the active engagement of students in learning; but there was nothing new about this. Jean Jacques Rousseau presented his thoughts on child education in the 18th century, and active learning was the main focus in the reform-pedagogy initiatives of Maria Montessori, Helen Pankhurst (Dalton), Célestin Freinet, Peter Pedersen (Jena), and John Dewey (Volman, 2006). *New learning* ideas were already present in the work of Carl Rogers and Jean Piaget in the 1970s and 1980s (Van Hout-Wolters et al., 2000). A connection was also made with Ivan Illich’s ideas on education (Van Oers, 2007).

From the moment that *!mpulse* was launched, *new learning* increasingly became an object of discussion. The *Trouw* article above reflected the impact a few years later: in 2011 schools no longer wanted to be associated with it anymore. One of the issues for debate was the provocative old-new dichotomy that greatly affected the appreciation of *new learning* among professionals in mainstream ‘old’ education and in the public debate (Ros, 2007). The polemics were publicly carried out via newspapers and Internet discussions. The fierce debate boomeranged back to teachers while affecting engaged supporters and endangering projects. Simultaneously, it made fools of engaged, traditional teachers, created gaps and misunderstandings between all the professionals engaged in the process of educating new generations; and finally, it silenced any important dialogue on the purpose of education. The Ministry of Education, who initiated space

⁵⁶ It is referred to Peter Senge’s *Fifth Discipline*, and to V. J. Marsick (1993) *Sculpting the learning organisation: Lessons in the art & sciences of systematic change*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. These are non-education based management and organisation books.

for *new learning*, noticed this increasing societal tension six years later. On its request, a review of 330 publications in Dutch newspapers and magazines between 2004 and 2006 was published (Hilhorst, 2006). It presented a broad variety of arguments, yet without considering the worldview behind them. It was argued that the debate was characterised by metaphors and “exemplifying situations” to clarify two extreme view points. The so-called *Iederwijs* school—the ordained archetype for every initiative—was opposed to the traditional teaching described as the ‘goose liver model’. The following quote demonstrates the biggest fear of both positions: “Opponents are afraid of the freedom of obligations whereas advocates are afraid of passivity” (Hilhorst, 2006, p. 2). The polemic debate had a rather pragmatic focus that hindered “an opportunity to properly judge diverse initiatives.” Moreover, the debate attempted to unmask opponents and led to polarisation about three major issues: doing justice to diversity among students, teacher professionalism, and the types of knowledge and skills. Van Oers (2007) regretted the polemic because it concealed the desire of teachers to find alternatives for perceived problems.

The oration in 2005 by prof.dr. Greetje van der Werf—professor of Education and Learning—created a turning point in the debate. She was the first to publicly use the qualification ‘ideology’ in combination with *new learning*. She criticised the positive approach of governmental (Educational Council) and scientific boards (KNAW)⁵⁷ towards the innovation. The educational sociologist dr. Sietske Waslander was program coordinator of the project *Expeditie durvendelendoen* (VO-raad, 2011), and published a general study of political and educational documents between 1995 and 2010 (Waslander, 2011).⁵⁸ She explained that only a few publications on *new learning* were published between 1998 and 2004—before a first publication on *Iederwijs* in 2002 gave an impulse to the debate. The number of publications increased ‘explosively’ between 2005 and 2008, a period during which *new learning* advocates were presented as “salvation prophets”; and *new learning* as a “nonsense belief”, an “ideological enemy of knowledge”, and an “independent religion” (Waslander, 2011, p. 38). A parliamentary investigation on innovations in 2007/08 was the final turning point in the general acceptance of all initiatives related to *new learning* (Commissie Parlementair Onderzoek Onderwijsvernieuwing, 2008).

Interlude

The fact is that the !mpulse director denied the roots of !mpulse in *new learning*. I, however, was not surprised by the fact that she repudiated it, and separated !mpulse from its history, and wiped out the community’s memory—in 2011 it was no longer

⁵⁷ Koninklijke Nederlands Academie voor de Wetenschappen; Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences

⁵⁸ Many studies investigated the effects and success, and discussions focused on its usefulness regarding the actual problems in schools; Waslander concluded that many innovations are reactions to problems and are not oriented towards fundamental changes in the institution of education.

beneficial to be proud of it. Nevertheless, she justified her plans to her team and to the parents with a reference to ‘the !mpulse concept’ that was rooted in the learning discourse. This chameleonic approach amazed and disturbed me deeply. I experienced it as an opportunistic game in which teachers, students, and parents were pushed around like puppets for the sake of organisational reasons without having a voice. I cannot deny that the director was sensitive to societal needs in a broad sense; she indeed adhered positively to all of the actors, but I had great difficulties with the process and its inherent oppressive mechanisms.

I recognised a more or less similar attitude among leading scholars in the field of education psychology, technology, and didactics—taking advantage of the societal circumstances. When reading the contributions in Simons et al. (2000), I noticed that they were driven to firmly establish their presence in the field of education. This resulted in a rather uncritical use of arguments from the discourse of the knowledge society/economy discourse to strengthen their own intellectual position. Within these efforts, (social) constructivism was taken for granted, and it sufficed to present only a long list of learning concepts (said to be) related to constructivism. In this sense, constructivism and its pragmatic translation and appropriation for learning and learning environments was used from a very specific perspective. This might not have been too problematic for scholars. The book, however, was used in various contexts. People, for instance teachers, who were less familiar with the philosophical complexity of constructivism, took it as an important publication. Consequently, I asked myself whether scholars should not be more aware of the impact of their actions on those who have less time or who are less competent of understanding a specific discourse.

Furthermore, educational scholars failed to explore the connections between the ongoing global debate about knowledge, learning, and education during the 20th century and *new learning*. I perceived a sense of arrogance when it was argued that progressive pedagogical ideas—with “an intuitive, philosophical and anthropological basis”—were currently only generally acceptable due to research in psychology, the theory of education, neurobiology, and information technology (Kok, 2003, p. 5). It would seem that only scientifically collected evidence on human learning and development might lead to general acceptance and application; however, this disregarded a sound philosophical exploration of the ideas. As for this, comparisons with progressive and critical pedagogues often lacked awareness of the differences in general perspective and context—this was also the case among critical opponents. I felt one of the issues that could have been better addressed was the fact that progressive education was not incorporated into a global economic discourse on human capital in education.

A Matter of Educational Consultancy

Introduction

The project leaders emphasised that the Impulse project was characterised by an open organic approach. To them, the project was an expedition during which they discovered that their own ideas resembled what they recognised in visits and found in literature. Hence, its rootedness in a larger worldwide discourse on learning in the 21st century went undetected. Much of what was a part of the Impulse concept had already been ‘prepared’ by other forerunners, namely educational or management consultants. One of these educational consultants, the KPC group, was involved in the development process right from the start, supporting the project team and the teacher team in the first years.⁵⁹ KPC was mentioned as a partner in the 2004 subsidy application for a project on Living Values (Senter Novem, 2004), in the *Visiedocument*, and on the billboards announcing the new school (Piter Jelles Impulse, 2006). This partnership had a two-fold character. On the one hand, KPC offered consultant guidance in the day-to-day process of supporting teamwork, sustaining organisational matters, and doing research. On the other hand, it offered ideas such as the concept of Restorative Practice—including an implementation plan (Oostrik, Ruigrok & Van Vroonhoven, 2005).⁶⁰ A brochure showed what the KPC group could offer, and what for a large part was used by Impulse,

The involvement of a bureau with education development as its core-business has the advantage that [teachers] can engage in value free and “out of the box” realistic dreaming about education and a suitable school building for the future. (Re)design of a vision includes various areas/fields of knowledge, such as: educational, learning/psychological, architectural, managerial (building project management), managerial change, and the financial fields of knowledge. For more than 30 years, KPC has developed its expertise in the fields of education, learning psychology, and change management. This expertise is very useful especially in the design phase. (Van Sijl & Van Dam, n.d.)

⁵⁹ KPC group published a booklet (Gerrits, 2004) to present their concept to school principles and teachers—they hailed their own initiative and themselves. It is explained that KPC group developed a general educational concept, launched as *new learning*. Together with school teams, they developed their ideas about *new learning* in more detail and made them applicable. “We are proud of these schools and we admire them: They have the guts and drive to innovate.” They are said to be able to make a difference and a necessary turn in thought and action. “We are grateful that we can think and work with them—we enjoy their success. Meanwhile, we are involved in a number of school projects in elementary and secondary education to implement *new learning*—*new learning* is trending.” (Gerrits, 2004, p. 1).

⁶⁰ It is announced in the preface to the book: “*Deze publicatie is tot stand gekomen onder verantwoordelijkheid van KPC Groep in opdracht van en gefinancierd door het Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*” / This KPC group publication was commissioned and financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Team members worked with consultants to develop effective teamwork, and many conversations about the most appropriate organisational structure took place—“But, here as well, they did not have many answers, the answers had to come from us. The arrival of the consultants was not the arrival of a tin full of experience and knowledge” (personal conversation IV, 2012).

The team was used to the presence of the consultants. Nevertheless, their involvement was less innocent than these examples show, and less innocent than probably understood. Substantial participation and input from Impulse guaranteed a long-term relationship and work for the consultants—Impulse was an important ‘object’ of ambition to further the school innovation concept developed by the KPC group several years earlier. Hence, I think, any discussion of the appropriateness of the concept, its underpinning ideas, and its implications for staff and students would have constrained the progress, ambitions, and profit of the organisation. Of course, school management and staff remained responsible for the school; but limited expertise—and time—gave room or perhaps to some extent free reign to consultants who had tools and expertise and allowed them to leave their mark.

Node The Other Side of Autonomy

Education sociologist Wesselingh (2001) argued against the government in its efforts for deregulation, claiming it had created opportunities for organisations to develop creative ideas for improvement and that they did not carry political responsibility for education. He included the example of a ‘thought experiment’ *Bij de les* (2000)⁶¹ and warned against various pressure groups—often opponents—trying to have an influence on educational policy. He expressed his worry about the absence of a Minister of Education who could steer a discussion on the purpose of education with vision and expertise saying,

Strong institutions—autonomous low rule schools—indeed, but not on their own feet, with other people’s money and with a government that wants champagne on a beer budget; hopefully it will have a happy ending! (Wesselingh, 2001, n.p.)

The *Onderwijsraad* (2002a; 200b) expressed similar concerns, arguing that deregulation would be no guarantee for complete autonomous responsibility in the curriculum design for schools. I understand, however, that the increased governmental deregulation

⁶¹ Max Geldens Prize 2000: ‘Bij de les!’ The board of the Max Geldens Foundation invited three experts to develop a state-of-the-art vision on the topic of ‘education in the Netherlands’. dr. F.J. de Vijlder, Ministry of OCenW, dr. A.H.G. Rinooy Kan, member advisory board ING Group and dr. R.J. in ’t Veld, Dutch School for public Administration (NSOB). McKinsey & Company supported by a team of consultants lead by Pieter Winsemius. In March 2001, the Max Geldens Foundation organised a seminar on this topic for all who can substantially contribute to this vision and its implementation (among others, teachers, school principles, policymakers and education experts). The foundation is linked to Mc Kinsey Consultants. (www.maxgeldens.nl)

and the emphasis on autonomy impelled the growth of a consultancy market. During the 1990s, school management faced the challenge of fulfilling governmental requirements on various topics ranging from political-economical interests to societal issues; as a result of this, they were involved in an increasing market competition. However, these forces went beyond subject matter, didactics and pedagogy—the focus of attention in teacher training. Overall, school managers and teachers had limited knowledge and experience to effectively meet new demands. Thus, they indeed welcomed a growing market of educational consultants who offered a broad variety of services and products to schools. In general, these consultants had a large (international) network at their disposal and were able to develop a variety of changing topics related to (inter) national policy and the governmental requirements on education. Hence, school management needed consultants for support; and at the same time, consultants actively approached schools to survive in the competitive market.

Three educational consultant groups (KPC, CPS and APS) had a special position in this market. They were founded shortly after WWII as national pedagogical centres to support Catholic, Protestant and public schools (Biesta & Miedema, 2000; Onderwijsraad, 2001; Onderwijsraad, 2002b)—it was in the high days of pillarisation. As a result, they had a long relationship with schools; they offered courses, introduced new pedagogical-didactical insights, guided pilots, and hosted school leader conferences (Onderwijsraad, 2001). Until 1997, they were publicly funded and received membership contributions from schools. From 1997 until 2002, the funding was based on “subsidy relationships” to support a “transition to a more market-oriented approach” (Onderwijsraad, 2001, p. 55). The governmental decision to privatise the pedagogical support centres resulted in a movement toward profit-based consultant companies similar to existing business consultancies. Consequently, they developed and sold a broad range of services and products from training to research. Often in collaboration with higher education institutes, consultants carry out substantial research for the Ministry of Education; results are transferred to courses or to publications in the field. In turn, educational researchers publish studies, practical experiences, and concepts under the auspices of the consultants; these publications are used in teacher training and education master programs. The broad expertise and deep rootedness in the field of education resulted in interesting partnerships; this was visible in the Millennium innovation discussed in this chapter.

Node KPC and Millennium Innovation

In 1998, the Ministry of Education, KPC, APS and CPS—along with the accountancy company Arthur Andersen—met at the conference *Leren in de 21ste Eeuw* (Learning in the 21st century) and at other seminars on the school of the future (Morssinkhof, 2003; Van Aalst, 1998⁶²; Waslander, 2006). 1998 was also the year that the conservative-liberal

⁶² Van Aalst was an OECD/CERI and KPC group consultant

Minister of Education Hermans took office—there might have been some fruitful cross-pollination. The conference resulted in a partnership innovation project for a large Catholic comprehensive school—the Carmel Foundation—with the KPC group. They initiated the Dutch ‘icon’ of innovative schools Slash21 that existed from 2002 till 2006. It illustrated the possibility for OECD scenario 3 and 4 *Onderbouw* schools (Van Dieten & Van der Geest, 2006)⁶³ and was welcomed as a necessary change in education. During these years, the school received a lot of attention from ministers and state secretaries, teachers, principals, educational policy makers, and journalists (Laman, 2011).

This innovation aimed at an integrative redesign of the educational concept, organisation, building and staff development for the first three years in secondary education within the boundaries of the examination system and subject matter outcomes; governmental and private funding financed the project. A special fund-raising expert was appointed to approach businesses for financial support. He considered sponsoring as an opportunity for companies to boost their profile by linking it with educational innovation. Moreover, in this way businesses could emphasise the importance of “good and appropriate” education for children and youngsters, as they are potential future employees or customers. Counter value for businesses investing in education would be free publicity (Keijzer & Botter, 2002).

KPC consultant Harry Gankema⁶⁴ was leading advisor on this project. According to him, education faced an inevitable change due to global economic developments and the ‘digital revolution’. This revolution brought about a way of life, of thinking, and of working at a higher pace and required continuous learning to stay ahead of time. Moreover, he argued, technological development would reinforce individualisation. Hence, anyone could choose an online learning course in accordance with his or her individual needs; what answer could formal education give? There was only one: traditional teaching and knowledge transfer had to be changed into forms of individual knowledge construction or ‘authentic learning’. School as, “an ‘institute for knowledge transfer’ had changed into a place allowing students to acquire knowledge. Here, they learn how to learn best” (Keijzer & Botter, 2002, p. 7), so he assumed; and this school would need a different type of organisation, a different role for the teacher, and different educational tools. Schools needed to be redesigned (Keijzer & Botter, 2002; Morssinkhof, 2003).

⁶³ The framework of scenario schools was developed by OECD/CERI in its Schooling for Tomorrow program. Scenario 3 schools are “Schools as core social centres”, scenario 4 are “Schools as focused learning organizations.” Source: <http://www.oecd.org/site/schoolingfortomorrowknowledgebase/futuresthinking/scenarios/38967594.pdf>

⁶⁴ Gankema was a long-term consultant at KPC Group. Originally a pedagogue and social researcher he turned to management and marketing research and theories in the period KPC was privatised; he developed the plan for its new market orientation. He introduced the Hammer Business Process Reengineering in his school consultancy practice. He was a Dutch representative of the OECD learning for the future program. (www.indire.it)

Twice, I came across the name of the consultancy firm Arthur Andersen (AA). It was mentioned AA had supported a school in Alameda in the San Francisco Bay Area (Keijzer & Botter, 2002; Morssinkhof, 2003). Former KPC director Van den Heuvel explained that the Slash21 project group was inspired by “a school in Alameda” based on a community learning concept. This school was said to be a role model because learning would be the new future in education. It was said, “no longer will schools maintain their status as production companies, they will excel as commercial service providers where both students and teachers benefit and enjoy being there” (Morssinkhof, 2003, p. 20). Morssinkhof carried out a “limited Internet excursion” and had discovered that Alameda attracted visitors from all over the world, among them the Dutch Minister of Education Loek Herman. The national newspaper *De Volkskrant* covered this visit in January 2001.

EDUCATIONAL PARADISE (A SUMMARY)

Hermans and several school principals and members of educational boards on primary and secondary education joined a study trip to California. The journalist Raoul du Pré reported from an *Education Paradise*, the trip to the School of the Future. Ronald te Loo, a Dutch economist and Arthur Anderson, consultant since 1995, accompanied the visitors. Du Pré gave the floor to Te Loo, who said that the Alameda Community Learning Center had received around one hundred school principals and policy makers from the Netherlands since 1999. He noticed a positively changed attitude towards the ACLC type of learning among the ones he guided on the trip. He assumed this change was rooted in the increasing interest for independent learning in the Netherlands.

Te Loo explained that AA had financed the project with one and a half million dollars, and had invested in the excellent ICT-infrastructure within the school. Moreover, AA consultants were responsible for the educational design. Ten years ago, AA consultants engaged in the debate on the 'loss' of education in the US, and it took five years to develop a special program. This was implemented with the help of teachers, parents, students and police officers in Alameda. In return, AA expected Alameda CLC to act as a demonstration school for the AA educational consultancy division; Ronald te Loo was employed in the Dutch branch. He was proud about the school and "to crown it all, it has already operated for five years without major incidents!"

The minister seemed to be quite impressed by the progress and independence of the students, who showed that learning was fun. The school principals understood that this type of schooling is well worth examining. One appreciates that this school created independent, technically skilled, and communicative students—although his colleague added, slightly critically, that teachers and staff would need to be well trained for this kind of school.

Source: Du Pré (2001)

Interlude

The Slash21 case revealed both an interesting connection between the Ministry of Education and the education consultants of the KPC group, and a surprising connection with Arthur Andersen. At the moment that Minister Hermans sent his policy letter to Parliament and called for bottom-up initiatives, companies with commercial and ideological ambitions had already done preparatory work for the Millennium Inno-

vations. As a matter of fact, the ministerial invitation authorised involvement that had already started. As such, the minister could directly influence the direction of the innovations, despite claims of autonomy and deregulation.

The presence of Arthur Anderson in the talks and the fact that Alameda came up was a big surprise, as I thought Alameda was a specific contact only of !mpulse. I had not been aware that corporate business had been an unknown player in the field of formal education. How come they got involved? The *Volkskrant* article presented the AA consultant and economist Ronald te Loo who acted as a travel guide on the study trips to the United States—Dutch educational consultant groups offered these trips as a part of their portfolio. This specific ministerial visit was also documented in *The Education Revolution: Spectacular Learning at Lower Costs* written by AA consultant Morton Egol (2003)⁶⁵—a book on Alameda. In the chapter “A day in the life of a facilitator,” it says:

The [facilitators] team was reminded that the two-hour guided tour of the CLC by a delegation of educators from the Netherlands, including the country's education minister, would be handled by two learners. Nancy invited the facilitators to join the group in the conference room for a portion of the 30-minute wrap-up. (Egol, 2003, p. 40)

This description gives an interesting insight into the visit and the way visitors were introduced to this way of learning. Alameda—a prototype community learning center—had to be an experience not a topic for discussion; apparently there was little space for deeper exploration. The consultant representing a business interest of Arthur Andersen's transmitted all that could be known about the Alameda concept. I found it interesting but also disquieting to discover that professional lobbying work among those responsible for education policy and those who have easy access to schools had an increasing impact on both policy and schools between 1998 and 2002.

In October 2002, Arthur Andersen went bankrupt in the aftermath of the Enron debacle. The consultant Te Loo had to look for a new job—and apparently school managers no longer visited Alameda. He started his own company and became the interim manager at !mpulse in 2009. He led the community out of the crisis according to the managerial principles of the industrial age, which he had professionally opposed between 1995 and 2002 when Arthur Andersen and Alameda were advocating for a transition into the information age—the old and new dichotomy was also a matter of ideology. I was shocked as I read his name, since I had met him several times in that crisis year and his relationship with Alameda was never mentioned.

⁶⁵ Egol's book is discussed in paragraph 4.

I reread Te Loo's quick scan about the crisis at !mpulse in 2009 (see part II, chapter 1). He concluded that !mpulse—like all other innovative schools—faced the question: “Does the school prepare students well enough for national examinations?” I realised, Te Loo was a figurehead in the Millennium Innovation and introduced an American concept to the wider Dutch field of education. He knew the presented concept was developed for a school system without national requirements; thus, he and the KPC consultants knew that introducing it into a Dutch situation was problematic from the start. Nevertheless, this must have been ignored—since after several years, this aspect still seems to be a major issue among innovative schools. It opened my eyes to the vulnerability of schools when it comes to the influence of profit-oriented education consultants.

Node Redesign

In 2003, it was decided that !mpulse would not be embedded into an existing school as unavoidable interaction with restricting conditions too often constrained or obstructed successful school innovations. Withdrawal from the mainstream context was an important condition for the successful accomplishment of the project; hence, !mpulse was placed in the difficult position of being between ‘new’ and ‘old’. This withdrawal, however, was a prerequisite inherent to the specific innovation concept aiming at a revolution in the education system. The assumed gap between what conventional schools offer and what society requires could otherwise not be filled (Egol, 2003; *Visiedocument*, 2004). The KPC group consultant Gankema had developed a re-design business model for schools, an adaptation of the Business Process Reengineering model (BPR) by Michael Hammer⁶⁶, the business buzzword in the 1990s (Boltanski & Chiapello, [1999] 2005). His ideas about a changed education were a mixture of managerial and marketing principles with constructivist learning psychology. BPR reduced all organisational factors to the one that was most important and self-evident for any company, namely the customer who should by all means be satisfied. Accordingly, the student was turned into the school's customer; in other words, student-centred learning was actually customer-centred learning. As is claimed in BPR theory, the only way to keep a customer was by understanding his needs and to organise service based on

⁶⁶ Michael Hammer and James Champy published their bestseller *Re-engineering your corporation: A manifesto for Business Revolution* in 1993. The point of departure for BPR is the specific focus on customer demand in organisations. Margaret Wheatley (1999) criticised Michael Hammer in *Leadership and New Science. Discovering order in a chaotic world*. In her book, she described the turn from an old mechanistic Newtonian perspective to a new Quantum self-organising perspective, from old to new sciences. At this point, she criticised that the introduction of his Business Process Reengineering was an illustration of a concept still rooted in scientific management. It was used as the ultimate answer to organisational problems, but “its costly failures were later acknowledged to have stemmed in large part from processes and beliefs that paid no attention to the human (or living) dimensions of organizational life (see Hammer 1995).” (Wheatley, 1999, p. 29) The KCP consultants found their motivation for the new school in this turn to the information age, to the discourse that the new sciences belonged to. Nevertheless, following Wheatley, I can conclude that KPC applied an old tool for the realisation of a new educational reality.

this understanding. This was translated into the educational context. Student needs were related to learning for future jobs; therefore, one would want all of the school activities to be in alignment with future job requirements. As a consequence, school was redefined as a workplace that supports learning to learn in an interdisciplinary way and based on the two cultures—the natural and social sciences—that integrated the awareness of norms and values and the development of skills. The school of the future was a learning environment (Morssinkhof, 2003).

!mpulse followed this redesign approach, and was integrated into a group of exemplary schools that applied this concept while being guided by KPC consultants from the think tank ‘redesign secondary education’. Their experiences, thoughts and learning were published in a serial publication (2006) to inspire new projects—as well as to promote the KPC-redesign. The booklet *Concepten bouwen en bewaken* (Building and maintaining concepts) (Van Dam, 2008) summarised and clarified general issues in the process of school redesign. In hindsight, it presented an explanation of the way !mpulse was shaped, and then embedded within KPC’s ambitions.

School redesign

The educational concept, “the pedagogical vision that underlies the delivered education” (Van Dam, 2008, p. 5), comprises of theoretical and personal opinions and ideas. These concepts originate from technological and economical progress, from actual changing generations, from the decline of knowledge authority and the changing position of the teacher, from growing research-based knowledge about learning.

In the redesign school, “objectives such as the focus on personal development of students, responsibility for one’s own actions, self-direction, autonomy, and reflection indicate the direction for design. The advancement of these qualities is integrated into the aimed at competencies, core objectives and attainment targets prescribed by the Dutch government” (p. 5). Redesign education values are student and teacher and their engagement in the learning process, their ownership for their choices, active learning, and trust in the developmental capabilities of students.

The building process “can be strengthened by the presence of an inspirator, a passionate person with a clear vision—a founding father” (p. 6).⁶⁷ He is so important because he stands at the beginning. They are “first owners of the concept and their knowledge is needed to inform anybody within and outside of the school what the

⁶⁷ It is stated, that “In the past, founders of reform pedagogy schools such as Maria Montessori, Peter Pedersen and Kees Boeke were inspiring; in the Dutch redesign processes, “people are recognised as sources of inspiration for their environment due to their passionate commitment and visionary ideas for the future. We mention here Harry Gankema and Henk van Dieten (Slash 21); Ida van de Velde en Reinald Gerbenzon (!mpulse); [...]” (p. 9).

values are. It is their ongoing responsibility to inspire, to mirror, and to compare pragmatic solutions with the initial ideas” (p. 9).

The redesign concept is founded in societal developments and school ambition. Managers and employees search and use “the dynamics outside the boundaries of their own school” (6), they visit conferences and innovative schools within the Netherlands and abroad; they have talks with trend watchers and scientists; they read their literature.

This concept leads to a mission, a vision, objectives, and ambitions. The mission describes the future school organisation based on reasons for existence; in the case of redesign schools, this orientation is on learning and the development of people and their functioning in society as a result of the school’s societal and pedagogical vocation. The vision translates the mission into a sketch of “future developments with regard to customers, competitors, content, organisation and the ideas society has about this” (p. 8).

Finally, it is advised to write ‘*a script of a day in the life of a learner and a day of the life of a teacher/facilitator.*’ It details expected behaviour, amenities, and activities.⁶⁸

Aligned with the systems theory developed by Marx (1975), organisational and educational subsystems should be geared to one another; the organisational system should be considered supportive of the educational because “a pleasant environment creates pleasant human behaviour” (p. 14).

Source: Van Dam (2008)

Interlude

Actually, on their striving towards radical change called revolution, the redesign school advocates turned their backs on the existing educational systems, committed people, satisfied students and parents. They saw no more value in past experiences and practices that invited to dream about better futures. Nevertheless, in hubris towards tradition, redesign advocates and consultants neglected the consequences for human dignity. The stories of students, parents, teachers, and founders made me aware of the backlash of such an approach. This free choice for customer-based learning forced people to explore new ways of learning or teaching or guiding. Familiar set-ups, ideas, or valued practice were rendered obsolete. At this point, I understood the critique that Wheatley (1999) expressed against Hammer. If the new paradigm was rooted in the flux of life any fragmentation would be contradictory. Hence, school redesign sepa-

⁶⁸ See Egol (2003) about Alameda. He also offers these ‘day in the life of ...’ insights in his book.

rated the past and the present, while also dividing the present into subgroups. I started to hesitate about the argumentation used.

The argument, that teaching would create unmotivated, consumerist students who only bought what they preferred, was used to render teaching obsolete. As a result, students were now officially transformed into customers—thus the reproach was the solution. The school would only need to offer what the student demanded—namely, learning; its quality would be perceived at the moment of truth when the service-providing teacher and the consumer student met in the learning process. The redesign school would be based on this service provision model. I use this marketing language on purpose to clarify that this was actually the context of school innovation. This might sound appropriate for a commercial business model, for instance for the KPC group—but for schools? After I had read all these documents, student-centeredness, self-direction, and the language of Impulse had lost all of its pedagogical sense to me. I noticed my discomfort with their claims; moreover, I think that this approach contradicted the basic idea of equality and community shaped by Impulse. The relationship between teacher and student was one of reverse inequality: the student would decide what a teacher should offer instead of the teacher directing the student. Furthermore, this perspective neglected Impulse’s pedagogical aim, which was and still is addressed in one sentence in a building block: “Develop humanity, acknowledge equality, human rights and sustainability” (*Visiedocument*, 2004, p. 10). I got the impression that the KPC redesign model somehow failed to consider these aspects due to a one-sided focus on thoughts derived from business and economy.

With the practice of transforming management concepts (especially the marketing service providing model) into education, it would seem that the consultants had entered a domain where it was quite common to pass on concepts without much consideration. The French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello ([1999] 2005) carried out research on the origins of management concepts in management literature specifically meant for managers published between 1959 and 1969, and between 1988 and 1994. Their study was quite helpful in understanding the mechanisms for transferring concepts, which I discovered in educational innovation.

They included in their study several intriguing yet disquieting statements that refer to a common practice among management authors and publishers, namely that “ideas are taken up, repeated, conveyed by various examples, pass nimbly from one author or editor to another and from one medium to another” (p. 60). So the number of themes or management concepts discussed in management literature is rather limited. This limited set of concepts returns in limited variation in numerous different books because different authors use their publications for different target groups. This would make it difficult to relate the “bodies of rhetoric” to the original authors. Hence, these books would add a status of considerable ideological significance to concepts while influen-

cing the work and life of millions of employees—and now students as well. In other words, the amount of publications concerning a specific concept was decisive for its reception and application. The Hammer and Champy re-engineering concept is explicitly mentioned as a widely used management concept for changing an organisation.

It is stated that many concepts can be related to the network paradigm, an “enormous conceptual brew” that has proliferated since the 1970s at a great pace in theoretical and empirical studies in different disciplines. Management literature on network related concepts is mostly repeating other management sources on the same concepts. References to the scientific background of the network discourse are rather rare and often limited to a few natural or social scientists. In this way, it seems as if management literature is a scientific discipline in its own right.

Three topics decide a specific discourse: 1. hierarchy and control; 2. competition; and 3. consumer demand. The latter two require adaptation, flexibility and change—which cannot be achieved within the current conditions of hierarchy, which are part of another historical context. Since large-scale worldwide operating companies require hierarchy and control, moral arguments revolving around the humanisation of organisations are used to support the claim. Employees and workers no longer accept dominance; and due to an increasing amount of educated people and an increasing level of education, everyone has similar value to a company—which contradicts a functional hierarchy.

The *new* employees are presented in the literature as well. They need to be freed, adaptive, flexible, innovative, autonomous, cooperative, informed, competent, self-organised, creative, tolerant, empowered, employable, and self-knowledgeable. These employees do not need hierarchical control, as they control themselves through their desire to perform and work. Hence, concepts of self-direction and intrinsic motivation based on passion and commitment spread around the companies. Alongside this form of control, trust and trustworthiness in relationships turned into control mechanisms. And despite the attempts to avoid all organisational control, one instance of domination became acceptable: customer demand or the “market type of control” (p. 82).

I compared the !mpulse ideas about self-directed learners with the characteristics for employees and organisation that Boltanski and Chiapello found in management literature; this comparison shed another light on the !mpulse text and language. The *Visiedocument* integrated repeatedly used management language; for instance, the building blocks present the concepts (self)-responsible, entrepreneur, competencies, autonomous, and collaboration as basic properties of the !mpulse learner. Moreover, ‘trust’ was communicated as the basic value in the relationship between teacher and student; even parents were asked to trust their child and their ability to take ownership over their learning. For me, trust is a basic element in pedagogical relationships; thus,

this demand seemed logical. Nevertheless, since trust is mentioned as a ‘slogan’ and organisational tool for control in management literature, I wonder whether its appearance in Impulse has another background. Actually, it was rather confusing to see that management language and school language could be intermingled so easily.

Furthermore, in its initial state, Impulse was a low-hierarchy learning community in which teachers and students had equal responsibility; this mirrors the 1990s management approach to organisations. As I absorbed the conclusion that the two worlds were combined, I had to ask myself what made the founders move in this direction? In our conversation, they explained that their thoughts and ideas were congruent with what they read and heard in the development process. Were they the owners of the thoughts, or did they reflect a global discourse on learning? It is difficult to discern where one’s ideas come from, especially if the root of thought is not a matter of concern. To me, the reading and comparing gave me more insight into the fact that the Impulse concept was infused with a neo-liberal based economic background—despite pedagogical or psychological learning considerations.

A Matter of Inspiration

Introduction

Alameda, a city in the San Francisco Bay Area, has a mythical significance in the Impulse context. It is the hometown of the Alameda Community Learning Center (ACLCLC). A visit of the *Piter Jelles* principals to this school in Alameda was the final stimulus for the Impulse project. Paul Bentz, the ACLCLC CEO, was invited to visit *Piter Jelles* in 2003. During his speech to all the teachers of the comprehensive school, his aim was to convince them through his personal experiences.

Besides, he supported the founders with advice during the start-up process. They travelled to Alameda in November 2004, an essential experience and the ultimate proof that their dream was not wishful thinking but a future reality. Real life experience in a similar school, which had been so successful since 1996, reassured them. This confidence affected parents, children and future staff when the school was launched.

Interlude

The school came to my research attention when I discovered that Alameda CLC was a source of inspiration for Slash21, was visited by minister Hermans and many Dutch school principals and teachers. I mentioned Alameda CLC in a conversation with my supervisor. He pointed out that the city in itself might already be significant. It is situated at the edge of the progressive and rich San Francisco Bay Area—near the University of California Berkeley campus, Stanford University, and Silicon Valley. As a result of its history as a former naval base, Alameda can be seen as a less wealthy and more conservative area. Thus, our question was why would a school with such an innovative program be located here? We explored the idea that the presence of this school with its focus on autonomous community learning and on ICT could be rooted in both the 1960s counterculture movement and the ICT developments in Silicon Valley. My supervisor advised me to read Fred Turner's book (2006) in which he describes the relationship between the 1960s counterculture and the rise of the Internet—I decided first to contact Paul Bentz via email.

@

24.04.2013

Dear Paul,

...

Lately, my American-Dutch supervisor and I discussed the relationships between ACLC and Impulse, especially in regard to the autonomous individual—community mind set, which is quite unique in the innovative schools in the Netherlands. And we wondered whether we could go so far as to consider this aspect in both schools as being rooted in the counterculture that emerged in the geographical region Alameda is located in. I recently read Fred Turner's book about Stewart Brand and the influence of his Whole Earth Network activity on digital technological developments and on society in general. Therefore, I am really curious to know what made you decide to start with ACLC – why ACLC - and whether you would connect the start and success of ACLC with the mentioned historical social movements in California.

A reply on the 5th of May 2013:

Marte,

Sorry it has taken so long to respond. We are in the process of hiring my replacement and I will be retiring in October of this year. A brief answer to your question appears on our website: <http://www.clcschools.org>

I did not actually start ACLC, I was just one of the first five teachers (facilitators) that was hired to run the program. The start of the school had nothing to do with historical social movements in California. But I will say that I was shaped by them and therefore perhaps my shaping showed up in the school as it evolved.

Source: Email conversation with PB April/May 2013⁶⁹

Paul Bentz retired in Autumn 2013. In an interview with a local newspaper, he reflected on his time at the ACLC. He explained his long career at ACLC was a result of the “enormous amount of freedom to creatively try to reinvent the future of education.” Despite the specific character of the school, so he experienced, it needed to be balanced

⁶⁹ Paul Bentz graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1972, and was involved in the AACLC part time in its initiation phase.

with the requirements of learning basic school knowledge (for instance, algebra). He recalled the early days during which this was not part of the program—Arthur Anderson had no clear picture of this. It was decided to add this to the program because the staff worried that parents would withdraw their children. He emphasised the need for this kind of school, as parents no longer wanted the outdated “1950 factory model” in education. Moreover, he addressed the specific school situation in the US, where parents have little school choice opportunities (Ellson, 2013).

After receiving Paul’s reply, I returned to the school’s website, which I had visited several times before. It gave a brief explanation of the school’s history, stating it was founded with the help of the accounting company Arthur Anderson—whose name was part of the school’s name until 2001: Arthur Andersen CLC. I was surprised that I was not more alert before; and then I understood that it was merely the combination of newly acquired knowledge and growing awareness that allowed me to become more critical about what I discovered. In this sense, I had to acknowledge that AA was never mentioned at Impulse, but that this was probably a matter of just taking it for granted. Another argument in favour of the founders could be the fact that the Impulse project started when AA was already out of Alameda and had gone bankrupt.

It took time to realise that Alameda was less ‘innocent’ than I believed it to be; I could no longer see Alameda as the inspiring place for learners and school innovators. I gradually understood that I had to look beyond Alameda and explore the hidden influence Arthur Andersen had had on the Dutch Millennium Innovation via this CLC. It was obvious that AA had access to those who had power in the field of education; moreover, companies such as AA were explicitly invited by the minister of education in his policy letters to engage in the innovation process.

Node An Accountant in Education

AA’s involvement with education started as a response to the call of President W.H. Bush Sr. for business involvement in public education during an education summit in September 1989 (Ravitch, 2010). Arthur Andersen had a long tradition in the non-formal professional education of its own employees, and was concerned about a future shortfall of skilled professionals who could effectively respond to the challenges of the information age. The business organisations and workplaces had changed; yet, the schools remained the same and continued to produce passive learners.

For AA, involvement in education was a matter of far-reaching investment in its own future. In addition to financial benefits, profit organisations could provide schools with management expertise to develop learner-based programs, facilitator training, and internship programs for students. In this way facilitators and students would learn to appreciate the “interrelationship of democracy and capitalism” (Egol, 2003, p. 64). Morton Egol was appointed to develop the *School for the Future*—resulting in the

Alameda CLC.⁷⁰ He aimed at a new educational system that would replace one that was unproductive and inefficient. This system would be more efficient as it saved costs, and would bring more societal and financial benefits to teachers and parents. Moreover, students would be able to enter the workforce at an earlier stage instead of going through an inefficient extended childhood in college that delayed “their economic livelihoods”. The new system would no longer generate inflexible passive learners, but a “stream of younger entrepreneurs and empowered professionals” (Egol, 2003, p. 26).

He motivated his claim to save educational costs by turning to learning. He claimed that if schools would focus on learning, less teaching teachers would be needed and educational costs could decrease—students would learn automatically and would only need coaching adults. Moreover, the turn to learning would be even more appropriate because human beings are gifted with a natural ability to learn which is driven by an innate curiosity. Any school that neglects learning actually neglects its moral obligation to free students from the chains of teaching. Besides these two reasons, a focus on learning would be consistent with the shift towards the information age. This requires a different paradigm—the so-called “learning paradigm”. This learning model however could never be successfully implemented into the existing system. Reform, so he argued, only reinforced current practices; consequently, he made a strong plea for revolution.

The relationship between Arthur Andersen and Alameda was explained in an article about the start of the school.

⁷⁰ Morton Egol has been a consultant at AA since 1962. He has led projects for and advised people, companies, and especially governments, (e.g. the American “Secretary of the Treasury in connection with the federal loan guaranty program to help bail-out New York City from its fiscal crisis [in 1975]).” He has advised in “large privatization and productivity-improvement projects at the federal, state, and local levels throughout the world.” Between 1989 and 1998, he was engaged in “developing a worldwide practice in education. After his retirement, he continued to support the development of the Community Learning Center at Alameda, and advises as a private consultant in matters of education and economical development worldwide.” (Egol, 2003). In 2003, he published the book in which he integrated small pieces tractates written together with Richard Measelle in 1991, 1993 and 1997. No visitor of the ACLC would be informed about the underlying ideas of the school unless they were discussed during the visit. This might be a reason why Morton Egol is not referred to in the other Dutch sources on Alameda that I came across.

'SCHOOL OF THE FUTURE' OPENS IN ALAMEDA - Sept. 5 1996

Debut of Arthur Andersen Community Learning Center

ALAMEDA, Calif., Sept. 5 /PRNewswire/ -- An innovative approach to education, a new model that creates a unique learning environment combining the best learning practices in elementary and secondary education with state-of-the-art technology, was unveiled today with the opening of Arthur Andersen Community Learning Center (AACLC) at Encinal High School in Alameda, CA. The AACLC is the first Center of its kind.

The 8,000 sq. ft. Center is a modern version of the one-room schoolhouse of old, using the most advanced technology to support self-directed, discovery-based learning with the goal of creating lifelong learners who possess the full range of skills needed in the Information Age. The Arthur Andersen Community Learning Center looks strikingly different from a traditional classroom. There are no chalkboards, no straight rows of desks, no teachers lecturing in the traditional way and no bells signalling class changes.

Instead, students and teachers -- referred to as learners and facilitators -- achieve learning objectives by working as teams. They bring into play an intriguing mix of computer-aided technologies to accomplish tasks. The approach builds on proven educational practices, which are also widely used in business with the notion that students have an innate drive to learn. This Fall, the Center will have 96 learners from grades 7-10. By 1998, the number of learners will increase to 150 from grades 7-12.

The students, who come from throughout the Alameda Unified School District, were selected by a lottery to represent the diversity of the student population in the District. Within a curriculum framework designed for self-directed learners, learning activities are orchestrated by five facilitators (teachers), who function as learning coaches in a technology-enriched environment where multi-age teams engage in collaborative learning.

"The Arthur Andersen Community Learning Center demonstrates a new learning model that resulted from the research and development activities begun as part of Arthur Andersen's School of the Future Program initiated in 1989," said Richard L. Measelle, Managing Partner Worldwide, Arthur Andersen. "Our partners and personnel are proud to be catalysts for change in education and urge other enterprises to get involved in education at all levels and to consider this new model."

"The vision for the School of the Future Program, a civic initiative, is to demonstrate a quality and productivity breakthrough in education," said Morton Egol, Director of Arthur Andersen's School of the Future Program. "The opening of the Arthur Andersen Community Learning Center is the culmination of that vision -- a fundamentally different learning environment that enables students to prepare themselves for the 21st Century."

Dennis Chaconas, Superintendent of the Alameda Unified School District, said the AACLC embodies the District's curriculum requirements and the skills that the Alameda community wants graduates to possess as agreed upon in its 1993 community vision exercise. "We are proud to have collaborated with Arthur Andersen in establishing the first demonstration Center of the new learning model at Encinal High School," said Chaconas. "The Alameda District attempts to view education through the eyes of our students. Although we are succeeding in providing high quality education for our students throughout the district, we believe the requirements of the marketplace in the 21st Century are evolving and we are committed to continuous learning improvement."

"During our initial experience with the Summer Bridge Session involving 48 learners in the AACLC, we were amazed by how quickly the natural learning ability of the students was tapped. Learning became exciting. This change in attitude energized learners and parents alike," Chaconas said.

Arthur Andersen formed an alliance with Creative Learning Systems, Inc. of San Diego, California, to design and implement the Creative Learning Plaza(TM) that is at the heart of the AACLC.

"This model site is based on the findings from our 25 years of research into the kinds of complex systems -- both social and technological -- that dynamically support self-directed collaborative learning," stated James Durkin, CEO of Creative Learning Systems. Our vision of the 'school of the future' matched the vision that Arthur Andersen was simultaneously articulating -- and their resources have been combined with ours to make the shared vision a gratifying reality." "At the AACLC, the Creative Learning Plaza enables young people to take responsibility for their own learning. It breaks through barriers of time, space, social roles, age segregation, academic disciplines, and ability groupings," Francine Foster, vice president of Creative Learning Systems, points out. "With the Plaza's advanced electronic and social network linkages to the world outside, the boundaries are being removed between home, school, work, play, and community life."

The Center has over 20 different learning areas, which can be reconfigured to accommodate evolving learner pursuits. "Activities in the Center emphasize basic skill building in math, science, reading and writing," said Linda McClusky, one of the five facilitators directing the Center's activities. "But truly unique is the learning environment that supports team building, collaboration, self-direction, problem solving, and discovery learning." McClusky has found that the relationship with learners is fundamentally different. "Being with the learners full time, each school day, for up to six years means that we know their strengths and weaknesses and are in a position to better support both," McClusky said. "Also, the ability to blend separate curriculum components into something meaningful to each learner increases interest."

Arthur Andersen, a leader in professional services worldwide, has a tradition of involvement in education at a grass-roots level. Much of this involvement stems from its commitment, as a firm, to continuing education. The Center For Professional Education, whose worldwide training and professional education facility is in St. Charles, Ill., houses some 1,750 professionals at a time. Last year some 55,000 learning days were utilized. Approximately 200 instructional designers and assessment professionals at this Center have advanced degrees in education.

The School of the Future initiative began in 1989 with the goal of demonstrating a breakthrough in the quality and productivity of public education. On the basis of extensive research on the best practices in education, Arthur Andersen has designed new organizing principles for schools, and developed training programs based on Total Quality, cooperative learning and authentic assessment -- all of which are embodied in the new learning model being demonstrated at the Arthur Andersen Community Learning Center.

Source: Arthur Andersen (1996)

AA invested two and half million dollars. In return, the school board had to accept that AA used the CLC as a prototype to attract and to convince visitors that mainstream education was obsolete and should be replaced by a CLC supported by AA (Dugan, 2002). To further its ambition, the company organised several global conferences titled 'Learning for the 21st century' starting from 1995 on; and, it hosted educators, university representatives, educational politicians, and business executives to establish a

worldwide network that would enable the transformation of elementary and secondary education.⁷¹

Interlude

The article brings the reader back to the past, to the mid 19th century, when children in the rural US were educated in a “one-room schoolhouse”. It reminds me of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, the book I loved to read as a young girl. Set in the first half of the 19th century, her father, Bronson Alcott, practiced a rather unconventional teaching style that aimed at active learning students in the one-room school—a way of teaching that goes even back into the 18th century. Despite the idea of an educational experiment, it is worthwhile to note that it was merely a practical consideration to combine all of the ages in one classroom with one teacher. Actually, Lennard’s father went to a village elementary school that functioned in this way for practical reasons. Anyway, Alcott was rather unsuccessful; instead, Louisa became famous as she started to write.

In the article above, Egol uses romantic nostalgia in his educational efforts. At first glance, this reminiscence surprised me in light of the Information Age rhetoric. But in a way it did make sense: in the one-room schoolhouse, one teacher taught multi-aged children. The pupils stayed the whole day at school, learned in their own manner and time, and the older children had to help the younger pupils. Likewise, the CLC would create opportunities for students with different backgrounds, ages and talents to cooperate with each other. In a so-called Cross-Age-Learning team they would learn in a non-hierarchical way with and from each other; moreover, this team was responsible for the smooth and successful running of the community. However, in his reference to the past, Egol concealed his real inspiration: the one office workplace in modern organisations—these unpleasant and dehumanising but cost saving ‘office gardens’.

Furthermore, the article explains the foundation of the educational concept within organisational needs, (human resource) management theory, and in technological developments. Any information about educational philosophy or about the value of knowledge is left out of the article. All that counts is the mantra of the 21st century and the skilled professional; for Egol, there seems to be no life beyond the workplace. In terms of management concepts, I recognised what I had read in Boltanski and Chiapello and what I knew about Impulse as well. What was new to me were the self-evident consequences of technological developments that blur all boundaries and integrate work and private life. This visionary image (in 1996) has indeed entered the life of those who work. Nevertheless, it makes me anxious to think that this idea was integrated into the CLC concept and has now entered many schools these days.

⁷¹ In 1996, Peter Drucker, Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, Hirotaka Tacheuchi (www.wccta.net) and, in 2000 Daniel Greenberg were keynote speaker (www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWMVnD0KdzQ)

Node The Egol Learning Model

The CLC learning model aimed at the ‘production’ of empowered, lifelong learning and networking employees who had developed an entrepreneurial spirit.⁷² Their learning process was instigated by projects offered by businesses and social institutions. This *real world* decided what information students needed to successfully complete a project—all information is now digitally available. In regard to (school) knowledge and knowing, Egol demonstrated an overall disdain. He argued that all subject-based taught knowledge was “obsolete” and “not valid theory” because of the “ever-quickening pace of knowledge development”. New questions emerged continuously and any current state of knowledge would not suffice to give answers to new questions emerging from a complex world—“no one can know enough” (p. 4). Hence, experience was the best way to become knowledgeable; and learning in a CLC created experienced practical answers to the questions. Actually, he argued, the CLC itself would become “a knowledge-creating resource” (p. 13) for itself and for the environment.

The business world entering schools blurred the boundaries between two thus far separate worlds; and this would in turn create a better preparation for adolescents to join the workforce at an early age. This learning model offered all young people—irrespective of capabilities and backgrounds—the opportunities to unleash their potential and to design their own individual pathways to success. In addition, the risk of dropping out was reduced to a minimum. As a result, “the nation’s competitive position” (p. 27), its “social cohesion”, “political democracy”, and “overall quality of life” (xii) would be guaranteed. Hence, the learning model would create the necessary social, political, and economic capital; in other words, employees whose “interactions with people in all walks of life would help to perpetuate our national values of self-reliance, diversity, capitalism, and democracy, while fostering deep understanding of the interplay of these values in real life” (p. 17).

He summarised the core elements of his learning model in an article in 2006. Despite the fact that AA collapsed in the aftermath of the Enron scandal in 2002, Egol did not lose his deeply felt belief in business leverage for education; he furthered the AA idea, expressing in 2006 that the “learning industry” will be big business.

The new learning industry is certain to be born. It’s only a matter of time and of where it will start. I should say where it will “explode” because there are already a number of schools that operate under these principles. But it is not an industry that can be built by simply buying a patent. This is a service, and those in this service business need to passionately believe in the concepts and purpose to attract the right people. It

⁷² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzUi9NV7OWQ> Published on Youtube April 25, 2014, the film shows an interview with facilitators and Morton Egol. One of the students, Katie Willis, remarks, “We will be good business people”.

also requires a critical mass of installations to begin to have any impact on the system as a whole. There are 300,000 CLCs needed in the United States and 6,000,000 needed worldwide. Undoubtedly, many entrepreneurs will love tackling this opportunity. (Egol, 2006, p. 73)

Elements of the Community Learning Center model

Self-directed learning allows learners to immerse themselves in areas of passionate interest, build on their strengths, and dramatically increase their productivity. Learners develop a personal vision for their aspirations and “reverse-plan” programs to fulfil them. It includes self-assessment, a vitally important skill for lifelong learners.

Learners’ timely documentation of their progress is frequently reviewed with facilitators. In the CLC, learners periodically demonstrate their capabilities and accomplishments relative to their plans before a panel of learners and facilitators (supplemented by a portfolio of their work).

A multi-age structure allows learners to learn from each other and creates a “scaffolding” that provides learners with role models. Principles and methods of learning are the same for all ages.

A large, open space to accommodate 150–175 self-directed learners facilitates interactivity and cross-disciplinary learning and increases the utility of learners as a resource for each other. By empowering learners to help other learners, schools gain a valuable resource, while learners practice their learning and working skills and achieve the sense of personal mastery needed for a dynamic workplace.

The teaching role is transformed from lecturer to facilitator, allowing for much greater interaction with individual learners.

Technology is used as an enabler of Self-Directed Learning and Self-Organization, the new learning paradigm.

The accelerating pace of change and the shift to a brain-powered economy mean that careers and knowledge requirements will change more frequently; lifelong learning is therefore an essential skill.

CLCs are very sensitive to continuous improvement; all costs directly relate to learning processes. The typical CLC of 150–175 learners operates effectively with five to six facilitators at a cost of at least 20 percent less than the cost of operating a typical public school.

Source: Egol, 2006

Interlude

The moment I saw Morton Egol's name in the 1996 article about the AACLC, I remembered that I had seen his name on the reading list in the *Impulse Visiedocument*—although I could not connect the author nor the book with Alameda, as the document writers did not refer to the source when they mentioned Alameda. The book was not available in Dutch libraries, nor accessible via Google Books, so I did not continue my search. The article however forced me to search again, and I found a cheap copy on Amazon.

The book revealed two lines of thought—one derived from management theories, and the other from educational ones. It was written in a popular non-academic style—despite the claim that ACLC was the result of thorough research. Obviously, Egol had a strong affinity with systems thinking presented by Peter Senge in his *Fifth Discipline* book⁷³ as it would be the organisational principle for the information age. During his years as a consultant he constructed a causal loop diagram for accounting in a new management paradigm called *Dynamic Scoring*. This method was now promoted for the design and assessment of community learning centres together with the principles of systems thinking as learning content.

The bibliography of his book showed an interesting range of well-known organisational and management scholars and consultants such as Jay Forrester, Peter Drucker, Milton and Rose Freeman, Russell Ackoff, Margaret Wheatley, Lewis Perelman, and Charles Handy. They were and still are influential thinkers in the discourse on knowledge society, the information age, and 'new sciences'. Moreover, he referred to publications on education and complex learning systems (Seymour Papert, John Chubb and Terry Moe⁷⁴). These publications reflected a gradual turn to complexity in management and organisation literature (Boltanski & Chiapello, [1999] 2005; Urry, 1995). Consequently, Egol used concepts from the proliferating complexity discourse—without discussing, however, the complexity perspective. His writings are unsophisticated, repeating concepts to position his learning model in the discourse—as is seen in his complexity description of the Community Learning Center,

⁷³ Within the context of the study of Boltanski and Chiapello the following information on Peter Senge is relevant. He was born in Stanford and graduated as an engineer and philosopher from Stanford University. He studied social system modelling at MIT with Jay Forrester. His book *Fifth Discipline* (1990) hit a "nerve deep within the business and education community by introducing the theory of learning organisations." The book was a bestseller; in 1997, the Harvard Business Review presented it as "one of the seminal management books of the past 75 years." Various business journals considered him as one of the most influential thinkers in management (source: www.solonline.org).

⁷⁴ Dian Ravitch claims that these two authors fiercely attacked the 'democratic' governmental control of public education, which would result in "poor academic performance." Moreover, this system was from their point of view unable to reform itself (Ravitch, 2010, p. 118).

Individuals and self-organizing teams will collaborate toward common objectives, informing learners' own plans as well as the overall plans for the CLC. Out of the chaos of individual choice, order will emerge. Continuous feedback and self-referencing among learners and facilitators will create a living system, a self-organizing learner community. (Egol, 2003, p. 9)

Besides Peter Senge, he explicitly acknowledged his indebtedness to the Sudbury Valley School founder Daniel Greenberg. Reading Greenberg (2000) indeed revealed that Egol had taken many practical elements from the Sudbury concept: its democratic structure, everyone has one vote at school meetings, its internal judicial committee of students for rule violations, cross-age learning, autonomy in learning and planning, the teacher as a role model for learning and living, and the open school building. All of these elements were implemented into the !mpulse context. Yet, Sudbury was the example for *Iederwijs*—the *new learning* exponent, the school director did not want to be associated with, the school that the founders did not want to build. It was interesting to see that !mpulse was more similar to Alameda than to Slash21 in this respect.

Obviously, this book had not been written from a progressive pedagogical perspective although it does mention John Dewey. His name possibly might have had the function of justifying the Alameda concept in reference to the long tradition of progressive education. He connected the names of Lev Vygotsky, Goodlad and McMannon, Jacqueline and Martin Brooks to CLC without explicitly expanding upon their ideas on constructivism. He presented books on natural learning (Renate and Geoffrey Caine), on brain theory (Eccles), again without any sound discussion in his book. It seemed to me that learning theories were integrated into the complexity perspective of a learning system without much consideration—it seemed to me that they were mentioned to validate the management-based learning paradigm in education.

My reading of Egol in June 2013 was a tense experience; the book was a breakthrough and an eye-opener for me. The book worked like a wake-up call; all of my interpretations of what I knew about the school lost its value at that point. It was an unpleasant experience to recognise my ignorance about the school's firm roots in neo-liberal politics and economics.

Based on this reading, I had to conclude that !mpulse was related to or perhaps even rooted in conservative American right-wing ideology: individual freedom and respon-

sibility; grass-root democracy rather than governmental involvement; marketisation and entrepreneurship. Moreover, what could I say about Egol's assumption that the "learning paradigm" rooted in US values would create a better world? This overtly expressed ideology was at the core of his book starting with the opening sentence, "This is a book about an educational revolution that we need in order to sustain our freedom and quality of life" (xi) and lasting until his final conclusions,

In the end, we in the United States must be guided, as were the Founding Fathers, by our hallowed traditions of individual rights, freedom of expression, and free markets. We, the people, must now reinforce and sustain these traditions. We can do so by designing an education system that allows our youth and the entire citizenry to be responsible for their own development and shaping of our democracy. (p. 67)

In other words, the language and concepts used in !mpulse and introduced via the innovation concept resembled the discourse of neo-liberal economic and political ideology—with a totally different understanding of the values of democracy, freedom, and independence. I felt very uncomfortable about my ignorance—and to some extent about fooling myself—as I did not recognise the impact of language. Even though I studied the spirit of the times in the Netherlands—both in politics and academia—and experienced that education was increasingly a toy in the dynamics of the knowledge economy, I needed this non-academic book about a prototype real-world learning community to understand the extent of ignorance about the context of !mpulse at its initiation.

To be honest: after reading the book in a way I felt betrayed. I had chosen a school without history and tradition—at least it was communicated as such. It was developed from scratch by managers and teachers. They had visited Alameda and had had many conversations with the CEO. And I assumed they had also read the book. What had they learned from these contacts? Again, I have to recall what they told me: we recognised our thoughts in theirs; our chairman of the board was inspired; we saw our dream in their reality; parents were enthusiastic about our plans. All that was seen by anyone visiting was its sparkling surface, and Egol knew this would suffice to spread the good news—this was applicable to Alameda, to Slash21, and to !mpulse—what would have happened if Arthur Anderson had not collapsed?

I wondered what the founders actually knew about the Alameda background. Therefore, I contacted them to share my discovery. I shared my anxiety with Ida over a comforting cup of tea in a nice café. It appeared that the founders had received a copy of the book during the year 2003/04. Ida knew about the book, but did not read it. In an e-mail to me after our meeting, she mirrored my feelings and gave me some of her reflections:

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[...]

I notice our talk still resonates in me. Let me share some of my thoughts with you. Your discovery that !mpulse had – unconsciously – allowed itself to be guided by the economical context of our society, though the image / starting point was /seemed to be different, invokes your anger. You made the impression on me as if you were misled. But we do educate students for a continuously changing society rooted in economic values. This insight also made me think. We educate children for society, but 1. it is in permanent change and 2. it is based on economic values.

And now you ask what we actually want from our education? What do students really need if we put economic value into perspective and talk about other values? [This was a] fundamental question, which we asked at the start of and during the development of !mpulse. So I wonder whether you have integrated into your research the key concept of !mpulse: the motivation of students for a love of learning. I wonder what you will find about positive self-image and confidence in becoming a member of society; about taking care of each other and being part of a community.

When I look with your eyes ... I see 'tribalism' in education. For both parties, the fundamental question counts: "Which values decide the choice? And are these two extremes on one scale, or can a bridge be built..."

Source: E-mail conversation with IV, 25.6.2013

I had a short telephone call with Reinald. He was surprised about my question about the influence of the Egol book. He confirmed he had read the book—a copied version. It had been inspirational because of the learning community it presented and the trust in children. He had appreciated the initiative of a business company to share its ideas about the future needs for a well-skilled workforce. The underlying idea of lowering costs had not been of interest. He advised me not to give too much credit to the book because the real life experience in Alameda had been more inspirational. In this sense, his words confirmed Egol's marketing trick about the psychological impact of a real life experience.

Still, Alameda—the source of inspiration—was a prototype, not just an innocent example of innovative education! Its rootedness in a neo-liberal economic view of life was overlooked. It was not recognised that the idea of the self-directed lifelong learner was based on the (greedy) need for economic growth. It was an instrument in the strategy of an ambitious consultancy business to form a society according to its worldview.

Alameda served as an overwhelming resonating experience, which showed that a 'dream' could suffice; it blinded idealists in search of better ways to educate.

Ida had a point, of course. I had met motivated self-assured students, I had enjoyed the community life, I had seen the pleasure of teachers in their work with the students. She turned my attention to the 'front page' of a complex untold story. I was aware of the fact that my question was unpleasant, and that I was possibly the first person who ever addressed the initiative from this critical perspective. Nevertheless, I was surprised by the reactions. Obviously, this perspective had not played an important issue in the development of !mpulse. But could I have expected a different—perhaps more distanced perspective after all that had happened at !mpulse?

While reading the mail and reconsidering the telephone call, I noticed that my growing awareness of the network context and driving motives of various stakeholders caused a distance between their and my way of thinking about !mpulse. My discovery of these hidden ideas behind !mpulse had made me sceptical about the experiences of motivated students who loved to learn and had fun, who developed this sense of community (among other more positive things that could be noted). No, I cannot and will not deny these visible and 'invisible' facts.

Two voices started to talk in my head and turned my attention to the personal dilemma the discovery had created. One voice said: "Why do you feel so uncomfortable? Lennard had some beautiful years at school; he made many friends; he felt respected by his teachers, and he was motivated to learn; he developed valuable skills that made him suitable for his future profession; he had no problems with his dyslexia."

"No", opposed the other voice, "Lennard was educated to maintain a status quo of economic growth, to become an obedient professional who merely fits the needs of political-economic forces—to become a 'little Arthur Andersen'. The economic and managerial perspective had entered the lives of 12-year-old children in such a way that they even really liked it. By the time they would enter the real world, this would be their perspective; you feel this way of educating minors is biased. Perhaps the most unusual, atypical, !mpulse student would actually be the student you would have expected !mpulse students to be like. How could you not have recognised this perspective?"

Did I feel guilty? I had to admit that my professional common sense and my enthusiasm had concealed pedagogical innocence. My self-criticism was quite confrontational; was I too severe with myself and with the founders? Could I have known at all; and if so, would it have made a difference regarding our school choice?

Interlude

Alameda and the San Francisco Bay Area, was this a coincidence? My supervisor had raised the question because of his roots in California; I, however, was unaware of the historical events in the 1960s. Therefore, I decided to read Turner.⁷⁵ It gave me another perspective on the world of complexity thinking that I had entered at the start of the DBA program. While reading, I started to see that the Alameda and the Millennium Innovation advocates claim of schools being obsolete was rooted in the long and interesting history of the gradual and complex transformation of the industrial into the information age. Again, I encountered a historical-social event I had not known about, yet which had influenced my life. Turner gave a detailed picture of connections of distinct events that in their unity gained a different significance and explained the world's complexity better. I learned that what we are facing nowadays and that what is hailed as 'new' was the result of a gradual development—just like how the global arrival of the Internet might have given an impression of sudden emergence to anyone who was outside of these developments (which was most of us). Actually, the book helped me clarify the flux of life again: nothing just happens; much should be considered in its historical-social context.

Turner investigated the unexpected positive reception and rise of the worldwide web in the mid 1990s. It was hailed as a key historical moment as its assumed transformational powers would enable global equality, unity, and freedom. Moreover, information technology was welcomed as an opportunity for anyone around the globe to achieve his full potential as an authentic and free individual living being in a personal virtual world without institutions bound by regulations and bureaucracy. This reception was surprising as only 30 years earlier—in 1964—during the so-called Free Speech Movement (FSM), young students at The University of California at Berkeley protested against a perceived threatening economic and political consensus about the importance of knowledge and knowledge workers for economic growths and the political power of an information society. The students opposed developments in information technology that would reduce human beings to brains and endanger human uniqueness—ICT would result in disembodiment. Participating knowledge-based institutions would constrain human growth, and therefore students demonstrated. The computer became the protest's symbol; much like the conveyor belt in Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* became the symbol against dehumanising manufacturing practices.

Within the diversity of the American counterculture of the 1960s the FSM was one of the movements protesting against the political climate in the United States. Turner however discerned another group, which he called 'New Communalists'. Around

⁷⁵ Turner is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Stanford University. He published his inquiry in his book from *Counterculture to Cyberculture. Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (2006).

1970, they withdrew from mainstream American society, as well as from the counter-culture protest movements, and founded communes often in remote places. Simultaneously, they turned to “technology and the transformation of consciousness as the elementary source for social change” (p. 4) because they expected it to create harmony, humanity, and togetherness instead of war, mass murder, and the fragmentation and dehumanisation of people. The writings of cybernetic⁷⁶ researchers such as Norbert Wiener, Buckminster Fuller and McLuhan—formerly considered “cold war researchers” (p. 9)—now received landmark status. They had worked on computer technology during World War II—funded by the national government and located around the Radiation Laboratory at MIT. They presented a “cybernetic vision of the world,” meaning that the real world could be imagined as an “information system”. Many other scholars from various disciplines⁷⁷ came together and looked for a shared language across their disciplines that could support trans-disciplinary communication.

Turner linked the influential status of these scholars to the historical-social conditions of the New Communalists, who “had grown up in a world beset by massive armies and by the threat of a nuclear holocaust, the cybernetic notion of the globe as a single, interlinked pattern of information, many thought they could see the possibility of global harmony” (p. 5). He explained the irony of the computer paradox as follows: “Somehow, by the 1990s, a metaphor born at the heart of the military research establishment became an emblem of the sort of personal integrity, individualism, and collaborative sociability that so many had claimed the very same establishment was working to

⁷⁶ “There are many definitions of cybernetics and many individuals who have influenced the direction of cybernetics. Norbert Wiener, a mathematician, engineer and social philosopher, coined the word “cybernetics” from the Greek word meaning “steersman.” He defined it as the science of control and communication in the animal and the machine. Ampere, before him, wanted cybernetics to be the science of government. For philosopher Warren McCulloch, cybernetics was an experimental epistemology concerned with the communication within an observer and between the observer and his environment. Stafford Beer, a management consultant, defined cybernetics as the science of effective organization. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson noted that whereas previous sciences dealt with matter and energy, the new science of cybernetics focuses on form and pattern. For educational theorist Gordon Pask, cybernetics is the art of manipulating defensible metaphors, showing how they may be constructed and what can be inferred as a result of their existence. Cybernetics takes as its domain the design or discovery and application of principles of regulation and communication. Cybernetics treats not things but ways of behaving. It does not ask “what is this thing?” but “what does it do?” and “what can it do?” Because numerous systems in the living, social and technological world may be understood in this way, cybernetics cuts across many traditional disciplinary boundaries. The concepts which cyberneticians develop thus form a metadisciplinary language through which we may better understand and modify our world.” Source: www.asc.org/foundations/definitions

⁷⁷ Macy Conferences around the 1950s hosted biologists, physicists, mathematicians, cyberneticians, psychiatrists, sociologists and anthropologists. Turner states: “Over time, [they] helped refine a number of cybernetic concepts, including the relationship between system and its observers and the nature of feedback. They also sent individual participants back to their home disciplines with a deep systems orientation toward their work and a habit of deploying the informational and systems metaphors. In this way, the Macy meetings helped transform cybernetics into one of the dominant intellectual paradigms of the post war era.” (Turner, 2006, p. 26)

destroy” (pp. 15/16). The New Communalists had turned the FSM protest against disembodiment into its opposite. They viewed virtual life as the ultimate possibility for humanity—as it would liberate individuals and society instead of generating victims of and fuel for unwanted processes in the economy and society.

The turn towards cybernetic researchers and their ideas was more obvious than expected because the research labs were organised according to the principles the New Communalists valued: “flexibility, collaboration across disciplines, and individualism as well as celebration of intellectual work and technology” (p. 16). Hence, although WWII language and argumentation remained the same, its meaning and implications—confusingly—changed. What used to be perceived as dehumanising language was turned into a generally accepted rhetoric about the digital human being in the information age. As a result, any information technological development was welcomed and this led to the development of Silicon Valley.

The next question for Turner was the importance of the Internet for the knowledge economy and for neo-liberalist thought. He presented a group of students, graduates, and artists around Stewart Brand. From his deep desire to liberate individuals, Brand found inspiration in cybernetics, in artist circles, in the communes he visited, and in the thoughts of the Stanford systems biologist Paul Ehrlich. He combined them into an individualistic way of living outside of bureaucracy that stayed within networks. In 1968, he founded the ‘Whole Earth Catalog’ initially for the commune back-to-the-landers. Soon after, it became a forum “for different countercultural, academic and technological communities” (p. 72). The contributors came from various disciplines and together looked for a new social life and language. Turner addressed the WEC community influence on the integration of ICT into daily life states, “over time, the network’s members and forums helped redefine the microcomputer as a “personal” machine, computer communities as “virtual communities,” and cyberspace itself as the digital equivalent of the western landscape into which so many communards set forth in the late 1960s—the “electronic frontier” (p. 6).

Brand and his contributors to the WEC gained worldwide attention. The global press, businesses, and governments regarded their work as “evidence for the transformative power of what many had begun to call the “New Economy” (p. 7). They were invited to the World Economic Forum in Davos, where it was acknowledged that the integration of information technology, the global economy, and organisational changes had created a new economical period. Likewise it was noticed this development required different human resources, namely “entrepreneurs, moving flexibly from place to place, sliding in and out of collective teams, building their knowledge bases and skills sets in a process of constant self-education” (p. 7). Additionally, governments should deregulate their activities for those businesses and industries that took the lead in the transformation—especially those engaged in Internet business, the so-called “harbingers of

a cultural revolution". In the 1990s, the Whole Earth community encompassed new elites—among them, libertarians and conservative republicans such as Newt Gingrich. The fact that "counter-culturalists, corporate executives, and right-wing politicians and pundits' joined in this process was not so surprising for Turner if one considered the developments after WWII as a matter of being connected—even though the 1960s could be looked at as a break with the past. Turner concluded,

As soon as they turned away from agonistic politics and toward technology, consciousness, and entrepreneurship as the principles of the new society, the communards of the 1960s developed a utopian vision that was in many ways quite congenial to the insurgent Republicans in the 1990s. (p. 8)

Stewart Brand successfully generated a global understanding of computers and digital communication as the tools for the "egalitarian social ideals" of the counterculture; this understanding became the most important feature of the proliferation of an increasingly globalised networked mode of living and working. In other words, the combination of information technology—the "cybernetic discourse and collaborative work styles of cold war military research"—and the "communitarian social vision of the counterculture" precipitated the networked world (p. 9). The connection has brought about a new worldwide language for describing society in the information age: a global community, collaborative networks, independent and authentic individuals, and "an image of an ideal society: decentralized, egalitarian, and free" (p. 1); this as opposed to the industrial age, which was identified as centralised, hierarchical, fragmented, and dehumanising.

Part III Thinking with Mannheim

Wishful thinking has always figured in human affairs. When the imagination finds no satisfaction in existing reality, it seeks refuge in wishfully constructed places and periods. Myths, fairy tales, otherworldly promises of religion, humanistic fantasies, travel romances, have been continually changing expressions of which was lacking in actual life. They were more nearly complementary colours in the picture of the reality existing at the time than utopias working in opposition to the status quo and disintegrating it.

(Mannheim, 1936, p. 205)

Introduction

Nowadays, !mpulse has settled into the local school scenery; and teachers, students, and parents enjoy the community for various reasons. Its complex, dynamic history of dissatisfaction with mainstream education, change, preservation, and its return to conventional patterns of education is however unknown. I made discoveries about its state of being, about hidden events, unknown assumptions and perspectives of people within and outside of the community, both in the past and present. They had affected the community right from the start and had shaped its destiny. As time passed, nobody could recall the process of becoming; not even the school's stones or the beautiful carpets could tell their story anymore because !mpulse had left its original refuge in 2012. Only its programmatic name carries the memory of its extraordinary past. I wonder whether telling the story of the life of !mpulse—as I did in part II—is of interest to somebody these days. People possibly just shrug their shoulders at this unbelievable story of assumed “wishful thinking” and move on. The ignorance about the past, however, shies away from a learning process. !mpulse reflects a possibility for change in the field of education. Although it did not disintegrate the existing educational reality, its utopian striving profoundly questioned this reality on a micro level. Knowing !mpulse helps one to understand the constraints it faced, and opens up space of possibility for future utopian initiatives.

Being with !mpulse, I had noticed the tension between a desire for change and a desire for maintenance as well as a sense of social and pedagogical unconsciousness. It resulted in reading and using the seminal work *Ideology and Utopia* by Karl Mannheim. His work is fairly unknown in the field of education, although it comprises many interesting topics for teachers—as I now know. Part III is an exploration of his thoughts combined with my sociological understanding of !mpulse through his vision of ideology and utopia. Mannheim's presence in my book after the presentation of my encounter with !mpulse is rooted in my constructivist understanding that knowing occurs while being and acting in the world, through the relationship with other human beings. Thus, I first had to be at !mpulse and to learn what had happened from the people before I could recognise to which theory I could connect !mpulse—a choice of sociological theory had not occurred beforehand.

The book is rooted in a strong belief in the structure of social reality (Kecskemeti, [1953] 1997). Human beings are embedded into a structure, while their efforts and actions are the stuff that constructs that structure. Its basic characteristics are “comprehensiveness”, “dynamics” and “intelligibility”. “Comprehensiveness” is about wholeness and interrelatedness, and the notion that all separate actions can only be understood within a larger context. “Dynamics” refers to the essential polarity between social groups that is innate to social life and the idea of “intelligibility” is related to the fact

that human action is rooted in thought and is goal-oriented. This is discernable when looking at the past but should also be a part of thought and action in the present, as “It is the highest goal and greatest happiness of the individual [...] to be in tune with the creative process which was going on in the depths of the structure” (Kecskemeti, [1953] 1997, p. 1).

Mannheim had a hopeful and promising opinion about human transformational agency. He trusted in the human ability to design, develop, and serve a vital society rooted in consciousness. Becoming conscious was a matter of being attuned with the world while existing in it. The knower encounters in the world phenomena to which (s)he wants to relate, to respond to, and (theoretically) to reflect on. In effect, knowing starts in one’s “relationalism” to the world; but it cannot be limited to the practical knowledge implicit in responding to encounters only. Each act of knowing needs an intellectual ‘digestion’ in reflection and conceptualisation. Mannheim addressed this rootedness in the concept of “conjunctive knowledge” (Kettler & Meja, 1995, p. 47). Central to this knowing process is the integrated activity of *Verstehen*, of understanding, and *Interpretation*, the basic mode of knowing in the hermeneutic approach. The English language does not separate the word ‘understanding’ into what the German language addresses as a difference between *Verstehen* and *Begreifen*. The latter entails the rationalist conceptualised element, and the first the relational and bodily experience. Hermeneutic interpretation integrates both although it is closer to *Verstehen* (Loader, 1985).

Mannheim's Seminal Work, two Editions

This final intensification of intellectual crisis can be characterised by two slogan-like concepts "ideology and utopia" which because of their symbolic significance have been chosen as the title of this book. (1936, p. 40)⁷⁸

Since spring 2013, Mannheim's books—both the German (1930) and English (1936) translations—have laid on my desk. They comprise of two lines of thought: Mannheim developed his Sociology of Knowledge as a theory and as a "historical-sociological" interpretative methodology. Together, they reflect the process of coming to a theory. This process approach enabled me to connect and become involved in the deliberation, instead of being placed at the end of theory construction. I have to admit that the German text—in Mannheim's mother tongue—is easier to enter and familiarise with than the English translation. This is partly a matter of my own knowledge of German language and philosophy. But, compared to the English edition, his choice of words and text construction seem much more organic and playful. His biographers have repeatedly addressed that the English text shows signs of disconnection with the German tradition of thought.⁷⁹

In cooperation with Mannheim himself, the Chicago School sociologists Louis Wirth⁸⁰ and Edward Shils translated the German version and edited the English edition. Their extended preface should be considered as an attempt to create understanding and acceptance of Mannheim's interpretative approach to the Sociology of Knowledge among Anglo-American social scientists. Moreover, it clarified his rootedness in the German intellectual and social-cultural traditions, and the political circumstances in the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century (Loader, 1985).

⁷⁸ For reasons of readability, I will refer to *Ideologie und Utopie* (1930) or *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) by the year of publication only.

⁷⁹ The translated 1929 essays are no literal repetition. As Wolff (1971, p. lxi) pointed out, the translators "replaced the relatively idiosyncratic German by relatively standardized English, thus presenting us with a book of a character quite different from the original". The freedom in translation, however, had implications for the understanding of the meaning of several concepts (Levitas, 1990; Loader, 1985; Mendel, 2006; Woldring 1986).

The English edition could be considered a result of the dialectic dynamic, the thinking characteristic of Mannheim's work. Several essays on the same topic published previously showed inconsistencies that led to a criticism of academic sloppiness. Kettler and Meja (1995) argued that the changing circumstances in Germany in the 1930s and Mannheim's entrance into the English sociological context had influenced his ideas. His hopes had been tempered and it had resulted in a focus on democratic planning, which also appeared again in his thoughts about education. It goes beyond the topic of this thesis to analyse this; nonetheless, I will work with both the earlier and later viewpoints in my discussion of Ideology and Utopia.

⁸⁰ Louis Wirth was a German born sociologist from the Chicago School of Sociology. He had left Germany at the age of 14 in 1911.

In a way, this preface focus reflected Mannheim's idea of the importance of the consciousness of thought related to a historical-social context. The very first sentence of his essay *Preliminary approach to the problem* (1936) explains the purpose of the book, "The aim of these studies is [...] to investigate not how thinking appears in textbooks on logic, but how it really functions in public life and in politics as an instrument of collective action" (1936, p. 1). Furthermore, he proclaimed that knowing happened in the world, not in a remote ivory tower looking at it. Knowledge had to be considered as the result of a process of interaction of human beings in their specific social context, "In which everybody unfolds his knowledge, within the framework of a common fate, a common activity, and the overcoming of common difficulties" (1936, p. 29).

Central Question

Mannheim explained that historical-social circumstances had given rise to scepticism and nihilism at the beginning of the 20th century.⁸¹ These sceptical and nihilistic thoughts reflected an overall crisis in thought. Human beings were confronted with a social-political context in which political opponents repudiated each other's thoughts and ideas as being ideological or utopian. For centuries, a long-held metaphysical unitary worldview⁸²—overarching all thought and directing action—had given people a generally accepted explanation of what happened and how life functioned. However, this was replaced by a multitude of modes of thought embedded in different worldviews. Although this process had already started with burgeoning scientific developments, industrialisation, and different but related thought processes, it gained momentum in times of emerging social, political and economic change in the early 20th century. In the 1936 preface, Wirth defined thought as a catalyst that unsettles routines, breaks with habits, weakens convictions, and creates scepticism.

Consequently, people experienced a *Lebenslage* or life situation of existential uncertainty that emerged from conflicts, paradoxes, and a sense of otherness—of anything that shattered feelings of comfort. This resulted in *Lebensverlegenheit* or "elemental perplexity" (1930, p. 3; 1936, p. 42).⁸³ In other words, one's hold on life was disturbed as worldviews were shattered; and this created bewilderment and the inability—or the

⁸¹ In Mannheim's days: social unrest and mobility; the Great War and the end of the German and Austrian Empires, the Russian Revolution; economic crisis.

⁸² The process had started in the Middle Ages. First, within the confines of the Catholic Church, then challenged by the Reformation. The Natural Sciences and the Enlightenment gave way to new insights, thoughts and attitudes; the French Revolution challenged political self-evidence; the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century led to mass production and changed society and political life with the rise of upcoming movements like liberalism, conservatism, socialism, Marxism, and fascism.

⁸³ This use of the word is not common in the German language, so it should be considered a specific Mannheimian concept. Pels (2000) translated it as *existential discomfort*. Although this translation reflects a sense of uneasiness and uncertainty, it does not transfer the power and urgency innate to the German concept.

perception of inability—to act properly. However, because of the innate human need for stability and certainty, people started to look for a new hold. In this process of stabilising one’s own position, dominance and authority, they counteracted the public and political activities of opponents to undermine their position. Thoughts were often repudiated by a practice of unmasking and debunking unknown—hidden—ideological or utopian interests. Every opportunity was seized to falsify the roots and intentions of action and thought. So, he considered, irrational behaviour of social actors constrained day-to-day public and political life.

Mannheim understood that existential perplexity made people sensitive to new “absolutes” or truth claims—his, *avant la lettre*, term for ‘grand narrative’.⁸⁴ Those who convey absolutes, however, aimed at the preservation of a specific social reality that was beneficial for the ruling class but neglected the impact on society as a whole,

It may possibly be true that, to continue to live on and to act in a world like ours, it is vitally necessary to seek a way out of this uncertainty of multiple alternatives; and accordingly people may be led to embrace some immediate goals as if it were absolute, by which they hope to make their problems appear concrete and real. But it is not primarily the man of action who seeks the absolute and immutable, but rather it is he who wishes to induce others to hold onto the status quo because he feels comfortable and smug under conditions as they are. Those who are satisfied with the existing order of things are only too likely to set up the chance situation of the moment as absolute and eternal in order to have something stable to hold on to and to minimize the hazardousness of life. [...] Thus we are faced with the curiously appalling trend of modern thought, in which the absolute which was once a means of entering into communion with the divine, has now become an instrument used by those who profit from it, to distort, pervert, and conceal the meaning of the present. (1936, p. 87)

Absolutes leave no room for various perspectives and for related *petites histoires*; moreover, as Jansen (2009) stated, they would replace them. This situation brought Mannheim to his pressing philosophical epistemological question,

Wie kann der Mensch in einer Zeit, in der das Problem der Ideologie und Utopie einmal radikal gestellt und zu Ende gedacht wird, überhaupt noch denken und leben? (1930, p. 3)

How is it possible for man to continue to think and live in a time when the problems of ideology and utopia are being radically raised and thought through in all their implications? (1936, p. 42)

⁸⁴ Lyotard developed the concept in his seminal work *The Postmodernist Condition: A Report on Knowing* ([1979] 1984).

The posing of this question reflected Mannheim's optimism in regard to the possibilities for change arising from existential perplexity. It would offer opportunities for the illumination of self-evident thought, of the "habit of self-hypostatization" (Wolff, 1971, p. 267) or "self-apotheosis" (Mannheim, 1936, p. 85). He was convinced that consciousness could transcend and transform a self-evident status quo, and could give strength to create a new vital order. In this sense, he tried to establish a perspective that would enable vital movement against destructive irrationality, absolutes, and a constrained motionless society. He advocated a dialectical process to handle personal or societal discomfort that entailed active confrontation, self-examination, and self-criticism—arguing that increased consciousness would allow for better, intellectual, control over one's life.

Observation with Mannheim

The question comprised the answer, namely to turn one's attention to the understanding that actions in a social reality have an ideological and/or utopian orientation. Thus, instead of neglecting the phenomena, one should analyse them consciously. Therefore, he invited taking a critical stance towards self-evidence in one's worldview. He acknowledged that such a critical stance is time consuming and is perhaps not straightforward. Regardless of this, a quick reductive exploration of circumstances aiming to create coherence would result in a premature solving of the paradox, and refrain from an appropriate understanding of situations. In beautiful German he explains,

Denn es ist hier so wie bei einer Neuorientierung in der Welt: in der Betrachtung der Dinge (geleitet von einem latenten, für die Reflexion nicht sichtbar werdenden Impuls) wird und gestaltet sich erst der Leitfaden, der dann alles zusammenhält. Jeder Versuch aber, die Anfangssituation gewaltsam zu überholen und von der neuen Basis aus bereits ein System zu gestalten, verfällt unvermeidlich den Prämissen, Begriffsschemen und Ordnungstypen der vorangegangenen und die deshalb nur verdeckenden Sicht. (1930, p. 2)⁸⁵

I really like his 'slow-research' approach—which he preferred to a non-critical reductive exploration—as part of what I call 'pragmatic orientation'. I understand 'pragmatic' as a way of working characterised by a focus on facts and practical affairs that is "often to the exclusion of intellectual or artistic manners" (pragmatic, n.d.). Thus, I do not use the term from the philosophical pragmatism perspective. Mannheim is wary of a lack

⁸⁵ My translation: In this respect one has to think of a reorientation of the world: it is not earlier than in the observation of objects (guided by a potential but to the mind invisible impulse) that the essential thought becomes, is shaped, and as a result can keep everything together. Every attempt, however, to ignore the initial situation and to take the new basis as a starting point for a new system falls prey to premises, definitions and structures belonging to a past and therefore concealing point of view.

of intellectual orientation and rationality, which are needed for contextual consciousness in this orientation. It directs people to a surface level discussion or problem solving process; and a focus on changing actions, rules, and procedures without understanding the underlying mechanisms related to historical-social conditions. Such an approach could have a fruitful short-term effect, but results in the continuous repetition of problematic circumstances. Consequently, he advocated an attitude of *Betrachtung*, or observation, so that the situation speaks to the observer. In this way, (s)he could connect, understand the underpinning processes, and find an appropriate solution in synthesis. Although anyone could analyse experienced societal problems in this way, it definitely had to be a task for intellectuals.

Observation and Pragmatic Orientation

Mannheim referred to observation, but not to the kind of anthropological participant observation I conducted. Although ethnographic sociological work was carried out for instance by his contemporaries from the Chicago School of Sociology (Erickson, 2011), he remained a macro-level investigator. When he wrote about observation, this should be understood as being attentive to historical-social circumstances through the hermeneutic study of documents.⁸⁶ He used a research methodology of “essayistic thought experiments”, essays in which he presented his developing intellectual engagement—particularly with political movements. Thus, he critically investigated the macro-context of human life; this, however, distanced him from human beings who lived in the world. Therefore, the perplexity and tragedy on micro-level human life resulting from macro-mechanisms and their consequences remained disregarded in his work. Nevertheless, he did emphasise the need to connect both levels.

My thesis reflects a connection between the micro-level Impulse case with macro-level mechanisms active around the Millennium. Moreover, I interpreted the activities within Impulse from the perspective of modes of thought, which he applied to analyse larger society. Thus, I consider my Impulse study as the attempt of an intellectual to reflect on the central question mentioned above in a specific social reality. As such, it is a description of a *petite histoire* and a societal grand narrative. This attentiveness to thought in a process of ‘slow research’ is illuminating—though, indeed, time consuming.

⁸⁶ In the early 1920s, Mannheim studied Wilhelm Dilthey, the founding father of the Hermeneutic approach of studying the world. Dilthey intended to oppose the dominance of the natural sciences, a rational mechanistic Newtonian worldview that separated a knowing subject from a to be known object—for the purpose of objectivist knowledge of the world. Natural sciences deny multiple perspectives that create differing knowledge and ignores the dynamic interaction of human thought and human action in the world. From Dilthey’s essay on *Weltanschauungen*, Mannheim developed the so-called documentary method for the social sciences and emphasised that the objects of the natural sciences needed their own methods. The application of these methods in the social sciences, philosophy, literature and arts would not be appropriate as their focus of attention was understanding (*Verstehen*) and interpretation (Bohnsack, Nentweg-Gesemann & Nohl, 2003).

Mannheim mentioned perplexity as a possible point of departure for such an inquiry. My starting point was one of questions about impulse, and the confusion that grew during the year. Our daily life entails many opportunities for incomprehension; and the question is, how do we react? As of 2005, I had questioned mainstream educational practices, but I had not started an inquiry into the offered alternative. Unwittingly, I had followed a self-evident grand narrative about the knowledge economy and lifelong learning. The appearing network (part II, chapter 3) presents a discourse that disqualified the existing mainstream education as ‘obsolete’, ‘outdated’ and ‘rooted in the needs of the times of industrial revolution’. On the one hand, society was indeed in motion and, I think, continuous reflection on the purpose of education is essential. On the other hand, a ruling self-evident perspective on society left hardly any room for different interpretations. Its initiators had chosen a direction that emerged from a ruling perspective left unanalysed at the start—and in the years to come. From a Mannheimian perspective, my unconsciousness had left me—in a way—out of control over my choices. In the same way, the initiators had been unaware about specific thoughts that were integrated in their initiative.

This brings me to the issue of what I call pragmatic orientation. I understood being aligned with this orientation hinders the process of becoming conscious. The team was engaged in their day-to-day practicalities of running the community. Reflections on what worked or did not aimed at the functioning, not on the function, of the learning concept. And it did not automatically drive an attitude of in-depth questioning of societal forces and purposes. I can imagine this was reinforced by the political call for ‘entrepreneurship’ that allowed teachers to produce their own educational innovation; however, ‘entrepreneurship’ in education entails an oxymoron, as the pedagogical purpose and perspective are different.

It is interesting to compare this situation with Mannheim’s concern about the relationship between politics and intellectuals. From the 19th century onwards, the relationship had increasingly problematised a dominant discourse. The societal appreciation of intellectual thought processes—as well as of intellectual debate—was both championed and denigrated; it had not resulted in better adjusted and more intellectual political discussion and decision-making. Mannheim, however, expected intellectuals to engage in adaptable and experimental thought processes, and to “think dynamically and relationally rather than statically” (1936, p. 87)—statically in the sense of looking for absolutes, fixed ideas, and dogmatism. Thus, intellectuals were asked to counteract and be critical, instead of defending established ideas. Transferred to education, Mannheim discussed—in posthumously published notes—the role of education in society and the function of teachers. He expected them to be knowledgeable in the field of psychology, philosophy and sociology (Stewart, 1967). This would support their observational attitude and their capability of aiming at the development of the

recognition and understanding of social conditions. The team I encountered was not qualified in this way, as in general are Dutch teachers not, because this is not a matter in teacher training (Jansen, 2009). Thus, entrepreneurship and grand narrative had created a new school but not conscious teachers.

Points of Departure for Understanding Ideology & Utopia

In this paragraph, I explore three concepts that are essential for understanding the relationship between ideology and utopia and the social context. First, I explore the concept of *Standortgebundenheit*—the notion that each human being is placed in a specific context within a larger society and its social-historical context; second, I present *Weltanschauung* or worldview, which is the decisive element for thought and action within this context. Finally, I present the aspects of the driving forces of human action, which either maintain or change a social reality—Mannheim calls them *Kollektiv Unbewußtes* or the collective unconscious.

Standort, Seinsverbunden - Existential determination

A human being has a specific *Standort* or place in society—social strata or class—that defines her being or *sein*. The relationship can be one of a closer connection to *Gebundenheit*⁸⁷ or of one of relative freedom—namely *Verbundenheit*. (S)he lives in a social group, and a collective of different and differing social groups builds a society. On the one hand, all the members of groups have an overall shared sense of belonging

⁸⁷ The English text also talks about ‘seinsgebunden’. Mannheim said that the translation ‘determination’ should not be interpreted in a naturalistic mechanical way since it does not address any universal determination. There is no such “metaphysical entity of a group mind” (1936, p. 2) that governs the individual. Determination “conveys a meaning which leaves the exact nature of determinism open” (1936, p. 267). According to Kettler and Meja (1995), Mannheim used both concepts interchangeably, stating that “The direction of research in the sociology of knowledge may be guided in such a way that it does not lead to an absolutising of the connectedness to existence (*Seinsverbundenheit*) but that precisely in the discovery of the existential determination (*Seinsgebundenheit*) is seen (Mannheim, [1931] 1952, p. 259).” Kettler sees in the use of the concepts the “nuance of difference” between the German words, which is ignored in the English translation of existential determination. “*Verbundenheit* extends to freely chosen and morally binding ties, while *Gebundenheit* reaches out towards compulsion. *Seinsgebundenheit* thus refers to an objective and comparatively strict linkage between the conditions under which thoughts exist in the world, and the makeup of thought itself; *Seinsverbundenheit* also expresses linkage but think of it more as a function of the subjective commitments and identifications of those who bear thought in society, and accordingly as less firmly fixed. Thus, in articulating the difference, Mannheim insists that the awareness of social commitments, which constitutes social knowledge, will counter the mechanical and alienated forms of those commitments operating as uncontrollable constraints” (Kettler & Meja, 1995, pp. 85-86).

Furthermore, *Standortgebundenheit* of thought is connected with the concept of “relationalism”; Mannheim was criticised for a relativist position, which he, however, negated as not being appropriate in the sense that it would exclude the notion of the relationship with the historical-social context explaining its truth claim in relation to this contextualised circumstance.

to this comprehensive society. On the other hand, understanding this society and the interaction between groups is a matter of group relatedness, and thus place in society (or *Standort*). A specific *Standort* leads automatically to interaction with others who live within or outside of one's group, who share or oppose one's mind-set, thoughts, and actions.

The *Standort* decides the thought process and action of human beings, which have to be regarded as being less unique than they are possibly perceived. A person takes up and applies already existing patterns of thought and behaviour, or dialectically moulds them with patterns that might fit his purposes or changed societal conditions for the better,

Thus, it is not men in general who think, or even isolated individuals who do the thinking, but men in certain groups who have developed a particular style of thought in an endless series of responses to certain typical situations characterizing their common position. Strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that the single individual thinks. Rather it is more correct to insist that he participates in thinking further about what other men have thought before him. He finds himself in an inherited situation with patterns of thought which are appropriate to this situation and attempts to elaborate further the inherited modes of response or to substitute others for them in order to deal more adequately with the new challenges which have arisen out of the shifts and changes in his situation. Every individual is therefore in a two-fold sense predetermined by the fact of growing up in a society: on the one hand he finds a ready-made situation and on the other he finds in that situation preformed patterns of thought and of conduct. (1936, p. 3)

The process of “growing up” is embedded in Mannheim's ideas about a dialectic dynamic approach to change. A “single individual” is connected and committed to the purpose of the collective of the generations (s)he belonged to. (S)he perceived what had been passed on by previous generations, in a “rhythmic movement” (1936, p. 270) of social reality, and reacted interactively. Thus, (s)he stood in a tradition of dialectically changing what had been passed on. Therefore, no social context is a static entity with a metaphysical authority dictating one's *Weltanschauung*; and they do not automatically turn a human being into a marionette.⁸⁸ The reverse side of *Standortgebundenheit*, however, is the different understanding of the social situation of various groups—whether one understands a glass to be half full or half empty is a matter of perspective (1936).

⁸⁸ A quick glance from a 21st century perspective embracing concepts of individual freedom, autonomy, independence and self-direction might judge the quoted words and ideas as out-dated or perhaps even obscure. This might result in disqualifying Mannheim as irrelevant to our times—a judgment illustrating his argument that thoughts and actions are socially determined. Our commonly held ideas on individualism, however, could be reviewed as misconceptions of reality hindering an understanding of its mechanisms.

***Weltanschauung* - Worldview**

Weltanschauung is a German composite from world (*Welt*) and ‘intuition, contemplation’ (*Anschauung*). A perspective develops from particular interactions—*anschauen*—of *standortgebundene* people with social events. This social interaction creates a system of norms and values that decides the way these people see, perceive and interpret their environment. Thus, to Mannheim “*Weltanschauung* reveals itself in cultural phenomena, without even being totally revealed” (Woldring, 1986, p. 94). In his, non-theoretical, interpretation of *Weltanschauung*, Mannheim followed Dilthey.⁸⁹

The presence of different social groups and the flux of life means that there is not one universal way to view one specific social phenomenon. This opposes the notion of eternal absolutes. Knowing and thinking emerge from the social conditions in which a human being is embedded; and these perspectives are related to historical-social reality. Mannheim defines this as “relationalism” between thought, action and social reality. Consciousness, therefore, entails the understanding of the presence of different perspectives on the world, and the understanding of one’s own partial point of view. In this respect, I like Mannheim’s metaphor of a moving staircase to illustrate the presence and influence of a variety of perspectives on one’s understanding and evaluation of the world. According to him,

⁸⁹ Despite the importance of the notion of perspective, he did not give an in-depth description of the concept in terms of theory and definition in *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) His point of departure is the presence of a *Weltanschauung*.

In his essay ‘*On the Interpretation of Weltanschauung*’ published in 1921-22 (Wolff, 1971), Mannheim explored the work of Wilhelm Dilthey and the question of how *Weltanschauung* could be investigated. He also attempted to connect *Weltanschauung* phenomenologically. He did not intend to produce a theory but wanted to develop methodological tools for a sound examination of a worldview and its influence on societal processes. *Weltanschauung* as such is rooted in epistemology and relates to Kant’s *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*; Mannheim stated that the difficulty with the concept lay in the rational approach of a non-theoretical construct. He referred to Dilthey who had already addressed *Weltanschauung* as something in itself and not as a product of thought processes. In other words, *Weltanschauung* is not a mere reflection of thought and philosophy. Dilthey’s anti-rationalist approach explained it as the result of human action in life—including religion, mores, art, philosophy etc—communicated through thought; thus, according to Dilthey, *Weltanschauung* is pre-theoretical; the notion of sense experience and perception is visualised in the use of the noun.

We are observing the world from a moving staircase, from a dynamic platform, and, therefore, the image of the world changes with the changing frames of reference, which various cultures create ... that you can only see various perspectives of a house and that there is no view among them which is absolutely the house and in spite of that there is knowing because the various perspective are not arbitrary. They can be understood from the other. What we, without any difficulty, admit for the apperception of the visual world, we ought to admit for knowledge in general. (Wolff, as cited in Kettler & Meja, 2001, p. 100)⁹⁰

He emphasised the importance of awareness and the conscious consideration of different perspectives behind opinions and actions. Moreover, he emphasised a constructivist perspective of knowing as a process of bringing various perspectives together. Thus, the encounter with otherness is a hopeful moment for new consciousness and a change of self-understanding and one's understanding of the world. Critical self-reflection and the reconsideration of long-held beliefs could create creativity and renewal and keep society vital. Engagement in such a process should not be disqualified as a signal of "intellectual incompetence", but of intellectual growth—a growth out of a level of ignorance where narrow perspectives are widened—this process cannot and must not be stopped.⁹¹ Each encounter of otherness brings other ideas, other perspectives, and asks for reflection—and perhaps reorientation. As a result, intellectual growth is a matter of flux. As Mannheim stated, "[a view] represents the continuous process of the expansion of knowledge, and has as its goal not achievement of a super-temporally valid conclusion but the broadest possible extension of our horizon of vision" (1936, p. 106). Despite this hopeful assumption, Mannheim was not blinded to the possibility of a *cul de sac* polarisation, of ruling absolutes and ideologies. He warned that they hindered a healthy and vitalising process of social change. Nevertheless, he was conscious of the fact that life is full of this tension between utopia and ideology.

I can see in my life various moments in which a change of worldview was enabled. They were less a matter of social mobility—as Mannheim explained in his work—then a matter of being based in social encounters that were enabled by my rootedness in a specific *Standort*. Just to mention a few: my life in Germany and marriage with a

⁹⁰ The sociologist and former student Kurt Wolff (as cited in Kettler & Meja, 2001, p. 100) referred to notes Mannheim wrote just months before he died. Knowing about the criticism of his approach of discussing one specific topic in different essays, he justified this by using the metaphor of the moving staircase. It reminds me of M.C. Escher's lithographic print of people on different staircases or one—who can decide—that he made in 1953, seven years after Mannheim died. This lithograph called *Relativity* reflects a world in which the natural law (and perspective) of gravity has ceased. Despite this people seem to continue with their lives as usual, neglecting the changed perspective.

⁹¹ At the time of writing my thesis, Dutch society witnessed a polarised discussion on *Zwarte Piet* (black peter). Mannheim's considerations were quite helpful in analysing what was occurring and in understanding the standpoints, actions, and loss of those engaged in the discussion and the *cul de sac* that society faces.

German Catholic man had changed my view on my Protestant life in the Netherlands; the encounter with the DBA had given me insights into a complexity perspective on life; the participant observation at !mpulse mirrored a self-evident assumption about constructivist learning in education. When I reflected on this, I realised that readiness seems to be of importance; and, it becomes more of a matter of having opportunities to experience them.

Perspectives on !mpulse

To Mannheim, social reality is characterised by comprehensiveness, dynamism, and intelligibility (Kecskemeti, [1953] 1997). Despite the presence of many social groups, and the perception of fragmentation and individualism, society is a comprehensive whole in which all human beings are inter-related. This whole is not the sum of its social groups, but the result of the social interactions between them. These groups are defined by their internal change and progress. Generations come and go, and participate in the group while responding to what is passed on. This participation is influenced by a specific worldview that has an establishing role in the self-understanding of the group members. As a result, larger society is in continuous motion because of dynamic social groups.

!mpulse was the result of continuing interactions between representatives of different social groups. At first sight, its initiation was a local school initiative of a social group of teachers in interaction with certain school principles. The founders had absorbed a teaching practice that had been handed down, which according to their understanding was no longer appropriate. Their critique was not generally shared in the group, and thus their ideas could only be applied within their own way of working—that is, until the moment school principles created room for change. However, the documentary study revealed that these actions were embedded in a larger societal discussion where education consultants and politicians decided the direction for a large part; moreover, parents and students could be discerned as being followers in the process. The interaction between the groups was rooted in a shared interest to make a change in education. Each group had its specific perspective on society and education, and had its own intention for change. A pragmatic orientation, however, kept the founders focused at the level of presented facts and their own interpretation of them. This concealed the different—probably conflicting—perspectives behind the ideas and behind the participation. The interaction was a matter of concealed otherness, and gave no opportunity for the awareness of differences.

This superficial unity in mindset caused a problematic situation at the micro level of !mpulse. The concept of “redesign school” and the withdrawal from mainstream education was a conscious choice made by the education consultants—and founders—in order to ignore different perspectives. Isolation was the only path to success because the presence of contradicting perspectives would be too constrictive. This revolution

approach ignored the basic characteristic of “comprehensiveness”. The initiative’s involvement with society and educational reality—where different perspectives indeed have their influence and their usefulness—was counteracted. According to Mannheim, such a point of view was illusory since transformation can only happen in dialectic dynamic, and not in isolation. Last, I think the idea of redesign constrained the local initiative. Actually, it was not until 2011 that a connection between !mpulse and mainstream education became feasible; however, at that moment, the !mpulse learning concept blended with mainstream school practice it had once opposed—!mpulse had lost its initial idealism and had become a matter of ideological thought.

At the start, the founders were familiar with the presence of different though connected social groups. Moreover, its embedding into the historical-social context of the Millennium Innovation was a shared experience. In due course, knowing the initial circumstances disappeared. The pioneer team of tutors and coaches still worked with the founders and education consultants. Time and crisis, however, concealed this past and separated !mpulse from the perspectives and motives that were integrated into the ‘story’ and ‘concept’. As a result, current team members responded to what was passed on to them without actually understanding the matter and its historical-social context. In addition, they brought their mainstream ideas on education, and intermingled them with an opposed educational vision: learning against teaching, ‘old’ against ‘new’, industrial against information age.

***Kollektiv Unbewußtes* - Collective unconscious**

For the transformational strength of human beings, Mannheim emphasised the need of awareness or consciousness about the real state of being of society for human beings to be able to understand and control influential forces. This awareness went beyond knowing facts, as it looked for sense-making. Mannheim wanted human beings to develop a strong mindset of readiness, so that they could open up to the characteristics of life and society. His plea was rooted in his experience that human beings tend to disregard them, and encounter the world through a restrictive group or personal focus or ambition, while being unaware about own thoughts and motives—as well as those of others.

Building !mpulse was first ‘making’ a story and a ‘concept’; a few years it focused on principles, and finally on unification in rules and procedures. It hindered the growth of critical consciousness, a process of sense-making and developing awareness that goes beyond the practical level. In this process, founders and the team entered a world of thought that was self-evident in light of the times. A mode of self-evidence thought, however, hindered an open mind from controlling and correcting oneself, which Mannheim addressed as being essential for fruitful change in social realities.

Unknown forces or motives—“collective-unconscious, volitional impulses” (1936, p. 5)—drive the thoughts and actions of a socially bound group that holds a specific worldview.⁹² Mannheim saw human striving from two directions: a direction of maintenance—an ideological mode of thought—and a direction of change—a utopian mode of thought. An advantaged group perceives social reality as appropriate and valuable and as something to be maintained—because of its benefits for this group. An oppressed group, however, views and understands its *Standort* as a constraint for human becoming and wants to change it. As long as these driving forces are integrated into thought and action but remain unrecognised, a clear view on what actually happens in society is obscured. This unawareness puts both the advantaged and the oppressed group into a state of vulnerability, and likewise threatens society as a whole.

One of the experienced practices Mannheim addressed was “intellectual antagonism” (1936, p. 280). Heterogeneous groups interact without properly analysing and clarifying points of view through assuming a perspective similarity. Interaction and discussion take place merely at the level of the experience of daily life—of “the object in itself” (1936, p. 271). This creates circumstances where people from different groups “talk past one another” about facts, rules, and regulations—and are unaware of other quite different points of departure. Thus, the illumination of driving forces and perspectives could control the influence of interest and motivation in the debate and reduce ineffective forms of irrationality.

I understood—from a Mannheimian perspective—limited intellectual control was discernable at impulse. Absence of analysis and awareness, unconscious participation in the macro political-economic discourse hindered teachers from taking a position from, for instance, a pedagogical point of view. Moreover, instead of having influence, the discourse was reinforced. This taught me that following a grand narrative in education actually neutralises the possibility of teachers having a critical position toward education and society (Jansen, 2009). If education and pedagogy aim at learning in the sense of consciousness and transformation, the rigid implementation of ‘the story’ or a ‘concept’ contradicts the purpose of education. Therefore, Mannheim’s emphasis on development of collective conscious to enable free and controlled action is comprehensible.

⁹² Collective unconscious is known as a psychoanalytical concept coined by Carl Jung rooted in Sigmund Freud’s personal unconscious. He elaborated the concept in the book *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1911/12) and connected it with archetypes. As far as I was able to investigate, Mannheim did not address Carl Jung. It is, however, known that Mannheim knew Freud personally. Moreover, he mentioned Freud as one of his inspirations (1936, p. 310), standing in the line of contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge behind Nietzsche, “who combined concrete observations in this [of ideology] with a theory of drives and a theory of knowledge which remind one of pragmatism” (1936, p. 310).

When Mannheim addressed control, he did not mean the forms of rationalist, bureaucratic control, which minimise disorder. This approach to control led to a deadening “matter of factness” or *Sachlichkeit* (1936, p. 257). A total absence of irrationality would endanger change and turn society in a static state of being. He meant “scientific guidance” (1936, p. 5) coming from those who are *verbunden* and yet at the same time are capable of taking a distanced observing view. They can analyse social circumstances, engage in self-reflection, and evaluate differences in viewpoints and interests for the proper understanding of a problem.

The team could not expect much from this type of guidance. I noticed, educational scholars were entangled in competitive discussions about the appropriateness of their particular intellectual viewpoints. For many years, learning psychologists, for instance, had opposed pedagogical approaches to education, and their position gradually got stronger. They benefited from the international political economic discourse on life-long learning and the knowledge economy (Biesta, 2006a), as they used its arguments to position themselves. Their perspective was integrated into the *new learning* concept. Simultaneously, politicians and influential organisations used research outcomes to inform their own ideas and to decide on new educational directions. At the same time, the founders did not actively search for other, more critical voices and different viewpoints to shed light on their innovation and on the purpose of education.

Furthermore, the educational consultants—who could perhaps have applied some reflexivity—were entangled in their own interests. They sold their ‘redesign school’ model and their supporting services. Alongside their business aims, the consultants supported the international political-economic discourse and its ideas about the role of education in a society dictated by economic forces. Confronted with “self-apotheosis”, the passionate but inexperienced teachers were exploited to disseminate this learning concept. Any advancement of critical reflection on their product and its principles, on its pedagogical appropriateness for education, or on its actual conditions would have endangered its organisational targets. Thus to put it bluntly, the consultant company directed a process of repudiating conventional education for the sake of its own existence.

Ideology and Utopia - Modes of Thought

I return to the philosophical question Mannheim posed: *How can human beings continue to think and live in times in which thought is repudiated as ideological or utopian?* Mannheim’s engagement with ideology and utopia might look confusing at first sight because he used the commonly held disqualifying description of these concepts used to deal with opponents. In this unmasking or debunking purpose I encountered the use of the

concepts in regard to Impulse and the Millennium Innovation in general. A team member defined the first years of Impulse as a life in utopia, and addressed it as a time of irresponsible dreaming; a father used ideology to explain the educational concept. My exploration of *new learning* addresses the fierce public debate between 2004 and 2007 in which these innovations were repudiated as ideological. Moreover, I needed to explain the Mannheimian meaning of the concepts whenever I talked about my research. In fact, much understanding of the concepts is still rooted in negative interpretations.

Mannheim redefined the concepts as modes of thought with the purpose of analysing social reality. In this way, he took them as rational tools to find the motives behind actions and thoughts, and to argue against disqualifying unmasking and debunking odd repeated word choice practices. This is of help for understanding the function of thought in social action. Thus, he opposed the practice of ignoring these concepts, as he explained in the original essay *Ideologie und Utopie* (1930),

Im Ideologie- und Utopiegedanken, in dem Bestreben, dem Ideologischen und Utopischen in gleicher Weise zu entgehen, wird eigentlich letzten Endes die Realität gesucht. Diese beiden modernen Vorstellungen sind Organe der fruchtbaren Skepsis und sie sind zu bejahen, weil sie der großen Verführung des Bewußtseins entgegentreten, der Tendenz des Gedanken, bei sich zu bleiben, Wirklichkeiten zu verdecken oder sie einfach zu überholen. Der Gedanke soll nicht weniger, aber auch nicht mehr enthalten als die Wirklichkeit, in dessen Element er steht. Genau wie die wahre Schönheit des geschriebenen Stils nur darin besteht, daß er ganz genau das Auszudrückende erfaßt, nie zu wenig sagt, aber auch nicht zu viel, so liegt die Wahrheit des Bewußtseins darin, daß es niemals daneben greift. Im Ideologie- und Utopiegedanken taucht also noch einmal die Frage nach der Wirklichkeit auf. Beide Vorstellungen enthalten die Forderung, daß der Gedanke sich auf seine reale Deckung hin auszuweisen habe. (1930, p. 54)

The attempt to escape ideological and utopian distortions is, in the last analysis, a quest for reality. These two conceptions provide us with a basis for sound scepticism and they can be put to positive use in avoiding the pitfalls into which our thinking might lead us. Specifically they can be used to combat the tendency in our intellectual life to separate thought from the world of reality, to conceal reality, or to exceed its limits. Thought should contain neither less nor more than the reality in whose medium it operates. Just as the true beauty of a sound literary style consists in expressing precisely that which is intended – in communication neither too little nor too much – so the valid element in our knowledge is determined by adhering to rather than departing from the actual situation to be comprehended. In considering the notions of ideology and utopia, the question of the nature of reality thrusts itself once again upon the scene. Both concepts contain the imperative that every idea must be tested by its congruency with reality. (1930, p. 98)

As a result of his essayistic exploration, the 1936 edition offers various attempts to approach the concepts. Therefore, I present his exploration chronologically in order to work towards comprehension in the essayistic way that Mannheim presented it in his book. Moreover, I place the German and English texts next to each other because of the differences in language use.

Essay *Ideologie und Utopie* - *Ideology and Utopia*

At !mpulse in 2011, my awareness of an incongruence between its self-presentation and my understanding of the community grew; it created an unpleasant feeling of paradox. I had the impression that I misunderstood the reality I was studying and was on a wrong track of interpretation. This happened because I found it hard to understand that people, wittingly and unwittingly, could present themselves and—in a way—believe a story that I could not recognise. Therefore, it was an interesting discovery as team members confirmed my feelings of incongruence.

As I entered !mpulse, the initial process of transcending change had already turned into an orientation toward preservation. The community had survived problematic, chaotic circumstances, and its members cherished and loved their community—even despite reduced leeway, and a return to conventional school operations. The team continued in its efforts for self-preservation, which included a process of ‘concept’ unification and the second attempt to implement an !mpulse *Bovenbouw*.⁹³ The result of this intention was a practice of integrating instructions for the regulation of the self-directed learning. This contradicted the principles of the learning environment published on the school’s website. In the curriculum and school organisation, a variety of mainstream approaches and processes had been integrated, denying the intent of the innovative school. Nevertheless, the community defined itself innovative in reference to its past. At this point, it was my prior knowledge about the community, and my connection to the founders and the early years of !mpulse that made me aware of and able to understand this incongruence.

The preservation of the community was an important point of attention for the management and the team in 2011. The realisation of a new *Bovenbouw* was essential for the school’s existence. This drove a reevaluation and revitalisation of a reified ‘concept’ in terms of practical solutions. The management solution for the *Bovenbouw* was, in language, connected to the principles of the former utopian concept. But these principles had been constrained by the integrated mainstream processes. Moreover, the discussion of the implementation of the solution had a pure pragmatic orientation without any intellectual analysis of the mechanisms behind the idea, of the pedagogical considerations, or of the refined concept itself. This resulted in the continuation of

⁹³ *Bovenbouw* is the second phase, the last two years at Havo and last three years at Vwo; the *Studiehuis* as a didactical approach to active and self-directed learning could be implemented in this phase.

a narrative from an ideological perspective. The team had created a new reality although they presented it as the reality that had been left behind—a new “absolute” was furthered.

It was easy to be convincing in this self-presentation because a majority of team members and current !mpulse parents did not recognise the incongruence. Especially, the inclination to internally and publicly connect the *Bovenbouw* !mpulse 3.0 initiative with a former reality gave the past mythical properties for the purpose of the continuation of the school’s existence. It occurred to me that I had actually experienced a similar situation. In 2009, the former Arthur Andersen educational consultant Ronald te Loo gave a quick scan presentation about the state of being of !mpulse, which resulted in suggestions to integrate conventional solutions for the problems. I was seduced by his convincing words that the educational concept would be saved (See part II, chapter 1). As a matter of fact, I could have noticed then the tragedy of !mpulse—that its initial utopian origins had died in the ideology of preserving the community. We knew what was going on, but we did not want to become aware of it.

In this early essay, Mannheim discussed the confusing experience of incongruence between social reality and the thinking and talking about it. He pointed out that the ideological striving for maintenance influenced a self-presentation that was incongruent with reality. It can be recognised by those who are already anticipating a new reality, and who experience tension in the existing one. An evaluation of ideology would clarify that a past existence might (partly) still exist in the minds of the community, although reality had been transformed or was in a state of transformation. An observer could discern three “*falsch*” or “invalid” ideological positions for the evaluation of *Sein*, an actual state of being, and *Denken*, thought. Mannheim argued that people or social groups think ideologically in all these cases. In their thinking and in their actions, they continue to exist in a reality, which is no longer present for the external observer. It should be noted that “*falsch*” or “invalid” does not implicate that ideas as such are wrong; rather, they describe a condition of lost relationalism, self-understanding and sense of reality.

In the first situation, he referred to the perspective of an individual who is bound to generally accepted norms that no longer suffice in a changed social reality. The second ideological element is given when an individual or a group presents its existence as unchanged, and is hailed as the ultimate ideal state of being—hiding its real condition nevertheless. Third, the ideological is recognised in the matter of knowing when concepts or their interpretations no longer suffice to understand—or even hide—a social reality.

Falsch ist demnach im Ethischen ein Bewußtsein, wenn es sich an Normen orientiert, denen entsprechend es auch beim besten Willen auf einer gegebenen Seinsstufe nicht

handeln könnte, wenn also das Versagen des Individuums gar nicht als individuelles Vergehen aufgefaßt werden kann, sondern das Fehlhandeln durch eine falsch angelegte moralische Axiomatik begründet und erzwungen ist.

Falsch ist in der seelischen Selbstausslegung ein Bewußtsein, wenn es durch die eingelebte Sinngebung (Lebensformen, Erlebnisformen, Auffassung von Welt und Menschtum) neuartiges, seelisches Reagieren und neues Menschwerden überhaupt verdeckt und verhindert. [...] Als Beispiel für ein falsches Bewußtsein auf der Ebene der Selbstklärung mögen die Fälle dienen, wo der Mensch ein historisch bereits mögliches "wahres" Verhältnis zu sich selbst oder zur Welt verdeckt, das Erleben der elementarischen Gegebenheiten des Menschseins verfälscht, indem er sie entweder "verdinglicht" oder "idealisiert" aber auch "romantisiert" – mit einem Wort mit all den Techniken der Selbstflucht und Weltflucht falsche Begegnungsarten heraufbeschwört. Falsch ist es deshalb, die suchende Unruhe durch nicht mehr lebbare Absolutheiten zu verdecken, so etwa "Mythen" zu wollen, für "Größe" zu schwärmen, "idealistisch" zu sein und faktisch sich selbst Schritt für Schritt in bereits leicht durchschaubarer "Unbewußtheit" zu begeben.

Falsch ist ein theoretisches Bewußtsein, wenn es in der weltlichen Lebensorientierung in Kategorien denkt, denen entsprechend man sich auf der gegebenen Seinsstufe konsequent gar nicht zurechtfinden könnte. Es sind also in erster Linie überholte und überlebte Normen und Denkformen, aber auch Weltauslegungsarten, die in diese "ideologische" Funktion geraten können und vollzogenes Handeln, vorliegendes inneres and äußeres Sein nicht klären, sondern vielmehr verdecken. (1930, pp. 50-52)

[...] an ethical attitude is invalid if it is oriented with reference to norms, with which action in a given historical setting, even with the best of intentions cannot comply. It is invalid when the unethical action of the individual can no longer be conceived as due to his own personal transgression, but must be attributed rather to the compulsion of an erroneously founded set of moral axioms.

The moral interpretation of one's own action is invalid, when through the force of traditional modes and conceptions of life, it does not allow for the accommodation of action and thought to a new and changed situation and in the end actually obscures and prevents this adjustment and transformation of man. [...] we may cite those cases in which persons try to cover up their "real" relations to themselves and to the world, and falsify to themselves the elementary facts of human existence by deifying, romanticizing, or idealizing them, in short, by resorting to the device of escape from themselves and the world, and thereby conjuring up false interpretations of experience. [...] This is the case when we create "myths," worship "greatness in itself," avow allegiance to "ideals" which in our actual conduct we try to mask by simulating an unconscious righteousness, which is only too easily transparent.

A theory is wrong if in a given practical situation it uses concepts and categories which, if taken seriously, would prevent man from adjusting himself at that historical stage. Antiquated and inapplicable norms, modes of thought, and theories are likely to degenerate into ideologies whose function it is to conceal the actual meaning of conduct rather than to reveal it. (1936, pp. 94-96)

Essay *Das Utopische Bewußtsein* - The Utopian Mentality

In this essay, Mannheim discussed for the first time the interpretation of utopia and ideology as two connected modes of thought. Both modes are incongruent with the existing social reality and attempt to transcend it. They differ, however, in their orientation. Utopian mentality strives to “pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time”. On the contrary, ideology transcends incompatible order but is “still effective in the realisation and the maintenance of the existing order of things” (1936, p. 192). At first glance, this description gives a positive impression of ideology: utopia is disturbing and creates chaos, whereas ideology seems to intend to transcend without problematic disorder. From this perspective, my evaluation of Impulse in 2011 as ideological would be acceptable, I presume. The community had continued its existence, and conveyed an innovative state of being. Nevertheless, this positive impression was only valid in its self-presentation. It is in regard to this incomplete evaluation of circumstances that I see the value of the combination of utopia and ideology. The awareness of the difference between the two enables different judgments in a situation of assumed change.

The presence of the utopian mode of thought is visible in the ideas of those who successfully oppose a status quo. Effectiveness is an important element in the evaluation of human action. In general, it is in the nature of human existence that actions are not “situationally congruous” (1936, p. 194). Nevertheless, most actions are not meant to change the status quo, and are therefore ideologically based. Thus, with the purpose of utopia identification, the matter of successful opposition is crucial; and the central question in the analysis would be: Did the idea change a social reality, or was the idea integrated into a ruling perspective? As a result, it is only possible to understand in hindsight which transcending idea was utopian, or to decide which idea comprised utopian as well as ideological elements. In this context, Mannheim discussed a constraining factor in the analysis of change. Representatives of the existing order could also accept utopias. In this case, change is controlled and rendered “socially impotent” (1936, p. 193) with the purpose of not changing the existing order—utopia is turned into ideology.

On the whole, an analysis and identification is problematic as utopian and ideological elements are so much intertwined with each other. Nevertheless, utopian thought should be recognised because of its importance for society. The utopian mentality is the perception of possibility, and a “function of the process of becoming” (1936, p.

126); moreover, it emerges from the dynamics in society, and cannot be created. Mannheim only asked for an open mind to embrace a recognised utopian mentality that reflected the hopeful innate human will to live and survive. The end of utopia would result in a closed, controlled “matter of factness” (1936, p. 257). A society without utopia ends up in a rationalized, pragmatic space that leaves no room for emotion, imagination and poetry. It dehumanises human beings, and brings them into a reified state of being—despite all the achievements based on both reason, rationality, and emotion, irrationality.

Although Mannheim had a tense appreciation of irrationality (Levitas, 1990), he understood the importance of the irrational for utopian thought. Its intention to transcend social reality—a “revolutionary purpose” (1936, p. 132)—enables a society not to stabilise—or in my words, petrify—within bureaucratic and administrative systems. Thus, utopian thought should be considered as outbursts of life that create cracks enabling light to come in. It gives room for the opportunity to imagine that nothing is permanent and that a different order is always possible.

Paradox, contradiction, incongruence, and inconsistency—these are returning words in Mannheim’s work. Social reality and human behaviour are not at all ordered, not at all balanced, not static or based on consensus. In his writings, Mannheim underlined the importance of disorder, dissensus and movement. It is in utopian thought that he sees opportunities for a vital society,

The complete disappearance of the utopian element from human thought and action would mean that human nature and human development would take on a totally new character. The disappearance of utopia would bring about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would be faced with the greatest paradox imaginable, namely, that man who has achieved the highest degree of rational mastery of existence, left without any ideals, becomes a mere creature of impulses. Thus, after a long, tortuous, but heroic development, just at the highest state of awareness, when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man’s creation, with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it. (1936, p. 263)

Introduction to 1936 Edition *Preliminary Approach to the Problem*

In his preliminary introductory chapter to the English edition, Mannheim introduced the following descriptions of the concepts for the first time,

The concept of ideology reflects the one discovery which emerged from political conflict, namely, that ruling groups can in their thinking become so intensively interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense of domination. There is implicit in the word “ideology”

the insight that in certain situations the collective unconscious of certain groups obscures the real condition of society both to itself and to others and thereby stabilizes it.

The concept of utopian thinking reflects the opposite discovery of the political struggle, namely that certain oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation, which tend to negate it. Their thinking is incapable of correctly diagnosing an existing condition of society. They are not really at all interested with what really exists; rather in their thinking they already seek to change the situation that exists. Their thought is never an analysis of the situation; it can only be used as a direction for action. In the utopian mentality, the collective unconscious, guided by wishful representation and the will to action, hides certain aspects of reality. It turns its back on everything which would shake its belief or paralyse its desire to change things. (1936, p. 40)

These descriptions had more explicit references to tension, discrepancies and conflicting interests than before; I perceive them as being less mild and considerate. He even distanced himself to some extent from his initial enthusiasm for utopian thought. What did he do in these interpretations?

Here, he connected ideology with political conflict and utopian thinking with political struggle. Conflict is a result of the incompatibility of wishes and needs, whereas struggle aims at freedom from constraints. Conflict is an issue of the ruling group, and the struggle of the oppressed. The dominant group is inclined to keep its status quo as it suits the group's wishes and needs perfectly, although representatives fear the status quo could be endangered. Therefore, their striving and actions aim at stability and the maintenance of the current position. As a matter of fact, their orientation and interest is merely backward-looking. In contrast, there is the oppressed, disheartened group experiencing suppression and constraints. As a result, this group develops a will to revolt against the existing mechanisms of oppression, and intends to bring about change. Its orientation and interest is forward-looking—but is not a matter of escapism (Levitas, 1990).

The will of both groups, however, involves them in action but leaves them unaware of the specific hidden motives that drive them. This matter of unconsciousness was emphasised much more in these descriptions. Although a ruling group would be capable of analysing and understanding societal flux, their ambitions leave no room for the correct interpretation of the concrete societal circumstances; ideology works more or less like “blinders on a horse” (Sargent, 2008, p. 7). Ideological thought is informed by severe rationality that stabilises society and results in a loss of plasticity, vitality and resilience; at the end of the day, the ruling group devastates itself. The idealistic—irra-

tional—character of the change process, however, endangers the utopian striving of oppressed groups. In their disinterest towards the real situation, they do not engage in a more rationalistic or profound analysis of their oppression and of the social context, which results in them losing sight of the existing order. Their passionate engagement in the visualisation of change hinders—knowingly or not—the acknowledgement of thoughts and actions that refrain from the realisation of change. To conclude, collective unconsciousness—ignorance or naivety—has a boomerang effect on both groups.

Ideology and Utopia in Thought at !mpulse

An analysis of thought in a social context is embedded in the perspective of the person who conducts the analysis. Thus, anyone who attempts to explore and to understand a social reality has to be self-conscious about his or her own position and mindset, as Mannheim argues. Thus, evaluating a specific circumstance as a matter of utopian or ideological mentality is never an objective process, but rather a kind of counterpoint dance with given factors—the case, its social circumstances, and one’s own position. Therefore, different observers will present different evaluations. My current evaluation is a result of my increased knowledge of !mpulse combined with my previous experiences and emotional bond.

An observer needs to start an analysis from the perspective of the realised change—ideological mentality fails and utopia is successful in its efforts for change. This implies that the observer needs to turn his/her attention to the moment of action itself. Often, an individual’s *Wunschtraum* (1930, p. 180) or wish for change—emerging from an existing social order—is an indication of a utopian mentality. A forerunner takes action for change, and functions as the creative and imaginative transformer of convictions and motives for a social group that (s)he belongs to. Especially his or her ‘talent’ to imagine other futures is needed to move on. Actually, Mannheim sees imagination as the foundation of our lives. There is, however, a restricting factor: the impossibility of single-handedly creating effective structural change. Accordingly, the individual incites a movement that is consistent with the social group’s will and in dialectic reaction to the existing order. Nevertheless, an observer needs to be critical of the fact that an action presented as change or innovation does not need to be a result of a utopian mentality; it can also be embedded in a striving for consolidation.

As I developed the reflective part of this study (See *Part II: Gleaning Memories*), I noticed a utopian mentality in the efforts of the !mpulse founders and the initial team. This is for me the utopian moment *par excellence* that I recognised at !mpulse. They had successfully opposed their existing social reality, and had created a new reality. The actual circumstances in mainstream education—an existing bureaucracy, a lack of freedom for teachers and an inhumane approach to students—urged them to break the “bonds of reality”. In this sense, they felt ‘oppressed’. This feeling was not private; similar sentiments were noticeable among teachers in general. They, however, took the

opportunity to strive for change—to me, the current presence of Impulse in the Leeward school scenery is a pale shadow of this past opposition.

The problem in this situation was a lack of intellectual exploration both of the historical-social reality and the discourse that they entered. Utopian striving is impatient, and rushes the thinker into action. (S)he cannot wait or catch their breath and critically review the current situation. The thinker seeks those sources that justify the choice. In this sense, the innovators joined and repeated a self-evident discourse on constructivist learning. They ignored sources—for instance, those critical pedagogy scholars who opposed the ‘learning language’ (Biesta, 2006b)—that could have shed another light on the discourse and on their own intentions. They did not want to be hindered and held back; they had to follow the impulsion. At this point, a problematic irrational element in the utopian striving constrained their strength. It kept them from having a conscious analytic stance in regard to the learning discourse. At the same time, however, rationality could have ‘killed’ utopia—at this point the rationality-irrationality dilemma becomes obvious.

But, would this project have taken place if the conditions had not been provided? Probably not. As a result, however, the local utopian mentality intermingled with an unexplored political-economic context. The governmental policy on education was a result of efforts to maintain and strengthen an existing economic order. This had resulted in a focus on ‘bottom-up initiatives’, ‘entrepreneurial’ schools and autonomy. Mannheim explained that representatives of the existing order could also accept utopias; in the case of Impulse, a utopian mentality was not only stimulated and enabled, but actually initiated from ideological goals. In this sense, the position of the Alameda CLC is illustrative of this political-economic ideological strivings. The CLC concept aimed at the preparation of suitable practitioners to continue economic growth in times of transformation. However, the CLC was also supposed to become a profitable business product to be disseminated worldwide. In its reaction to the changing world, the Arthur Andersen perspective could be considered as a matter of utopian mentality. Business started to cooperate with education; and this resulted in schools transcending reality and producing better-educated students. Still, I would not consider this striving utopian, as Ego (2003) intended to maintain American neo-liberal values and business.

Mannheim talked about blindness for or a lack of interest in social reality. The withdrawal from mainstream education seemed to me to be an interesting metaphor for both ideological “utopian blindness” and utopian “reality blindness” (1936, p. 197). This blindness among Millennium Innovation partners created problems for all. The networking stakeholders—the Ministry of Education, Arthur Andersen, the KPC group, and school management—were interested in self-preservation; thus, the best conditions for change were sought in isolation. Their striving, however, created much

public and political upheaval and resulted in negative attitudes towards educational change in the public and among teachers; and it resulted in a Parliamentary inquiry with critical outcomes in the report presented by the *Commissie Parlementair Onderzoek Onderwijsvernieuwingen* in 2008.

Teachers who wanted to change their teaching practice were excluded from a fruitful dialectic process. As a result, two educational realities started to exist side by side, and Impulse continuously encountered the reality it was trying to transcend. This circumstance led to a defensive instead of dialectic dynamic. Several years after the initiation, they were left alone with their innovation as their supporters had left the local scene and the political climate had changed. Their once promising utopian striving had constrained a sense of conscious readiness for unforeseen occurrences. In 2011, the mainstream processes had infused the utopian efforts. This integration of utopian and ideological thought, however, I believe occurred at the expense of the transformation of educational reality.

Consideration or Concern

Mannheim presented an interesting and—for me—welcome perspective on the difference between ideas and actions that have utopian transformational power, and those with an assumed ideological power for change. Moreover, he clarified that the tension between the two modes are innate in our lives. Therefore, he stressed the importance of consciousness when acting in social reality. His drive for this contribution to the field of sociology was his wish to enable a humanised form of living, in which human beings have control over their life, are not reduced to things, and can become agents of change in the world they live in. The connection of my research experiences with his concepts were useful in transcending my own narrowed micro-understanding of Impulse. I, however, conducted a hindsight study. In ‘slow research’, I gradually developed the awareness that from now on would support my readiness for similar conditions.

I wonder, however, how human beings—in this case teachers—can develop such readiness. Looking at the conditions at the beginning of the Millennium, I think it would have been possible to gain a better insight into the actual perspectives of the stakeholders. Besides, I can imagine that the consciousness among teachers could have been developed during the years of building Impulse. Even in 2011, it had been possible to ask questions about what was going on. I have the impression that the pragmatic orientation could be integrated into the intellectual explorations. In this sense, I return to Mannheim’s “conjunctive knowledge” perspective. I have this hopeful expectation that teachers will be able to become more attentive and to develop readiness for the tensions between utopia and ideology. Perhaps, this is an expression of a utopian mentality—it is by no means wishful thinking.

Part IV Reflexivity in Thinking through Making

Sometimes, I envy you—really. Then, I see you sitting somewhere, and I think, she does not need to say anything, she only needs to listen—I would enjoy that.

(From an interview with a teacher, 2011)

Introduction

I was participant observer at the experimental secondary school called *Impulse* between January 2011 and February 2012; this was at the school's original location on the *Archipelweg* in Leeuwarden, Friesland, The Netherlands. My encounter with teacher innovation took place in the teachers' habitats—that is within their learning community and their social circumstances. I believe I was conscious of and sensitive to the fact that they hosted me and that I was their guest. Ingold's request for an attitude of *attendre* or of being attentive and attuned to what happens in the world one studies (Ingold, 2013) is, I believe, not only a methodological issue. It is a matter of decency and respect, which are essential prerequisites for doing research. I followed the school's development, changes and daily routines; and together with the school, I explored their and our social relations. The initial distance between the teachers and myself receded as we got to know one another. My prior history with *Impulse*, as the mother of a student, I believe contributed to the acceptance of my presence and to the teachers' openness.

But, it was not until we shared experiences of distress and anxiety a few weeks after I had begun my research that my presence really became grounded in their circumstances. One Wednesday afternoon, the team and I were gathered in the ritual of the 'talking circle' preceding the weekly team meeting. The tension was high because the day before the team had been informed that the final decision about the school's future, which was uncertain, had been postponed. I not only witnessed the emotions and anger, but also physically felt the pain of the situation. In my position, as mother, I had shared a similar experience and feelings in 2009. I expressed my sorrow and tried to encourage the teachers. And all of a sudden the distance disappeared; I had become a participant with whom circumstances, feelings, and thoughts could be shared.

This experience was important and provoked changes in my initial pre-design and methodological focus in regard to ethnographic data collection (Lee & Ingold, 2006). It was obvious, as Lee and Ingold (2006) state, that one cannot assume that just entering a social reality will produce transformational participant observation. The sort of research I aim to requires embodied presence and "sensory attunement" (Ingold, 2011, p. 128); a characteristic of Ingold's concept of *correspondence*. His perspective on our relations with the ones we study has come to guide my methodological choices.

The *Impulse to find out* study is therefore grounded in a "thinking through making" perspective in contrast to the commonly applied academic way of finding things out, which Ingold calls "Making through thinking". My approach, inspired by Ingold, emphasises everyday experiences, sensory attunement, and imagination; and it attempts to combine these with intellectual awareness and theory. The methodology is about attunement with and responsiveness to the state of being encountered. Hereby, the

past hopefully produces learning, whereby possible orientations for the future can arise.

In the pages that follow, I will elaborate on the ways that my participant observation and relationship to !mpulse developed, whereby my 'knowing' has led to the central theme(s) of this thesis. Moreover, I will reflect on my possibilities and !mpulse's teachers' possibilities to respond to my and their 'knowing'.

Participant Observation

On average, I spent one day per school week at !mpulse. The choice of the day depended on my availability and the school's activities. Since the school's teacher or team meetings always took place on a Wednesday afternoon, I mostly spent that whole day at !mpulse. I extended my presence to other days to have an opportunity to meet all the teachers, since not all of them worked full-time and not all of them were present on Wednesdays. Moreover, this gave me better insight into the way learning was organised and managed. Different things after all happened on different days. Several times, I also just passed by to join in for just a few hours.

There was an implicit, silent agreement that I could walk around in the open spaces of the school and sit down where ever I liked. I observed the teachers involved in the learning processes of their students in mathematics, sciences, or languages; in the coaching of community work; in supervision of projects. Despite our agreement, I usually first discussed with the teacher(s) involved my visits to the more private school activities, such as motivational coaching or student portfolio talks—a few times, they discussed my presence with the students involved.

When the teachers went for a break, I took my coffee and ate my lunch with them in the kitchen. When they met for team meetings, I sat with them in the ritual of the talking circle and listened and observed their discussions on matters related to the students, their learning, and the running of the community.

When I was at !mpulse, I was actively involved in the day-to-day processes of the school. Occasionally, I was asked to supervise a group of students or to give a hand and to assist in an activity. And the teachers asked me for feedback on their way of working, and on the behavior of their students, or on how I perceived their community. We shared pleasures and concerns. Often we had lengthy, sometimes, controversial discussions—and that led to cold coffees. In those moments, I had the impression that individual teachers wanted to learn with and from me, in the way I was learning with and from them. I felt that we had connected and we had reached out to one another. This has inspired my use of the *tendril* in this book as a metaphor for the learning process.

Most interesting for me were the moments that I sat in the Grand Café, the hub of the learning community. Besides during the pauses, everything that happened here just happened, without any specific goal—the Grand Café functioned like a regular café, where people met in a public/private sphere. Thus, when I sat there and enjoyed all its liveliness, and did some writing about my experiences and perceptions, teachers and students would come to sit with me and would start conversations. All of which often resulted in meaningful exchanges of ideas.

If special activities were planned, I would visit them as well. For instance, I attended the meetings with parents scheduled in the evenings. I was present and participated in the information evenings for parents of the first year students (in September 2011). I was introduced to the parents as researcher and I joined a parent group and followed the program from them. I visited the two meetings organised by the director and the team in June 2011 and January 2012. The plans for the future of !mpulse were then being discussed with those parents whose children were affected by new developments. These meetings introduced me to the front and backstage communication of the team with and about parents. It also strengthened my growing awareness of the incongruence between what I experienced, and the storied !mpulse. I joined the teachers, parents, and students in their annual BBQ (in June 2011). The events committee of the students had organised the BBQ, parents brought salads and some other food, and the staff hosted the parents by serving drinks and providing the meat. In a pleasant leisurely atmosphere, the parents enjoyed the hospitality. I visited the Open Day for interested elementary pupils and their parents in February 2011, when the students and staff alike showed off the best of their community. And, I witnessed the return to the past during the graduation ceremony in June 2011.

In November of that year, the director invited me to accompany the team for a two-day meeting outside of the school's confines. Unfortunately, I could not attend these sessions initiated to finalise the new plans for the school's future. Therefore, I asked the team to tape the sessions for me. This resulted in 12 hours of audiotapes of the plenary and small group discussions—including gossip and emotional outbursts. The teachers were in control of the tapes and aware of the fact that what they talked about was recorded; I transcribed everything and made it available to the teachers.

Furthermore, I received the weekly newsletter for staff, the minutes of the team meetings, and I was integrated into the school's email communication. To a certain extent, this kept me updated with what happened in the team, beyond my presence.

My Moleskines

Ethnographic participant observation aims at writing about people. For this reason, it is argued that the writing down of observations is at the core of ethnographic fieldwork (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2008; Ingold, 2013). The way the ethnographer gives account of her/his observations and perceptions is an important issue. The ethnographer needs to follow well-designed criteria and strategies for her/his note taking. Reflexive awareness is required. Despite wide consensus about the importance of note taking, a variety of approaches are recognisable and discussed in the methodology literature. For instance,

If, for example, one sees the core of ethnography as writing observations that would be more or less available to any trained observer, one can separate the 'findings' from the process of making them and 'data' from 'personal reactions'. (Emmerson et al., 2008, p. 354)

It is just in regard to this point that Ingold criticises the work of ethnographers. A focus on accurate meticulous note taking, with the purpose of data collection as such, occurs at the expense of sensory attunement and learning via the encounter. Disciplined note taking creates distance between the researcher and the researched. I have followed Ingold's emphasis on *thinking through making* that also asks the researcher to develop, change and reflect—in short to learn—alongside mastering whatever skilful approach to note taking that is appropriate to the purpose of the research.

It was not actually my intention to produce an ethnographic account about an innovative school—I wanted to understand what happened. I did not set out to see !mpulse as a system to be analysed or to analyse it in terms of beliefs, hierarchy, gender, social class, generation differences, or whatever classical social science categories. I wrote copiously in my Moleskine ruled notebooks—I filled at least 15 to 20 of them. This was a matter of attempting to make sense of what I observed and experienced—in addition to writing notes about what happened or what people said with the purpose of supporting my memory. I have always understood writing as a matter of connecting to, and trying to understand, the world; thus writing in participant observation was merely a condensed version of what I feel writing is (should be) all about. Rereading the Moleskines made me aware of a dialectic struggle accompanying my presence, revolving around the question 'Why is it so difficult to understand what I observe, feel and think?' Or put differently, 'Why do I have in !mpulse such a strong experience of paradox?'

Taped and Non-Taped Conversations

The participant observation entailed spontaneous non-taped conversations and planned for taped interviews—each of these are social encounters that enabled conversation partners and myself to make sense of and to know the world we shared at that moment. Of course, interviews are very different from spontaneous conversations.

Interviews are often considered a qualitative method par excellence, to collect data on a specific topic. Different approaches to the character and purpose of interviews and to the position of the interviewee are known. For instance, an interviewee can be considered as a bearer of knowledge that an interviewer wants to have. In this perspective, interview strategies and techniques are applied to “extract information as directly as possible.” However, this point of view functions without considering the epistemological question of the construction of knowledge in the social interactions taking place during the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 2).

Kvale used the metaphor of a miner to explain the intention of an interviewer as knowledge or data digger. Next to this, he placed the metaphor of the interviewer as a traveller who “wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people he or she encounters” (Kvale, 2010, p. 19). He refers herein to the Latin roots of the word ‘conversation’, meaning ‘wandering together with’ and he emphasises that,

... the journey might not only lead to new knowledge; the traveller might change as well. The journey might instigate a process of reflection that leads the traveller to new ways of self-understanding, as well as uncovering previously taken for granted values and customs in the traveller’s home country. (Kvale, 2010, p. 20)

I think Kvale and Ingold take a similar stance to knowing in research. Words, emotions, non-verbal expression move between two (or more) participants, (hopefully) creating a meaningful experience for all involved—not only for the one who has initiated the talk. I considered my conversation partners as storytellers who gave me their interpretations of their social reality, which I had entered into and which I observed. I connected with their interpretations as they did with my thoughts—I asked questions and so did they. Together we developed meanings, which in a way were a continuation of the relations, started in the participant observation process—and that did not end after the recording stopped. Furthermore, it was quite interesting to experience that the research conversations also resulted in talk between the participants, especially between the parents, and in the student groups, leaving me as a listener on the periphery. For these participants, these conversations were opportunities to make sense of not before shared experiences.

I, the interviewer in a traveller state of mind, in effect, encouraged the interviewee to perform: happiness, accomplishment and success; care, concern, fear; awareness, feeling betrayed and wronged. How they performed all these facets to their practice formed important information for me—as did their spontaneous off-the-cuff comments and responses. The one is not more ‘true’ than the other; rehearsed and thoughtful answers are just as ‘true’ as are flap-outs and playful comments. I tried to collect as many different sorts of speech as I could. I made transcriptions of all my interviews and sent them to the participants; and I received their permission to use the texts.

I used the interviews to reflect on shared experiences and to test my perceptions. I began interviewing in June 2011 and continued until February 2012. For each interview, I prepared a mind map (Buzan, 2010) as a guide to what I wanted to ask. I decided to work with mind maps because they are a commonly used tool for !mpulse students in their learning process. Thus the teachers and students were familiar with this approach. Each conversation started with the question: “What does !mpulse mean to you?” I had noticed that this question was rather unexpected, but was an excellent starting point for an open process of sense-making.

I invited all the teachers to make an appointment with me for an interview; only two did not participate. I did not ask for their motives. Thus I talked with 17 teachers, among them six who belonged to the pioneer team. These conversations lasted between one and two hours each, with one exception of 50 minutes probably due to the fact that this teacher had just returned from a period of illness—talking was for that teacher rather fatiguing. With five teachers, I had two conversations because of changing or emerging circumstances—these second interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. In addition, I had non-taped conversations with the new director, who I wanted to inform about my research. Unexpectedly, that conversation developed into a far reaching perusal of !mpulse and its future. I also had several non-taped talks with the caretaker when I sat in the Grand Café and he joined me.

After I had attended several parent-teacher meetings, I felt the need to have interviews with parents as well. Thus, I invited three couples, whose children had just started at !mpulse, for a talk. And I met the mother of a third year student; and two mothers who were trying to establish a new parental participation initiative. Although I have focused in this thesis on the teachers, the conversations with the parents helped me to recall my memories, and to reflect on my reasons to enrol my son at !mpulse and to review my past experiences (see part II, chapter 1).

Finally, as I was leaving the community, I met with 14 students in groups. One was a group of four 1st year students, and one was a group of six 2nd year students. And I spoke with two pairs of 3rd years. I asked them to take a photo or to make a drawing, explaining the importance of !mpulse to them. The first year students presented me with a mind map, which we used as a starting point to talk. The third years offered me a photo and a collage of symbols. Unfortunately, none of the second years had prepared anything. We explored their and my experiences with !mpulse. A few months earlier, in October, I had met three boys in their 3rd year in the Grand Café. I witnessed a fierce debate between them and their coach; and, I overheard their negative reactions after the coach had left them with an assignment about learning at !mpulse—I invited them to transform the assignment into a taped conversation.

Often, the team members referred to the role of the former project leaders and to the utopian idealism attributed to them. Consequentially, I decided to contact the two founding teachers who had left !mpulse in 2009. First, I was hesitant about this, because they had suffered so much from the crisis !mpulse had faced. It turned out that they were very happy with my invitation and the opportunity it gave them to present their perspectives on the rise and fall of the school. They openly shared their thoughts and feelings with me—it seems that there had been little interest up to then in their experiences. As a result, we engaged in three lengthy open conversations. I used their stories for the *Gleaning Memories* presented in part II.

Return to my Room

In my study, which is my refuge, I reflected on my experiences. Thinking through my experiences, observations and thoughts, is not always helped by being bodily in touch with !mpulse. I noticed that I had internalised the !mpulse community, and it was constantly with me. I think I had more problems regaining reflective distance than in achieving proximity. While transcribing the interviews and team meetings, I reconnected to the team members, the students and the parents, and I sensed their love for and struggles with !mpulse. Writing vignettes became a method to visualise and interpret my presence and learning in the !mpulse community.

As a result of my reflecting on and reading over and over again the documents I had produced in and about !mpulse, I started to follow clues about !mpulse's origins, development and thought processes. I became fascinated by the text of the community and what it implied, suggested, hid and proclaimed. !mpulse, so I discovered, was ideationally much more complicated than I had initially thought. I had seen !mpulse as a radical student-directed educational experiment; but I discovered that it was also a business proposition, a political project, and many other things. My investigation led me to documents that revealed the historical-social context and related ideological modes of thought that had given rise to !mpulse. I conducted this part of the study after I had completed my observer participation, though I did present my discoveries to the founders. These moments of sharing, however, revealed that my research had drifted me apart from them, and I feel I was then still unable to appropriately respond to this.

Choice of Matter for Interpretation

My hermeneutic interpretive perspective and the application of Ingold's anthropological participant observation demand choices underpinning the sensitising and intellectual research processes. The attunement and intellectual explorations in the "*thinking through making*" approach enabled me to see things in the way that the !mpulse team did. And it made how they talked about circumstances and issues seem natural and inevitable to me. This brought about reciprocal responsiveness and new knowing. This knowing, however, challenged my understandings of !mpulse with which I had entered the community. I had brought with me my experiences and my knowing of the foundational principles of the community and of its learning concepts. But the !mpulse I experienced was not the !mpulse of the first hour, nor was it the !mpulse that I had conceptually created in my mind's eye. The actual or new !mpulse, contradicted the 'old'.

My awareness of what had initially been claimed as its pedagogical identity created an inner tension in me. Contradictions between the initial story of innovation and the

practices of preservation puzzled me. Furthermore, I noticed incongruence between what the community communicated about self-directed and autonomous learning, and what I observed of the day-to-day processes of learning and of the organising of the learning. This created a perception of paradox that was strengthened by the comments and concerns of the teachers, and students, and parents. My research into the original pedagogical vision and into the societal forces that had led to !mpulse happening in the first place, reinforced my sense of paradox as well.

I have used Karl Mannheim (1936) as sparing partner in my effort to understand the pedagogical paradoxes. He argued that perplexity—feelings of discomfort or incongruence in social reality—is a possible starting point for intellectual attention. I found from him an assurance that the study of paradox can despite anxiety and distress enrich one’s awareness. I have grounded my representation of !mpulse in my effort to dialectically respond to the paradoxes. Hereby, I try to understand what has and still is happening. Following Ingold, in his suggestion that understanding the world demands rich texts and that these make transformation possible, I have chosen for Mannheim’s approach to ideology and utopia as key concepts to help me to make sense of !mpulse.

In order to make paradoxes and learning visible, I wrote part II. For the first chapter *Gleaning Memories*, I used the interviews with the founders and the taped and non-taped conversations with team members who had worked at !mpulse since 2005. I integrated the documents that had been produced at and about !mpulse. For the vignettes and tendrils in *Being with !mpulse* I used my Moleskines and insights gleamed from the interviews. The tendrils present the learning process rooted in paradox. The last chapter, *A Network Appears*, I explore the clues I had found to the historical-social context crucial to the start of !mpulse—documents produced by !mpulse’s founders had led me to a variety of externally published documents.

Responses

My research at !mpulse was rooted in my curiosity and striving to understand what had happened and still is happening within and in regard to an innovative school—the research was my initiative. In the presentation of my intentions to the management of the school, I stated the opportunities that the research could offer for team or individual learning. I addressed the fact that my presence, as such, would be an intervention in their day-to-day practice, which I hoped would lead to self-reflection and new insights. Nevertheless, I did not integrate the learning of the team or of its individual members into my research. Nor were the director, the team leader, or the team members attentive—or interested—in the possible benefits of my research for !mpulse. The teachers, I believe, were more often in survival mode than in an explorative or thoughtful one.

Participant observation, coupled to a social constructivist approach to meaning and knowledge, meant that shared sense-making is crucial to me. My interviews and observations brought me to understand the prevailing discourse in !mpulse, but also to see many tensions between that discourse and the school realities of today. When I started the research I fairly uncritically valued the educational discourse of the child-directed and socially engaged school. I shared !mpulse's discourse; I believed in it and I valued it. But I discovered that the discourse had met with many snags during the school's rather fraught development. And I discovered that the discourse had for me some very unexpected attractors and sources. Put bluntly, the discourse was in some aspects not at all what I had thought it was.

I often felt shared sense-making in the conversations with the teachers. We speak the same language and profess many of the same beliefs. Ingold refers to George Bateson's article on 'deutero learning' when he explains that we should be taught by the facts of the world, instead of thinking that we could just be provided with those facts (Ingold, 2013). Awareness is active, conceptual, doubting, thoughtful and questioning. I believe that my presence, questions, and reflections were a starting point for a thought process amongst the teachers, as I responded to them and they responded to me.

Responses to my Presence in Participant Observation

My presence and opportunities for day-long periods of observation led to interesting reactions by the teachers. For instance, one teacher expressed her feelings of envy at my opportunity to do research, saying that she would love to do the same. When I asked her why she did not do so, she was quite strong in her reply that it was her responsibility to teach. Likewise, one of the teachers commented that I was able to observe how different team members worked with their students—she assumed that I could more or less oversee what happened in the learning process. She asked me whether I had noticed differences and asked me to share my impressions. I was hesitant to share at this point. After all, my awareness of learning and teaching may be different than that of the teachers, but it is no less partial, circumstantially grounded or experiential than theirs.

Increasingly, the interviews became moments for teachers to express their growing concerns about what happened at !mpulse. When I became aware of this effect, I tried to address it by asking the teachers why they did not and it seems could not address these issues in their teacher/team meetings. I saw a few times that my comments indeed seemed to lead to more open and direct conversation in the teacher meetings. It also happened that after a while a teacher said, he or she had reflected on my remarks and had decided to act differently in the future. Whether or not this happened, was beyond the scope of my research.

Most of the time, I responded to individual team members, either because of their questions or because of the reflections they provoked in me. Just a few times, I presented my observations and reflections to the whole team. This sharing with them, however, did not create a team reaction but only individual ones. Late May 2011, for instance, the !mpulse director presented her plans for the school's future (see part II, chapter 2, *Tendril with the Team*). After her presentation, some questions were posed and positive remarks were made. Then she left the meeting. As soon as she had gone, the team members started to express their criticisms and concerns. The team leader noticed my visible astonishment. He asked me to speak out—this had never happened before. After a split second hesitation, I described what I had seen and I asked why the feedback had not been given to the director. The team sat in silence until one of the teachers explained his considerations, admitting that this was not effective and not honest to the director. The matter was not explored further. Next time the topic was discussed, the director actively asked for feedback, stating that she had heard that last time many questions were posed after she had left—somebody thus had informed her. The matter of team interaction was not addressed.

Response to my Understanding !mpulse

Despite my relation with the team, cognitive distance gradually developed. I had discovered a different !mpulse, which enabled me to go beyond any one-dimensional rendition of the school. The initial confrontation with unexpected otherness at !mpulse had become more apparent, as I left and started to explore the historical-social context. Occasionally I met the teachers. It was, however, difficult to keep them abreast of the path I was pursuing, and to explain to them the different perspectives I saw emerging. When I told in what way my understanding of the community had developed, I was told that this was indeed interesting, but I had to keep in mind that their students had good results and were very motivated—perhaps even more than in other schools—and what counted even more, the Dutch Educational Inspectorate was very satisfied about the innovative character of the school.

I think I was more interested in the idea !mpulse than the teachers who voiced a pragmatic focus. !mpulse for the teachers is their work; !mpulse for me was a process of research, reflection and discovery. I think, they want to be engaged, involved and to identify with their school. I value the outsider's position much more. I want to know about innovation, ideology, idealism and pedagogy. I have worked for five years to try to know !mpulse. Although my research in !mpulse was grounded in the assumption that knowing is constructed in social encounter, I did not (nor did I want to) *go native*. I was not out to teach in !mpulse or to manage !mpulse. I wanted to gain insight into idealistic or utopian innovation—I wanted to know more about belief in action. My engagement was dialectical: it entailed involvement, respect and shared experience; but also theoretical analysis, examination of social-political contexts, and a certain sceptic towards utopian beliefs.

Since my observer participation has been completed, I have worked on this thesis at a distance from !mpulse. The spatial distance now hindered the initial correspondence of the participant observer. And I realise that in addition, due to cognitive distance, I felt unable to bridge the gap. As a matter of fact, I was hesitant about this. I had experienced that becoming conscious of the gaps between the !mpulse or pedagogical story and what had happened on various levels, had made me vulnerable. It took a long time to develop a sense of acceptance of my changed perspective in regard to !mpulse and to frankly admit that my love for !mpulse had turned into a *shaded love*.

It took a whole thesis to develop my interpretation of utopia and ideology in !mpulse, and to accept the paradox and tensions, while not stepping in the pitfall of blaming, prescribing or running away. I found it difficult to share fragments of the thesis with the !mpulse team. But, since I have concluded that the thesis is a thesis and an anti-thesis, response is inherent to its character. Thus I returned to !mpulse and felt again the correspondence between myself and pedagogical idealism.

I met one of the two founding teachers. I presented her with my thoughts about !mpulse to utopian idealism in which we had both been entangled. I took her on my path, leading to Alameda, to the role of political decision-makers, and the biased role of educational consultants—we remained in emotional silence and amazement over what was unknown. She listened with interest to my interpretation of the risks of too little intellectual exploration and readiness, alongside a strong pragmatic orientation. !mpulse had innovated, but it had chosen for self-preservation. And she recognised that a strong tendency to preserve the original discourse had had a major effect on !mpulse. My alternative storytelling, based on the thesis/antithesis, created a counter-discourse that (at least in my experience) needs time for digestion. It took me several years to get to terms with the paradoxes. Her listening to my story and my listening to her reactions, created a new process of sense-making in which we shared how problematic school innovation really is. But she, like me, is at a distance from !mpulse. She no longer works there. !mpulse for her is now reflexivity, reflection, and the re-examination of the possible.

This thesis did not set out to be school action research and it never became it. It is in part a record of the learning process of a researcher about pedagogical complexity and the pitfalls of pedagogical idealism. My conversation partner has acknowledged (at least the major lines of) my interpretation. This thesis is about becoming reflexive. A certain distance to !mpulse and level of reflexivity defines the re-established, new correspondence with a school founder. But I have to think about an appropriate way to ask for new responses from the field. !mpulse is a never-ending story—!*mpulse to find out* is indeed a pedagogical thesis/antithesis.

Part V With Altered Eyes

Le véritable voyage de découverte ne consiste pas à chercher de nouveaux paysages, mais à avoir de nouveaux yeux.

(M. Proust, À la recherche du temps perdu, La Prisonnière)

Tension

Tension meanders throughout the thesis. I have explored a *petite histoire* embedded within a grand narrative, in which teachers were empowered to become the entrepreneurs of a *new learning* concept. The encounter with the unknown world of entrepreneurial teachers had created an unexpected though interesting combination of experiences, perceptions, concepts, texts and disciplines resulting in different expressions of tension. The combination allowed interplay of conflicting elements that challenge each other. As a matter of fact, a tendril also visualises tension, as both—tendril and tension—are rooted in the Latin verb *tendere*, meaning ‘to stretch, to extend’. Thus, reaching for otherness created tension, and the movement gave consciousness.

At the micro-level of a school, the tension between a utopian mentality in a merely ideologically determined field of education became visual. Impulse embodied both change and preservation in a vibrantly magical and tragic way; and ultimately found a mode of existence—this *petite histoire* resembled a Greek tragedy, somehow. The study also describes the importance of change and utopian mentalities for a society dominated by an ideological striving for preservation of its status quo; at the same time, it describes the danger in ideology for utopia. And, Mannheim, the macro-level sociologist, is embedded into the anthropological, micro-level participant observation advocated by Ingold; I needed both scholars for my work. Furthermore, I discuss the confrontational impact of choosing to conduct a PhD that resulted in a transformational process from pedagogical naivety to pedagogical consciousness.

Although the tension is apparent, it does not mean that it is solved; as a matter of fact, I had no intention of doing so. Resolving tension entails the difficulty (or even partiality) of claiming that there is only one possible answer—one ‘story’, or one ‘concept’. A focus on one concept, however, narrows understanding of the complexity of life. In this sense, my text is a *thesis / antithesis*, a *thesis slash antithesis*, that produces dynamic spaces for ongoing learning in its dialectic.

A Pedagogue’s Naivety and Cognisance

By ‘awareness’ I do not understand the mere accumulation of rational knowledge. Awareness must mean both in the life of the individual and the community the readiness to see the whole situation in which one finds oneself, and not only to orientate one’s own action on immediate tasks and purposes but to base them on a more comprehensive vision. (Wolff, 1971, p. 374)

Transposing Mannheim’s understanding of awareness to myself as a teaching professional: I could be perfectly competent and be a good teacher—applying my tacit,

practical, knowledge and didactical skills—and still be unaware of the implication of my being in the world for my teaching, and of the social forces that affect my teaching reality. In other words, Mannheim would have regretted my state of naivety because my subject understanding, didactic skills, and professional experiences do not suffice to be a conscious, intellectual pedagogue.

In a commencement speech in 2005, the late novelist David Foster Wallace told his audience an anecdote,

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How's the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?” (Wallace, 2009)

The old fish's question is a fine pedagogical question, which results in a researched response and a confrontational starting point for pedagogical cognisance and self-awareness. Reflectivity is considered an important feature in the professional development of teachers. Nevertheless, it is obvious that reflection does not often move beyond the practical issues of daily teaching and school life. Despite an increasing focus on reflective practitioners it is doubtful whether this approach indeed suffices the development of needed teaching professionalism. Therefore, it is probably more fruitful when a teacher is engaged in research in his or her own practice. A teacher-as-researcher needs to confront him or herself with the day-to-day practice, and engage in dialogue with others for self-reflection. This creates possibilities for essential philosophical, ethical, and sense-making deliberations beyond the practicalities. Such research-based reflection allows, or perhaps in effect asks for, a dynamic open mind to what occurs instead of a reflective entering a practice along prescribed, technical routes (Day, 1993).

During my study of *!mpulse*, the teacher-as-researcher and the teacher as (non-)reflective practitioner were both present. I encountered teachers engaged in the pragmatic building and preservation of a learning community. I experienced that they neglected critical self-reflection and self-evaluation as they entangled in the demanding and time consuming process of making their reality, without much thinking beyond practicalities.⁹⁴ However, this circumstance constrained a learning process and led to unconscious repetition of actions. Already Mannheim addressed the problematic pitfalls

⁹⁴ The *Expeditie durvendoendelen*, the VO-raad project, also aimed at teachers doing research in their own innovation process (Lockhorst, Van den Berg & Boogaard, 2011). At *!mpulse*, however, only external researchers from Oberon, an independent educational research and consultancy organisation (www.oberon.eu), investigated the process (Aarts, 2011; Ledoux & Volman, 2011). Team members were interviewed, but did not participate in any research; the report (Oomens, Van Aarsen & Van der Linden, 2010) had no clear function.

of repetitive difficulties as a result of limited reflections. In this respect, I found it quite interesting to experience that only a few teachers were really interested in my observations on the community; I was not considered as an aid for their learning. The team or management did not see my research as an opportunity for ‘unpaid’ reflections and feedback. And when one of the team members started a Master’s research about the coaching in the community, this still did not result in dialogue when she informed her colleagues and asked for involvement (see also Part IV).

I recognised this pragmatic orientation—a lack of reflection beyond practicalities—and the lack of interest in research carried out by colleagues in my own teaching practice. Moreover, I understood that I was also an actor in ideological and utopian thought processes, and that this absence of reflexivity had influenced the continuation of self-evident points of view. In my experiences with *!mpulse*, my encounters with scholars, and through my readings, I gradually understood that teaching needs intellectual thinking about philosophical questions about ontology, epistemology, pedagogy, and sociological issues. Hesitantly, I had to admit that I had been susceptible to forms of grand narratives, despite my critical professional thinking.

My awareness had consequences for my appreciation of constructivist learning in the way it had been implemented into my teaching practice. Although the implications of choosing for constructivist learning were not my research focus, it was an element in the mirror that *!mpulse* provided. I had been working in a constructivist learning environment for a long time, and considered myself an advocate and expert of its Problem-based Learning approach. However, *!mpulse* showed me the narrowness of its perspectives on learning and didactics. The related principles of active, contextualised and collaborative learning were translated into both learning environments. And in both situations, students were defined as self-directed, autonomous learners. However, the focus on learning had neglected the philosophical consciousness of being and knowing from a constructivist perspective. Moreover, neither teaching practice was inclined to consider ideological thought—which was central in its efforts to maintain the learning concept. Additionally, in reading Mannheim, I realised that in my teaching practice the world was limited to the field of the future professional lives of my students. I realised that we provided students a nice and motivational learning space while leaving out the essential elements needed for transformational education.

As a teacher-as-researcher, I conducted my study not within my own university, but rather in the world of other educationalists. My own practice was mirrored, which gave me a new perspective on what had been so self-evident for me. Thus, the participant observation with others was quite confrontational; and therefore, it was essential for my learning and transformation. In this sense, my research was indeed an illustration of the effect of research as a means of developing a different kind of reflectivity that goes beyond day-to-day practice. For me, the PhD resulted in a confrontational and dia-

logical reflection on my teaching and school context. It supported my professional growth and transition. The process of becoming conscious is an arduous, time-consuming journey; nevertheless, it is an exciting and essentially humanising one. In this sense, I recognised an interesting opportunity for a practice of teacher-as-researcher in the combination of anthropological participant observation and the historical-social “relationalism” emphasised by Mannheim.

Tense Consciousness

In my encounters with the teachers, it became obvious that their ‘love’ for impulse was embedded in their experience of liberation and freedom. They had left mainstream schools, which they had experienced as being restrictive for learning and the personal growth of the students. Moreover, it was experienced as bureaucratic, leaving little room for autonomy in regard to their own teaching. As a matter of fact, throughout the years, they had ‘opposed’ mainstream thoughts on education. With Mannheim, I had learned to see the ideological inclination to preserve a status quo in education—as well as the presence of unconscious teachers who were wittingly or unwittingly bound up in this mode of thought. Still, Mannheim presented in his political connection of ideology and utopia the possibility for humanisation in becoming conscious; I also see this with Ingold, and the advocates of teacher-as-researcher (Day, 1993). Inquiry can create inclusive awareness—so important for teachers to become *transformative intellectuals* (Giroux, 1988), and to develop reflective utopian mentalities. It creates the state of being in control intellectually. They can challenge whatever ideology determines educational reality; a challenge will of course not be a guarantee for success, but at least some *cracks in rigidity* can be made.

The *Commissie Leraren* (2007) advised the Dutch government in regard to a forecasted shortage of teachers. The advice to invest in the quality of teaching professionals, and to have them do a Master or a PhD, was one of a variety of measurements to be taken to preserve the Dutch knowledge economy. I wonder whether the government considered the impact of this advice. Moreover, I wonder whether this aspect was considered at schools and universities of applied sciences—as its employees started to conduct research, and to become more conscious of their circumstances. Teachers doing research do not only develop professionalism in the sense of professional competencies; the research gives them an opportunity to develop awareness. For instance, the moment a teacher poses a ‘What is water?’ question in regard to his or her educational context, long-held institutional self-evidence—which is often embedded in the ideological efforts to maintain an educational or managerial status quo—is challenged.

As a consequence of these opportunities, the interesting question for both the organisation and the professional would be ‘What could be the added value of a cognisant pedagogue for the students and the organisation?’ Whatever the answer could be, the added value moves beyond the daily activities in the classroom. It might at first sight be

uncomfortable for those who did not engage in such a process; nevertheless, a challenge can be of great value for a future educational existence. However, the challenge is at risk as long as the general mindset has an either-or orientation—either ideology or utopia. Mannheim connected both mindsets in order to avoid opposition and perplexity, and to give room for human dignity. He emphasised reflectivity and awareness to develop essential readiness and resilience for both parties.

Relation and Transformation with Ingold and Mannheim

In the Impulse research, three disciplines are combined: education, sociology and anthropology. With the help of Mannheim and Ingold, I used specific points of view from sociology and anthropology. With *Ideology and Utopia*, the focus on a transformational function of thought in societal life is combined with Ingold's transformational encounter-based anthropology; a fourth discipline—philosophy—is implicit in their work. Both scholars connect social sciences with philosophy. With Ingold, I introduced an anthropologist who integrated philosophers into his approach of studying with the people; and with Mannheim, I presented a *Geisteswissenschaftler* and philosopher who turned to sociology, a study about people.

Their philosophical orientations returned in the discussion of ontological and epistemological questions; and their answers have much in common. Both approach the world from a Heraclites, *pantha rei*, perspective of life in flux, and emphasise the responsibility of human beings to respond to what is passed on to them as they come into the world. The noun responsibility entails the verb to respond, 'to give an answer'. Thus, a human being is and acts in the world and develops, in this way, knowing. Both scholars highlighted a constructivist perspective of becoming knowledgeable in the world. From a shared philosophical point of departure, both address the matter of relationship (Ingold) or "relationalism" (Mannheim). Relationships with Ingold are ontologically based; "relationalism" with Mannheim is epistemologically rooted. Relationships are about what happens between human beings, whereas "relationalism" reflects the importance of the social perspective and the relationship between thought and society.

Ingold concentrates on the encounter and the relationship between human and humans and their artefacts. He narrates in essays the *petite histoire* of a single craftsman and the making of an artefact. To Ingold, relationship is timeless and not bound to space. His understanding leaves out the comprehensiveness of society and the rootedness of encounters in it. As a result, it is not in his interest to include societal forces in the relationship—which makes his stance apolitical. I recognised in Ingold a form of naivety in the micro-level process orientation. Ingold's vision of transformation has a utopian and pedagogical character. He emphasises the processes of personal growth, transformation, and leading people out; his concept of correspondence reflects an orientation aimed at the future. In encounters with otherness, the connection with

different perspectives and opinions allows for new knowing and understanding of one's self and of the other. Impulse illustrates a non-Ingold micro-level relationship that, however, has similar characteristics. The relationship between teachers led to a narrow, I<>WE emphasised, self-referential apolitical perspective. And although Impulse understood itself as part of a larger society, and their students had to learn from the world, societal forces were taken for granted and not as a matter for in-depth exploration in the process of building and running the community.

Mannheim's point of departure is society and a human being as part of interacting social groups. His scholarly interest was the transformation of societal order. He was less interested in the process of knowing and thinking between human beings; he aimed at understanding the function of human thought in society. Therefore, he emphasised the social-political consciousness of human beings that enables them to take intellectual control over their life in society. When it comes to relationships, Mannheim concentrated on those between humans and social groups, and their historical social reality. His macro-level perspective and interest in political, economic and societal forces left out micro-level circumstances. Mannheim resolved neither the tense presence of both ideological and utopian thought in human actions nor the blindness innate to both of them. He had a preference for the utopian mentality as it entailed that transformational power society needs to keep its vitality.

Ingold and Mannheim share a philosophical attention to thought and thinking in the world. Their discipline-based interests and perspectives, however, lead to different foci. It is interesting to notice that the differences in perspective are reflected in their applied research methods. Ingold advocates participant observation aiming at encounters in which humans can learn with and from otherness. The perspective of sociology—namely the study about and description of people in society and its construction—is for Ingold a reason to oppose the sociological use of ethnography. In this opposition, his attention for human learning is reflected. Mannheim challenged sociology with his claim that it paid no attention to the function of thought in society, which resulted in the implementation of hermeneutic interpretation. He applied documentary study to analyse social-political forces in society that influence human thought and actions. It was not his research interest to understand how humans arrive at thought and understanding. This is reflected in the fact that he did not engage with people in the world—for instance as an ethnographer.

Both of them shed an interesting light on the life of human beings; nevertheless, a sole perspective presents only one aspect of a complex life. In this sense, Mannheim's use of the metaphor of the moving staircase is illustrative for the fact that a limited perspective does not give full comprehension. At this point, I see the relevance of Mannheim for educators in the 21st century. Despite the fact that Mannheim was first published in 1929, his ideas are still congruent with our historical social reality. Throughout the 20th

century, societal complexity grew in globalisation and in transition to the so-called information age. This resulted in increasingly worldwide operating perspectives—as well as ideological and utopian thoughts—that were highly influential on micro-level life. These days as well, I think Mannheim’s call for consciousness has great value in the teaching of future generations.

Thus, I needed both scholars and both perspectives to understand !mpulse and to develop consciousness. With Mannheim, I could study !mpulse from the macro-level perspective, and with Ingold from the micro-level. If I would have taken a purely Mannheimian stance of hermeneutic analysis, I would not have engaged in correspondence with innovative teachers and their way of making !mpulse. As a result, I would not have had the possibility for reflexivity and transformation. A pure Ingold approach would not have given me the awareness of the absence of consciousness in regard to the macro-level forces that had shaped !mpulse as well. It would have left me alone with the question, ‘How can educators lead young people out when they are unconscious about the world themselves?’ For me, teachers need the awareness of the importance of the encounter in order to build pedagogical relations. Nevertheless, a sole focus on personal transformation needs to be balanced with the consciousness advocated by Mannheim to realise the pedagogical intention of leading children into society. However, this answer also creates tension because it presumes an understanding of the purpose of education. Such an understanding runs the risk of creating grand narratives and ideological thoughts.

Consciousness is needed to recognise and understand the broad variety of perspectives and driving forces. Mannheim discerned the problem that people have difficulties understanding the variation of perspectives. He, however, did not focus on the encounter of otherness in the way Ingold emphasised. He prioritised the macro-analysis carried out by intellectuals. However, I noticed at !mpulse and in my own school that the encounter of otherness does not automatically lead to a process of understanding. Therefore, I regret Mannheim’s position of ‘outsourcing’ this intellectual exploration. I have noticed in my research the fruitfulness of encountering otherness for one’s own consciousness and for understanding social reality. It is difficult to make people understand the multi-levelness of incongruence in action and thought. The comprehension of a complex social reality needs a consciousness of circumstances, as well as the bodily encounter of otherness and involvement. In this sense, Ingold and Mannheim would be a nice couple and leave room for the possibility of learning and transformation, both at the personal and the societal level. It is for this reason—to avoid ideological thoughts about education—that I emphasise the importance of both Ingold and Mannheim.

Shaded Love for !mpulse

Mannheim argued that if there were no utopia, movement would drain off and social reality would turn people into “no more than a thing” (1936, p. 263). Humans reduced to ‘things’ was what !mpulse tried to oppose. Thus, my research question ‘Why !mpulse?’ could be answered as such: because of utopian idealism and passion; because teachers, parents and students felt the confines of mainstream education; because I wanted to give my child opportunities for meaningful growth; and because Lennard had a nice time; because it gave sense-making teaching experiences.

I will continue to hear stories about motivated students, enthusiastic teachers, satisfied parents, and positive Educational Inspectorate evaluations. Still, I will never be able to see !mpulse again, as I saw it at the start of the PhD. Other answers to the question also became visible: !mpulse was an exponent of political-economic forces aiming at societal self-preservation; it offered a learning concept that entailed neo-liberal values that contrasted with my pedagogical and life values; it showed a partiality of perspectives and unconsciousness. !mpulse was the mirror that showed that my innocence about the community and education in general was no longer possible.

The two sides of !mpulse that I discovered in my PhD have changed my perspective on the community. I have to be careful about the fact that my changed understanding is rooted in my research at !mpulse. This new perspective is possibly difficult to understand for those who knew my passion, for those who did not examine, or for those who just disqualified the community. I feel privileged that I have these two rather different perspectives. On the one hand, I can understand those who are enthusiastic; and, on the other, those who are critical. This awareness allows me to stay connected to both parties. And since the two perspectives both have their value, I will continue to talk about my shaded love.

Why?—An Epilogue

The question ‘Why?’ is the gift of a child that explores, fascinated, a world unknown to her; it sees purely otherness. This questioning helps the child to become knowledgeable and to understand. However, an adult who asks ‘Why?’ can easily be disqualified as incompetent; or perhaps as a querulous person, spreading scepticism, nihilism or relativism. Nevertheless, throughout the ages philosophers have asked ‘Why?’ because they knew and accepted that they did not know. Or they challenged a generally accepted reality; for instance, Socrates, the gadfly, counts as a great example. Doing research is a continuous questioning the world and oneself. It is travelling through the world; it is encountering others and otherness; it is listening to what the world has to tell; it is being in search of knowing and making sense. My research illuminated the importance to me, a teaching pedagogue, to integrate a questioning attitude into my day-to-day activities.

Recently, a colleague asked me: “And, what will be the use of your research for our school, or for education in general?” It resulted in a discussion about the value of doing research for teachers.

The question reminded me of an anecdote from the late 1970s that my sisters and I recall now and then. In those days, we often knitted sweaters and shawls—especially on Sundays, when we had no homework for school to do. When our grandfather Harmen visited us, he used to ask us—with a kind smile on his face—whether our knitting was *nuttig of fraai* (useful or a matter of art). We had learned to answer “a matter of art” to please him. In his youth, anything ‘useful’ done on Sunday, for instance knitting a sweater, was considered work. And it then had to be unravelled on Monday. His question was embedded in a forlorn Protestant Christian worldview that had determined his life—and that of many others—with the ideological purpose of preserving its social existence. Our knitting counteracted this perspective, which we found quite outdated. Now, I know the importance and value of the encounter of these two worlds; of my grandfather’s wisdom—because life had taught him that things had changed, and will always change—combined with our innocent giggling at the strange question.

My colleague’s question revealed our differing viewpoints about the value of teachers-as-researchers for the school and for one’s teaching practice. I again realised the effect of different perspectives on our lives, and the difficulty of engaging in dialectic dialogues. A societal denigration of the use of intellectual debate hinders the understanding of its importance for society; a focus on pragmatism and functional research

aiming at evidence and truth, which opposes an approach to interpretive research, hinders awareness of the complexity of life.

So why did I engage in research? I was curious, wanted to find out, and I felt a need to be intellectually challenged. As a result, my '*petite histoire*' presenting understanding, learning and transformation was told—in a dialectic text of useful art for artistic use.

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Samenvatting in het Nederlands

!mpulse te (onder) zoeken

Een onverwachte ontmoeting met innoverende docenten, utopie en ideologie

!mpulse en Impuls

Mijn proefschrift is ontstaan vanuit een onderzoek naar Piter Jelle !mpulse, een “vernieuwende school” (Waslander, et al., 2011) in Leeuwarden. !mpulse, een leer- en leefgemeenschap, was een exponent van onderwijsinnovaties die in het eerste decennium van de 21^{ste} eeuw zijn geïnitieerd en onder de naam *nieuw leren* bekend werden. De leertheoretische en didactische oriëntaties van deze innovaties waren gericht op het bevorderen van onafhankelijk, betekenisvol en samenwerkend leren (Teurlings et al., 2007). In een aantal gevallen werd ook de schoolorganisatie zelf veranderd. !mpulse behoorde tot deze integrale innovaties, die ik in mijn proefschrift Millennium Innovaties noem. Het idealistische veelbelovende initiatief bleek voor docenten, een groep ouders en leerlingen een gewenst alternatief voor het reguliere onderwijs. Ik hoorde bij deze ouders en mijn zoon Lennard bij deze leerlingen. Na een ‘magische’ start kwam de school in problemen, wat het voortbestaan bedreigde. Er werd een oplossing gecreëerd, en in 2015 viert de school haar tweede lustrum.

De naam van de school, !mpulse, is ontleend aan het woord ‘impuls’, een aansporing of stimulans—in het geval van !mpulse gaat het om de (intrinsieke) stimulans om te willen leren. In impuls zit ook een verwijzing naar ‘opwelling’, wat verbonden wordt met onbedacht handelen. In dit geval is het niet duidelijk waarom een bepaalde handeling in een bepaalde context plaatsvindt, en waarom een mens op een bepaalde manier handelt—bijvoorbeeld, waarom een onderwijsvernieuwing ontstond en de vernieuwende school nog steeds bestaat. De vraag naar het onzichtbare in de zichtbare sociale werkelijkheid van de school intrigeerde me en was voor mij de aansporing om *!mpulse te (onder) zoeken*.

Ik benadruk in de titel dat het niet alleen gaat om een antwoord op de waarom-vraag, maar dat het proces van onderzoeken zelf essentieel is. Mijn zoekend bewegen en de onverwachte ontmoetingen met de ander waren nodig om te komen tot begrijpen—in de zin van het hermeneutische *Verstehen*—van het onbekende dat in en met !mpulse is verweven. Ik geef dan ook de voorkeur aan het werkwoord onderzoeken boven het zelfstandig naamwoord onderzoek— onderzoeken benadrukt het proces van kennisontwikkeling en groeiend bewustzijn.

Tekst

Het promotie-onderzoek leidde tot een proefschrift, een statische—ingedikte en gereduceerde—presentatie, dat het proces heeft geabsorbeerd. Ik gebruik de metafoor van weven en weefsel (textiel, van Latijn *textere*) om de relatie tussen proces en product te

verduidelijken. De wever, een vaardig ambachtsman, spant lengtedraad—schering—op een weefgetouw en beweegt een klos met draad—de inslag—er doorheen. Langzaam ontstaat een patroon, afhankelijk van het materiaal, de relatie tussen materiaal en wever, zijn bewegingen en zijn verbeelding; het resulteert in textiel met, in eerste instantie, veel losse niet afgehechte uiteinden. Zoals de wever textiel maakt zo maakte ik tekst (eveneens van Latijn *textere*), waarin nieuw weten—de inslag—in het bestaande—de scherping—werd geweven.

Mijn perspectief op de opvoeding van mijn kinderen, mijn ervaringen als HBO-docent en professionele opvattingen over onderwijs brachten me bij Impulse. Langs de zijlijnen van de school had ik een beeld ervan ontwikkeld. Deze elementen vormden de scherping. Ik ontmoette een team van docenten en leerlingen die gestalte gaven aan een leer- en leefgemeenschap. Ik herkende hun idealisme en veranderingsgezindheid, hun toewijding, en de behoefte om de verandering te bestendigen. Ik ontdekte de neoliberalistisch bepaalde politiek-economische context die op macro-niveau de aanzet tot de innovatie bleek te zijn. Ik besepte dat een ogenschijnlijk kritisch pedagogische visie op onderwijs in feite een vertaling was van management- en organisatiedenken, dat kennelijk overeenkomstige taal hanteerde. En, als onaangename verrassing, realiseerde ik me dat docenten, waaronder ook ikzelf, zich onvoldoende bewust waren en zijn van historisch-sociale omstandigheden en de ermee samenhangende vanzelfsprekend geworden opvattingen over onderwijs. In de combinatie van scherping en inslag maakte de tekst de gelaagdheid van een complexe sociale realiteit zichtbaar—en ze nodigt uit om aan onafgehechte draden te trekken.


Methodologische Benadering

Als afgestudeerde geesteswetenschapper ben ik opgeleid en vertrouwd geraakt met hermeneutisch onderzoek waarin interpretatie en dus *Verstehen* van (geschreven) tekst centraal staat. De sociale werkelijkheid kan gezien worden als (levende) tekst, waarbij de onderzoeker in de beweging en ontmoeting met de ander de tekst kan 'verstaan'. Deze ontmoetingen vinden plaats in de wereld die de onderzoeker en de ander delen. Ik ontmoette docenten in hun VO-school die weliswaar gescheiden is van mijn HBO-wereld, maar samen verweven zijn in één onderwijsveld. Een onderzoek in een 'andere' school is in feite een onderzoek in de eigen—onbekende—wereld. En de kennis die ik met 'andere' docenten construeerde en het hieruit voortkomende *Verstehen* was niet alleen kennis over een afgescheiden wereld maar had ook betrekking op mijn wereld, mijn school, mijn professionele praktijk.

Vanuit dit ontologisch en epistemologisch perspectief ontstond de keus voor een participierend observatie-onderzoek. Van januari 2011 tot februari 2012 verbleef ik gemid-

deld een dag in de week op !mpulse. De open ruimtes in de school, passend bij het originele leerconcept, en de openheid van het team en de leerlingen maakten het mogelijk het leren en leven in de gemeenschap te beleven en me met hen te verbinden. Conversaties waren een essentieel onderdeel; ze vonden veelvuldig spontaan plaats. Na vijf maanden begon ik met geplande ‘interviews’. Deze open en opgenomen conversaties met docenten, studenten en ouders boden ruimte om gedeelde ervaringen in rust te verkennen en er betekenis aan te geven. Mijn insteek in deze interviews was met de mensen te 'reizen' (Kvale, 2010). Daarnaast voerde ik een uitvoerige documentenstudie uit naar politieke beleidsstukken, publicaties van onderwijsadviseurs en onderwijswetenschappers, en krantenartikelen aan de hand van aanwijzingen die ik in de gemeenschap vond.

Mijn participierend observatie-onderzoek evenals de wijze waarop het ‘onderzoeksdesign’ zich ontwikkelde is een illustratie van de antropologische benadering van Tim Ingold (2013). Ingold maakt zich los van de gebruikelijke etnografische benadering van participierend observeren. Het doel van etnografie is de nauwkeurige beschrijving van een sociale realiteit en hiervoor is specifieke dataverzameling noodzakelijk (Emmerson et al., 2008, Ingold, 2013). Voor Ingold is het leerproces dat in de relatie tussen de onderzoeker en de ander gebeurt het doel van antropologisch participerende observatie. Hij houdt een pleidooi voor onderzoek waarin de relatie tussen onderzoeker en 'onderzochte' en het leren en betekenis geven met deze ander centraal staat. In zijn onderzoeksbenadering herkende ik de pedagogische relatie zoals die zich in een onderwijs setting tussen docent en student voordoet—in dit geval was ik in de positie van student.

Hij beschrijft deze relatie als *correspondence* in de betekenis van brieven schrijven—in een pre-email tijdperk. Gedurende vele eeuwen zijn er voorbeelden van filosofen, auteurs, kunstenaars—en geliefden—die een langdurig briefcontact met een ander onderhouden. Ze delen naast de dagelijkse beslommeringen hun denken en voelen. De relatie tussen deze briefschrijvers kenmerkt zich door afwachten, volgen, *attentiveness*, en responderen, *responsiveness*. Ingold transfereert deze naar de relatie tussen onderzoeker en ‘onderzochte’. De onderzoeker volgt en wacht af wat er gebeurt om in relatie met de ander een respons te geven, waarop een respons terug kan komen. Beide meanderen om elkaar heen en vinden houvast; zo ontstaat met de ander betekenis geven, kennis, leren en mogelijk transformatie. Mijn relatie tot het !mpulse team en de individuele docenten ontwikkelde zich volgens dit patroon. Ik introduceer in mijn proefschrift voor dit meanderend leerproces de metafoor van de (wijn)rank , in het Engels *tendril*: een ranke tak die zich kronkelt langs een muur of een leidraad en zo houvast zoekt. Dit houvast moet keer op keer worden vernieuwd—leven is in beweging en voortdurend anders.

Ingold stelt dat ook de constructie van het onderzoeksproces in de gedeelde wereld en in elkaars aanwezigheid vorm krijgt. Hij zet in plaats van een vooraf bepaald onderzoeksdesign *thinking through making*. Hij ontleent dit proces aan het werk van de ambachtsman met materiaal waaruit artefacten ontstaan—bijvoorbeeld een wever die een textiel weeft. Hoewel ik in eerste instantie uitging van een *making through thinking*, van te voren bepaald design van etnografisch onderzoek, ontdekte ik in !mpulse dat deze opzet belemmerend werkte, omdat ze geen rekening hield met de relatie die ik al met het team had opgebouwd in een eerdere fase en die nu om voortzetting vroeg.

Uit de opgebouwde relatie ontstond op een bepaald ogenblik cognitieve distantie. Ik werd geconfronteerd met incongruentie tussen wat ik wist en wat ik ervoer, met een spanning tussen zelfidentificatie van de gemeenschap als zijnde innoverend en de op behoud ingerichte interne processen. Mijn groeiende perceptie van paradox vond zijn climax toen ik—nadat ik !mpulse had verlaten—in de documentenstudie de neo-liberalistisch bepaalde historisch-sociale context ontdekte.

Utopie en Ideologie

Naar aanleiding van mijn perceptie van paradox besloot ik het in de sociologie baanbrekende boek *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) van de Duits-Hongaarse socioloog Karl Mannheim te gebruiken om mijn paradox te begrijpen. De perceptie van paradox of perplexiteit—gevoelens van onbehagen of incongruentie in de sociale werkelijkheid—waren voor hem mogelijk startpunt voor intellectuele aandacht en ontwikkelen van bewustzijn. Ik vond bij Mannheim de bevestiging dat vanuit paradox verrijkend bewustzijn ontstaat—de moeite van ‘beproeving’ alleszins waard.

De van oorsprong geesteswetenschapper Mannheim ontwikkelde—onder invloed van de Duitse sociologen Georg Simmel, Max en Alfred Weber, en Max Scheler—de kennis-sociologie (Loader, 1985, Woldring, 1986). In zijn theorie verbindt hij sociologie en filosofie wat naar voren komt in de vraagstelling in zijn boek: *Hoe kan de mens blijven denken en leven in tijden waarin denken voortdurend wordt ontmaskerd als utopisch of ideologisch?* In zijn dialectisch ontstaan theoretisch antwoord ontwikkelde hij het begrip-paar ideologie en utopie als denkwijzen van sociaal bepaalde groepen die vanuit een bepaalde—veelal onzichtbare—drijfveer handelen. Hij zette ze bewust naast elkaar als twee verschillende zienswijzen in en op dezelfde sociale werkelijkheid. Hij benadrukte de wederzijdse afhankelijkheid en beïnvloeding van denken en handelen van de mens in een sociale realiteit. En, zo stelde hij, het negeren van de functie van (onbekend) denken in de samenleving bedreigt humane autonomie en menselijke waardigheid (Mannheim, 1936).

Ideologische mentaliteit is herkenbaar in het streven en handelen van een ‘heersende’ groep—in de brede zin van het woord—dat gericht is op het voortbestaan van de eigen omstandigheden in een sociale werkelijkheid. De utopische mentaliteit is de denkwijze van ‘onderdrukten’—in de brede zin van het woord—om onacceptabele omstandigheden in een sociale werkelijkheid te veranderen. In beide perspectieven wordt weliswaar de bestaande sociale werkelijkheid ter discussie gesteld, en worden veranderingsprocessen ingezet, maar de daadwerkelijke verandering van de samenleving wordt alleen nagestreefd door mensen wier denken een utopische kwaliteit heeft. Daarom kan, aldus Mannheim, een samenleving alleen vitaliteit behouden wanneer utopisch denken ruimte krijgt.

Het herkennen van de vitale vernieuwende initiatieven wordt bemoeilijk doordat drijfveren in de handeling onzichtbaar blijven. Dit hangt samen met de problematiek van het gebrek aan of beperkt intellectueel bewustzijn— inherent aan zowel het utopische als ook ideologische denken. Het zicht op de werkelijkheid raakt verblind in het streven naar verandering of behoud. Hierdoor wordt de mogelijkheid van controle en invloed op het handelen beperkt. Mannheim was echter hoopvol dat de mens wel degelijk intellectueel bewustzijn kan ontwikkelen op het moment dat de paradox ervaren wordt.

Mannheim stelt zijn vraag vanuit een macro-perspectief op de samenleving; hij was niet geïnteresseerd in de effecten van macro-processen op het micro-niveau. Desalniettemin laat ik in mijn proefschrift zien dat zijn denken zeer goed te gebruiken is voor het interpreteren van een micro-situatie van een onderwijsvernieuwing. Deze staat niet op zich maar maakt deel uit van een groter geheel. Een eenzijdig micro-perspectief staat juist het zicht op de relatie tussen de twee niveaus in de weg.

Vanuit Mannheim ontwikkelde ik de gedachte dat intellectueel bewustzijn essentieel is voor docenten, opdat ze (we) de sociale context, de gerelateerde opvattingen en vanzelfsprekendheden, *fads and fashions*, kunnen (leren) herkennen en bevragen, en autonoom kritisch invloed op ontwikkelingen in het onderwijs kunnen uitoefenen. Tegelijkertijd vroeg ik me af of we bewustzijn—intellectuele paraatheid of gevoeligheid, *readiness*—kunnen ontwikkelen onafhankelijk van een paradox perceptie. Ik kwam tot deze gedachte vanuit mijn interpretatie van !mpulse. Ik zag het utopische idealisme en herkende dat het ideologisch denken in de !mpulse context bijzonder invloedrijk was.

Overschaduwde Liefde - *Shaded Love*

Mijn zoektocht en tekst kan gezien worden als een praktische demonstratie van groeiend bewustzijn zoals Mannheim beschreef. Aan het begin stond naïeve ‘liefde’ voor een—in mijn ogen—noodzakelijke onderwijsvernieuwing. De intellectuele ontmoeting met !mpulse bracht schaduwranden aan. !mpulse bleek zo veel meer facetten te hebben dan zichtbaar waren.

Op micro-niveau was !mpulse het doel van bevlogen—utopisch—idealisme van docenten die de ruimte namen om negatieve ervaringen met het bestaande onderwijs en hun droom van beter onderwijs om te zetten in een hoopvol alternatief. Ze kregen hiervoor de ruimte van hun schoolmanagement en werden ondersteund door een onderwijsconsultancy bureau—de KPC groep. Helaas, constateerde ik, had in de geschiedenis van !mpulse nauwelijks een (gemeenschappelijke) verkenning van de historisch-sociale context, van de belangen van betrokken partijen, van het gepresenteerde leerconcept, van de leeromgeving, van de eigen overwegingen en van het doel van onderwijs plaats (gevonden). Het ongeduld om de droom te realiseren en een pragmatische oriëntatie van docenten beperkte de—in mijn ogen—noodzakelijke intellectuele exploratie.

De keus om de school zowel inhoudelijk als ook organisatorisch te vernieuwen leidde tot een geïsoleerd bestaan naast de reguliere scholen in het bestaande onderwijsveld. Deze kunstmatige scheiding van het reguliere onderwijs veroorzaakte spanning. Uit deze spanning ontstond—langzaam maar zeker—een rigide streven naar zelfbehoud. Ik noem deze ontwikkeling een *petrifying*, fossiliserend, proces, dat twee kanten heeft. Enerzijds leidde het tot het voortbestaan van !mpulse—tot tevredenheid van docenten, leerlingen, ouders, schoolmanagement en onderwijsinspectie. Anderzijds had de ideologische denkwijze de transformerende kracht van de utopie—met ruimte voor dissensus, chaos en het onbekende—te niet gedaan.

Essentieel is bovendien de context op macro-niveau. Rondom het Millennium werd vanuit het Ministerie van OCenW, in afstemming met de Tweede Kamer, de al langer bestaande deregulatie op het gebied van bevoegdheden van schoolmanagers verder uitgebreid en schoolautonomie vergroot. Schoolmanagers en docenten werden opgeroepen ondernemend and innovatief te worden. De (commerciële) onderwijsadviesbureaus speelden een actieve rol bij de ontwikkeling van de zogenaamde bottom-up innovaties in primair en voortgezet onderwijs. Het KPC was richtinggevend bij de implementatie van een beperkt aantal vernieuwende scholen waaronder !mpulse. Deze scholen gingen zowel onderwijskundig als ook organisatorisch “op de schop” (Gerrits, 2004). Het door het KPC ontwikkelde concept van de “redesign

school” was het uitgangspunt voor de inrichting (Morssinkhof, 2003; Van Dam, 2008). Dit was gebaseerd op het in managementliteratuur en -praktijk populaire concept van Business Process Re-engineering ontwikkeld door Michael Hammer – een inmiddels overleden MIT professor in computer technologie (Boltanski & Chiapello, [1999] 2005; Hammer & Champy, 1994).

Het initiatief van het ministerie van OCenW en het onderwijsadviesbureau kan niet los gezien worden van de activiteiten van een wereldwijd opererende accountant en management consultant bedrijf Arthur Andersen. Eind 1980 nam dit bedrijf het initiatief om vanuit een businessmodel, managementconcepten en het nieuwe ‘leerparadigma’ een onderwijsconcept te ontwikkelen met als doel dit als winstgevend product wereldwijd uit te rollen. In het concept werden Amerikaanse neo-liberalistische waarden van vrijheid en ondernemerschap, en het versterken van de kenniseconomie in de context van de informatiesamenleving geweven (Egol, 2003). In een aansprekende prototype school, de Alameda Community Learning School in Californië (VS), dichtbij Silicon Valley, werd deze *best practice* getoond. Rondom het Millennium bezochten Nederlandse beleidsmakers en docenten de school—op studiereis georganiseerd door de onderwijsadviesbureaus. Onder hen was ook de toenmalig minister van OCenW, Hermans (Du Pré, 2001).

Ik concludeer dat de implementatie van het (aangepaste) concept in Nederland de economische focus van de overheid, financiële belangen, bedrijfsvoering van de onderwijsadviseurs, en marketingoverwegingen van schoolmanagers weerspiegelden. Ze vonden en versterkten elkaar in het framende discours van de ‘revolutionaire innovatie’, noodzakelijk omdat het bestaande onderwijssysteem ‘niet meer van deze tijd’ zou zijn.

Oogst

Ingold en Mannheim

In deze studie naar Impulse kwam een onverwachte ontmoeting tussen Ingold en Mannheim tot stand. Deze resulteerde in een vruchtbare, interdisciplinaire combinatie van inzichten van wetenschappers die in hun eigen aanpak discipline overstijgende zienswijzen ontwikkelden. Beiden benadrukten in hun visies op onderzoek en samenleving het belang van de verbinding tussen denken en handelen—tussen antropologie en filosofie enerzijds en filosofie en sociologie anderzijds. In deze studie verbond ik Ingolds gericht zijn op het micro-niveau van het menselijk bestaan met Mannheim die de macro-processen in de samenleving als uitgangspunt nam. De combinatie van de twee niveaus in methodologie en interpretatie leidde tot een brede kijk op de sociale werkelijkheid. De beperkende blik op een micro-onderwijs setting—*petite histoire*—

kreeg geplaatst in een sociologisch perspectief meer betekenis. En de abstractere sociologische invalshoek kreeg in de beschrijving van de micro-niveau ervaringen een concrete illustratie van de effecten van macro-factoren.

Aandacht en Ontvankelijkheid

Uit dit onderzoek komt het belang van ruimte voor utopische mentaliteit naar voren. Tegelijkertijd vestig ik de aandacht op de problematiek van *unconsciousness*—onbewustzijn van wereldwijde ontwikkelingen en samenhangende perspectieven en denkprocessen. Deze hebben voortdurend impact op de pedagogische relatie tussen docent en student en op de beleidsmatige en organisatorische keuzes die in de onderwijs worden gemaakt. De innovatie *!mpulse* is derhalve niet een uniek en op zichzelf staand fenomeen. Vernieuwing is een constante in onderwijs, en in elke vernieuwing zitten elementen van utopisch en ideologisch denken.

Ik realiseerde me dat het belangrijk is dat een docent aandacht heeft en behoudt voor ontwikkeling van inzicht in de samenleving en in zichzelf—in eigen denkbeelden die in het handelen verweven zijn. Dit bevordert een kritische en autonome attitude met betrekking tot interne en externe processen, en maakt controle en invloed mogelijk. Mijn proefschrift biedt echter geen oplossingsgericht concept ter ondersteuning van deze ontwikkeling; dit zou mijns inziens ideologisch denken bevorderen. De spanning in mijn proefschrift zit juist in de lastige schoonheid van dialectische dynamiek die uitnodigt tot kritische reflectie, bevragen en Socratische dialoog. Wellicht kan mijn proces van bewustwording als spiegel fungeren, zoals de ontmoeting met *!mpulse* een spiegel voor mij was. Ik beschouw mijn proefschrift (these) daarom als een these/antithese dat de gepresenteerde dialectische spanning van *encounter* en *response* niet wenst op te lossen, maar om nieuwe respons vraagt.

Opbouw

Het proefschrift kent vier delen, en drie stemmen. In deel I presenteer ik de onverwachte ontmoetingen die essentieel waren voor het onderzoek. Dit was het internationale DBA/PhD programma *Meaning in Organisation*, aan de Universiteit voor Humanistiek, waarin uiteenlopende wetenschappers hun ideeën en onderzoeken in dialoog met promovendi presenteerden. Naast een introductie op Mannheim en Ingold relateer ik *!mpulse* aan een *petite histoire* van een utopische beweging, beginnend in de tweede helft van het 19^{de} eeuw. De beweging waarin mijn overgrootvader lokaal actief was, streefde naar gelijkstelling van onderwijs, wat resulteerde in artikel 23 van de grondwet dat de vrijheid van onderwijs regelt.

Deel II bestaat uit drie samenhangende hoofdstukken. In hoofdstuk één construeer ik vanuit het perspectief 'moeder' een verhaal aan de hand van de herinneringen van docenten die aan de start van !mpulse stonden; parallel loopt mijn reflectie op mijn eigen drijfveren en overwegingen voor mijn enthousiasme voor deze vernieuwing. Het verhaal eindigt op het moment dat in het najaar van 2009 het utopisch !mpulse definitief verdwijnt. In hoofdstuk twee reflecteer ik als *docente* op mijn ervaringen tijdens de *participant observation*. In *vignettes* laat ik kenmerkende—oorspronkelijk utopische—!mpulse momenten zien, waarin ik ook mijn *correspondence* met het team en de studenten evenals mijn beleving met het ideologische streven heb verwerkt. In *tendrils* bevestig ik het !mpulse leerconcept, de door mij ervaren pragmatische oriëntatie van docenten en gebrek aan *readiness*, en mijn professionele vanzelfsprekendheden. In hoofdstuk drie ga ik als *onderzoeker* op ontdekkingsstocht in het historisch-sociaal bepaalde ideologisch denken en handelen. Ik construeer een netwerk van externe macrofactoren die hebben geleid tot de micro-ontwikkeling van !mpulse.

Deel III geeft de interpretatie van utopisch en ideologisch denken in en om !mpulse. Ik laat de interpretatie samenvallen met de verkenning en de bespreking van het boek *Ideologie und Utopie* (1930) en *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) van Karl Mannheim. Ik presenteer deze theoretische verkenning na het deel over !mpulse om te verduidelijken dat de keuze voor de theorie voortkomt uit het praktijk.

Deel IV en V zijn reflexief van karakter. In IV blik ik terug op het leerproces in de participerende observatie. In V benoem ik de spanning die door het proefschrift meandert.

In de Epiloog concludeer ik dat het vijfjarig proces en het product voor mij persoonlijk kunnen worden samengevat als 'nuttig en fraai'. Deze ouderwetse uitdrukking van mijn grootvader refereert aan andere tijden, maar ze heeft nog steeds kracht. Ik gebruik haar als kritische kanttekening bij de discussie over de maatschappelijke relevantie van interpretatief onderzoek, en van geesteswetenschappen in het bijzonder. Tegelijkertijd is ze een verwijzing naar mijn plaats in elkaar opvolgende generaties. De mensen die voor mij leefden hebben mij hun dialectisch denken en handelen doorgegeven. Ik bevestig het op mijn beurt en geef het in een andere vorm verder—zo staat mijn leerproces in de dialectische dynamiek van het leven.

Photographs of !mpulse







About the Author

Marte Rinck de Boer (1960) studied German Studies at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, and the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, Germany. In 1986, she graduated cum laude on the function of short stories in literature education and on Richard Wagner's reception of the medieval romance of *Tristan and Isolde* in his *Musikdrama*.

She taught text interpretation at the University of Groningen before she changed to the International Hospitality School at Stenden University of Applied Sciences (former Christelijke Hogeschool Nederland). As a member of the pioneer team of teachers she contributed to the initiation of the third Dutch hotel school in 1987. She engaged in the development of the language program and coordinated a learning to learn program. She started and led the self-management and personal coaching program. Throughout the years, Marte Rinck developed her expertise in the field of Problem-based Learning, a social-constructivist approach to the curriculum. She enjoyed the coaching and training of tutors, and conducted research among students. Currently, she combines her interest in doing qualitative research with BA dissertation supervision of hospitality management students. She also provides students and colleagues with workshops on qualitative research methodology.

Marte Rinck lives with her German husband Konradin Rauh in Leeuwarden and is mother of Lennard (1993), Gysbert (1994) and Arriën Symon (1996).

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In *Impulse to find out* Marte Rinck de Boer gives a rich and multi-layered account of her experiences at an innovative secondary school. This school was an exponent of the so-called redesigned new learning schools that were established at the beginning of the 21st century, and which were hailed as a necessary alternative to an obsolete school system. As a mother teaching in higher education, she had been sensitive to and appreciative of this alternative option — which resulted in her son's enrollment there. Her return to the school in the role of teacher-as-researcher, however, confronted her to the fact that the innovation she had once regarded as a critical pedagogical project had turned out to be much more insidious than she had initially imagined. This awareness emerged from an anthropological participant observation — inspired by the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold — which enabled her to learn with and from the school's team.

Based on the experience and perception of paradox, she turned to the sociologist Karl Mannheim and his seminal work *Ideology and Utopia* (1936). Her readings made her understand that the 'rise and fall' of the innovation was deeply affected by both utopian and ideological modes of thought. She recognised that an innocent utopian idealist mindset had rendered the teachers and herself unconscious to both the ideological socio-historical context of the school's initiation and the ideological assumptions involved within the educational concept.

With the voice of a mother, teacher and researcher, Marte Rinck describes her growing intellectual consciousness and how it resulted in a transformed perspective on her teaching practices and professional self-evidence — as well as on educational innovation and its related discourse in the Netherlands. She acknowledges the importance of utopian idealism and the dedication of innovating teachers but also emphasises the risk of a consequent pragmatic orientation with limited intellectual consciousness. This, so she concludes, results in the obstruction of critical reflection on innovation initiatives, on the impact of the current political-economic discourse within the field of education, and on biased roles for the educational consultants whose services reinforce this discourse within schools. *Impulse to find out* reveals a situation of insoluble tension and invites anyone who has responsibility for education to dialectically engage with it.

Marte Rinck de Boer is currently senior lecturer at the Stenden University of Applied Science (Bachelor Program International Hospitality Management) in Leeuwarden (NL)

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