

## *The Call of Pedagogy as the Call of Contact*

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The pedagogical question:  
How are we to act and live with children,  
helping them to create their human capabilities,  
while realizing that we are apt to do damage?

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In a poem entitled the “Bearhug” Michael Ondaatje (1979, p. 104) describes the night-time call of his child from the bedroom for a goodnight kiss:

I yell ok. Finish something I’m doing,  
then something else, walk slowly round  
the corner to my son’s room.  
He is standing arms outstretched  
waiting for a bearhug. Grinning.

In the next stanza, Ondaatje gives a sensitive poetic description of the way a parent hugs a child. But then, almost as an after-thought, two short lines trail the end of his poem:

How long was he standing there  
like that, before I came?

In this calling of his young son, and in this lingering moment of reflecting, Michael Ondaatje experiences a pedagogical moment. This pedagogical moment takes the form of a personal responsiveness: acting (saying “good night” to his son, though after letting him wait expectantly) and reflecting (asking himself: “What was it like for my son to have to wait like that?” And by implication perhaps, “Should I have been more attentive?”). This simple moment of a goodnight kiss may actually be filled with psychological and pedagogical significance, as the many references and studies about the goodnight kiss in Marcel Proust’s writings attest (1981): his staying awake while waiting for his mother to come, and whose kiss would finally be able to put Marcel to sleep, his father’s disapproval of him, and the psycho-analytic entanglements.

Unlike Proust’s interpreters, Ondaatje does not seem to want to make a psychological issue out of this childhood incident. And yet, Ondaatje alludes to the implied meanings of this common, significant childhood moment (the child cannot sleep and calls to the parent for a goodnight hug; Ondaatje dawdles and finally comes to the child’s bed). Ondaatje makes it into a pedagogical incident by wondering: How long has my child been standing there, expectantly and waiting there before I finally came? And, he makes us reminisce what this moment may be like for the child, standing there like that. Have many of us not had personal experiences like this—as parent or as child: waiting for the goodnight hug or kiss?

Most of us should be able to recognize many of such pedagogical moments from our past or present lives. Pedagogical experiences occur when adults stand in pedagogical situations and relations with children or young people. They are the critical instances

when the adult has to do something: to act pedagogically responsibly and appropriately in such situation. Sometimes, if not usually, in our daily living with children we are required to act in the spur of the moment. The usual case is that we do not have time to sit back and deliberatively decide what to do in the situation. And even when there is time to reflect on what several alternatives are available, and what best approach one should take in the pedagogical moment itself, one must act, even though that action may consist in holding back (for a further explication of the pedagogical moment, see van Manen, 1991).

We recognize pedagogical experiences because we have received the attentive care and worries of a mother, a father, a teacher, a grandparent, or some other adult who at various times played a formative part in our young lives. Without the pedagogical support from these adults, we simply could not and would not be alive today, or, for better or worse, we would not be who we are.

At a social evening, people were sitting around talking about the recent concert that was playing in town. Edward, a 72 year-old retired accountant, expressed his admiration for the concert-master. Some other people joined in talking about the life of being a successful musician. Then Edward took the floor again:

You know, this is a memory that has obsessed me my entire life. Until the last few years, I have not been able to tell it to anyone because it is so hurtful. Even as an adult, sharing it would have brought me to tears. When I was 16 years old, after studying violin for a number of years, I realized that I could never really be good enough. I just lacked something. I could not really excel. So, I decided to give it up. My father was very unhappy about my decision. He tried to change my mind. I refused. I told him that I knew that I would never be able to play the instrument well enough. Angrily, my father took my violin. He hung it on the wall of the living room and said: 'From now on, whenever you look at this violin you will know what a failure you are in my eyes.' I felt horrible. After several weeks, my mother took the violin down from the wall. She felt sorry for me. But the empty spot could not be taken down. It haunted me: I was a failure for my father. The memory of that moment has troubled me all my life. My father never took his words back about me being a failure. But, now, at the age of 72, I finally feel that I have dealt with it.

I find it astonishing how the latency of pedagogical moments can affect us for the remainder of our lives; whether we are keenly aware of it not. We can recognize the significance of the occurrence of negative pedagogical moments, because we may have blamed some adults from our youth for their neglect, their negative influences, or past harmful actions that still haunt us. These blames too constitute pedagogical narratives of our lives.

Hopefully, each of us can recognize the power of pedagogy when we gratefully acknowledge the love and care we received from a mother, father, or some other significant adult who worried about us and was there for us when needed. We may recognize the consequences of pedagogy when we become aware of the latent, lasting, and lingering effects of the events that make up the innumerable often-forgotten experiences, foggily fragmented and half-remembered pedagogical happenings in our childhoods. The latent values of these events means that they have formative (and yet

often un-traceable) consequences for our unfolding sense of self, personal identity, secret interiorities, and for who and what we (have) become. How many of us are still longing (secretly calling) for the father's recognition or the mother's appreciation that still somehow drives what we do and what we hope to make of ourselves? This powerful pedagogical theme of the latent significance of an adult's approval in our lives is a poorly recognized and a little understood pedagogical phenomenon.

The meaning and significance of pedagogy is determined by what we do with the calling that we experience in living with a child. Indeed, this calling may be recognized in a practical down-to-earth manner of everyday acting: it can be recognized in the context of situations requiring shared discussions and reflective conversation with others, and it can be recognized as pedagogical issues requiring informative advice, moral judgment, and reflective action (van Manen, 1982). Pedagogy is not just an objective social science construct. It is a phenomenon that issues a complex imperative in the manner that we see, feel, sense, reflect, and respond to the call of the child before us.

Pedagogy is in the routine and reflective, habituated and deliberate, preconscious and conscious practice of upbringing, and in the pedagogical relation there is influence, exercised by the adult toward the child. Some of the influence is planned and deliberate, such as in the context of schooling and certain parenting tasks, and some of the influence is unreflective, tacit, and subtle. But it is important to realize that the explicit and the implicit influence may have enormous consequences. We simply cannot predict in childhood how the latency of pedagogical influence is felt and realized throughout life—even when the child has become an adult. Of course, the child also influences the adult. In fact, the pedagogical relation is extremely complex, and in part, it is also a process of self-development and self-understanding for the adult. The mother, father, teacher learn to understand themselves in new ways as they are prompted to reflect on themselves and the children for whom they care.

In everyday life, we ongoingly act and interact with children, but every now and then, we do something or fail to do something that prompts us to wonder and reflect: Did I do that right? What was this situation like for the child? What should I have said or done? Thus, as an active and reflective understanding of how we are (to be) with children and young people, we are inextricably tied into a recognition of pedagogy in whatever contingent modalities we may encounter it.

From the history of child psychology and child studies we know that young children, who do not experience a minimum of proper care, tend to do badly in life. Abandoned babies in crowded orphanages that lacked adequate nursing care have died from the simple lack of loving touch and affection. They perished from lack of contact. Children who must somehow grow up while surrounded by neglect, or worse, by suffering abuse and maltreatment may be doomed to be damaged for the remainder of their adult lives. The simple principle is this: it is pedagogy that makes the crucial difference in a child's life. Pedagogy involves us in distinguishing actively and/or reflectively what is good, life enhancing, and supportive from what is not good or damaging in the ways that we act, live, and deal with children. A positive pedagogy of parenting and teaching may promise a life with adequate doses of happiness and healthy and responsible relations with others.

While we should be able to recognize the meaning and significance of pedagogy from our childhood and personal child-life experiences, it should also be pointed out that we may not fully be able to grasp what pedagogy means until we have lived ourselves with

children or young people for whom we hold responsibilities. For example, just because we have been students and have spent many years in schools and other educational institutions that does not mean that we really know what it is to be a teacher. The same is true, of course, for families. We may not fully understand what it is to be a mother or a father until we have truly lived the caring life of a mother or father ourselves. At the same time, there are many teachers, social workers, nurses, pediatricians, and other childcare professionals who have developed a wonderful sense of pedagogy without having had children of their own.

### **The personal response of pedagogy**

Martinus Langeveld (1975) describes an incident to show how our personal response to situations in which we find ourselves with children gives us insight into the sorts of practical ethical competencies that are required in such situations. He tells the story of how an accident happens in the street, right in front of him, when a 12-year-old girl calls her father whom she sees on the other side of the street.

“Hello daddy!” she calls out, waving to a man on the opposite side of the road, who waves back to her. He then steps from the pavement to meet his daughter and, before her very eyes, he is run over by a car. He is killed, but she does not yet know. Soon she will: already she screams loudly. Later she’ll go on crying and seeing the image of her father’s death happening in front of her. She has an irrational feeling of guilt: she *knows* she is not guilty, but she called his name, she waved to him and then he stepped off the pavement and it happened. (p. 9)

Langeveld asks: What does one do in a situation such as that? Of course, some people may hurry by and not get involved. But Langeveld shows that one cannot help but respond. A personal response is required: to be available to the girl who is in need of help. Langeveld does not use the term “pedagogical moment” in his texts, but we might say that he found himself in a situation that for him became a *pedagogical moment*. He experienced a demand: the pedagogical call of contact. He had to act. Levinas calls this experience of an ethical response to the demand issued by the appeal of human vulnerability: responsibility for the other (Levinas, 1969). When Langeveld (1975) sees the child’s horror, he cannot help but experience his own response to this vulnerable child—his own responsibility. He tells how a “personal response” became a “*pedagogical response*.”

What, now, did you do walking behind the girl whose father was run over by a car? People hurried to the place of the accident. Should this girl see her father crushed and bleeding? *Before you knew what you were doing, you had already decided*, and you had taken the girl’s hand in order to prevent her from approaching that horrible sight. “Let us go quickly to find your mother.... Where do you live? Where is she?” [emphasis added] (p. 9)

Of course, we can argue about the reasonableness of Langeveld’s actions. But judging his response is less important here than noticing that he inadvertently shows us what the structure of a pedagogical moment looks like.

First of all, we can learn from this anecdote that the pedagogical moment is embedded in a situation where something pedagogical is expected of us, and in which we subsequently are oriented to that which is in the best interest or “good” of this child or these children. We must act. Second, we see that usually the pedagogical moment does not permit us to step back from the situation. In the interactive moment of teaching, or dealing with children, there is no time to deliberate rationally and morally, considering one point of view and another, weighing what are the various possibilities and consequences that this situation offers us. Reflective deliberation would require that we use a form of practical reasoning to arrive at a morally and relationally responsible decision about how best to approach the situation, and then to act on this decision.

But practical reasoning—the critical comparing, sorting of alternative means and ends, weighing the consequences, and deciding of what one should do—rarely can be employed in pedagogically interactive and relational situations. When we are teaching (discussing, listening, showing, interacting with) a group of children or dealing with a single child, we tend to be relationally “captive.” Quite literally our mind is not our own. And thus we can say, “We give the other(s) a piece of our mind.” Pedagogical moments usually consist of immediate actions and thus it is not surprising that Langeveld (1975) says:

*Immediately* you brought the child into a different life situation: a mother, a house. *Immediately* you assured her that people were looking after her father: ‘Shall I go and have a look?’ ‘No’, you added *immediately*, ‘no, let us first find your mother, as you live just around the corner’ (emphasis added). (p. 9)

Langeveld himself does not comment on the curious “immediacy” of the nature of pedagogical acting. Rather, he uses the anecdote as a basis to reflect on the practical ethics of pedagogy. He shows how pedagogy demands something of adults. He goes on to suggest that it demands reflection on the meaning and significance of pedagogical notions such as the child’s experience of risk and safety, and need for security, reliability, and continuity. These values, he suggests, are basic to the experience of pedagogically responsive and responsible acting in our everyday relations and situations where we teach or live with children. To a certain extent, in an increasingly complex and risky environment, children need to be able to experience the world as secure, they need to be able to depend on certain adults as being reliable, and they need to experience a sense of continuity in their social relations with those who care for them.

But Langeveld (1975) also warns that there exists no closed or universally acceptable rational system that would tell us how we should behave with children in our everyday actions and how we should rationally justify our pedagogical approaches and methods. What is reasonable to one person may appear unreasonable to another person, says Langeveld. Instead, he attempts to locate the norms of pedagogical acting in the concrete experiences of everyday living with children. We need to realize, however, that these norms may differ from place to place, from time to time, from situation to situation, and from culture to culture. Indeed cultural pedagogy is a related discipline that explores childhood practices across cultural and global settings.

So, Langeveld tells us a plausible story about an event that might happen to any of us. And in the language of the story, he shows us more than he actually tells us. He shows that, although we say “before you knew what you were doing, you had already decided,”

this is actually not a process of reflective decision making in terms of which pedagogical acting in the school and in the classroom are usually discussed. And in this feature our living with children at home or in the community does not differ fundamentally from the more intentionally structured processes of teaching in the school classroom. In their daily conduct with children, teachers as professional pedagogues, just like parents, are expected to act immediately, though thoughtfully, and in a pedagogically appropriate manner with children. Thus pedagogy first of all refers to our active everyday living with children as parents, teachers, school principals, child-care workers, and so on. In everyday life we practice a certain pedagogy, and of course the pedagogy of the home is different from the pedagogy of the classroom, or the pedagogy of the psychologist's, the pediatrician's, or social worker's office.

At this point it is important to make clear that the word "pedagogy" itself already has ethical, normative, and moral aspects built right into its commonly accepted meaning. The meaning of the concept of pedagogy in Dutch, Belgian, German, Scandinavian languages is almost identical with "bringing up children," except that it has a slightly more formal (academic) usage. As well, it is generally accepted that pedagogy is a central dimension of teaching. The word "pedagogy" (*pedagogics*) is so common in these languages that their users immediately understand that it has to do with questions such as what is good for a child, or what is in the child's best interest. And, of course, teachers and other educators, too, must constantly teach in a manner that is pedagogically appropriate. Therefore, Langeveld and his predecessors considered pedagogy an independent discipline that cannot be reduced to psychology, sociology, politics, or philosophy even though pedagogy needs these disciplines as resources for its own rational-ethical ends.

Langeveld (1943/1979) defined pedagogy in experiential ethical terms:

Pedagogy is a science of experience; it is a human science, indeed it is an ethical human science that is conducted or studied with practical intent.... [It] is a science of experience because it finds its object (the pedagogical situation) in the world of lived experience. It is a human science because the pedagogical situation rests on human intent.... It is ethical because it distinguishes between what is good and what is not good for a child.... It is practical because all this is brought to bear in the practical process of [*opvoeding*] bringing up and educating children. (p. 178)

The challenge of pedagogy is to distinguish actively right from wrong, good from bad, ways of living with (bringing up and educating) children and young people. At heart, a pedagogue could be considered an ethicist—an ethicist who specializes in questions and concerns that have to do with pedagogical situations, relations, and actions. Pedagogy asks, what is in the best interest of children? And, how can we know what is good for children? How should parents and teachers practice their care and responsibility for children? What does pedagogical responsibility and pedagogical care mean?

### **The caring responsibility of pedagogy**

Although pedagogy is a fact of every day life, it may not be easy to see what the pedagogical phenomena of everyday living consists of. Therefore, it may be helpful to

turn to media where the reality of pedagogy is presented indirectly. Cinema, poetry, novels, and other arts offer us opportunities to experience pedagogical moments pre-reflectively and thus bring them to our reflective attention. Just as with the Ondaatje poem we may vicariously gain pedagogical understandings through the indirectly mediated immediacy of cinematic experiences.

In the movie, *The Browning Version* (Gitlin & Scott, 1994), Albert Finney, in the teacher role of Mr. Andrew Crocker-Harris, gives a painful farewell speech to the students and staff of a British boys' school at which he had been teaching for 18 years. The viewer of the movie is quickly impressed that Crocker-Harris is an expert in the classic languages he teaches and that he is exacting and demanding of the learning he expects of his pupils. So why apologize? He apologizes because he realizes that he failed not in his curriculum expertise or instructional standards but for the fact that his teaching lacked the care of pedagogy:

I am sorry.... I am sorry because I have failed to give you what it is your right to demand of me as your teacher, sympathy, encouragement, humanity. I have degraded the noblest calling a man can follow—the care and moulding of the young. When I came to this school I still believed, that I had a vocation for teaching. I knew what I wanted to do, and yet, I ... I did not do it. I can offer no excuses; I have failed, and miserably failed. And I can only hope that you can find it in your hearts—you and the countless others who've gone before you—to forgive me for having let you down. I shan't find it easy to forgive myself.

No matter how old fashioned the apology of Crocker-Harris may sound, and how antiquated his expression of “moulding of the young,” there is something in his speech that should give us pause: that teaching and caring for children—whether as professional educator or as parent—is indeed the noblest calling that any human being can follow in his or her life. And yet, there is something even more stirring in this apology. We should also give pause to the realization that undoubtedly, in our pedagogical lives with children, we commit to failings about which we may not find it easy to forgive ourselves. A profound failing of Mr. Andrew Crocker-Harris is a problem that is common in many schools: that the teacher teaches to the heads of the students, but fails to be sensitive to their hearts.

Pedagogical failings do not refer here to poorly applied techniques of teaching and curricular competencies. Rather, these failings have to do with the personal relational and ethical aspects of the pedagogy of teaching. Pedagogy is that more elusive and invisible dimension that lies at the heart of teaching and all other childcare practices. But even though pedagogy is a difficult subject to study and practice, a pedagogical perspective on teaching should be mandatory as it forces us to try to see and understand the complexity of classroom and school experiences and events as a formative reality that encompasses the many influences and factors that play a role in the students' transformative becoming of educated grown-ups.

Watching movies in which the pedagogical relation between children and adults is at the center is a revealing activity. It permits us to take a reflective glance at situations, relations, and events that tend to elude us in everyday living. Especially when we watch scenes that mirror and uncannily exemplify our lives, sometimes so recognizably, we cannot help but admit our own failings. Film critics rarely, if ever, view the movies they

discuss from a pedagogically-sensitive perspective. They rarely have an eye for the ways that childhood and children are portrayed in the cinema of yesterday and today. If they did, they would notice the sense of hope, tragedy, and humor that hangs over all of our lives. There is not a single honest film about children that does not show, directly or indirectly, the good as well as the damage we do as adults to children. Even though we may generally approach our vocation with loving pedagogical intentions and sentiments, we cannot help but do wrong at times—and oddly we often fail at those moments when we assume that we act out of caring responsibility.

The movie, *The Class* (Arnal, Benjo, Letellier, & Scotta, 2008), shows the disillusionments and occasional triumphs of a pedagogically well-intentioned teacher. François Begaudeau, who plays himself as the teacher François Marin, wants to deal with his students in an open and respectful manner. He engages them in his lessons through dialogue and conversation, but things continually go wrong. On the one hand, this movie clearly shows how the ongoing interactions, the constantly modulating relations and shifting situations in the classroom, constitute the experiential reality and sphere within which all instruction and curriculum mandated teaching takes place. The pedagogical atmosphere of the classroom seems composed of modulating waves of attention and distraction, washing over the complex life and dynamics of interiorities and exteriorities within which teaching and learning occur.

The individual events of teaching and learning cannot really be culled from the total sphere within which it all takes place. As we observe the goings on and as we focus here and there on the students and teacher, we should wonder: How really are these students experiencing the situations? What, if anything, is this student “learning” in this moment? What about that student? What events may have lasting consequences for the student? What is the teacher’s awareness of what is taking place while involved in a routine exposition or a challenging exchange? How does the “personality” of the class as a social entity moderate the experiences of the various individual children and the teacher?

Sometimes, teachers say one thing but do another. It is one thing to know that every student needs to feel respected, but what if the body language, the tone of voice, or the eyes of the teacher do not express such willingness to respect? So, how is it that this teacher, François Marin, can feel so dedicated, can so eloquently show insights into students’ lives, and share with his colleagues how children should be positively regarded and understood? And yet, in his interactions with the students, he often seems to be saying and doing something entirely the opposite. He frequently does not seem able to evoke the right tone for teaching what he is trying to teach. He seems to be caught between his desire for maintaining a reciprocal relation with his students and the authoritative social structure of the institution in which they find themselves.

In one of the last scenes of *The Class*, at the end of the last day of school, the teacher asks students to tell what they feel they had learned during the school year. Some students joke and others share some of their passions or interests. When the buzzer goes, they all file out of the classroom. But one student lingers and stays behind. She approaches the teacher at his desk. She is obviously distressed. She confesses to the teacher that she is worried because, “I did not learn anything.” The teacher Marin doesn’t seem to understand, “What? That doesn’t mean anything.” He explains that it may be difficult to think and remember what she has learned.



- But I don't understand.  
—What do you mean?  
—I don't understand what we do.  
—In French?  
—In everything.  
—You can't say you don't understand anything in any subject.  
That is not true.  
—I don't want to go to vocational school.  
—There's no question of that yet. You are moving on to next year. You'll have plenty of time to think about your future.  
Vocational school isn't an absolute certainty.  
It all depends on how you do next year.  
—But I don't want to...

This is such a wrenching and critical scene because, again, the teacher Marin fails to fully recognize the pedagogical significance of the moment. Some students suffer through our schools, day after day, week after week, month after month, while none of their teachers has an inkling of the daily drowning desperation that is the consequence of having lost touch with the lessons, not being noticed, not being understood, and not being worried about. In this instant, the teacher fails to say or do whatever it is that the girl needs to hear. It is a failure to make contact and to reach out when it is so desperately needed and wanted.

Movies like *The Browning Version* and *The Class* are so pedagogically powerful because they make “indirectly” visible what seems to be largely invisible in the educational literature. First, they make visible the invisibility of pedagogy itself. Pedagogy can only be seen and felt indirectly and often only interpretively from life's happenings. They make visible the slight gestures, the significant glances, the atmospheric qualities, the conspicuous hints, and the numerous other physiognomic and relational subtleties that betray or intimate emotions and intentions that often contradict what we are actually saying or claiming to do. Such movies may show viscerally that the dynamics of interacting with children depends on pedagogy: the ability to distinguish actively and reflectively what is good from what is not so good in our interactions with the children for whom we carry responsibility.

### **The present past of pedagogy**

During my visit to the Netherlands, I have managed to locate an old yellowed copy of the trilogy by the Dutch author, Piet Bakker. The books are out of print now. And this copy, which I recovered from an antique bookstore, upon opening, pours out the same papery scent that my parents' books possessed. When I was a young adolescent, these books were already second-hand. The aging pages show brown spots like the skin of my mother's hands. I recall how turning the dry and fragile pages would release this not unpleasant musty odour. This slight smell of stale paper dust and dried glue somehow belong to the story of the life of Ciske and his teacher. The story belongs to my childhood. But it also confronts me with my own aging, my mortality in the light of the youth of my own children. And as I now skim the pages of this book, I skim through the memories of my early school years.

How do children enter our adult lives? How do they acquire significance, concreteness, reality? As I reread the opening lines from the novel *Ciske the Rat*, the story and atmosphere revisit me with a vague vividness that characterizes childhood memory. I am rereading a childhood reading. I am reading my childhood.<sup>1</sup>

And that is how Ciske the Rat came to our school:

“Today we are going to receive something that will give us much joy,” mocked Maatsuyker, the school principal, as we were just finishing our morning cup of coffee before the start of school. “A transfer. Boy oh boy, he has quite a reputation for criminal behaviour already. In and out of juvenile court. Fighting with a knife.... And he will be in your class, Bruis!”

The latter was meant for me. I regarded him somewhat coolly because Maatsuyker was in the habit of acting rather pompously and overbearingly. Especially towards me, because I had only been teaching for a fortnight. He knew that he could not impress the other teachers but with me he was still playing up his authority.

Maatsuyker looked at me with a certain glee which annoyed me. He immediately passed me some pedagogical advice:

“If I may counsel you, then let him know immediately who is boss. Put him up against the wall and use your hands if you have to. That kind of kid only has respect for physical authority, if you know what I mean. Give him a licking so that he will think twice trying anything with you.”

“No way,” I replied curtly, “then the kid knows instantly that in truth you are afraid of him.”

“A nice challenge for Bruis!” said Ms. Tedeman. “Bruis still has ideals. Well you can practise your pedagogic skills, young man.”

Ms. Tedeman is a likable spinster teacher in her fifties. She has lost some of her enthusiasm for teaching but she still has her heart in the right place for the fifty plus children in her class. [author’s translation] (Bakker, 1944, p. 7)

From my present point of view the author, Piet Bakker, was led more by a sense of realism and humanity than by a motivated understanding of pedagogy. And yet what was so appealing in these stories was the difficult but growing caring relation between a less than perfect teacher and a troubled child. Did I, as a child, identify with Ciske? Or did I identify with his teacher?

Jorisse nodded to Ms. Tedema’s words. He had a story. “When, last year, we made a field trip a police-van stopped at the station just about six yards from our group. And out of the car emerged a heavily shackled fellow. Of course the children were all eyes. And the chap scarcely saw me and he shouts: ‘Hi teacher!’ Indeed it was a former student of mine! And what does the schlemiel do? He starts singing: Twinkle, twinkle little star....! And suddenly I see him in front of me! The third desk near the window. A nice boy with brown eyes and a grey sweater. A pleasant open face. So then it really bothered me when I saw him being led away by two cops. I mean, I did not get upset by my former student, but by those cops. No

don't laugh so stupidly! I felt that those men should keep their hands off one of my kids. Crazy, of course. And then I looked at the children around me. They stood there so charmingly with their backpacks and their cheery clothes, and I thought: God knows who of you will end up in one of those police-vans. Yes, that was a lousy start of a day's outing with my class....”  
[author's translation] (Bakker, 1944, p. 8)

The Ciske trilogy awakened first my desire to become a teacher, to want to make a difference in the lives of children. But I was perhaps twelve years old then, still a child myself. Can a child have a pedagogic interest in the welfare of another child? I believe that as a child I developed a caring relation to Ciske. But the relation was a reader's experience. I was understanding something that I could not yet explain. The story of Ciske spoke to me but I could not tell why it had such appealing power. It simply “spoke” to me. Do I have words for the experience now? How can a teacher communicate what it means to develop a caring relation to children?

What I realize now is that this book is structured like a composite of stories, anecdotes. Bruis is the authorial voice. And he tells anecdotes about Ciske—about his own life as a teacher with the child Ciske—as if he were entering in a diary everything that seemed worthwhile recounting as it happened during the day. What makes the stories so effective is that they each seem to tell something important about teaching, about the failures, promises, disappointments, and possibilities of our pedagogic living with children. Yes, fictional stories are so powerful, so effective, so consequential in that they can explain things that resist straightforward explanation or conceptualization. They explain indirectly by evoking images of understanding of the significance of an experience.

“There he is,” Maatsuyker suddenly announced. At the end of the hallway stood the Rat. Leaning against the wall. His head hardly reaching the coat pegs. A smallish boy. Maatsuyker right-a-way walked up to him, like a man who had an important mission to fulfill. There he stood: Big, enormous, and assuming in front of that little Rat. A blush of anger crept to my face when I saw how, without any ado, he dealt the boy a slap in the face. And I heard him shout in a high-pitched voice: “Can't you properly take your hat off your head?! That is what we are used to here. Remember that! Hat off stinker!”

The jerk! All children walk in the hallway with their hats on. The kid was utterly surprised by the unexpected attack. Maatsuyker wanted to reach out again but slyly and smoothly the Rat ducked away from his flailing arm, and before Maatsuyker knew the Rat skittishly ran away. And then I saw how he had obtained his nickname. That sly shifty escape had something animalistic, really like a rat that is hunted by a yelping dog.

But just as he wanted to run onto the street, Vermeer walked through the door. He always arrives a bit later at school because he has to take his daughter to kindergarten. Vermeer caught the rat in his arms and carried the struggling and kicking boy to Maatsuyker.

“Come on little deserter!” he smiled. At that point I quickly walked up in order to prevent any more incidents. I was furious! That stupid and awkward Maatsuyker had ruined my intention to greet the Rat normally,

like I would have greeted any other newly transferred student to my class.  
[author's translation] (Bakker, 1944, pp. 8–9)

The Ciske trilogy is hardly an example of high literature. In Holland this genre is called “folk novels.” And the three volumes were among the dozen or so books that my parental home possessed during my elementary school years. How these books entered our house I do not know. By the time I developed a hunger for words they were simply there on a small shelf next to an ornamental ironwork statue that my father had welded for a hobby. My parents never seemed to pay much attention to the books (my father only read newspapers) and so I moved several of them to a corner under the eaves of my tiny bedroom. Consequently, I had finished reading the Ciske novels (as well as an adult text on human sexuality and other less memorable works) before I had completed grade five. For several years the Ciske novels were amongst the most frequently reread texts in my modest but steadily growing library.

“I’ll take him to my class right now,” I said resolutely. And without waiting for a response from the dumbfounded Maatsuyker, I turned to the Rat: “Let’s go mate!” For a moment he looked at me. He had large grey eyes. Eyes with a wild glance. And yet incredibly beautiful. Those eyes in that pale face with lank colourless hair and thin lips. Those eyes were the only thing really striking in that shabby child’s body.

In that glance there was something like “What do you, big guys, all want from me!” and I could not help but wink at him, in which he probably read: “Just let them drop dead, Rat! Come on along!” Because he walked very tamely beside me through the corridor. [author’s translation] (Bakker, 1944, p. 9)

The Ciske novels were well-suited to my circumstances. I attended an inner-city Dutch school where a street-kid like Ciske would not have felt out of place. There were several Ciskes in my class. Often these kids evoked in me a mixed sense of pity and fear. Pity, because I sensed that they were not loved by anyone, at home or at school. Fear, because I sensed their growing hardness and immunity to the damaging effects of the poverty, abuse, and neglect around them. Ironically, as a child, I did not fully realize that my elementary school had been an inner-city school of questionable quality until I became a teacher many years later. Then I received my first teaching appointment at the same school. But not after I was warned about the rough-trade nature of this lower working-class school whose students simply were not destined for higher goals such as grammar school or academic high school, preparing for university or professional career. Few finished high school at all. Most students were children without a “future.”

To be honest, my meaningful wink was meant more as a protest against the meddlesome interference of Maatsuyker than as a sign of sympathy for the kid. Maybe also because I felt ashamed for the school. The school is for the children a piece of civilization. Our modes of conduct need to be decent. Even the littlest beggar has a right that his teacher is a considerate, gentle person. I am not at all opposed—and neither are the children—to the occasional rap. But Maatsuyker does it in such brutish, vulgar manner.

So when we entered the classroom Johnny Verkerk screamed: “Sir—that’s the Rat!” And then I did really the same as Maatsuyker, because

promptly Johnny received a rap on his knuckle hard skull. "Finish your math," I growled. "I did not ask you for any advice did I?"

There shone a certain contentment in those big, grey eyes of the Rat....  
[author's translation] (Bakker, 1944, p. 9)

I am an older adult now, and as I continue to re-read pages from the Ciske novels, I gain some insight into the charm of this text. This child, Ciske, is an enigma. He is the original stranger, the child who brings the adult to puzzlement because the adult does not understand the child and does not know what to do with the child. The child is as unfathomable, as bewildering, as a wild animal. And yet in so many ways this child is the product of an adult world. The adult does not realize that he is already deeply involved in the child's problems.

I harbor genuine envy to those real and experienced teachers as Vermeer and Jorisse. They seem to know almost immediately and naturally what tone to use with any particular student. I don't in the least. I still have to learn that from a few hundred children. And they unfortunately are my guinea-pigs, that is their bad luck.

When the Rat stood at my desk the class was quietly working at the math problems that I always put on the board before school starts, to please the eager kids. But I could not help noticing how continuously some eyes wandered toward the Rat. The latter was standing there, as an accused who is determined to keep his mouth shut in front of the Bench's Magistrate.

"Well, tell me what is your name, comrade!" I said as naturally as possible. But the Rat must have detected something unnatural, something artificial or phoney in my voice, because he looked at me with those strange eyes and remained silent. "You won't suck me in that easily!" that face said. [author's translation] (Bakker, 1944, p. 11)

How does one find the right tone, the right words for each child? That is surely the question that is at the heart of our pedagogic lives. The teacher's task is not merely to find an opening, a way of reaching the child. As if it is not difficult enough to detect what language, what words, what gesture, what kind of tone can breach the barriers that separate any particular child's world from an adult's understanding and good intentions. The teacher must also do something with the language. The teacher's aim is not to battle, to penetrate, to violate the child's inner nature; rather the teacher's intent is pedagogic, to establish a pedagogical relation wherein it is possible to distinguish what is good and what is not good for the child.

Damn, what incredible eyes that boy has in his head! Pearl grey with dark, scintillating pupils. An ill-omened glow smouldering in those eyes. The eyes of a wild creature!

"Well that is babyish," I responded with an air of indifference. "You don't even dare to say who you are?"

Again he looked at me with a stony stare, and then I did something stupid. "Perhaps you would rather tell your name to the man from the hallway?" I said mockingly. What an ass I was to resort to Maatsuyker as some kind of bogey-man! I became annoyed, when the Rat haughtily

shrugged his shoulders. His face did not betray the least amount of fear. I said curtly: “Go and sit in that front desk, boy-with-no-name!”

Henry Berg moved over as if someone with the plague was coming to sit next to him. I knew for sure that he would come to school tomorrow with a note from his mother, “that she does not appreciate her son to have to associate with such riff-raff.” The Rat walked to his desk. Impassively. I had suffered my first defeat. “Take out your reading books,” I instructed the class. [author’s translation] (Bakker, 1944, p. 11)

That is how the novel, *Ciske the Rat*, begins. A journey into the lifeworld of “a child without a future.” Or at least without any prospect that I, even as a child myself, understood as “no future”—delinquency and crime. And so the rest of the book reads like a pedagogical thriller. How can a teacher make a difference in the life of a child-without-a-life? Here is a child who seems to desire no future because he lacks already a life worth living. There are no rules, no principles of knowledge that can tell the teacher what to say, or how to say or do the right thing when the child is there. What is the difference that makes a difference between a life and no life? Does this sound sentimental? Does this appear naive to my present adult reading? I take the Ciske novels back “home,” to Canada.

As I talk with teachers, I hear many anecdotes about teaching, school, and the children or adolescents they teach. Sometimes the stories are inspiring, reflecting the joys of teaching and living with children. Sometimes the stories are disturbing; they may resemble the life of Ciske. Except that there is now a heightened reality to the stories I hear because most often I already know these children, not fictionally, but concretely, in flesh and blood. Many present day stories we hear about through the media, and people in our lives, are stories that are more desperate even than the story of Ciske.

### **The contact of pedagogy**

A Taiwanese teacher explains how she feels that teachers in her culture are less likely to open themselves to their students. Many Chinese teachers don’t feel comfortable showing their vulnerabilities, she says. They don’t know how to make contact. I ask her to give an example, and describe in experiential terms, a moment in her own teaching when she had experienced difficulty in making contact with her students in her teaching. She responds with this story:

I clearly remember this one time when I walked into my class with a smile on my face. I looked forward to discussing with the students a captivating story by a famous author. However, as soon as I faced the students and started to introduce the lesson, the same thing happened that always happened. The students all turned their faces down and started writing notes. All I saw were fifty heads of black hair. As I continued analyzing the novel, I did not see a single face, not a single pair of eyes looking at me. I knew that the students were listening to me but their attention was passive. They simply jotted down notes to later memorize and then reproduce on the test or exam. I felt very unhappy with this inattentive attentiveness. I wanted to have real contact with my students, I wanted to

touch them and make sure that the story really meant something to their lives. But even when I asked questions or tried to involve the students in a discussion, they answered politely and dutifully, but without a real spark of interest. They merely wrote down the question in case it would appear on the test...

But that day something strange happened. As I was discussing the themes of the story that the students had read, I casually mentioned how my boyfriend disagreed with me about the meaning of the book. I said, "Last night I discussed the story with my boyfriend. But my boyfriend thinks that the book is not about sacrifice at all, but really about betrayal. So he and I started arguing about the meaning of the story and about the meaning of sacrifice and betrayal." The strange thing is that when I uttered those words, an unbelievable thing happened: suddenly fifty black heads of hair turned upwards and fifty faces looked at me with expectation, interest, and curiosity.

For a moment, I was taken aback with suddenly seeing all these eyes and faces facing me. But then my confusion turned into elation. And I felt that I had to clarify further my disagreement with my boyfriend. But in the instant of the moment I also realized that I had made real contact with my students. I felt totally thrilled.

The young teacher, from Taiwan, who told me this story was so impressed with the contact she suddenly had experienced with her students that she wanted to study how she could understand better the personal dimension of teaching. I suggested that she should begin her study with the story she told me.

Young people crave the feeling to belong. We can see this in the popularity of cell phones and the wide usage of social networking sites, text messaging, Twitter™, and other digital communication devices. For some students to be without a cell phone, and not being able to text message with the friends, is a terrible predicament. It is even more terrible when you as a young person have no contact with the friends around you.

Of course, contact is not only an issue in the social lives of young people. The reason to address the topic of the pedagogy of contact is that education is increasingly falling within the sphere of instrumentalism, technologism, economism, corporatism, and managerialism. It is difficult nowadays to think of teaching and learning without immediately being concerned with effectiveness, efficiencies, outcomes and the instrumentalities, methods, and technologies of teaching.

Contact is in-touchness. Usually, when we read about "contact" in education, it refers to "teaching contact hours" that students will receive. Ironically, contact has become a commodity or a product to be negotiated in educational institutions. Another, but sad, reference to contact in teaching is when we read or hear about teachers physically touching students inappropriately. This kind of contact marks sexual or physical abuse. The political refrain for teachers has become "Teach don't touch!" I want to advocate the opposite: "To teach *is* to touch!" But, of course, I mean that teachers touch students pedagogically. The teacher touches the student with his or her voice, eyes, gestures, and presence. To say it more pointedly: a real teacher touches the students with his or her being and mind.

Governments are concerned with youth violence and criminality, but the great irony is that we do not seem to want to acknowledge that we have created an educational environment that is toxic for young people. Just as we are now discovering that the plastic in baby bottles is toxic to children, so the chemistry in the technology of media and teaching has become toxic for our children. Even well-meaning and competent teachers can become toxic teachers in a world where we become impotent and insensitive to the pedagogy of contact in teaching and learning. Toxic contact that children and young people experience may leave damaging consequences for the child's being and becoming.

In an article entitled "Contact" the philosopher Alphonso Lingis describes a simple moment when someone calls to us in the street. "Hey you!" And Lingis asks, "Isn't it quite striking...that I feel these words coming straight at me, finding me, taking a hold on me?" He says, somehow these words seem to penetrate whatever role I am enacting, and makes contact with the "real me," the "core me." In this wonderfully simple phenomenological observation, Lingis (1998) makes us reflectively aware how powerfully a word or the calling of one's name can be experienced as a demand, as an appeal—as contact—a grandfather says:

When I visit my grandson, who is still a young toddler, he may be playing on the floor or having a bath. When he looks up, his face may be indifferent or inquisitive, as if he seems to wonder for a moment: who is this person? But then he sees me and there is this big smile. In this smile he opens himself to me and my smile does the same to him. (p. 441)

Isn't it remarkable how a smile can open a space where people make contact? Buytendijk (1988) once described smiling as a moment, an encounter where someone "enters the threshold of my inner life and whose own inner life reveals itself to me." He says, "The smile is not just an expression; it is also a response to the person or object toward which our heart has affectionately opened."

The child reveals his or her human nature through smiling...the child who is caught in the stream of unselfconsciousness, but then overcomes it by the ontic participation in the awakening awareness of a felt security. Something awakens in the child from a slumber, like a bird wakens in the morning, welling up from his or her deep innerliness and radiating as a recollection of this origin and as a sign of a certain destiny. (Buytendijk, 1998, p. 23)

You may feel that you can have contact with some people, like your friends, but it is difficult to have contact with some other people. Some of us have better contact with our mother than our father, or the other way around. With some people we feel that we can talk, with others we cannot. Even more importantly, with some people we have such good contact that we can be together without having to talk or to smile. We feel comfortable and pleasant merely by being in each other's company. This, too, is the intouchness of contact. It may be experienced as the contact of the familial, of togetherness of living together. It is the most elemental kind of contact that we may also find in the togetherness of a classroom.



Eye contact, oculusics, is one of the most intimate kinds of in-touchness that we may experience with another person. Of course, the eyes can express very different relational qualities: the eyes can be warm and inviting, wondering and inquisitive, friendly and open, but also hostile and cold, distant and reserved. Through a glance of the eyes we can express and experience an interest in the person we pass or with whom we interact. Generally, we tend to betray through our eyes more authentically how we feel and regard the other than through our words (see van Manen, 1991).

Eye contact may be experienced differently in different cultural settings. For example, men and women in some Islamic communities tend to lower their eyes and try not to focus on the face of the opposite sex after the initial first eye contact. Lowering the eyes avoids potential unwanted desires. Glances to those of the opposite sex, young or adult, are prohibited. This means that eye contact between any man and woman is allowed only for a second or two, except of course among spouses, family members, and relatives. In everyday life there is an implicit general rule that says that only “clean eye-contact” is allowed. Clean eye-contact means no “adultery of the eyes” and no glances of desire. This relation of normativity of oculusics is so corporeally habituated that in schools too, Muslim students tend to lower their glances when teachers talk with them. And the non-Muslim teacher may not realize that this modesty in eye contact is not a sign of indifference or disrespect.

Regardless of the cultural context, a phenomenology of contact makes us aware that the experience of contact is always a deepening or intensifying experience. That is why the topic of contact has such important potential in education, although it is rarely, if ever, mentioned in the research. Teachers who are blessed with pedagogical sensitivity seem able to “touch” students with their eyes in a tactful manner. Their students feel that the teacher has contact with them. Pedagogically sensitive teachers can touch the students with the subject or knowledge that they teach them. The learning of knowledge with such a teacher deepens and becomes more personally integrated in the identity of the student. Contact with a person who matters to us has consequences for the way we see ourselves. In other words, a relation with other makes possible a relation to self, and this is a condition for an emerging sense of self-identity. We see this when, for example, a student—who has been touched by a certain teacher—says, “I write poetry, I am a writer, I am a poet.”

The experience of contact is that moment when, in a manner of speaking, a soul touches a soul. Making contact sounds like an active occurrence. But it may also be a passive instance when someone looks at me in a certain way and I feel that I made contact with this person—that moment might feel like a spark. We recognize such moments when we meet a new person and we feel instantly that we have contact with that person. The strange thing is that contact may happen not only when we speak with another, but contact also happens through the eyes and gestures that we meet in the other person.

We meet a stranger and we may feel strangely touched by this person. Afterwards we say things such as “I have good contact with her” or “with him I have contact.” With one friend we experience contact when we talk together. With another person we may experience contact when we do things such as go for a walk. With yet another friend you can feel contact because you trust to tell this friend your secrets. Contact happens when I touch something or I am being touched by something that matters to this person, this

friend, this teacher. Therefore, making contact or experiencing contact with someone or something that matters is always a meaningful action or an ethical response.

### **Practicing pedagogy as contact**

The pedagogical contact between teacher and student tends to be seen as “close and personal.” This may be especially the case for very young children and their teachers as well as, perhaps, for graduate students and their professors. But for many school and college students that regretfully may not be the case. One may even question whether personal contact is still possible between teacher and his or her many students. Perhaps, personal contact between teacher and students is possible but we have to understand the various modalities of pedagogical contact may only occur at different times in schools and classrooms.

Here I distinguish five modes of contact: familial, deferential, valuing, responsive, and devotional. I will suggest that these are modes of contact that are made by teachers who possess pedagogical sensitivity. Each mode of contact is characterized by certain affects, and these affects, in turn, translate into the pedagogical practices of care, respect, worth, responsibility, and love.

(1) *Familial contact* means seeing the child’s singularity. Familial contact is a form of relation that sparks care. The child experiences trust, security, being worried about.

Children may experience different modes of contact in school. The most elemental and basic kind of contact is familial. The term “family” refers to a form of contact or closeness that is the unity of living together. The pedagogy of familial contact creates trust and is conditioned by trust. It is not uncommon to hear a teacher talk of her students as her children and her class as her family. Only if children feel secure and safe at school will they dare to risk themselves and extend themselves. Even when the students have gone home then they still are tied to the familial unity of the school and classroom through homework and memories of the day. But what happens when this basic atmosphere of trust is lacking or is undermined? Here is a story that a senior professor at Hong Kong University told me a few years ago:

I don’t remember much from my childhood but there is one event that I still distinctly remember from grade 1. It has stayed with me all my life, for more than fifty years.

It was the end of the school year and the teacher had handed out rewards for all the students who had done well that year. Many students received prizes, and the teacher gave me a sweet stuffed bear. When I came home, I showed the bear to my father and told him that the teacher had given it to me because I had done such fine work.

But my father did not smile. He remained quiet. Then he said, “Son, you received this prize because you are number 6 in your class.” And he looked at me, and then he inquired softly, “Do you remember what student was the first one to get up? Now THAT student is number 1.” I looked into my father’s face and felt very strange. It seemed he was no longer seeing me with love in his eyes.

From then on my prize was not sweet any longer. That day I had gained a whole different understanding of school and learning.

In this anecdote the familial love of the parent for this child is no longer felt by the child to be unconditional. The father's love, it seems, is now dependent on the child's performance at school. And if things do not go very well at school, and if the teacher does not create a pedagogical atmosphere of trust, then the unity of contact is obstructed and the child lives in the constant shadow of the danger of experiencing a lack of familial care both in the classroom and perhaps also at home.

(2) *Deferential contact* means seeing the child's dignity. Deferential contact is a form of relation that sparks respect. The child knows that he or she has the right to fair and equal treatment.

Mona, who is now a 35-year-old teacher, recalls a seemingly trivial incident with her grade 13 science teacher. After the lesson, as she was one of the last students to walk out of the classroom, the teacher called her name "Mona!" Mona stopped, "Yes?" "Mona, I just want you to know that I am very happy that you are a student in my class." Mona says:

That was the nicest thing that happened to me in high school. I was very messed up and most teachers paid no attention to me, an aboriginal girl with an alcoholic mother and father. They looked down on me. For them I was a lost cause. But my science teacher was friendly and fair. No teacher had ever said something like that to me, and that year I learned to love science. In his class I could learn to respect myself.

Contact is not simply calling a student by his or her name, though naming and the ways in which we remember and utter a student's name, or the way we call on a student, may be formative of contact or make contact unlikely. Huixia, a student from mainland China, tells of her first year in a Canadian high school:

I am a foreign student who has been in Canada only for a few months. My Chinese name, Huixia Chung, is perhaps hard to remember or difficult to pronounce for Canadians. I am also rather quiet in my classes because of my inadequate English skills. All in all that makes me feel somewhat invisible in class. In one of my classes I am impressed by the teacher's ability to motivate students' participation in class discussions. The teacher learned everyone's name very quickly despite the large class size. He always calls students by their first name. However, he has never mentioned my name. I thought that I did not mind it that much. But one day, when he discussed each group project, calling each student's name as if he appreciated every member's effort, I found myself waiting for my name to be mentioned. At last it was our turn. There were four in our group.

I concentrated on the teacher. He began to name the first two individuals in our group. Then, I saw him look at me, and hesitate for a moment, as if he did not really see me. Then he quickly skipped my name to the fourth member. I was unrecognized. I was a bit surprised at myself.

I did not expect that I would be so disappointed. I was embarrassed. I was painfully aware of my Chinese name, which makes me who I am. I realize that I have become nameless, invisible, a nobody in this class.

Huixia is a secondary school student who shows remarkable insight into her experience. But we should realize that this awareness is only possible because she has expressed her experience in language (here in written form). She seems to realize that, at the collective level, her Chinese name gives her a certain identity, but she also realizes that at the personal level her name refers to her singularity, her uniqueness. On the one hand, it is her uniqueness that is denied by the teacher's not including her by her name. By the teacher having forgotten or skipped her name she cannot feel seen—she feels nameless. On the other hand, her cultural identity is also at stake in the teacher's name forgetting. Huixia seems to experience hurt associated with the failing of real contact at two levels of subjectivity: her collective subjectivity (being Chinese) and her singular subjectivity (being her own unique self).

We must not see contact as simply making a connection with students. On the one hand, students know when or whether they have good contact with a teacher; on the other hand, contact is not so easily visible to the untrained eye. Rather the existence of contact between teacher and students is felt like a supportive classroom atmosphere. It is the pedagogical atmosphere of comfort in the knowledge that you are being seen, respected, valued, and liked by the teacher.

(3) *Valuing contact* means seeing the child's worth. Valuing contact is a relation that sparks esteem. The child experiences a sense of achievement, success, feeling valuable, and capable.

Sometimes teachers may be exquisitely aware that some students they teach are unusual in that they are extremely smart, highly sensitive, artistically talented, or have an unusual background in music or sports. But, of course, many students are not so talented. And yet, they, too, need to be seen and valued. Here is a story written by a student:

I put the finishing touches on my art project. As I cast an appraisive glance at my creation, I am overwhelmed with relief at finally completing the piece. And I am aware of a growing sensation that faintly resembles pride. This is pretty good! I turn expectantly to the art teacher who is slowly making her rounds through the classroom. I am anxious to show her my finished work. She ambles over to my table and nods distractedly. "Very nice" she says, and that is that. She then turns her attention to others at my table who are intently working on much more intricate and more beautiful pieces than mine.

"Very nice?!" A lump rises in my throat and a flush of embarrassment rushes through me. I am so taken aback at her response. I was at the point of asking her for suggestions, but was secretly hoping she would first say something positive about my work. I had not expected her utter disinterest.

I let go of my breath and sink back in my chair. All of sudden I am filled with frustration and disappointment at her curt comment. I want to throw a tantrum and cry at the same time. The vague nod with which she responded to my efforts stings in its dismissal. Her gesture leaves me conflicted and sullen. The fact that my teacher does not "see" my hard work and modest accomplishments leaves me deflated and helpless...what more can I do?

As if at a great distance, I watch her talking to my friends at my table—like I am missing out on something, like I am unworthy of my

teacher's attention. I feel completely out-of-touch with my teacher and with my friends.

What I find compelling about so many student or teacher stories is that they are so un-compelling. They don't concern life and death issues and they are not glamorous or exotic stories. So often the memories seem trite in the eyes of teachers. And yet, I do not doubt that the experiences that students and teachers tell may have profound consequences for their personality. Often teachers do not realize that acting inattentively has created an atmosphere that endures and that leaves residues of self-doubt, insecurity, feelings of inferiority, even self-hatred. An act that the teacher considers totally trite can establish for this student an unshakeable atmosphere of oppression that is damaging to the ego.

(4) *Responsive contact means* seeing the child's otherness, mystery, and "face." Responsive contact is a relation that sparks responsibility. The child experiences his or her uniqueness—being a "who" (not a "what").

In responsive contact, the teacher sees and is stirred by the vulnerability of the child. The teacher is touched in his or her sense of responsibility. Here is a story by a student of a responsive teacher:

The new grade 8 math teacher took over three months into the school year. By that time I had already developed a serious case of math anxiety. During the math classes I had gotten lost in a fog. I gradually realized that I no longer could do the assignments. Meanwhile I tried to keep up a front that I knew what was going on. I was no longer able to understand the in-jokes of the math teacher. I felt like a fake, uncomfortable, and increasingly oppressed by past failings. I had given up hope that I could somehow catch up with the others.

I distinctly remember our second class with this new teacher. She called on me to solve the math that she had explained the previous day. But I was totally confused and frustrated. Then she looked me straight in the face and she said something that I still remember almost two years later. This is what she said:

"I am sorry, I must not have explained it very well. Let us go over it again. We'll do it a different way." Then we did go over it again.

That day it became clear to me that with this teacher I had become unbelievably smart overnight.

Pedagogical contact means both that the teacher is "in touch" with the student and that the teacher "touches" the student in a manner that is experienced as encouraging and respectful.

(5) *Devotional contact means* seeing the child's specialness. Devotional contact is a relation that sparks "falling" for the child. The child experiences feeling special, loved, being "chosen".

As the students walk into the classroom, the teacher sits at her desk, collecting the homework assignments. Mat slips by the teacher's desk.

"Do you have your writing assignment, Mat?"

"Yes, I handed it in."

“No, you did not,” the teacher says.

“Yes, I put it with the others already.”

“Well, the papers are all right here in this pile. Identify yours please.”

Mat does not move and looks sheepish.

“You did not do your assignment, did you!” the teacher says directly, while looking him in the eyes. Mat shrugs his shoulders, and nods slightly. The teacher sees a boy who acts with indifference, passive defiance. She is annoyed and watches him with displeasure.

“Well, I am really concerned about your lack of responsibility and your blatant lying. I want to see you after class.”

After class, Mat is quite willing to chat. And he smiles when the teacher says that he has developed a really effective skill: “You are a pro! You are just excellent at avoiding work.” Mat confesses that in class he always feels bored, and after school he does not like to do homework: “I can’t see the point. When I get home then I just don’t feel like doing school stuff. So I go on my computer, or I play my guitar, or bike in the woods.”

While Mat talks about his music, the teacher regards him. She looks directly into Mat's face and suddenly she is struck by what she sees: an awkward looking youngster whose depth of emotions seems quite unfathomable. This youngster is so much more complex than the student she saw at the beginning of the lesson. How strange that she can now wonder: “who is this person?” She feels moved because not only does she see him as if for the first time, she also sees his vulnerability. Here is a big boy with complex emotions who, like a young child, still seems caught in the present and for the present, without regard for things that lie ahead.

What is going on in this story? What is happening to the teacher? When Mat goes home after the talk, he has promised his teacher that he will try to make a better effort. But teachers know that most promises like this are rather futile. After a couple of days good intentions tend to be forgotten. Yet, the teacher feels she had made contact with Mat, and in this contact they have experienced in-touchness. She may now have a deeper understanding of Mat and she has a deeper understanding with Mat. They have talked about personal things, Mat’s desires and interests. And the teacher knows that Mat knows that she has really seen him in his specialness. He has become a special student in her life.

Yet, promises will be forgotten. So what is the good of having had a talk? A teacher would say that teacher-student talk is pedagogically good if it provides opportunities for further contact, for seeing this child or this young person, and for a personal relation to develop. A good talk creates a shared history. A good talk leaves a memory of affect. The affect is that the teacher has fallen for this youngster, as happens to teachers.

To fall for a child is not unlike falling in love—not romantically of course, but pedagogically. This is pedagogical love for a child who has captured the teacher’s care. When later in the week the class reads a story about biking in the woods, the teacher glances at Mat. She gives him a quiet wink and he smiles back—the moral spark of contact. The teacher says that she is “suturing” small moments of in-touchness into the pedagogical relation she has with him. So the good of the talk was that, in days and weeks to come, at the appropriate time, the teacher can exchange a meaningful look—a

look that has special significance just for Mat—a prompt to reflect on how his teacher sees him, and cares for him, his being, becoming, and growth. Not only does Mat feel seen; the teacher also has a unique and complex experience of contact and recognition.

Pedagogically falling for a child is to see the child as special. This is often the child who is especially vulnerable and who demands our special care and attention. The various kinds of contact that I have tried to distinguish are probably never quite so clearly distinguishable in our lived experience. Rather we come to experience and know contact in its various aspects. Perhaps falling for a child is the most complex and subtle way in which we touch a child and are touched by a child or young person.

When we “fall” for a new friend we like, for a love we meet, for a person we admire for a special talent, we have the enigmatic experience of recognizing the unrecognizable, of seeing what can really not be seen. We may have this uncanny experience when meeting someone new who we feel could really be a wonderful friend. Or we may meet someone whose mind fascinates us and we cannot help but feel inspired in the company of this person. We recognize something in this other person that is uniquely special and that we must respect and protect—not for ulterior motives but for the sake of self and this other.

So from a pedagogical point of view we may not only fall for a love, we can also “fall for a child.” Indeed, we would hope that every child has a parent or a teacher who has fallen for this young person. A teacher who has fallen for a child has taken a special interest in this child. This interest is motivated by the love of care, worry, and fascination with the subjectivity and enigma that can be seen in every child. This may be a child of worry, a child of hope, a child of puzzlement.

Stefan is a student in Ms. Anderson’s grade 9 English class. She often tells stories about him to her colleagues. Perhaps it is in part because she does not seem to have Stefan figured out. And yet, as teacher, she is quite fascinated with him. Or perhaps she is so preoccupied with this young person because he is somewhat of a problem and a puzzle to her. He refuses to be pinned down by her teacher language. As his teacher, she is convinced that Stefan is very intelligent, amongst the brightest of the students she has taught. And yet, he is often unwilling to participate in class. He often poses the strangest questions that will leave her stymied. In his writing assignments he digresses into dark reflections. At other times he challenges the purpose and nature of her assignments. He complains, (but only in writing), that he does not intend to do writing exercises in which he is not interested. Yet, this same brilliant student hardly ever speaks up in class. Unlike other students, he never comes around for a chat. He appears withdrawn and even indifferent. He rarely addresses the teacher directly in class. But, yes, the teacher admits that she has “fallen” for this young person. She wants to understand him, acknowledge him, draw him out of his shell, help him realize his potential. She regards Stefan with wonder and awe.

Through our words, gestures, and actions we teach our students subject-matter content and skills, and we ready them for tests and examinations. This is the curriculum or *didaktik* of teaching and learning. Through the tonalities of our words, through the affects of our gestures, through the sensuousness of our presence, and through the

sensitivities of our perceptions, we practise our teacherly tact and thoughtfulness. This is the pedagogy, the relational, and ethical dimension of education. Through pedagogical sensitivity and tact we make contact with the talents and intelligences, vulnerabilities and fears, happiness and hopes—the inner lives of the children and young people we teach. Only through genuine contact can teachers open up the spheres of pedagogical encounters.

We not only teach students knowledge and skills, more importantly perhaps, we teach them who they are and what they are. We teach them about themselves and how we regard them. Educators rarely reflect on the fact that meaningful learning is always infected with the relational and situational particulars of the moment in which the learning takes place. Whatever we learn is always affected by the contextual details of the living situation and relation in which the learning occurs. From a pedagogical point of view, learning is not like storing information on a digital storage device, learning means that whatever is learned becomes part of the personal being of the student. It is important to reflect on the nature and kinds of contact that we are able to establish with the students we teach.

Children who are very young learn through their bodies how they are regarded. Their bodies are attuned to contact and sensitive to the atmosphere of the school and classroom in which they live with their teachers and other students. The pedagogical significance of the various modes of contact lies in this caring quality of in-touchness and living together, in the atmosphere of trust, respect, worth, unicity, and pedagogical eros. Only in such atmospheres do children experience themselves as cared for, worried about, deserving of respect, regarded as worthy, unique, feeling loved, recognized—and, yes, interested, caring, and motivated to learn about the worlds in which they live, and that lives in them.

#### ***Appendix: historical notes***

Pedagogy has a long history in early Greek and Western European philosophies. A list of prominent thinkers of pedagogy usually includes Plato, Seneca, Augustine, Erasmus, Montaigne, Comenius, Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Herbart. But it is with Dilthey, Nohl, Litt, and Flitner that the study of pedagogy entered the philosophical period of human science (*Geisteswissenschaften*). The tradition of *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* was a consequence of a cultural reaction to enlightenment rationalism of previous periods in Continental thought. In Germany, the *Geisteswissenschaftliche* movement was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century foremost a pedagogical development.

Some of the main recent proponents of the pedagogical movements were psychologists, while others were philosophers since the chair of philosophy was often responsible for pedagogy at Western European universities. And yet, *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* should not be confused with “philosophy of education,” at least not as we know it in North America and Britain. The Continental movements were very different from the later British and North American fields of analytic philosophy of education. In the German, Dutch, and Scandinavian traditions the study of pedagogy was seen as a theoretical and practical discipline in its own right—rather than as the application of philosophical concerns or concepts to education.



From approximately 1910 to the late 1950s in Germany, and from the end of the Second World War to the mid-1960s in the Netherlands, several generations of educational scholars participated in an emerging form of inquiry and thinking that became known as *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* in Germany, and as *fenomenologische pedagogiek* in the Netherlands. As these terms suggest, the German tradition was more hermeneutic in orientation, while the Dutch tradition (also known as the Utrecht School) was more oriented to the phenomenology of the pedagogical lifeworld. In Germany the first major proponents of the *Geisteswissenschaftliche* tradition in education were Herman Nohl (1879–1960) and his contemporaries Theodor Litt (1880–1962), Eduard Spranger (1882–1963), Max Frischeisen-Köhler (1878–1923), and somewhat independently Peter Petersen (1884–1952). In the Netherlands it was especially Martinus J. Langeveld (1905–1989).

As a student of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Herman Nohl (1879–1960) was largely responsible for working out a pedagogical theory on the basis of Diltheyan starting-points and formulations. To the second generation belong Nohl's students such as Erich Weniger (1894–1961), Wilhelm Flitner (1889–1990), Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1903–1999), as well as Josef Derbolav (1912–1987), Theodor Ballauf (1911–1985) and Klaus Schaller (1925). The thinking and the theoretical corpus of this group became known as the Dilthey-Nohl School. This movement was primarily oriented to explicating the meaning of pedagogy in human life. Pedagogy was first of all a notion that the *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* approached on the basis of two modes of manifestation: pedagogy as a primordial human phenomenon and pedagogy as a cultural phenomenon (see Hintjes, 1981).

Thus, pedagogy became an emergent field of studies and theorizing. First pedagogy became a theme in the hermeneutic human sciences of Dilthey, Nohl, and Litt. Subsequently the emphasis shifted to the phenomenological pedagogy of Langeveld, Bollnow, Vermeer, and Beets. Both were eventually displaced by the critical pedagogy of Wolfgang Klafki (1927–) and Klaus Mollenhauer (1928–1998) in Germany, and somewhat differently Paulo Freire (1921–1997) in Brazil. In the Anglo-Saxon contexts, the currency of the term “pedagogy” dates at least to the French *pédagogie* in 1495. It was used to refer to the place of teaching such as a school, college or university. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the University of Glasgow was also called the Pedagogy of Glasgow. The British usage of the term pedagogy (pedagogue, pedagogical, etc.) was actually rather limited—it has been mainly used to refer to the art, practice and occupation of teaching, and to the theories, principles, and methods on which these practices have been based. The term pedagogy was generally felt to be pedantic and did not become popular in the English speaking world until the 1980s.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the education and upbringing of children was strongly influenced by the norms and values of the church (Catholicism, Protestantism, and other denominational belief systems). With the emergence of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) the taken-for-granted beliefs and practices of the old normative pedagogies were increasingly questioned and philosophically interrogated. It is in this context that phenomenology and hermeneutics became strong philosophical platforms for the attempts at developing approaches to pedagogy that could be freed from the normativities and habituated presumptions and prejudices of the milieus in which they operated.

In Continental historical contexts, there is a considerable literature of past authors such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Fröbel, Montessori who preoccupied themselves with pedagogical questions of the practice of schooling and bringing up children, and ethical questions of how children are or should be cared for in families, schools, and communities. In continental cultural contexts, these past traditions have contemporary proponents. In the United Kingdom and North America there is (strangely perhaps) very little comparable pedagogical literature and scholarship. Only critical pedagogy became a hotly debated field of concern in curriculum studies.

At the heart of teaching lies indeed a pedagogical ethic, sensibility and pragmatics: the teacher is not only responsible for subject matter didactics (what, when, why, and how to teach) but intertwined in the didactics of teaching and the curriculum is the thematics of pedagogical reflection and pedagogical responsibility: examining questions such as how to determine what is in the best interest of this child or these young people (considering certain social, cultural, and historical contexts).

Some authors, such as Herman Giesecke, argue that pedagogy is no longer possible since the ultimate aim of pedagogy (the child's maturity or adulthood) can no longer be determined—to speak of “adulthood” makes no sense any longer since even so-called adults keep developing, learning and improving themselves. Giesecke reduces the practice of pedagogy to the practice of “helping children learn” and unwittingly purges pedagogy of its ethical essence. In effect he has reduced pedagogy to what in the American literature used to be referred to as “instruction,” the science of helping students learn. However, it could be argued that the contemporary complexity of conflicting understandings of adulthood and the multiple (cultural and philosophical) interpretations of what is good for children actually makes pedagogical reflection and discourse even more necessary than ever before. More recently the phenomenological pedagogical orientation of Langeveld, Beets, and the later Mollenhauer, has been revived in the work of, for example, Max van Manen, Bas Levering, Eva Simms, Cathy Adams, Tone Saevi, the editors of this journal issue, and others.

From pedagogical perspectives, teachers are seen as pedagogically co-responsible for the growth of children in terms of their capabilities and personhood. In many north European countries, pedagogy is normally included in university programs aimed at teachers, psychologists, social workers, and other child-care practitioners. Indeed, all these professionals are somehow involved in decisions regarding children's welfare and growth. Thus pedagogy belongs to the so-called “agogical sciences,” which include orthopedagogy (children with special difficulties), andragogy (adult education), school pedagogy, cultural pedagogy, the history and theory of pedagogy, and so on.

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<sup>i</sup> I translate the following excerpts from the Dutch novel, *Ciske de Rat* (Bakker, 1944)

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