

Abstract

The question of the meaning of life is in the end the wrong question. It's life itself that asks questions, and in particular to us. Our whole existence is nothing more than to give answer, to be responsible to our life in the practical experience of the here and now.
Viktor E. Frankl¹

I use the metaphor of *an expedition* for the development of this dissertation, which is based on my Surinamese working experiences within education. *Expedition* points to the idea that I see this development as an unfolding process. The open approach during my traveling, in which new ideas and directions arose and were used, characterizes the social constructionist approach of this study. The metaphor of expedition, is also an image which suits the subject of this research. In this research, I show that we still approach educational reform by using the idea of *a detailed and planned journey*. This more or less closed approach has, as will be shown in this study, not brought us enough successful and sustainable change in education. It is based on the concept that change processes are planable, predictable and controllable. Fullan (1991, 2005, 2008), Hargreaves (2005, 2006, 2009), Lagerweij (2004), Mitchell and Sackney (2000, 2009), Stevens (2004) and many other scholars are critical about this concept. They illustrate in their research that change processes are dynamic and hardly planable, predictable or controllable. There are, according to Lagerweij (2004), in addition to planable changes, also autonomous and spontaneous changes happening which were not predicted, still these changes are essential for strengthening the change process. Furthermore these scholars conclude that educational change processes occur simultaneously at different layers within the system.

The process of the development of *the I Believe in You!* publication is an example of such an expedition. In the review process it becomes clear how these autonomous and spontaneous changes were used for the sustainability of this change process.

In May 2009 I proudly presented, together with Liesbeth Roolvink (UNICEF) and Henri Ori (MINOV), the publication called *I Believe in You!* This publication was the result of a two year collaboration with many people throughout the whole country. I could fully sense the responsibility in our life in the words of Viktor Frankl – or in constructionist language, to be relationally engaged and responsible in our lives – by taking the opportunity to design this publication based on the many positive dreams and hopes people had.

After the publication, my heart told me that something really essential had happened - something so precious that it would be regrettable to let it go. I found it important to inquire into my experiences as the coordinator of this change process. I became curious about what had happened and started to question myself: *What was it that had generated change and had brought people into motion? What did we do together that made this project successful? Which features contributed to sustainability? Would it be helpful to inquire into this change process to gain better understandings for my present work? And perhaps, will my*

¹ Viktor Emil Frankl M.D., Ph.D., was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. Frankl was the founder of logotherapy which is a form of Existential Analysis, the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy". His best-selling book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (published under a different title in 1959: *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, and originally published in 1946 as *trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*), chronicles his experiences as a concentration camp inmate and describes his psychotherapeutic method of finding meaning in all forms of existence, even the most sordid ones, and thus a reason to continue living. Frankl was one of the key figures in existential therapy and a prominent source of inspiration for humanistic psychologists.

findings help others within the educational field to understand and approach change processes in more hopeful and successful ways? My curiosity and my inner drive to contribute to life with purposeful and meaningful actions were the fuel to inquire into this life and working experience. This dissertation is the result of my expedition. *The I Believe in You!* process was an interesting case to study. It shows how we can look at educational change processes in a different way to find more hopeful solutions for the complex reality of education. This change process must be seen as an example of the many possibilities of how we can approach educational reform. From the social constructionist stance, I do not present a method or an approach which can simply be used for other situations. I present how this particular change process was constructed and what affect it had.

After a brief introduction in *chapter 1* about my background, the motive and theme of this dissertation, I illustrate in *chapter 2 The business as usual* within educational reform. Change is a daily business in education, but we are still eating the same soup when we deal with educational change processes. I argue that eating the same soup has not brought us far enough to establish a more successful and sustainable educational change. The ingredients have changed in some ways, but we are cooking from the same recipe. We still approach the educational change process from the individualistic² stance which says that change it is planable, controllable and predictable and which approaches change as a *here and there* happening in which we are out of relation. Politicians, researchers, curriculum developers and so on, as producers of change programs, live far away from the change processes. Students and teachers who are the consumers of these programs, try to put them into practice in the middle of the change process in their daily classrooms. In this way, the producers and consumers are not connected, they are out of relation. Unfortunately the individualistic approach has not brought us enough successful reform so far. In the historical review, I show that for many years educational reform has been failing. It is only during the last decade that we are understanding educational change more and more. The paradigm shift from the individual towards the relational orientation began just recently. We are in a transitional stage where we often meet mixed forms of both.

In *chapter 3*, I move from business, as usual, to social constructionist thought. By doing this I explain how we can see social construction as another orientation rather than a method. Within this orientation the issue of relating is essential. By *being in relation*, we enter the new paradigm of looking at reality as being socially constructed. From relationships the world has become what it is. (Gergen & Gergen, 2004 p. 9). Explaining business as usual and social construction brings us in *chapter 4 (Time for a new recipe?)* back to educational change. After first arguing that for many years educational change has been dominated by the individual orientation, discovering that this has not brought us far enough within the educational reform, I put the question: Do we need a new recipe and a different way of cooking to meet the future challenges of the educational reform? Reading the educational change literature of many scholars shows us that during the past decade a movement has been going on which is compatible with relational constructionist thought. The most overlooked dimension of leading educational change for years seems to be the relational one. The central thought of relational constructionism is *to be in relation* with the other, the otherness and our socially constructed reality. Hosking & McNamee (2006) describe some generic themes that contribute to this relational change work. I will use these themes in the analysis of this process. These generic themes are:

- Knowing and influencing are joined
- Multiple, equal voices

² In this dissertation I will use the terms individualistic and relational stance to describe the two main paradigms which do have considerable influence within the change processes.

- Emphasize possibilities and positive values
- Inquiry and intervention are joined
- Careful questioning and careful listening
- Constructing in conceptual and non-conceptual performance
- A deep ecological approach

Dialogical and collaborative approaches support *this being in relation*. We must see educational change processes as human work where we encounter young and old in many different ways at different layers within the system. "This is about seeing schools as a complex network of human beings and not as an array of cogs within a machine. We must first see schooling in all its human qualities; designed by humans for humans to benefit humans." (Branson, 2010, p. 110). *Chapter 5 Collaborative and dialogical approaches to educational change* shows that both approaches contribute *this being in relation* with the other and the otherness. In constructionist literature different expressions are used: the way people are doing or making things together, being in relation or joint action. The philosophical stance of the collaborative and dialogical approaches emphasizes appreciation and the invitation to others to co-create meaning and understanding together. To say welcome to differences and to use them as strengths rather than weaknesses. They strengthen the educational change processes because they *put people into relation*.

With all this background from *chapters 1 to 5*, we go on to part two of this dissertation where *the I Believe in You! process* is the central issue. I use this process as an example to illustrate how this particular change process was constructed and how it contributed sustainable change using the ideas of relational constructionism. *Chapter 6* will set *the stage of Suriname*: What is Suriname's context and in specifically the educational context? By doing so, we can better understand the local context of this change process. Then I move on by explaining the different reform programs which influenced *the I Believe in You! process*. I start with the LEARN pilot project. From 2003-2008 we experimented at fourteen elementary schools the possibility of pupil centered elementary education in the local contexts. The lessons learnt were used to design in 2008 a long term reform program which we called PROGRESS. This program started in 2008 and will last till approximately 2015. A crucial foundation of PROGRESS was the design of a nationally shared vision of pupil centered education. The idea was to organize a participative change process to construct this statement by inviting a great amount of members within the Surinamese society with all kinds of backgrounds to sample their ideas, dreams, and hopes for future education. In May 2009, we published the book *I Believe in You!* 10.000 fold. *Chapter 7 Methods and analysis* gives the reader some understanding of the research seen from the social constructionist thought. Appreciative Inquiry was the fundamental approach of *the I Believe in You! process*. *Appreciative Inquiry* can be seen as a form of social constructionism in action. I use the generic themes described by Dian Hosking to analyze the process.

In part three I step back. I reflect in *chapter 8 What do we know now and how can we move further?* on the results of the analysis. In this chapter it becomes clear that we can achieve more sustainable change when we are aware of how we can *be put in relation* in change processes. The Appreciative stance, Building bridges, the Collaborative and Dialogical approaches supported this *I Believe in You! process* in many ways. I step back again in the final *chapter 9 How this all affected my present work*. I briefly show some examples in the Netherlands as well as in Suriname, how my increased awareness and deepened knowledge influenced my work in many ways. These examples show how we can achieve sustainable change when people are put in relation.

This Ph.D. study, which was like an expedition, enriched my understanding and awareness of change processes in many ways. My expedition will continue and hopefully, I can contribute to the educational reform for a better education for our children, our future.