

## Brief Encounters with the Taos Institute

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This month Loek Schoenmakers, Taos Associates and coordinator of Taos Institute Europe, shares with us his experience with schools and education as....



### Every Child a V.I.P.!

By [Loek Schoenmakers](#)

*Every school has them: students who know and care about the digital world. Smart schools know how best to use these students. For example, by inviting them to form an IT “help desk” for the school and teachers.*

In my daily work as an educational consultant and trainer the LinkedIn message above caught my attention. Isn't this a great idea to use the enormous potential of students' wisdom and knowledge? How different our educational world would be if we included students – at whatever age – within the educational learning and change process. What if we appreciated students as “experts” and invited them to help transform our educational systems by turning them - together with their teachers - into active co-producers of change, instead of keeping them in a static and passive position as consumers?

It brings me back to the many experiences of using social construction, which is an enormous inspirational resource for my educational change work. It was at a meeting of a primary school when the staff asked me to organize a parents' meeting. I was the “expert,” and I was to tell the parents about the importance of social climate and conflict resolution within the school. I suggested carefully to the staff, “what if we invited the children of all ages to come as the ‘experts’ for this evening meeting?” The staff was shocked by this proposal and couldn't imagine that children could be used as experts. The turmoil became even louder when I suggested that this would mean that we would also include the 5 and 6 years olds as experts.

‘Trust the process’ is still one of the mantras I learned from Sheila McNamee. So, I did. I trusted the process. I gave the staff a few minutes to recover and soon this normally conservative staff was ready to take the challenge. No need to tell you how different this parent meeting was and how thrilled the teaching staff was to see the positive effects of this meeting. These young children were able to express their learnings in very touching ways, coached by their teachers. In our reflection afterwards, they mutually agreed: *from now on we will always organize our parent meetings in this way.*

Students and teachers are the human face of every day educational experiences. The language within our schools represents our view of reality and holds our school systems and, therefore our approaches to change, in “iron cages” as Andy Hargreaves tells us. Words make worlds.

How would it be if we change our language within our schools and stop talking about special needs children, and highly gifted students, as if the former are less smart than the latter? Every child is gifted. Every child is an expert. A new world opens when we become aware that, as soon as we shift our focus to “what is happening in between,” many new solutions can be found. Changing language to one of hope and possibilities suddenly activates everyone to make a difference, not only by talking but, most of all, by “doing.” Together. Through joint action. I am thrilled when we see the many possibilities.

We can treat *every* child as a V.I.P. – as a Very Important Persons – using their potential to open new worlds which will lead to better solutions for our complex educational world.

A teacher affects eternity, but s/he can never tell where her/his influence stops, AND I am convinced that our children will tell us how to do it....

Read more: read my WorldShare book [Happily Different!](#) Or join the [Learning Festival](#) in Roskilde, Denmark, Nov. 16 - 17.