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PROEFSCHRIFT

Sustainable Educational Change

is Being in Relation

Based on the insights of the *I Believe in You!* process Suriname



Appreciation **B**uilding Bridges **C**ollaboration **D**ialoguing

LOUIS HENDRIKUS SCHOENMAKERS

Sustainable Educational Change is Being in Relation

Based on the insights of the *I Believe in You!* process Suriname

Appreciation, **B**uilding Bridges, **C**ollaboration and **D**ialoguing

Proefschrift

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Dedication

*Life
Is meeting people
Is being in relation
With the other and the otherness*

*Life
Is full of possibilities
Is full of opportunities
For those who choose*

*Life
Becomes a wonderful adventure
When we do appreciate
That change is part of life*

*We can all contribute
To construct a reality
A promising future
A legacy
For our children*

For AnneMarie, my wife, who unfailingly supports me no matter what and where ever we are. Words can't capture what you mean to me.

For Roel and Jon, my two sons, who are proud but also happy that the work on this Ph.D. adventure is ending. They have often asked "How long are you working at this book? And "When is it finished?" Now we can spend lots of time together. Thanks Jon for your camera work!

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For my colleagues and friends in Suriname, Tille, Henri, Liesbeth, Lillianne, Carl, Nico, Loes and many others involved in this *I Believe in You!* process. Your belief in this project is still the engine to go on. For *VVOB-Belgium* financing the *I Believe in You!* process, and for giving me the opportunity to work in Suriname at the different change programs.

For all the people I met during this process. From the main city of Paramaribo to the interior. Your stories and hope for a better future have touched me deeply and enriched my life.

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For all people in the world who contribute to students' lives in appreciative ways.

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.

Samenvatting

*De vraag naar de betekenis van het leven is uiteindelijk een verkeerde vraag.
Het is het leven dat vragen stelt, in het bijzonder aan ons.
Ons hele bestaan is niet meer dan het geven van antwoorden,
verantwoordelijk te zijn voor het leven in het hier en nu.
Viktor Frankl*

Ik wil de metafoor van *expeditie* gebruiken voor de ontwikkeling van deze dissertatie die gebaseerd is op mijn Surinaamse werkervaringen in het onderwijs. Expeditie geeft aan dat ik de ontwikkeling van deze dissertatie zie als een zich ontvouwend proces. Deze open benadering, waarin al reizend steeds weer nieuwe inzichten en richtingen duidelijk werden en gebruikt konden worden, is kenmerkend voor de sociaal constructionistische benadering van dit onderzoek. De metafoor expeditie is ook een beeld dat goed past bij het thema dat in deze studie wordt onderzocht. Zoals blijkt uit dit onderzoek past men in de gangbare onderwijsverandering of innovatie nog steeds de aanpak van de *in detail geplande reis* toe. Deze min of meer gesloten benadering heeft tot nog toe, zoals blijkt, te weinig geleid tot succesvolle en duurzame verandering in het onderwijs. Het is gebaseerd op het idee dat veranderingsprocessen planbaar, controleerbaar, maakbaar en voorspelbaar zijn. Fullan (1991, 2005, 2008), Hargreaves (2005, 2009), Lagerweij (2004), Mitchell and Sackney (2000, 2009), Stevens (2004) en vele andere onderzoekers uiten hier hun kritiek op. Zij laten in hun werk zien dat veranderingsprocessen dynamisch van aard zijn en nauwelijks planbaar, controleerbaar of voorspelbaar. Er vinden zoals Lagerweij (2004) dat zegt behalve de geplande veranderingen ook autonome en spontane veranderingen plaats die niet voorzien zijn, maar uiterst belangrijk zijn voor het versterken van deze processen. Het proces van de ontwikkeling van de publicatie *Ik Geloof in Jou!* - het thema van dit onderzoek - is een voorbeeld van zo'n expeditie. In de reconstructie van dit proces wordt duidelijk hoe en op welke manier deze autonome en spontane veranderingen gebruikt werden om een duurzaam veranderingsproces tot stand te brengen.

Ik presenteerde in mei 2009 samen met Liesbeth Roolvink (UNICEF) en Henri Ori (MINOV) met trots deze bijzondere publicatie *Ik Geloof in Jou!* Het was het resultaat van een tweejarige samenwerking. Deze publicatie is gebaseerd op de positieve dromen en wensen van veel betrokkenen uit het onderwijsveld en de Surinaamse maatschappij. Het ontwikkelen van de publicatie was een bijzonder project. Ik vond het belangrijk mijn eigen ervaringen als coördinator van dit veranderingsproces te onderzoeken. Ik werd nieuwsgierig over wat er gebeurd was en begon vragen te stellen. Wat bracht deze verandering tot stand en wat bracht mensen in beweging? Wat hebben we samen gedaan om dit project succesvol te maken? Wat droeg bij aan de duurzaamheid van dit proces? Zou het zinvol zijn om dit proces te onderzoeken ten einde een beter begrip te krijgen van mijn huidige werk? En misschien, kunnen mijn bevindingen anderen helpen om onderwijskundige veranderingsprocessen beter te begrijpen en meer succesvol te begeleiden? Mijn nieuwsgierigheid, gecombineerd met mijn innerlijke drang om betekenisvolle bijdragen te leveren aan het leven, waren de motor om dit onderzoek naar werk- en levenservaringen te volbrengen. Deze dissertatie is het resultaat van mijn reis. Het proces van de totstandkoming van *Ik Geloof In Jou!* bleek een interessante casus om te onderzoeken. Deze dissertatie laat zien hoe we op een ander manier kunnen kijken naar veranderingsprocessen om zo succesvolle oplossingen te vinden voor de problemen binnen de

complexe wereld van het onderwijs. Het moet gezien worden als een voorbeeld van de mogelijkheden van een veranderingsaanpak, zoals er ook vele andere mogelijkheden zijn. Vanuit de sociaal constructionistische gedachte presenteer ik niet een aanpak die toepasbaar is in elke situatie of een zgn. quick-fix methode. Ik laat vooral zien hoe dit veranderingsproces opgebouwd was en wat het effect hiervan was.

Na een korte introductie in hoofdstuk 1 van mijn achtergrond, de motivatie en het thema van onderzoek, schets ik in hoofdstuk 2 hoe de denkwijze van de geplande reis nog steeds een gangbare manier is binnen de aanpak van onderwijsinnovatie. Verandering is een algemene en dagelijkse gebeurtenis binnen het onderwijs. Ik constateer dat er voortdurend op een zelfde manier gedacht en gehandeld worden om veranderingen binnen het onderwijs door te voeren. Deze manier van kijken heeft ons nog onvoldoende verder gebracht om duurzame en succesvolle innovatie te bewerkstelligen. In de loop der jaren is er wel het nodige veranderd, maar deze veranderingen waren zelden duurzaam. We benaderen onderwijskundige verandering nog steeds vanuit de zogenaamde individuele positie die zegt dat verandering planbaar, controleerbaar en voorspelbaar is. Deze individuele benadering is een manier van kijken waarbij we te weinig in verbinding staan met de ander en de werkelijkheid. We koppelen ons als het ware los van deze werkelijkheid. Politici, onderzoekers, curriculum ontwikkelaars enzovoorts zijn nog te vaak de producenten van de verandering maar ze zijn losgekoppeld van het dagelijks leven in de scholen. Leerkrachten en studenten zijn nog te vaak de consumenten van de vele initiatieven en proberen deze in de dagelijkse praktijk in te voeren. Het succes is van deze manier van werken is wisselend, deze manier brengt ons nog steeds niet ver genoeg tot duurzame onderwijsveranderingen. Ik schets in het historische overzicht hoe decennialang deze kijk op onderwijsinnovatie heeft gefaald. Het is pas sinds het laatste decennium dat we onderwijskundige verandering steeds beter zijn gaan begrijpen. De paradigmaverschuiving van de individuele (moderne) naar de relationele oriëntatie (postmoderne) staat nog in haar kinderschoenen. We bevinden ons in een overgangsfase waarin we beide oriëntaties in onze onderwijspraktijk tegenkomen.

In hoofdstuk 3 beschrijf ik het gedachtegoed van het sociaal constructionisme. Ik bespreek dat we het sociaal constructionisme niet als een methode of techniek moeten zien, maar meer als een filosofisch gedachtegoed. Binnen het sociaal constructionisme is het in verbinding zijn met de ander en de werkelijkheid een centraal uitgangspunt. Onze werkelijkheid is door ons samen (sociaal) geconstrueerd of gemaakt. Dit gebeurt door onze manier van samenwerken, onze manier van kijken en hoe we over onze wereld praten. (Gergen & Gergen 2004). Nadat ik vaststel dat de individuele kijk en aanpak op verandering ons onvoldoende ver gebracht heeft, beschrijf ik in hoofdstuk 4: *Tijd voor een nieuw recept?* een nieuwe aanpak die nodig is om de grote en complexe uitdagingen waar we voor staan succesvoller tegemoet te treden. Ik lees in de literatuur vele voorbeelden van onderzoekers en ontwikkelaars die werken vanuit de ideeën van het relationeel constructionisme. Ik vind dat de relationele kijk nog steeds te weinig aandacht krijgt bij de aanpak van onderwijskundige veranderingen. Willen we tot verandering komen dan is een andere zienswijze, een nieuw recept en een nieuwe manier van koken, nodig. Het sociaal constructionisme of het relationeel constructionisme laat een nieuwe manier van kijken zien. De centrale gedachte van het relationeel constructionisme is dat we altijd in verbinding staan met de ander, het andere en onze sociaal geconstrueerde werkelijkheid. We staan er niet los van. Door op deze manier te kijken gaan we steeds meer inzien dat we binnen de onderwijsverandering elkaar allemaal beïnvloeden en op die manier allemaal producenten van de verandering zijn. Ook de leerkracht en de leerling worden op die manier producenten van de verandering en worden als even waardevol gezien. Binnen het veranderingsproces zijn we dus in verbinding met elkaar en de onderwijswerkelijkheid die we samen (sociaal) maken (construeren). Onderwijskundig veranderwerk is mensenwerk! Of zoals Branson (2010, p. 110) het zegt: *"This about seeing schools as a complex network of humans 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." Hosking & McNamee (2006) beschrijven een aantal thema's die het relationeel veranderingswerk ondersteunen. Deze thema's zijn:

- Kennis en invloed zijn voortdurend in wisselwerking met elkaar
- Veel verschillende manieren van kijken naar de werkelijk zijn mogelijk en even belangrijk
- Mogelijkheden en positieve waarden worden benadrukt
- Onderzoek en interventie zijn voortdurend in wisselwerking met elkaar
- Luisteren en vragen worden bewust toegepast
- Conceptuele en non-conceptuele aanpakken zijn beide belangrijk
- Een diepgaande ecologische benadering is belangrijk

Het met elkaar en de eigen realiteit in verbinding zijn (*being put in relation*) zijn wordt bevorderd door de samenwerking (*collaboration*) en uitwisseling (*dialogue*). We moeten onderwijskundige veranderingsprocessen zien als mensenwerk, waarin jong en oud op vele verschillende manieren en niveaus met elkaar in verbinding staan binnen het onderwijssysteem. Hoofdstuk 5: De *collaboratieve en dialogische aanpak bij onderwijskundige verandering* laat zien dat deze aanpak de verbinding met de ander en onze werkelijkheid (sociale constructie) positief beïnvloedt. In de sociaal constructionistische literatuur gebruikt men verschillende uitdrukkingen. Denk hierbij aan "Wat mensen samen doen of maken" (*what/how people do together*), "In relatie of verbinding zijn" (*being in relation*), gezamenlijke actie (*joint action*), "Samen verder gaan" (*going on together*). De *collaboratieve* en *dialogische* aanpak kenmerkt zich beide door de basis van waardering en de openheid om samen met de ander betekenisgeving tot stand te brengen. Men waardeert verschillen die eerder gezien worden als mogelijkheden dan als problemen. Deze manier van aanpak versterkt de onderlinge verbinding en draagt op die manier bij aan de duurzaamheid van de verandering.

De hoofdstukken 1 tot met 5 zijn de achtergrond om in het tweede deel van de dissertatie het project *Ik Geloof in Jou!* aan de orde te stellen. Ik gebruik dit project als een voorbeeld om te illustreren hoe dit veranderingsproces was opgebouwd en hoe verschillende aspecten de duurzaamheid hebben versterkt. Daarbij gebruik ik de uitgangspunten van het relationele constructionisme. In hoofdstuk 6 schets ik de context van Suriname en het Surinaamse onderwijs. Hierdoor kan het proces van *Ik Geloof in Jou!* beter begrepen worden. Ik beschrijf vervolgens een aantal onderwijskundige programma's die de grondslag waren voor deze publicatie. Ik begin met het LEARN-project. Van 2003 tot 2008 experimenteerden 14 basisscholen met de ideeën van het ervaringsgerichte onderwijs binnen de lokale context. De inzichten die uit deze pilot werden verkregen, werden gebruikt om het PROGRESS-programma 2008-2015 te ontwerpen. Het fundament van PROGRESS was het ontwerp van een nationale visie op leerlinggericht onderwijs. Het idee ontstond om een participatief veranderingsproces op gang te brengen met een zo groot mogelijke groep deelnemers uit de maatschappij. De dromen, wensen en ideeën van de deelnemers bleken waardevol om de inhoud van de nieuwe visie voor het toekomstige basisonderwijs te ontwerpen. Dit resulteerde uiteindelijk in de publicatie *Ik Geloof in Jou!* die in veelvoud van 10.000 werd gedistribueerd in mei 2009. In hoofdstuk 7 *Methode en Analyse* geeft ik de lezer meer uitleg over de onderzoeksmethode die gebaseerd is op de inzichten van het sociaal constructionisme. *Appreciative Inquiry* is daar een belangrijke basis geweest. *Appreciative Inquiry* kan gezien worden als een vorm van sociaal constructionisme in actie. In dit hoofdstuk gebruik ik de eerder genoemde thema's van Hosking & McNamee (2006) als kader voor de analyse.

In deel 3, hoofdstuk 8 *Wat weten tot dusver en hoe kunnen we verder?* reflecteer ik op de resultaten van de analyse. In dit hoofdstuk wordt duidelijk dat we duurzame en succesvollere verandering kunnen bereiken als alle betrokkenen samenwerken en met elkaar en de geconstrueerde werkelijkheid in verbinding zijn en

blijven. Daarvoor is een open houding en de bereidheid tot samenwerking (*collaboration*) en uitwisseling (*dialogue*) noodzakelijk. Tot slot kijk ik nog eenmaal terug op mijn huidige werk als adviseur in het onderwijs. Ik beschrijf in hoofdstuk 9: *Hoe dit alles mijn werk heeft beïnvloed* beschrijft een aantal voorbeelden uit mijn Nederlandse en Surinaamse praktijk.

Deze studie, die ik ervaren heb als een expeditie, heeft mijn kennis en inzicht in veranderingsprocessen in vele opzichten verrijkt. Mijn expeditie is een proces dat zal blijven doorgaan. Mijn toegenomen bewustzijn zal hopelijk een waardevolle bijdrage zijn aan de verbetering van het onderwijs voor onze kinderen, onze toekomst.

Appendix DVD

***Impressions of Change Moments* by Loek Schoenmakers & Pierre Pas (2011)**

In this documentary, Loek Schoenmakers expresses his experiences within change processes in Suriname as well in the Netherlands. The documentary shows scenes of being in or out of relation taken from the movie *Every Child is Special* directed by Ahmir Khan and how this influences social constructed realities. Furthermore it shows impressions of change moments based on the constructionist thought within educational change. Pierre Pas was a great help in editing this documentary.

The documentary *I Believe in You!* produced by VVOB-Progress Suriname (2009)

I produced this documentary when I was working in Suriname 2007-2009. From the early beginning we started to sample impressions of this change process. Norman Deekman, the cineast, was a great help and friend during this process. By being in relation we could produce the best.

VVOB- Belgium/ Progress who financed the whole process, gave their approval to copy this documentary.



Suriname, Hester Jonkhout

Section one

1

Introduction

“A teacher effects eternity.

He can never tell where his influence ends.”

(Fullan, 1991, p. 356 quoting Henry Adams)



Introduction

My educational life is an ongoing story, since I entered it as a young child at the age of four in 1965 in the Netherlands. I didn't know at that time that this story would be never ending, as I still experience that the influence of being in relation with many teachers, colleagues, school leaders, parents, students, inspectors, ministers, directors, professors, trainers and educational friends I was privileged to meet, still goes on today. They all enriched my life, whether it was with good experiences or bad. *Being in relation* gave many opportunities for growth and new insights. When I was a four year old child, curious about what the big world would bring, I didn't know how complex the educational world could be. In those early years I experienced it openly, fully in the present, curious and expecting the good and the best to happen. Now 46 years later, I realize that I still could keep this open, curious and positive stance towards education and its processes. The writing of this dissertation stimulated me to dig deeper into my work and also into my private experiences. I felt the need, better to say, I felt an inner drive to give voice to my experiences, to research and to recall all the different kinds of experiences I gathered in all these years. Working with people - young and old, being in relation with them - has always been a challenge and a red cord throughout my life. I found a nice quote in one of the training papers when I was emptying boxes after we returned to the Netherlands in June 2009:

A person is only a person

as seen through the eyes of others

I am

because we are

and since we are

I am

I exist because of others, and these others play important roles in the game of life. Still others, working with them in the educational field in the Netherlands and abroad in countries such as Denmark, Great Britain, Aruba and Suriname have been, and still are significant to me. It's because of them that I am who and what I am. In the past twenty five working years I have been involved in all kinds of processes of change, playing different roles such as student, teacher, school leader, school advisor, educational specialist, teacher trainer, coach, program designer and coordinator. I have become aware of the complexity of change processes, and simultaneously more curious about what the secret of change could be.

From February 2007 until June 2009 I worked as an educational specialist in the Republic of Suriname, South America. I was involved in the design of the new long-term program which we later would call PROGRESS. Within this program, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6 *Setting the stage*, I developed the idea that this program would be more powerful when we based it on Suriname's own best vision of education.

Very soon, in the beginning of July 2007, I met with the educational specialist of UNICEF Liesbeth Roolvink who had the same ideas. Our enthusiasm affected Henri Ori, who was at that time the Ministers' advisor. He was enthusiastic for joint action and fully supported the whole process. From that moment onward, our

collaboration and long-term friendship helped to develop the Surinamese shared vision for elementary education. We organized a participative change process throughout the whole country. It is this process which is the subject of inquiry of this dissertation. In May 2009, two years later, we proudly presented the book entitled *I Believe in You!* During these two years, our little group of three increased to more than 400 participants, who all worked together on the design of this book. Being part of this process was a very special experience which strengthened my ideas that anything can be possible when you really believe in it. When we published the book I felt that what we had experienced had been so impressive that it would certainly be worthwhile to share it with others. In the meantime, I had my first contacts with the Taos Institute, and was accepted to join the Ph.D. program which is based on social³ constructionist thought. I needed little time to decide which subject I would choose. I felt that *the I Believe In You! process* offered so many learning experiences that I wanted to use this process as the central source of my research. I was curious to find out what had happened in this process, what it was that made so many people get into positive motion. From the social constructionist thought my question was *What did people do or make together in this change process which generated sustainable change?*

I Believe in You! is symbolic of the belief we should have in ourselves and others to create positive relationships which can help to create better, and hopefully more sustainable futures. Relationships seem to form a fundamental bond that defines living things. This belief can be seen as a curiosity about the other, an open stance in meeting the other as equal even when backgrounds and experiences and knowledge are different, a drive to make positive futures together in which we all can be producers. From the constructionist point we must see this belief as a by-product coming out of the process of how we do things together.

I do not intend to search for a receipt or a formula, a set of rules or procedures or one method but, rather I want to foster a vocabulary of relevant action along with a way of deliberating on its functions and translation into other practices. Therefore we cannot use precisely the practice of *the I Believe In You! process* in all situations, but if we can abstract ideas from this practice we have means of deliberating on how we might proceed elsewhere within change processes. Within the complexity of change processes this may give us lots of different, new or other understandings of how we may approach change processes. How can our practices have relevance for people's everyday lives in our fast changing world, what is relevance, and who determines it? How can we describe it in such terms that many of us can understand this in better ways? I am convinced that this work is a little contribution to these questions.

So, having made the decision to use the *I Believe in You! process* as the main source of inquiry, I became more and more curious about what had caused this positive motion among so many people. With my openness and curiosity I started feeling very uncomfortable with the mostly taken-for-granted approaches in educational reform, which are used to finding the "one-fits-all" solutions, or even thinking that one can change or has the power to change others. I started to question what people, including myself, had done or made together in this process. Which features contributed to this change process? And how did this affect the construction of more successful and sustainable change? And at least, will my findings benefit

³ Cited from Paré (2009, p. 8): "The word "social" in this term reminds us that human knowledge emerges from communal exchange—the primary, though not exclusive, medium of which is spoken and written language. The word "construction" points to the way the meanings that constitute "what we know" are not so much discovered as *built*. Broadly speaking, this happens through talk (Strong & Paré, 2004)—the institutional discourses that insidiously infiltrate popular culture and understanding (Bakhtin, 1986; Foucault, 1970), and the intimate therapeutic dialogues where meanings emerge from the nuanced exchanges of two conversants (Gergen, 2006; Shotter, 1993)."

educational change processes? With these questions I come close to the two important questions professor Sheila McNamee, my Ph.D. advisor, asked in her Fielding Graduate Speech (2008a):

Do we enter into organizations with a set of essential features that must be explored?

or

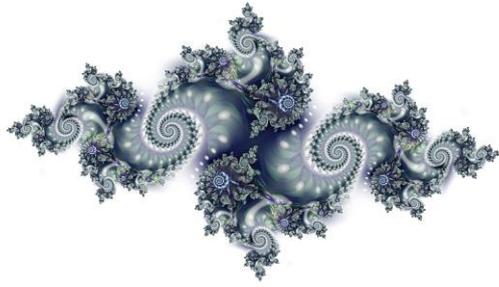
Do we engage with organizations in ways that create or make generative transformation and useful forms of life?

These last questions made me curious. Supported by Sheila, I started to read and understand the social or relational constructionist thought. The paradigm shift from the individualistic to the relational thought was, at the start, not an easy one, but as I got more and more into it, it opened up and enriched my view of change processes dramatically. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I will illustrate how this research process has influenced my work as an educational consultant. My hope is that others will benefit from understanding the construct of this change process. They will hopefully discover possible reasons for their efficacy or strengths within the processes of generative change.

We live in an increasingly complex educational world with many quick changes. Relational thought⁴ has shifted my fundamental understandings of change processes fully. I support the wish of Kenneth Gergen (2008, p. 124) "The hope is to bring forth new and more promising ways of life." Our world is changing rapidly. People demand systems and services that are more flexible and respectful. They are becoming aware that they are dependent on each other to achieve better success. It is not the individual who should be celebrated and put in the center, as Western culture has done for many ages and still does. Solving the immensely complex problems humanity meets now and in the future compels dialogical, collaboration and ecological solutions. So patterns of traditions, the way we always did the things and the taken-for-granted, are more and more questioned than ever so we can find these new solutions. The better understanding we have of these processes we engage in together, the more we can change our attitude towards it, together.

In the first part of this dissertation I question the taken-for-granted, or, business-as-usual approach of educational reform. I use the Chinese saying as a metaphor: Are we still eating the same soup? Is it time for a new recipe? So let's look at how we are used to look at change, and at what people do or make together in the change process. It is, in my opinion, a challenge to look at these processes in new ways, to what people are constructing together. By looking for something different from the business-as-usual approach, we might create new spaces for new approaches. Maybe we can give deeper meaning or understanding to our organized lives, involving others to participate in the change processes. Maybe we can establish processes in which we can learn and dialogue with each other to give meaning to the work we do, to give meaning to the contribution we deliver, and to the life we are living.

⁴ The relational approach to generative change is characterized by the attention to what people do or make together. The power to create change is located in ongoing processes between people (interaction, collaboration, meaning making). The terms social constructionism and relational constructionism are interchangeable used in this dissertation.





2

Business as usual

**Are we still eating the
same soup?**

“We need bold new solutions, not stale old slogans.”

(Hargreaves, 2009, p. x)

Introduction

There is a Chinese saying that I would like to use as a metaphor for this chapter when we talk about change: The ingredients change, but the soup remains the same. Is this still the case in educational change? Hargreaves quotation together with this Chinese saying, illustrate in a way the tension between this chapter and the next chapters. Are we still eating the same soup? And is it time for a new recipe? This chapter deals with the way in which educational change processes and educational reform have been seen in the past decades. I became more aware, by reading literature, analyzing, reflecting and observing the different approaches throughout decades of attempted educational change, that most people still address change driven from their own deeper understanding and interpretation of the more traditional ways. It seems that we still treat change processes as makeable, manageable, controllable and predictable entities with a beginning and an end, often initiated by others, such as government or policymakers and so called experts, rather than teachers and their students. In spite of all my professional experience in education I was quite shocked to discover that this idea still prevails in the educational change efforts. Hargreaves quotation reveals the tip of the iceberg. I will try to argue that this traditional way of approaching change has to be dissolved, as it were, and that we need other or new ways of approaching change as a process.

Approaching change as a predictable, makeable, manageable, controllable entity appears to me contrary to the nature of change. While change is ever moving, dynamic and ongoing, change was and still is often treated as a static something, an entity. De Caluwé & Vermaak (2006) come up with an interesting point of view. He points out that when change is the only constant in our universe, it would perhaps be better not to try to control it. Perhaps we need to deal better with coincidence, instead of thinking that we may have control of change processes by detailed planning as if we can foresee everything what will happen.

I became aware that, in my own conception, influenced by theories but perhaps even more by life and work experience, I have come to see change more and more as something that occurs within the moment. A sad occasion in my working life forced this insight on me. When I was 27, my friend and school leader suddenly died of a heart attack at the age of 37, leaving a young family behind. This was so shocking to me that I realized that change happens in a second, and that we think we know what will happen in the next moment, but we do not. I became very much aware of the unpredictability and uncontrollability of life. I had to address change in a way that was totally new to me. To me life is change and coincidence is an essential feature of the nature of change. This disturbing experience showed me that my steps today will decide the steps of tomorrow. Yes we can make our plans, and yes we must have our dreams of and desires for our future reality, but we also have to be aware of the moments of change while we are within the change moment. We should not live too much in the future or in the past, but live in the *Now* as Eckhart Tolle (2006) says in his book *The Power of Now*. We will see in the dissection of *the I Believe in You! process* that we can use the many unforeseen moments to strengthen the change process.

The way we look at things in life determines to a large extent what we will see. Lagerweij (2004, p. 159) refers to the work of Laing (1970) when he cites "Wat u niet ziet, ziet u niet totdat u het inziet. En wat u niet inziet, ziet u niet totdat u het inziet. En als u het inziet is het altijd een onverwachte gebeurtenis." (What you don't see, you do not see, until you see it. And what you are not aware of, you are not aware of until you become aware of it. And when you become aware of it, it always happens unexpectedly.) The word 'happens' is crucial in my opinion. When we talk about change it is not something done by you or someone else does for you. It happens.

So seeing change as manageable, controllable, predictable, etcetera, greatly influences the next steps we take in the change process and how we approach it. The way we talk about change leads us to believe that this way of thinking about change is “natural” or “reality”. We like to have control of our environment. We think that this helps us to remain balanced. We construct emotions like ‘feeling good’ and ‘feeling safe’ that seem to guide the process of constructing the so-called manageable reality. It is my belief, and experience, that treating change in this unilateral way often leads to unilateral outcomes or solutions, which are limited in fact by our own beliefs, our idea of change. It means that we need to break out of this box, to find “new bold solutions” and find alternative ways in the many moments of change processes, when decisions have to be made. I will explain in chapter 4, *Time for a new recipe*, that there are other ways to look at change processes, which lead to other outcomes or solutions. Unfortunately, we will see in the historical overview that this traditional view has constantly influenced educational change processes, and does so even today. Many educational change processes have failed and have made many educators even more suspicious of the meaning of change. The never-ending stream of reform actions poured out over schools makes teachers ask the questions, “What is new? Are we really sure this will help us and our students? Do we really want to eat the same soup?”

Change is usual business in education

Change, as De Caluwé & Vermaak (2006) state, is not an incidental happening, but a constant in our universe, a continuous process. Educational change or reform, the field of my work experience, is no exception to this. Our society has increased in complexity and this also affects schools and the people working in them. I wonder whether it is us, the people within the system, who makes it more and more complex. It reminds me of a meeting with a Taoist monk in Ladakh in the North of India. He explained to me the Taoist ideas about change from *the Book of the Way* by Lao-Tzu (600 BC) and said that the more we want to get a hold on change, the more we lose our grip of it. Being a teacher myself, I think that in practice many teachers deal with daily change in their classrooms, trying to make things better. Frequently, we are focused on the content of change rather than the process, on the moment, the happening as such. Teachers or educators are often not fully aware of this. They do their best to keep afloat in the turmoil of complex school life.

The human factor, which is indispensable to education, is a factor that should not be underestimated, but it has often been treated by so-called experts as an instrument which may be used to bring about change. Human beings are in this view, seen as wheels in the machine of change. The challenge of educational reform is to appreciate the fact that education is human work and to work with the dynamic and unique character of each individual or group in each local school. Hargreaves (2009) states very clearly that we need a new way (a fourth way) building on the best we have learned from the past without retreating or reinventing the worst of them. As Fullan (2008) explains in *The Six Secrets of Change*, we cannot use one approach to fit all others. We should give back the power of change to those who bring about change in the daily work of the classrooms and schools. I have often noticed that solutions found by others for teachers seem to lead us even further away from the outcome we want to achieve. Let us have a look at the different meanings of change, educational reform and ‘the business as usual’, and then give a historical view.

Educational change, educational reform, school improvement, innovation

The study of educational change is quite young. It is only since the 1960s that educational change has been studied as a phenomenon. Fullan (2008) states that he is happy that we finally can learn from the past. Many terms have been used to refer to educational reform, but many of them are used interchangeably. The literature on the subject speaks of reform, educational change, development, improvement and innovation. All these concepts are used interchangeably without any real difference in meaning. To keep it simple, we can talk about change to improve education which means making better what exists. Or we can talk about change as creating totally new ways. Ofman (1995, p. 119) distinguishes three transitions: 1) to do something better, or to do more of the same, 2) to do something new, something that is familiar, 3) to do something new, where the outcome is not clear or unknown.⁵ To make things easier for the reader, I will use the terms *Educational Change and Educational Reform* in this dissertation, because it points to the field I am talking about, i.e. education, and on the other hand includes the word 'change', of which we can simply say it means making something different from what it was before. De Caluwé, Kor, Weggeman, Wijnen (2007) assume that the term change is used both for the product and for the process, and that there are various ideas about how to guide the process better. Lagerweij (2004) explains the different views on change. It is seen as an entity (static, something, a product, often focused on content, the WHAT) or seen as dynamic (forever ongoing, focused on the process, the HOW).

How we are used to looking at educational change

In many cases, educational change is seen as a controllable process. We want to make something different from what it was, make a plan and think about the steps to be taken. We take the steps, evaluate the plan and actions taken and the educational change process is finished. Educational change is often defined as: consciously planned changes. In recent years new ideas have been developing, but let us first look at the traditional way of looking at change processes.

Lagerweij (2004, p. 23) states that educational change is often seen as "het op planmatige wijze proberen de kwaliteit van het onderwijs in één of meer scholen te verbeteren in relatie tot bepaalde gewenste doelen. (trying to improve the quality of education in one or more schools in relation to certain desirable goals in a planned manner). He concludes that many theories about educational change come from the paradigm of planned change, which is just part of reality. Too often change has been seen as a totally controllable and analyzable phenomenon. This suggests that change passes linear, logical and structured ways. De Caluwé & Vermaak (2006) also conclude that many theories show, based on this idea, the strict, linear, systematic solutions easily overshoot the mark, because they devote too little attention to the underlying mechanism with diversity, with contrasts or underlying emotions.

The historical overview of educational change will demonstrate that this way of thinking has been common up to today. There is still a tendency to look at change processes as rational, gradient events which can be

⁵ Ofman (1995) sees less impact doing something better or the same within change processes. These are changes which are simple to plan and design by rational thinking. Types 2 and 3 are more difficult. In type 2 one has some knowledge about the wished reality, but the question is whether this reality will be like that. In type 3, where we do something new without knowing the outcomes, the transitions are most difficult; this asks for much courage of the leader.

planned. Kurt Lewin⁶ is one of the founders of *Planned Organizational Change* (POC). He talks about the more or less linear process of Unfreezing-Moving-Freezing. My criticism is that it is impossible to unfreeze and freeze processes. The change process is too dynamic, too fitful to do this. Too many issues influence the change process.

Change seen as a machine or clockwork

Morgan in *Images of Organizations* (1992) uses images to 'read' organizations. He explains that it is very important to be aware of our own observations, which in the end determine what the outcomes will be. This is what I said earlier: what you see is what you will get. I noticed this in the different posts which I have had. In my present work, I am very much aware that my observations and belief systems will determine which direction and actions will be taken. It is where the social constructionist thought shows that we should be aware of how we give meaning to our existing reality, which is highly influenced by the language games we play within our communities. I agree with Morgan that we still act on the basis of views that are founded mainly on mechanical and biological images that we have taken for granted. "Veel van onze schijnzekerheden over organisatie berusten op metaforen, zelfs al herkennen we die niet als zodanig. Zo praten we bijvoorbeeld over organisaties alsof het machines zijn, die zijn ontworpen om van tevoren vastgestelde doelstellingen te bereiken, en die gladjes en efficiënt moeten werken. Als gevolg hiervan proberen we organisaties vaak op mechanische wijze te organiseren en te leiden, waarbij we de menselijke factor naar de achtergrond verwijzen." (Many of our false certainties about organizations are based on metaphors; even if we do not recognize these. We talk about organizations as if they are machines, which are designed to reach aims set in advance, and which must work efficiently and smoothly. Consequently, we try to organize organizations or processes in a mechanical way, where we push the human factor to the background.) (Morgan, 1992, p.13).

We are often not aware that we still see processes or organizations in this way. Organizations and processes are complex realities which ask for multiple views. Morgan uses the metaphor of a machine to illustrate this view. The organization can be seen as a system of wheels making the organization work. When one wheel fails, we can fix it by replacing the wheel. This 'mechanical thinking' came into being at the time of the Industrial Revolution in Western society. When we study changes in organizations we see an increasing tendency towards bureaucracy and routine training in those days, which strongly influenced the way we now approach change processes. In December 2010 I had a meeting with other school advisors about *something new* coming to the classrooms. It is called a *group plan*. The idea is that when teachers know how to deal with long-term planning, with emphasis on the different levels of students in their classroom, this will strengthen their grip on this reality. It does not mean that planning is wrong, but we must realize that focusing too much on planning results in losing one's grip on reality: the change itself. We are still preparing the same soup in a mechanistic way. Just put it on the menu and the teachers and students, learners, will eat it. (but do they really?) We need a new way, by stepping out of the system expressing democratic and humanitarian values.

⁶ Kurt Lewin was a German-American psychologist, known as one of the modern pioneers of social, organizational, and applied psychology.

So the theories of classical management or scientific management were born in the early days of the 20th century. The classical management theorists devoted their attention to designing organizations as a whole, whereas the scientific managers were focused on the design and control of the individual tasks. Organizations were described by the classical management theorists as pieces of 'clockwork' or interdependent parts which were arranged in a strict order, hierarchically, and which were anchored by precisely defined protocols. The idea behind it was that organizations were rational systems which had to work as efficiently as possible. It was expected from all workmen that they would behave like machine parts. (Morgan, 1992) Frederick Taylor was the pioneer of scientific management. His principles still influence how we design and organize life and work today. Taylor had five principles:

1. Move all responsibilities for organizing work from workers to manager.
2. Use scientific methods.
3. Select the best man to do the designed task.
4. Train the workers to work efficiently.
5. Control the workers to make sure that procedures are followed and results are achieved.

Is it not amazing that after a century (Taylor died in 1915) we are still strongly influenced by these principles in all kinds of disciplines? I found this quite shocking. I was surprised myself at all these daily 'to do lists' which I used to draw up but had to change immediately. I was struck by the daily practice in schools, the way in which these school systems were organized, and how this construction frustrated reform or change attempts.

The soup and its ingredients

So what ingredients have I discovered while reading the literature? What makes up the soup we eat from day to day? When reading literature, I found many instances of how change processes are seen and treated in this mechanical and biological manner. In this perception, change is seen as something one can plan, control and predict. As I said before, we find something we want to change, make a plan and set some goals, determine the necessary conditions to reach planned goals, chop the process into little steps or actions, start following the steps in the agreed sequence, evaluate the process at the end, and that is it. The soup is ready. This is the way, I discovered, of preparing the soup. The process is planned with a beginning and an end confined in time. The issues are identified. They are then fragmented to make them more manageable, like wheels of a machine. An expert, or group of experts, who is often not part of the reality of the process, orchestrates the process deciding what is good for all. A little group makes decisions for a large group that is involved in the process. Sense-making or giving meaning is done by others. A lot of attention is devoted to the run-up to the process, to making the best plan, whereas change actually occurs in or after the process. We try to apply proven, or scientific, methods to other situations. We then assume that what has worked in those cases will also work in our case. Fullan is a fervent critic of this. Scientifically proven means high quality and the only truth. The best option. One fix for all. We then spare no efforts and energy to keep the plan working. And finally we talk a lot about the plan, but too little about the real story. The people working in the planned process are still too often seen, from a Taylorist view, as interchangeable with others. And above all, we make the process controllable. The issues of change are made into entities, like learning outcomes, so are meant to be controllable. This splits the process into many fragments. It is about quality,

but what is quality? The focus is on outcomes and results. But in this complex world, what is the result or outcome? And what decides its quality? And for whom is it anyway?

Day (2000), Fullan (1991,2005, 2008), Hargreaves (2009), Lagerweij (2004), Mitchell & Sackney (2000, 2009), Morgan (1992), Schollaert (2007), Sharmar (2010) and many other scholars state that these beliefs and assumptions are hidden so deeply in people that they do not even see alternatives. Schools are still heavily influenced by these mechanical approaches. The iron cage of a mechanical system or view is still strong. One of the most basic problems in modern management is that this mechanistic view is so deeply rooted in our daily assumptions about organizations that it is often very difficult to organize in other ways. (Morgan, 1992) Ghosal and Barlett (in Morgan, 1992, p. 252) argue that creativity and individual initiative in the so called modern organization are still subordinate to the alleged need of consistence and control. Within the described bureaucratic form, specialization, routine and control lead to predictability and efficiency. Taking a view of these insights, I will concentrate on three of them. Choosing them helps me to formulate the arguments as to why we have too much of this business-as-usual within educational reform and why there is an urgent need for other views or approaches. The historical review below will emphasize this motivation.

1. Planned and predicted change: the usual recipe for the soup

It is easy to refute this statement. How on earth can we organize change processes without a plan? Is there life without a plan? Why not set some goals? Why not plan activities? Why...? We are so used to asking these questions. Look at our daily private lives. I noticed this when coming back after living and working in the tropics for six years. Even young children seem to need a diary or schedule to keep a grip on their busy lives. Is it something typical Western? Is it culturally and historically determined? I had almost forgotten this aspect. I must admit that it is one of the aspects I do not like about my present life in Europe. Of course, when we want to change something or want to achieve something, we need to take action, and it is clear that as soon as we know in which direction we want to go, we know what steps to take. By planning we make the work manageable and controllable. In a way, by planning we think we know what our future, a new reality, will be like. It helps us to keep control but also to manage life. We feel we need that in the complexity of day-to-day life. It almost works like a recipe for a good soup. We like the soup, because we are used to it. We just have to follow the instructions on the package, almost automatically, and the soup is ready to eat. But do we realize the impact of this way of preparing the same soup? I think in a way it is necessary to increase our awareness of how we view change. We must be aware of the recipe and our ways of cooking. We must appreciate its good intentions, but simultaneously we must also be critical of its effects.

Planned educational change

When working with educational change we have to do the same. I am not arguing that planning is wrong. We cannot sit in a boat without knowing where to go and how to get there. That would not lead us anywhere. In a way, we would be adrift. Planning certainly plays a role in the process of change, especially when working with larger groups of people. It is, therefore, not the plan which I think is the issue, but it is how we deal with the plan. I am convinced that we are still too unaware of how deeply rooted the idea is that the plan, which we have often spent many hours preparing, is definitely what we will follow and what will lead to the desired change, the reality wished for. But the balance is wrong if we focus too much attention on the

plan, and too little on the change itself. It is our flexibility – what I will call later our improvisational skills – which in the end determines the success of change. De Caluwé et al (2006, 2007) point out that too often we spend lots of time and effort on designing this so-called planned change on the basis of rational approaches. He doubts the effectiveness of this. “At some moment the belief was created, the belief that nature was a giant clockwork with discrete sub-units functioning smoothly to create the larger whole, thus was born the rational, analytical view of the World which we still live today.” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 2)

My own experiences go back to the days (2007) when I assisted in the design of the PROGRESS Program in Suriname. I worked for a Belgian Organization (VVOB) in Suriname, which aimed to strengthen the elementary education system. We developed a program, which we later called PROGRESS (PROGRam for Effective Schools in Suriname), together with local people by means of a participative process. I will write more about this program in chapter 6 *Setting the stage*. We had been instructed by the Belgian financier (DGOS) to design a very detailed plan covering more than three years of change process. We had to work out, for example, how many people would participate in how many workshops in 2010 or 2011, what it would cost and what (Smart) goals we would reach. We had to describe many indicators which would help to control and manage the set goals and many activities. In the middle of the night, amid frustrations caused by deadlines, I wondered, how on earth could we have known in 2007 how many people would attend certain workshops and if anything would be changed in 2010, 2011 and 2012? How could we have known all these steps and results, when we did not yet know what the responses would be to the first step? How could we have known what would happen when nothing had happened yet? I felt it was, in a way, a waste of time to look into the future in this very detailed way. I already knew that we would have to change the program and planning several times when the time, reality and real practice came. Looking back four years later, I can only conclude that by working in this still mechanistic way many working hours had to be spent to adjust the plan again and again. Once again, it is not that our planning is at fault, but we must realize what effects our detailed plans have on the change process. We look at the content of the plan, but too little at the process. I am sorry to say this, but I see a parallel to the way in which we deal with changes in present-day education in the Netherlands. More and more attention is given to planning (bureaucracy). The teacher’s job seems to be making plans, testing plans and evaluating plans, training students to succeed these tests, but I think their main job should be concerned with change itself: their work with students.

On the basis of his research, De Caluwé & Vermaak (2006) state that the extent to which changes can be directed and planned is often overestimated. According to De Caluwé, it turns out that 75-80% of changes have not been effected in accordance with the original plan. The work of Lagerweij (2004) illustrates how the approach of detailed planning of educational change is still common, he refers to the Dutch government. The government still expects schools to make detailed plans. Lagerweij shows that research has shown that there is hardly any consistency between the paper school plan and day-to-day practice. He says there is a natural, autonomous dynamism within the change process. In his research, he shows that these dynamics are strong and have important effects on the change process. In his view, change should not only deal with the planned changes, but also with the autonomous and unexpected changes. This again shows that we must appreciate planned change, but also have to be open to the change itself.

Reality is complex, and moves, or changes. Louis & Miles (1990) come to the conclusion that these dynamics ask for evolutionary planning not static planning. Present educational reality is also very complex. People live and work together at multiple levels; change happens at all these levels within all kinds of different social constructions. As the school leader of a primary school in the south of the Netherlands (1989-1999), I had to design lots of plans, often not linked to our practice. These plans were checked by school inspectors sent to the school by the government on a regular basis. One day a school inspector arrived to

check my planning. Instead of looking at the actual reality at the school, he looked at his list of protocols and procedures. According to his checklist there should have been a music program. This was not at all what we were concerned with as far as change was concerned. Our business was dealing with the ongoing stream of new children and parents, increasing school staff, organizing new locations for all these children, raising money, dealing with the emotions of parents having to send their children to another location, and so on. Even though this school inspector understood the issues we were faced with, I still had to send him this music program as soon as possible. This was not my focus at all, but the power game (stop the money supply to the school) forced me to write a music program. I played the game too. I copied a music program, changed the name and sent it to the inspector's office. After three weeks I received a letter stating that everything had been approved. The reader may think that this is my usual way of working, but that is not the case at all. The situation, the construction of the system, forced me to act in this way.

Focus on plan or change?

Too much planning can result in giving too much attention to the plan or program. Minzberg (1979) warns us against giving too much attention to programming, a vast amount of bureaucracy and too little to the real process. I face exactly the same situation in my present work. Teachers and school leaders are too busy with all this bureaucracy, and it seems that they have less and less time for the real process, the work of the students. Planning goals is also a rational activity. I cannot think of any situation where we have not had to adjust the goals to the reality of the moment. Weick (1979) states that predictable roads hardly exist in planned and paved change processes. The loosely coupled systems interact slowly, quickly or not at all with one another. This idea is at odds with the image of the organization or process as a consciously, rationally designed machine in which every part matches the other and delivers predictable products. Weick also states that the theory of the planned process is often totally different from real practice. His observations show that organizations or processes are hardly characterized as entities with one direction and strong rational approaches. Organizations and processes are more characterized as networks of autonomous nuclei which interact continuously with each other and so find their identity and direction.

Many present scholars such as Day, De Caluwé, Fullan, Gergen, Hargreaves, Homan, Hosking, Lagerweij, McNamee and many others emphasize the dynamic character of change in their work. Hosking (2002) speaks of so-called multiple co-ordinations which happen simultaneously within all these different constructs (realities). My experiences show that, while as a school leader I was working in a network of school board or fellow school leaders, my staff was working in the classrooms dealing with their daily practice, working in a network of children and their parents. The children in their turn were working with their fellow students or friends in their networks. From the outside, all this seemed to take place independently, but when we take a closer look it all worked in relation to one another, interdependently. Interventions at one level, had an impact on other levels.

Fullan (1991, 2005, 2008) finds that planning takes place in the action and not in advance. "Onderwijsverandering verloopt niet langs vaste lijnen van logica en verstand alleen. Scholen veranderen. Scholen ontwikkelen zich langs alle dimensies die organismen kennen". (Educational change takes place not along the lines of logic and mind only. Schools change. Schools develop along every dimension that organism know." (Lagerweij, 2004, p. 46). I have often noticed this while working with schools and supporting their change processes. Although I always prepare my workshop or activities, it is in the end the experience at the moment that I have to follow. By observing the process, by collecting data, by talking about the process with others, I improvise and adjust the actions moment by moment. So it is not only about logic and mind, but also about emotions and heart! De Caluwé (2006, p. 53) underlines Fullan's statement

in citing Rittel and Weber (1973), who state that one tends to give too much attention to the malleability of problems: enucleate and dissolve into parts; approach the problem in sequence: first analyze, then design the solution and then operate; divide content problems and persons who are concerned with it and separate this from the context. We should see change no longer as a planned journey through a known landscape, but more as an exploration of an unknown landscape. (Boonstra in: Van den Nieuwenhof (2005, p.13)

Power and manageability

The traditional view of planned change processes is based on a mechanistic world view, which is associated with a positivist epistemology and rationalist methodology. From this perspective, manageability and power reside at the top of the school organization and roles, responsibilities, and spheres of decision-making are clearly delineated. A fundamental assumption of this world view is that there is only one best way to do certain things and that the best way can be discovered through experimentation and disseminated through direct instruction. "Recent investigations have shot gaping holes through the mechanistic way. They have demonstrated that there is never just one way or even one best way. Instead, alternative voices and understanding are not only possible but are always present." (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000, p. 126). So there seems to be a construction of assumptions and belief systems of this mechanistic world view and bureaucratic mode. This social construction has sought to render the people and processes predictable and therefore controllable. In this view, there is a place for every player but ... everyone stays in that place. In this view, as I see it, schools are still treated in the same way. Fullan (1991) is very clear that change is not a fully predictable process. Fullan (p. 128) also explains that we must not try to find answers in the ready-made guidelines, "but by struggling and modifying events and processes that are intrinsically complicated, difficult to pin down, and ever changing. Rational planning models do not work." This shows, I think, how important it is to move away from the static view towards a more dynamic view.

2. The expert orchestrates the process

Another issue I would like to address in this business-as-usual approach is the issue of the expert. It reminds me of my parents' stories about the doctor, the priest or the civil-law notary of the village where they lived in the 1940s. They still see them as experts, who know it all. They have studied, so they are right. My parents are now in their 80s and have changed their views because of many occasions on which reality did not seem to be what they thought it would be. The know-alls do not have a monopoly on the truth after all. When we look at change processes we should be critical as to who is orchestrating the process. Looking at things from the mechanistic tradition, the expert knows which direction to go. He knows how to plan, selects the ingredients and cooks the soup. It is a little like the Carnival song they sang in Aruba "Follow the leader, follow the leader", but in this case it is "Follow the expert". I often notice this assumption in my school advisory work. When confusion or uncertainty rises to a certain level, the whole staff waits for the expert to come up with one and only correct answer. People are not always aware of doing so, but they do. In the meantime, I have enough experience to be aware of this phenomenon.

Who is in charge?

When we ask, "Who is in charge of the change process?", we often see in past educational reform, which often failed, and sometimes in present reform that one or more persons are in charge of traditionally planned change processes. We have seen before, in the mechanistic way of viewing and dealing with change

processes, that Taylorism has played a significant role in the absence of power of workers in change processes. One of Taylor's principles was to move all responsibility from the workers to the manager, and to use specialists. As a result, a small group designs and plans the change process, separated from those who will undergo the change process and have to put the changes into practice. The power is taken away, and through it, the responsibility for change. The first reaction to this could be that these days this is not the case anymore. What I experience more and more in the Dutch educational system, however, is that teachers are asked for their opinion, but that their opinions are not always taken seriously. I experienced this in a staff meeting where we talked about the children's social behavior problems. The teachers immediately started to discuss possible solutions, without involving the students themselves. School leaders discuss school problems with their senior staff, decide on an intervention to be used by the teachers, present their well-intentioned solution to their teachers and meet resistance.

I do not want to give the impression that experts are not needed anymore. But the point is how we use experts in the change process and how we give voice to those who participate or are affected by these changes. It is about how we see experts, how we socially construct our meaning about this. Who determines who is the expert? In the social constructionist view, every participant within the change process can be the expert. The input of each is valued as important. The soup is hard to eat when it is not your favorite taste. The soup will be more palatable when we have prepared it together, assuming our cooking skills are good enough. As long as we define the experts as being separated from our realities and give them a certain power in the change process by putting them in higher positions, we construct them as entities. In doing so, we make them static. But most of all we put those who need to produce the change, such as students and teachers, on the side line. From a social constructionist orientation one could ask, "What do we do that makes people experts?"

The human factor which was underestimated, in the mechanistic, biological approach, seems to determine to a large extent the success or failure of change processes. You could say there are briefly four groups that are involved in the educational change process: the policymakers, the school boards, the schools and their teachers, and the students and their parents. What we still observe is that these groups operate separately from one another in the change process. On many occasions, as will see in the next section, there is hardly any open or connecting communication. Those who make the decisions, or plans, are not those who benefit, such as the students. Those who have to implement changes, i.e. the teachers, are often not the ones who benefit from the changes or who may have determined these changes. Policymakers or school boards such as those in the Netherlands, often hardly know the real story of teachers' lives in schools. Homan (2005) speaks of the formal stories and the informal stories. Fullan (1991) speaks of the smaller and bigger pictures. Change initiators have to make more efforts to hear the real stories to be successful in reform. Fullan (1991, 2005, 2008) emphasizes the importance of giving meaning to change, which is often neglected. By hearing all the stories we understand all these different meanings better. As a result, we may be a little bit more successful in the change process. Hargreaves (2009, p. 107) puts an interesting view by stepping out of the system. He names it the Fourth Way, "is a democratic and professional path to improvement that builds from the bottom, steers from the top, and provides support and pressure from the sides."

The hierarchical structures

The hierarchical structures that still exist, in schools and school boards which I visit, seem to restrict or slow down the process in schools. This also is the power issue. When I talk to teachers I often observe their feelings of decreasing passion and involvement in the desired changes. When I visit school board offices, I

see rooms decorated with beautifully designed posters and flyers about the mission statements of education they have. The formal stories I hear are perfect. But when I visit schools and hear the real stories of teachers' daily lives, I discover a wide gap between the two. Teachers often say they are not seen by their superiors. Planned change implies smart goals. This is another common view in planned change. By setting goals, one thinks it helps to achieve the desired outcomes of the plan better. In a way this is logical. When you know what you want, it is easier to work on it. The only problem is that these goals are often set by experts or policymakers, and not by those who have to reach these goals, i.e. the teachers and the students, or that the set goals are such that they are not in keeping with the reality of change, which characterizes the dynamics of education. The problem with goals is that everyone can place his own interpretation on these goals. Everybody can say, "this is my goal", "this is my opinion". The problem is that we often think that what is written on paper means the same to everyone. Goals are often vague, ambiguous, separated from daily practice and reality. Nevertheless, lots of efforts are spent on setting these goals. The historical overview will show that, in many educational reform projects, products or methods were developed by experts such as scientists outside schools to be used by teachers. In those days, the somewhat naïve view was that education could be changed by rational planning and scientific research into new products or approaches, which were then distributed to the teachers.

De Caluwé et al (2006, 2007) observe an interesting mechanism operating in teachers when they do not like the soup. He calls this phenomenon *the pocket veto*. Even though the senior staff have reached agreements about the planned change, the teachers, or the implementers, say yes but do the opposite. On the outside it looks as if the formal change is working, but inside teachers think, do and feel other things. They do not eat the soup when they do not like it. In this way they are still in charge. Their veto is hidden in their pockets. The innovation may look all right, but in the long run it does not work. Is this not something we have all experienced?

Are teachers and students given power?

The pyramid structure in school systems is still a reality. The leader is at the top and the power is legally given to the leader and that is not a subject of discussion. The workers, or teachers, listen; rationality and reasoning are dominant principles, planning and manageability are the basis for steering, the teachers, or workers, can be replaced. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) state that the usual construction of education has put the people in the school on the fringe of what is happening. This leads to inner withdrawal from the change process. Change or improvement fails, as long as the teachers and students are positioned in the debate as objects to be manipulated and controlled rather than as professional creators of a learning culture. Also Hargreaves (2009) emphasizes the productive roles teachers and students should have. In *Profound Improvement* (2000, p. 2) Mitchell & Sackney cite Starrat who argues that schools and learning are too much managed, manipulated, controlled, organized, and constrained by adults who are, at best, out of touch with the realities with which teachers and students live. A simple question in the change process can be, "Who is in it and who is not?" Or, "Who is seen as the expert and who is not?" From the social constructionist point of view, we are all experts. The answer will show what kind of change process is going on. It will throw light on who has the power and who has not. It is not only important that individuals are asked to strengthen and give meaning to the change process, but it is perhaps even more important that they can participate actively in the process, as they did in the Surinamese process. Being heard, being seen and being understood. Mitchell and Sackney (2000, p. 127) criticize most previous attempts at educational attempts: "Change is rather something that has been done to teachers than something that has been done by teachers." Fullan has tried almost his whole life to understand the phenomenon of educational change. In *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (2007, 4th ed.) he recognizes the importance of seeing teachers as active and

worthwhile partners in the educational change process. His wise and simple insight is that there will be no change without the teachers and their students. "We have to know what change looks like from the point of view of the teacher, student, parents, administrator, if we are to understand the actions and reactions of individuals; and if we are to comprehend the big picture, we must combine the aggregate knowledge of these individual situations with an understanding of organizational and institutional factors that influence the process of change." (Fullan, 1991, p. xi) He concludes, "If we know one thing about innovation and reform, it is that it cannot be done successfully to others." (p. xvi). Alienation takes place when those who are involved in the change cannot play an active role and feel that they are manipulated, steered by others. (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000) Just visit one school and talk with any teacher and they will tell you many stories of their experiences when others told them what and how to change.

On the basis of these insights, I think that people construct their understanding, or as the social constructionists say meanings, based on their social interactions and social arrangements. Of course, this has always been the case, but in the clockwork view it has not always been evident, has not been seen and, above all, has not been talked about. Throughout the years it has become more and more obvious. One should not silence those who are involved and implement or undergo the change. We need to listen to all these sounds in the clockwork and above all to what music is played. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) emphasize this traditional view. This is a construction of assumptions and belief systems of a mechanistic world view and a bureaucratic mode. This social construction has sought to render the people and processes predictable and therefore controllable. In this view there is a place for every player.

3. How do we communicate and understand the plan or change?

Listening to the many sounds of *the change music* could be a metaphor referring to this next section. How does the mechanical view influence communication? This is another aspect that seems to arise from my literature study, giving meaning to the change process. With the help of the machine or clockwork metaphor, the organization and, consequently, the process were divided into parts separated from each other. As we have seen before this separation led to separate tasks and responsibilities. The power issue even increases the gap between all these groups. Formerly, and it is sometimes still the case, plans were devised and goals were set for the workers by others. The plan was designed and discussed in detail in the small groups of so-called experts. They could be the leaders or policy-makers, or the experts on change such as researchers. Because of all the separate layers and well-defined responsibilities in the organization, communication took place within these separate groups but too little between the groups. Power was given to a small group over the larger groups of workers. The leaders' stories of how workers acted and thought were different from the real stories of the workers who lived and worked in the daily reality of the organization. But the leaders did not always realize this. They supposed that their story was the real story and acted on it. This seems odd, now that I am writing this. It seems like another time or space where this happened but, unfortunately, I still see this mechanism working today in so-called modern organizations. Communication may be improved by better insights, or better trained people (see one of the principles of Taylor) or even by better technologies like the Internet, but my own experiences in my present daily work in schools, with school boards, with individual teachers or within my own company, show that this mechanism still exists and has consequences for the change processes. What I observe is that leaders still think that once they have organized communication properly, in a structured manner, their construction is that what they see and hear, and the way they construct it is the real story. They think the meaning they give to this reality is the same as that of others. I call this the formal story. Their stories, however, differ frequently from those of their followers. They

tell different stories. Again, this need not be a problem. I think it is of all time. People construct and deconstruct their own stories many times. In relation with others these stories are under construction, they are ongoing and changing. We just need to be aware of this.

Separating formal and informal stories

Often communication is divided into parts, separating the formal and informal stories. Leaders often manage on the basis of their own, formal, stories. Communication, however, is not only formal, but also informal. What are people really talking about when they exchange their experiences? In this context I refer to the work of Homan, who once at a workshop expressed it in the following way. When people have a training or meeting they will contribute in the desired way, perhaps give answers in the desired way. But as soon as they go to the toilet they will tell others how they really experience the situation. It is in these informal moments that we can learn a lot about the real change processes going on. I use these informal moments often, because they give the opportunity to hear what people think about the process and what could make it better. This knowledge helps me to fine-tune the process to the moment. Communication is about people, colored by what we think might be, often misled into thinking that our constructed thoughts or impressions are the reality, the Truth. It is also then, within an open and safe environment that we can hear the real stories.

Are we talking about the same?

Another problem that occurs frequently is that although we may think that we are talking about the same change issues, this is often not the case. On one hand, it is partly caused by the limited or separated communication, which gives different meanings to the issues of the change process. On the other hand, it is caused by paying too little attention within the change process to the issue of giving meaning. In my present work in supporting ineffective staff to go on together in better ways, I try to stimulate different ways of communication between the different groups of the system, such as the students, teachers, parents and managers. By doing so they are put in relation again. I like the work of Fullan (1991, 2005, 2008), who provides interesting insights into this problem of giving meaning, which in his opinion causes change processes to fail. One of the reflections in my log reads, "After reading literature, my awareness is growing that defining change is difficult, or perhaps even impossible. To a large content it depends on what the collective memory is of past experiences and how the individual can be critically aware of his own influence in this. Members of the change process, and also outsiders, create all their own unique meaning of the change process and its issues. This construction is, I feel, an ongoing process of active participation and intense communication. Furthermore, I realize that the reader of this dissertation will do the same. And I am happy to invite him to derive his own meaning from the insights and experiences I am writing about. Change should be concerned more with generating linkages and relationships among the various stakeholders. The way we communicate has enormous effects on the relationships we build and consequently on change processes." (Log, May, 2010). Another problem is that there is a danger, that in cutting the cake of change into separate pieces, we communicate about the change process in separate parts and not about the whole. As we will see below, the responses between the different parts make the change and make it different each time and unpredictable.

The human factor and giving meaning

I refer to the Chinese saying of the Chinese soup, of which we know which ingredients to use to make a good soup. We also know the recipe, or the procedure. But what we do not know yet is what it will taste like.

We will experience this when we eat the soup (during the change so to speak). I realize now that however it will turn out to be, the mutual reactions will decide what the taste is like. My insights, noted down in my log, are that the human factor plays a crucial role in the change process in terms of giving meaning. This giving meaning will be different each time, it is a dynamic process. "The problem is that we turn giving meaning into something static as if it is an entity. From this thinking in terms of an entity, we move on in the change process without being aware of this static thinking. Change, and the issues that crop up in change, becomes an object in this way." (Log, June 2010)

If we spend little on mutual communication about this meaning giving process, we will be farther away from the success of change, often without realizing it. We think that we know what we are talking about, but in reality that is not the case at all. We all eat our own soup and think that it all tastes the same! Minzberg (1979) gives some idea of these loose, separated parts with his principle that the different factors within the change process influence one another permanently and decide how we will deal with the change process. This influence gives the process a different color each time. It shows its dynamic character. And above all it shows how unpredictable change is. The quotation from Ford that De Caluwé & Vermaak (2006, p. 114) cite is interesting, "Change is a phenomenon of time. It is the way people talk about the event, in which something appears to become, or turn into something else, where the 'something else' is seen as a result or outcome."

Educational change, interactions and relationships

Lagerweij (2004, p. 45) states that "Educational change is a dynamic occasion characterized by interactions and relationships between people. This is it what makes the process so difficult." Another risk involved in educational change and the question of giving meaning is that so-called proven methods or approaches are copied in other situations too easily. The meaning-giving by a small group of experts and policymakers is passed on to the larger group of workers, i.e. the teachers. Huberman (1992, p. 7) states that "Education is a tricky business. We try to plan and to implement programs which are not tried out in these certain contexts. We never know if they will work in other contexts, until we have tried... We try to achieve planned goals and outcomes of which we are not sure if these are reachable. We try to change habits of teachers, but in the meantime we are corroding the teachers' workplace." I think Huberman makes a good point here. It is interesting to see, in the often bureaucratic approach of planned change (mechanistic view), that leaders try to control the change by protocols and procedures etcetera, but that the workers try to avoid this steering, especially when it does not match their meaning giving. I would like to refer here to the issue of *pocket veto* I wrote about.

Being out of relation with the different layers within change processes and organizations results in different stories in the process. The problem, as I see it, is that people in the change process know too little about each other's realities; it seems as if they are hidden in the process but have great influence below the surface. I experienced this during *the I Believe In You!* process in Suriname. Not being locally or politically involved, I did not know the stories or realities of some important key persons. Thanks to the help of my friend and advisor of the Minister of Education in Suriname, Mr. Henri Ori, I became more aware of these often hidden stories and realities and could act on them better. In simple terms, people do not only bring their hands but also their hearts and minds to the process. Communication in the form of dialogues and real encounters will help us to make the difference, to improve mutual understanding. It is necessary to create bridges between all these hierarchical levels to hear one another's stories, to understand each other to be able to really work for the sake of change. The challenge in change processes is to unveil all these hidden stories. I have seen that creating many different moments of formal and informal communication, often in the

form of dialogues and collaborative activities, help to unveil them. De Caluwé (2002, p. 11) states that “Employees are acting permanently in the process and in their minds the process is created again and again each day based on the meanings they give according to their acting.” In addition, he cites Van Aken (1993), “Organization is an interaction pattern that unfolds in time, a social system that cannot be taken apart like a machine. Furthermore it is unknowable, that is that we can impossibly know which expectations all that are involved do have about their own and others’ roles, and about all mutual relationships in their formal and informal details, whereas these expectations above all are in continuous movement.”

Morgan (1992, p. 333) even doubts whether we must see organizations or change processes as a group of people who try to reach a mutual goal. In reality, he thinks, we are blind people who each try to decipher the change. He uses the metaphor of a handshake, which feels different at each moment. He says that we effect the separation into parts ourselves to handle change, it happens more in our head than in the change itself. In this way Morgan expresses the still common rational way to deal with change. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) promote the interpersonal capacity in which teachers share meaning and in this way work on profound improvement. Organizational structures can isolate parties and fragment the process! They emphasize the need for different structures which honor connections rather than separation, diversity rather than uniformity, empowerment rather than control, and inclusion rather than dominance. Structures are both invisible, as in cognitive assumptions and attributions, socio-cultural conditions, and collaborative processes, and visible, as in the physical arrangements of location, space, time and so on.

Emphasizing differences or appreciating them

By separation we emphasize the differences instead of embracing and appreciating them. This weakens the process. From the constructionist view we must be aware that it is natural that every participant of a change process understands the change differently, there are multiple views. By exchanging these different meanings in appreciative ways we can encounter each other and understand each other’s stories better. To be heard and seen, or understood, is important for the commitment to the process. Communication in the form of real encounters is very stimulating. Your story must be heard. An important conclusion of many scholars is that it is not that people resist change, but that it is more that they do not understand the change and do not know how to cope with it. (Day et al, 2000; Fullan, 1991, 1995; Lagerweij, 2004, Stevens, 2004, Hargreaves, 2009). I think it is very obvious that it is harder for people to get onto the boat of change if they do not know where it is going, or if it will complete the journey. Fullan makes it very clear in his work that communicating about the change and the change process helps to understand it better. We need to help teachers to understand the change if we want to be successful in reform. We will see in the analysis of *the I Believe In You! process* that understanding the change and the approach helped to make a success of the process. “The problem of meaning is central to making sense of educational reform”. (Fullan, 1991, p. 4) We have to understand the small and bigger pictures. We have to appreciate all stories. The small pictures concern the subjective meaning or lack of meaning for individuals at all levels of the education system. It is also important to build the bigger picture in a clear way for all those involved. I think that *in the I Believe In You! process* in Suriname the search for the small and bigger pictures of all who were involved underlines what Fullan observes. All those involved were able to give their opinion in the process. All these stories could be combined in a way to get the bigger picture. Those involved in the change process need to understand what it is that should change and how it can be best accomplished, while realizing that the *what* and *how* constantly interact and reshape each other. Solutions must come out as the byproducts of the process. “The interface between individual and collective meaning and action in everyday situations is where change stands or falls.”(Fullan, 1991, p. 5) Fullan emphasizes that everyone in the change process is important and must be seen; everybody has his own responsibility. It is my view and experience that there

should be an ongoing connecting dialog in the change process. Fullan concludes that real change lies in how we deal with the many subjective realities (or meanings) and that how they are addressed or ignored is crucial. "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it is as simple and as complex as that." (Fullan, 1991, p. 117) Hargreaves (2009) goes even further by not only looking in how we give meaning to many aspects of education and change in the system, but also how we give meaning to the system itself.

Historical review: Are we still eating the same soup?

Remember the Chinese saying at the beginning of this chapter: *Are we still eating the same soup?* In other words, do we still approach educational change in the way of Morgan's (1992) clockwork or machine metaphor? Or are we preparing a new kind of soup? It is interesting to incorporate the findings so far into the historical review of educational change. Educational change in the Western world, as in the Netherlands, where I now live, usually follows that in the USA. Even though there has been a long tradition of teachers trying to improve their educational work on a daily basis, the study of educational change, reform or innovation is quite young and started somewhere in the 1960s. Fullan (1991, 2005, 2008) is quite positive when he states that in spite of many failures in the past, we seem to learn more and more about educational change. Hargreaves (2009) expresses that we must take the best lessons of the past and bring them into the future. That is hopeful. It is very clear to me that, after all those years of organized change, lessons can still be learnt. It was quite an eye opener that the paradigm of planned change, which is predictable and controllable and done to or over the heads of people has been an important connecting thread throughout the years of educational reform initiatives in the Western world. Even today, in my present work as school advisor, I would say that I daily observe the strong influence of these mechanistic or Taylorist beliefs in education. I agree in this with findings by Branson (2010), De Caluwé (2002), Fullan (1991, 2005, 2008), Hargreaves (2009), Lagerweij (2004), Mitchell and Sackney (2000, 2009), Morgan (1992).

After reading their work I have tried to combine their views and compose a brief overview. I must point out to the reader that in reality the periods were not strictly divided into periods of ten years. The most important thing is to demonstrate the ongoing strong influence, with its ups and downs, of the concept of planned change. "The history of implementation is not pleasant. It shows that planned change attempts rarely succeed as intended. As some sayings go 'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip', 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating', and 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions'." (Fullan, 1991, p. 9) It is only in the last few years that we have come to see that the proof is in the pudding. Lagerweij is even more optimistic when he says that in spite of the fact that we have had to deal with many failures and that it sometimes seems nothing has changed, when we look to the long term, we will notice that our education has changed, but there have also been ups and downs.

The 1960s

The history of the study of educational change is quite young. Since the 1960s we have arrived at a better understanding of the processes of Change in education. That does not mean that there was no change before the 1960s. Change has always been part of education as De Caluwé says. It is inherent in working with human beings. Before the 1960s, at least in the Netherlands as Lagerweij (2004) explains, it was the

period of pioneers. The reform movement with pioneers like Montessori, Petersen, Ligthart, Decroly, Steiner, Dewey, Boeke and so on tried to stimulate change in traditional schools by spreading their ideas. The approach to the child, you could say child-centered education, was an idea they had in common. Before the 1950s there were no strong incentives on the part of the government to change education.

In the 1960s the Russians launched their first satellite Sputnik, which created a real Sputnik shock in the Western world. It is from that time that one started to question the quality of education. Competition resulted in increased quality and the government started to influence education by financing many large-scale innovation projects. In a way this Sputnik shock stimulated innovation in schools. The idea of the changeability of education was in some way naïve. The government was most concerned with how many innovations were undertaken. "The more innovations, the better it seemed for the own career ladder of the superintendents." (Fullan, 1991, p. 5) Science had a considerable influence on these change efforts. Governments and policymakers were happy to use the products of science, often for their own benefits. This is when the government wanted to exert a greater influence on education and its quality and started to go about it in a systematic manner.

This is when, I think, the assumption was first made that schools, or rather teachers, were not able to develop innovations themselves. Teachers were out, experts were in. It was without doubt a general thought that change is good. In the USA, RD&D Centers (Research, Development and Diffusion Centers) were organized throughout the country. The idea was that schools could improve their education better with the help of scientifically proven methods of developing methods and approaches for the teachers. As soon as products or methods had been developed they were distributed throughout the country. "One size fits all," was the motto. The study of educational innovation was still in its infancy, so one did what one thought was best. Experts were brought in to improve the quality of education, one did not have faith in the innovation capacity of teachers or schools. What was new in education was that the government no longer waited for change to come. It stimulated school experiments to a greater extent. Lessons were learnt, and were copied and used in other schools but, unfortunately, often without success. What helps one, helps all, was the idea. Scientifically proven methods were tried. It was thought that teachers could easily adapt these externally developed high-quality approaches because they had been scientifically proved. Science combined power and truth, was the common thought. Nowadays we know better. As De Caluwé, Hargreaves, Fullan, Lagerweij, and others have found in their research: Teachers are not naïve implementers, they are critical consumers. They will only use methods or approaches which are effective in their daily classrooms. Above all, they will use these methods in their own way, and not in the way prescribed by others. The RD & D Centers displayed a form of expert thinking: we know the truth or the answers, and you, i.e. teachers, do not. The scientists, not the teachers, had the power. Innovations were developed by others, the experts. They did not reflect critically enough on whether innovations would be appropriate. As long as they were innovating, it seemed to be all right. Hargreaves (2009, p. xi) names this way of educational reform *the First Way* "of state support and professional freedom, of innovation but also of inconsistency."

It must be clear that many of these innovations were not taken over by teachers. They felt very frustrated and they felt they were not seen in the innovation campaign. In spite of the well-intentioned government initiatives to influence education, teachers used their pocket veto (De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2006), saying yes and doing no. Negative experiences accumulated. Science, i.e. the experts lived in a reality totally different from the one of the teachers. The first attempts at planned change failed. Fullan, de Caluwé, Lagerweij, Hargreaves et al. conclude that teachers want to change, but they do not want to be changed by others. Change attempts initiated by the government, developed or designed by others, one fix for all, scientifically proven, experts were no guarantee for improving education.

When we look back on this period, the most important lesson from these large-scale reforms and modest attempts is that “veranderingen lopen niet langs een logisch, rationeel, gepland pad en zeker niet langs precies geplande stappen.” (Change doesn’t follow logical, rational, planned paths and surely not along precisely planned steps”. (Lagerweij, 2004, p. 27) A common idea in the Netherlands in those days was that protocols and procedures would guarantee good schools. As in Morgan’s clockwork image, the different roles in school were clear and separated. Everybody knew what to do and stayed in their own territory, in their own place. Teachers reigned supreme in their classrooms, administrators took care of the administration. The school ticked as a clock and was in good hands. Doesn’t this sound like the situation I still come across in schools?

The 1970s

In the 1970s, manageability seemed to be the key issues in educational reform. The government still exercised a strong influence. We only have to count the number of documents that were written by the government and policymakers over the years. In the Netherlands, Leune (1990) counted 244 policy documents over the period 1970-1992. The emphasis was on planning. Education followed the insights of business, where systematic planning and control, efficiency and effectiveness were the main issues. Because of the experiences in the 1960s teachers were frustrated and negative about all these government initiatives. Many innovations had been adopted, but were not critically evaluated. Little attention was paid to the follow-up. Change for the sake of Change seemed to be the motto. “The prime movers were distinguished university scholars; what was assumed to be the greatest strength, turned out to be the weakest point.” (Siberman, 1970, quoted by Fullan 1991, p. 22). They failed to ask the central question, “What are schools for?” And the question, “What do people do together to generate change?” was not asked. Instead, the focus was on fragmented parts of the change process. Lagerweij (2004) calls this the dispersed method. The interest in change processes and innovation grew. The word innovation was introduced into education. The greatest failure was that nobody succeeded in implementing all these well-developed ideas in schools. The distance between the developers and the implementers, the teachers and their practice, was still too great.

Human Relations and Human Relations Development appeared on the scene. Lagerweij (2004) notes that in the Netherlands the notion grew that education was not intended to serve the purpose of pedagogics, but also to combat inequality in society. The social needs in society encouraged the government to initiate and stimulate change. Social science made its appearance. Fullan labels this the period of implementation failure. Many innovations were originated by scholars who did not understand school practice or were too far away from it. Furthermore, a blend with political pressures. Fullan, Lagerweij, Hargreaves, Liebermann and many scholars of the international handbooks for educational change (2005) criticize the professional policymakers. “They tended to measure their success by the number of things they got started.”(Fullan, 1991, p. 179) After the first years of implementation their attention flagged, the glamour vanished, so the implementation not followed through and new shiny programs were introduced. There was still a lot to be learnt about innovation and implementation. Hargreaves (2009, p. xi) characterizes the 70s, beginning 80s as “the Second Way of market competition and educational standardization in which professional autonomy is lost.” More standardization points again to the idea of controllability and as I call it *the-everywhere-the-same-approach*.

The 1980s

The 1980s were not highly successful, but the positive thing about the 1980s was that we started to learn from the negative lessons of the 1960s and 1970s. The positive themes began to emerge but they were still often unrelated. There was a second 'Sputnik shock' in the Western world, like the one in the 1960s. The government, in spite of all its efforts, was again confronted with the lagging quality of schools. This was the period of "back to basics" and later the "effective schools movement". The assumption was that one could predict and influence the learning results of students. Learning results were the measure for quality. More planned activities were started to improve the basic subjects like reading and mathematics. Effectiveness became the norm in these years. Within these activities one was focused on planning, setting clear goals and manageability. The challenge was to reach these set goals as efficiently and effectively as possible. The goals were set by the government, not by schools and their teachers. Teachers were stimulated to standardize and control the learning process. Models like effective instruction for teachers, effective learning period, key issues for effective leadership and so on were developed and distributed among schools. Training for teachers and school leaders was organized.

These uniform models had proved their effectiveness, and the idea was that they could be used by all teachers in all schools. The purpose was to achieve maximum learning results. This approach is characterized by a more individualistic view. For example, lists of all kinds of issues were made and used to check if a school leader worked effectively or if a school had the characteristics mentioned on the effective school list. If we fix the 'broken parts', or if we give more attention to the forgotten parts, the school or the leader will act more effectively. By the end of the 1980s the government in the Netherlands was focusing more on the content of education, so they developed attainment goals. I remember I received a brochure about the attainment goals from the government with an endless list of subjects and with an enormous number of goals to be reached at all levels, not matching daily reality and classroom time. In spite of this, or perhaps thanks to, school effectiveness, school improvement, implementation of research and practice, staff development (e.g. coaching), leadership (e.g. the role of the leader), successes emerged, but they were still more or less independently documented.

Critics in Europe came up to against American reforms. Their criticism was that the Americans were "too inclined to look for the quick fix, and too preoccupied with ad hoc, small-scale, piecemeal innovations, instead of tackling more basic structures and more comprehensive reforms." (Fullan, 1991, p. 6)

Fullan (1991, pp. 6-7) describes two different forms of directions which occurred:

1. **Intensification:** the what and how of teaching was given extra attention in forms of increased definition of curriculum, mandated textbooks, standardized tests tightly aligned with curriculum, specification of teaching and administrative methods.
2. **Restructuring:** more attention was given to the structure of the system in forms of school based management, integration of multiple innovations, enhanced roles for teachers in instruction and decision making, restructured timetables, supporting collaborative work cultures, radical reorganization of teacher education, new roles in the schools like mentors and coaches, developing shared goals in the schools with teachers, administrators, the community, and sometimes students.

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the focus of the government in Western Europe shifted more to the content of education.

The 1990s to date:

In the 1990s new insights were gained on the basis of the experiences of previous years. In the Netherlands, the government wanted to decentralize, increase participation of teachers and parents in school policy, stimulate greater autonomy and above all they wanted to save money. In those days, I was school leader of a growing primary school in the south of the Netherlands. My main task was often to deal with the many guidelines and policy documents produced by the government in times of economic recession. This went so far that one day new guidelines arrived for heating expenses of schools. The temperature of the classrooms depended on the amount of money I could spend on heating! The more children I had, and it was a growth school, the less I would need for heating the school was the assumption. Planning and manageability went so far to control even the temperature of the classrooms, can you imagine? I had to deal with unlikely initiatives on the part of the government, like implementing ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in my school community consisting of about 400 students: 3 computers for 400 students spread out over 3 locations in the city.

Although the views of the schools inspectorate took on a more participative, collaborative orientation, they used uniform standards, assuming that these were objective and value-free. These standards were set by special organizations like S.L.O. (Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling⁷). Collaboration in Europe had its effects. Quality thinking started in Europe. The E.F.Q.M. (European Foundation for Quality Management) was founded. The principle of data feedback was introduced based on ideas going back to the 1960s. What we see here is the notion of manageability. Soon all the participating countries in northern Europe were using the same ideas about controlling the quality of education.

The product of this period was: Understanding change better. But does this mean that innovations have been more successful since the 1990s? The new wave in innovation was concerned with comprehensiveness. The attempts at change were aimed to bring systematic change to the schools from top to bottom and vice versa. More attention was given to the meaning of change. Fullan observes that intensification and restructuring work in combination. He is quite positive that the knowledge of educational change is accumulating. But again, are we preparing a better soup? As a school advisor visiting schools, I doubt very much whether the deeper beliefs and assumptions about change have changed enough. This study has made me more aware of the fact that this “machinery thinking” (Morgan 1992) still often directs the change processes.

Fullan (1991) uses two critical questions to examine how and what decisions have been made, namely:

1. Who benefits from the change? (the question concerning values)
2. How sound or feasible are the idea and approach? (the question concerning the capacity for implementation).

I like his use of ordinary language to explain things in a simple way. I would like to add a third question, “Who initiated and designed the change?” (i.e. process and content). In other words who were the active producers of change? I observe the trend in history that change has usually been designed by others than teachers or students. Changes have often been bad. A certain idea may be good as such, but may not be developed sufficiently. The false illusion, that one idea helps all, increases the chance of failure. Many ideas

⁷ S.L.O. is the National Institute for Curriculum Development

have been rushed into school practice without any clear notion as to how to put them into practice. In the 1990s I experienced an enormous increased bureaucracy. The government was cutting the finances for schools and as a school leader I had to deal with many regulations and paperwork. When I come back to my third question, "Who has designed or initiated the change", it is clear that many innovations have been mandated by the government. It supplies the money. It is interested in spending the country's money in the best way to achieve the best education. At least this is what it should do. Practice does not always bear this out.

Fullan (1991) concludes there are two other major problems when he reflects on the reform the past decades. "The appropriateness of innovations that are introduced" and "The bias of neglect vis-à-vis needed changes that are never so much promoted." (p.19) Innovations get generated through a mixture of political and educational motives; writing large, educational reform is very much a political process (see Sarason, 1990). I do not use the term political pejoratively, but only to recognize the process for what it is. Politically motivated change is accompanied by greater commitment of leaders, the power of new ideas, and additional resources; but it also produces overload, unrealistic time-lines, uncoordinated demands, simplistic solutions, misdirected efforts, inconsistencies, and underestimation of what it takes to bring about reform. If one is on the receiving end, as nearly all of us are, the main piece of advice is caveat implementer." (Fullan, 1991, p. 27) He continues: "In the past we have often worked on the notion that we just fix it and if all perform their roles better, we will have improved education." (p. 29)

Still, the government and their policymakers have the idea that planning is necessary. Still, school leaders need to make their plans in which they take responsibility for their actions in school. Still, one expects that there will be more change or reform when schools make more plans or are more active. After living abroad for six years, I am shocked when I visit classrooms in the Netherlands these days to find that this notion of planning is still firmly entrenched in the thinking and acting of many educators. Teachers in Dutch classrooms spend more and more time on following procedures and guidelines provided by others. They have to take time to write down what they have done each week. They have to test all children on a regular basis. They even have to produce a test calendar. Results, outcomes, are what it is all about. Tests are developed to control and predict the results. Special courses are given on trend analysis in the long term. I wonder if a teacher nowadays even has time to teach his students, let alone to be involved in the change, the learning process itself. Schools are burdened with inspections if they fail to achieve the desired outcomes, compared with other schools in a similar context. Lagerweij (2004) shows that this "planned work" is an illusion. Schools do not improve because of their well-defined plans. But blue print planning is still common and stimulated. Hargreaves (2009, p xi) makes a very critical observation by explaining that from the 90s till today there is a Third Way that tries to navigate between and beyond the market and the state and balance professional autonomy with accountability." His conclusions are sharp in expressing that we need to move forward from *The Third way* into *the Fourth Way*: "It is not a way to retain autocratic control over narrowly defined goals and targets(...)Through highly quality teachers committed to and capable of creating deep and broad teaching and learning, it builds powerful, responsible, and lively professional communities in an increasingly self-regulating but not self-absorbed or self-seeking profession."

Fullan as Hargreaves highlight educational change at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century by emphasizing that we need a new way, a *Fourth Way* (Hargreaves) or *fourth fase* (Fullan) to move into the educational reform future. "We are at the early stage of the fourth phase in which there is a growing realization that accountability per se is not the answer, and that the 'capacity' of the school system and its communities is the key to reform. Fundamental change, then, means basic transformations of educational institutions. As we move to the 21st century, the interests of the Western countries, and those around the world, whether they be in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa or Latin America, are beginning to

coincide. All now appear to agree that transformation of society – individually and interdependently – is essential, and that educational reform is the critical strategic intervention that will achieve these goals.” (Fullan, 2005, p.2) In *the Fourth Way* “a resilient democracy builds an inspiring inclusive vision through courageous national and state or provincial leadership that draws teachers to the profession and grants them public status within it.” (Hargreaves, 2009, p. 107) It is not just the responsibility of the teachers but of the whole community.

Reading this I think it means for the next period of reform that we have to focus on fundamental educational reforms. Accomplishing educational and societal reform in our present world based on this insight is really a challenge of enormous complexity. That’s why I think that a fundamental shift in our mindset is necessary. I therefore think that the radical focus of social constructionism, moving away from the individualistic towards a strong relational orientation will help us to make that shift.

To conclude

Reflecting on these findings, I have come to the conclusion that we still have to learn a lot about educational change. We have not yet found the Holy Grail or have not been able to put our finger on it. The idea of planned change has strongly influenced the change processes in schools from the early 1960s till today. There still is this stereotypical way of thinking about change, which is also found in education. It presents itself as ‘planning’ and ‘contingent approach’. Both are based on the assumption that change processes are rational and can be shaped. In the introduction to *the International Handbook of Educational Change* (2005, p. x), Hargreaves et al. are very clear, “Rational theories of planned change that move through predictable stages of implementation or ‘growth’ are poorly suited to schools where unexpected twists and turns are the norm rather than the exception in the ways they operate.” They also state that these days needs of schools do not fit in with all the models and theories that were developed in the past. They are of little use, because innovations are now multifarious and priorities compete. The change problems schools have to deal with are immensely complex today.

Lagerweij (2004) observes certain trends when he reviews all these decades of educational change. His observations are interesting because they show the ongoing influence of the so-called technical, or mechanical emphasis in educational change alternating with a more human or organic emphasis. In the period of technological emphasis, the focus is mainly on standardization, control and efficiency. In the period of human and organic emphasis the focus is on issues such as networking, participation in decision making and the development of cooperative work and culture in schools. The context plays an important role in this emphasis.

Period	Emphasis	Characteristics
19 20s	Technological emphasis	Organizations are seen as machinery
30-40s	Human factor, organic emphasis	Human relations, Hawthorne effect
50-60s	Technological emphasis	RD&D , curricula development
70-80s	Human factor, organic emphasis	Problem solving; social interaction; teambuilding
80-90s	Technological emphasis	Effective school; effective instruction, back to basics
90-00s	Human factor, organic emphasis	Learning organizations, constructivism
2000-to Date	New technological emphasis?	Bio-demic technology and ICT

Figure:
Lagerweij
2004, p. 72

Furthermore, Lagerweij finds that there seems to be a connection between an economic recession and emphasis on the need for goal-related strategies (efficiency). Similarly, in periods of a booming economy there is more emphasis on human factors (well-being). There is no need to explain the link between the present crisis and the enormous amount of money the Dutch Government wants to save on education. I observe an increase in the technological emphasis. All I see is the continued focus on results and outcomes or, in other words, the main focus on basic skills like reading, writing and mathematics. Lagerweij observes two trends in the last few decades and today's educational change agenda. One is the rational technological approach in which strategically-planned change is the focus and the second is the more human-orientated approach in which dynamic-interactional strategies are central. This is in other terms confirmed by Van den Nieuwenhof in *De Taal van Verandering (The Language of Change, 2005)*. He distinguishes a "design-approach" where plans are designed for achieving step by step the desired change, as well as the "developmental-approach" in which change is approached by letting it evolve and respond to the unforeseen moments. Both approaches can occur at the same time within the process.

Planned educational change is still business-as-usual

I have tried to show in this chapter that as far as planned change is concerned it is still business-as-usual in educational reform. Although this planned change has led to many failures and frustrations, it has had its use in starting to achieve quality improvement. It would be impolite to all those who have devoted their efforts to bringing about change. I do not want to give the impression that planned change as such is wrong and does not support the change process. In my opinion, some kind of planning is essential, especially in working with groups. One needs to know what step has to be taken next or in which direction the desired change should go but I doubt the idea that a detailed plan at the beginning of the change process guarantees that our design will follow the exactly outlined path. So it is not the plan that is the problem, but rather the understanding of the change process and the role the plan can play. Planning must be seen as one of the means, and not as the guarantee of predictable outcomes of processes.

Furthermore, it is a matter of how we deal with planning and are capable of responding to what happens during the change. It is correct to say that change processes cover more than the intended planned change. We have to be aware during the process that we also have to deal with unplanned, unforeseen changes, which occur spontaneously. Lagerweij (2004) also mentions autonomous changes, about which De Caluwé & Vermaak (2006), Ofman (1995) state that they just happen. We will see many examples of this in *the I Believe In You!* analysis, chapter 7.

When we look at 'business-as-usual', we can fortunately say that other insights have come to the fore in the last few decades and that they predict promising outcomes. It is for this reason that I think this dissertation may help a little to understand this other way of looking at change processes in order to arrive at other and better solutions. I can agree with Fullan's (1991) conclusions that planning starts during the operation. Scientific thinking is focused on goals that can be planned at the beginning of the process and tends to see processes as rational, gradient sequences. Structured planning, or planned change, points to linear, logical, structured process of change. But the nature of change is different. "Everything follows its own path, unhesitating for those who want to steer." (De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2006, p. 58) As far as change educational is concerned, it is not simple to steer process. Education changes, but not along logical paths, and certainly not in precisely planned steps. Instead of understanding change as a mechanical, rational, structured, planned etcetera process, educational change should be more focused on the emotional and the

unforeseen moments. Nevertheless people who are making these processes together act not only from their rational minds but, as Hargreaves explains in his work, also from their emotions.

As I see it, schools are miniature societies formed by people of all ages, human systems, human processes. Schools offer a place to work and to learn, offer structures, but in the end it is the people within the system who determine how to think, act and feel and what will change. The work of Mitchell and Sackney (2000, 2009) has made me even more aware that change, and consequently the learning processes in the classrooms, cannot as we often think be planned, controlled and steered. This unpredictability of change is what makes change difficult but also challenging and, for me after more than 25 years, a fascinating process. The work of Hargreaves (2009, p. 109) shows even more clearly that “the old ways no longer serve us and some of them has even actively betrayed us.” He makes it very clear: “We need bold new solutions, no stale old slogans.”(p. x)

My experiences and this Ph.D. have convinced me even more that we need dialogues, horizontal and vertical, within the system to hear the real stories of the working practitioners. In doing so we connect, on the basis of appreciating differences and strengths, create ownership and commitment. In doing so, we do not make the process simple, but we create a more powerful, durable and sustainable process of change. Unfortunately, I experience these days a lack of dialogic practices, a lack of connectedness between the different hierarchical layers in the school system. Students, teachers and school leaders often do not feel seen or heard. I experience, especially in these days of economic recession and financial crisis, an increasing focus on planning, control and accountability as far as school results are concerned, which results in losing the most precious aspect of education: the power of the teachers' intuition, passion and enthusiasm. Educational change has its aims, but they should not be so definite and clear-cut that flexibility gets no chance. It is important to dare to improvise, to adapt, turn around and start all over in the change process.(Lagerweij, 2004, p. 45) I wish to stress this when we look at my own experiences in the Suriname process, later on.

All these different theories also show us that in the past decades there has been a lot of thought about educational change and how complex it is. They emphasize the complexity and irrationality of change processes. They also force us to think about the one and only way we tend to look at change and how we deal with it. This is the paradigm of planned change. Change does not always succeed in achieving the desired outcomes and forces us to look for new ways. I learnt not to see the expert as an outsider, but as one of the participants in the change process. His contribution in local settings is determined by the relationships and linkages in that particular social construction, which is different every time. It requires flexibility or as Homan (2005) says I-professionals (Improvisation professionals). Hargreaves (2009, p. 109) comes in his approach very close to the social constructionist idea by looking critically from the outside to the social constructed educational system: “It is time to reshape the world and to reinvent ourselves within it.” I have experienced that social constructionism offers many new perspectives in this context. In the next chapter I will explain more about the social constructionism. This is important to understand the thought of this dissertation and the analysis of *the I Believe in You! process*.



3

From business as usual to social constructionism⁸

There is no other obstacle than yourself.

Watch it! It is tougher than you think.

*When you become trapped within yourself,
the world becomes your veil.*

(Shabistari in:

De geheimen rozentuin W. Vander Zwan, Wijn en Rozen, 2010)

⁸ Hosking (2002, p.7) explains that the terms social constructionism and social constructivism are often used indiscriminately. "In psychology it is used to refer to either *constructivism* or *social constructivism* centering individuals, subjective knowledge, and concepts such as perception and mind maps and continuing to position the scientist/narrator as one who can produce objective knowledge (see e.g. Gergen, 1985; Hosking & Bouwen, 2000)." She goes on to explain that the version of social constructionism connecting "strongly with postmodern and poststructuralist themes, reflecting new psychology, and centering ongoing relational processes as they make people and worlds. (Hosking & McNamee, 2006 p. 10) Notes, p. 68 social constructivism continues to separate the individual and internal cognitive processes from an independently existing World, talking of how knowledge of that World is constructed on the basis of mind operations. Burr (2007, p. 19) "The person is seen as actively engaged in the creation of their own phenomenal world."

Introduction

As we still see change as a machine or clockwork, change is not grounded on reality and this can lead to alienated participants, i.e. the teachers and students who are WITHIN the change every day.

We can no longer let this happen.

There will be no educational change without the participation of the teachers and the students.

We need to be in relation if we want achieve sustainable educational change.

Loek Schoenmakers, Log January 2009.

“What are you studying?” is a question often asked by relatives, friends or colleagues. I must admit that at the beginning of this Ph.D. I only got as far as answering, “I am studying the Surinamese process when we produced the book. It seems so important to do something with the experience I had and doing a Ph.D. helps me to gain a better understanding and it may even provide a sound basis for writing a book about it.” I did not really know the Taos Institute and its committed people at the time, but I sensed, looking at their website, that they would be the right people to help me on my way. The deeper I got into the process, the greater my grasp became of the social constructionist orientation, although I must admit it took a long time before the penny really dropped. I am not an academic, or a theorist. At least that is not how I feel. I am a practitioner, brought up from child to pupil, student to teacher, headmaster to school advisor, teacher trainer to educational advisor and parent. One of my reflections in my Log (April 2009) is, “I am beginning to realize that my way of learning is learning in practice, by doing, experimenting. Call it reflection-in-action. I need to feel and observe practice to really get a deeper understanding.”

I had some discussions with my advisor Sheila McNamee in the beginning when I approached this Ph.D. from the *individualistic or modernist* point of view. I had no idea what she was talking about. When people asked me in what way I would approach the subject of this Ph.D., it sounded very interesting when I said to them, “Well, I am doing it from a social constructionist point of view, which is very complex but also challenging”. Fortunately, they stopped asking questions. There came a time when I saw the light. Suddenly a certain realization came over me, and I started to look differently at all sorts of activities and reflect differently on the situations I experienced. I saw social constructions everywhere, at work, but also in private life. I became constructionist sensitive. Some years later, while in the Ph.D. process and after enlightening experiences, I dare to say what I think social constructionism is and why I put my hopes on it.

Social constructionism, a method or an orientation?

I used to think that Social Constructionism (SC) was a certain method or a technique with systematic steps to be followed. It was my belief that I could research the Surinamese process using this method and would finish with a superb product, useful for others in all kinds of situations, new, innovative and never seen before. When reading the literature, I discovered this was not the case at all. If we saw SC as a method or as some particular techniques, it would mean that we viewed SC as something static, applicable to all kinds of situations. This static notion, which Dian Hosking calls “entity thinking”, is the subject-object view. In fact,

SC criticizes such a view, and so does postmodernism. It strongly criticizes the status of methodology: "Under postmodernism, methodology loses its status as the chief arbiter of truth". (Hosking, 2006, p. 43) Burr (2007, p.2) "There is no one feature to be said to identify a social constructionist position. Instead, we might loosely think of as social constructionist any approach which has its foundation one or more of the following key assumptions (from Gergen, 2008)", she goes on to explain that SC insists we take a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world including ourselves. "Social Constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be." (Burr, 2007, p. 3) And as Gergen (1999) explains, "Social constructionist ideas emerge from a process of dialogue, a dialogue that is ongoing, and to which everyone may contribute." We fabricate together what we might live into."(McNamee, 2008b, p. 167) "It is more a general orientation or thought style – a way of engaging with the world that centers on dialogue and multiplicity – an orientation that gives new meaning and value to going and open dialogues". (Hosking & McNamee, 2006, p. 23) Well, does this make sense? Do not hesitate to say, No, I still do not know what you are talking about. Please explain it to me. Perhaps this helps?: Social constructionism is the creation of meaning through our collaborative activities. (Gergen & Gergen, 2004)

I will try to give an example:

Our dog Cacho⁹ was about 8 weeks old, when we found him on a hot day among some cactuses. At the time I was living with my family in Aruba, in the Caribbean. He grew into a **friendly and lovely dog**, a real beauty and we were quite happy to take him with us when we went to live in Suriname so that he could guard the house. Burglaries were not uncommon in our neighborhood. So in that specific local context he could be a **guard dog**, protecting us against strangers. Barking furiously at people in the street, he was quite impressive. Some visitors were perhaps a little bit afraid of him, when he jumped at them when they entered the garden. They said, "What a **wild dog**!" and so he was. He was given the label (entity) of wild dog. We could live with it.

In 2009 we went back to the Netherlands, Cacho came with us and suddenly there was a different situation. In the beginning he was quite shy, not knowing this new world, sniffing around to become familiar with his new home. The Netherlands is quite different from Suriname. Houses are smaller and much closer together. The climate is colder, so life is lived in the house rather than outside as in the tropics. Now Cacho had to be a home or **house dog**. He had to behave well, listen, and above all there was to be no jumping and no barking. As his boss, I had to react differently to him. Although he was still a dog, he behaved differently. And because of this I and my family started to behave differently. More than in Suriname, we wanted Cacho to be a well-behaved and well-trained dog. So after a while, after he had bitten the plasterer, we decided to get him trained. In spite of the fact that he was a mongrel and the other dogs were **pedigrees**, the other dog owners found him a well-behaved and beautiful dog. We were very happy when we read the first test report, "Cacho is a friendly dog who wants to wait-watch..." Was this our **wild dog**, who had to be a **house dog**, and was now labeled a "**friendly dog**"? We talked about Cacho's behavior in relation to our behavior with the dog trainer. He made it clear to us that there is an ongoing interaction between dog and family. Looking carefully at what we all did in certain contexts, provided us with more insight and solutions to handle him. Instead of being given some techniques, we got a better understanding (giving meaning) of our own reality.

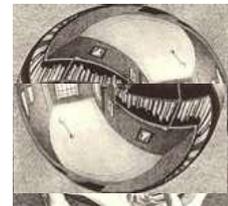
This dog training, which was very much focused on a positive, constructive relationship between dog and dog owner was perhaps the beginning of my understanding of social constructionism more fully. First, I thought the dog was not well-behaved because he was a "wild dog". He had a problem. If he did not change quickly, we would throw him out of the house! Can you imagine the poor kids crying. I then started to look

⁹ Cacho is Papiamentu language for dog.

differently at what was happening. It is in the local context that where we create our meaning. I, the dog and others, constructed together our meaning about the experienced reality. This meaning can vary from moment to moment, and over time, and from situation to situation. Creating meaning can be explained as constructing the reality as it has been experienced and by doing so, trying to understand it. We cannot create this understanding by ourselves or alone. We need others to construct our view of reality, by being put in relation with the other and the otherness. The most difficult part of this is to be critical about how we give meaning to our constructed realities. This social constructional process is dynamic, ongoing. In literature social constructionism and relational constructionism are used interchangeably. Let us have a closer look at this story.

This and that, here and there, you and me

My average approach was this dog has a problem, not his boss. "I am OK, and he (the dog) is not OK!" That is not the same as the book published by Thomas A. Harris MD., entitled *I'm OK, You're OK*, which seems to be one of the best-selling self-help books ever published. Separating the dog's world from my world or reality made me powerless



to solve the problem, which I did not experience as my problem at the time. By doing so I treated my world and the dog's world as separate entities, in a subject-object relation (the dog's world is not my world), and I felt this situation would never change, rather, remain static, which made me powerless. Hosking (2002, p. 3) refers in her work to the mainstream approach in which subject and object are treated as independent existences, as if they were "a singular, bounded and separate, someone or something." And "When people and/or things are separated this has implications for how their relations are understood." At one of her workshops, Dian showed the picture of Escher, where we see the artists as part of his reality, the relational constructionist thought. Within the here and there positions - the individualistic thought - we are separated from our constructed world. The artist positions himself outside of reality. I manipulated the picture, because it illustrates very well how we can see this.

Let me continue with my story about the dog. I slowly expanded my thinking. What is this dog doing? What can I do to handle the situation better? From an individualistic perspective I was making my own inner representations of what went wrong or what went well. This gave me the idea to be stricter with the dog. My inner presentations were, a dog which became wild when people entered the house, the owner (me) who gave commands to make him listen, or do what I wanted him to do. This was sometimes successful, but sometimes failed. I did not get beyond this. The dog training helped me to look at the same reality in a different way. It showed me that I was not separated from the dog's reality. It is not *this and that*, and *here and there*. I am related to the dog in that local situation and my behavior responds to the dog's behavior. The same dog, Cacho, responds differently to others, like my children. Still, he is the same dog. When I understand the dog's and my own behavior better, and change my own behavior, the dog will respond differently. We act and react differently at home from outside, in the woods, or in the training hall with other dogs. When I act in a dominant way, the dog will respond aggressively or show fear. When I act more friendly and appreciatively, the dog will respond happily and full of confidence. This enabled me to

understand the SC orientation better. Aware of the different ways to view reality I can follow John Lannamann in *The Social Construction of Organization* (Hosking & McNamee, 2006) when he explains the following different views.

First, there is the view of “the realists”. “These realists argue that the world determines our representation of it. A fact is simply a mental representation of something real out there in the world.” (Hosking, 2006 p. 112) So, in the case of Cacho, I see an animal with four legs barking, so it is a dog. He continues with a second view, that of the constructionists. “We may call this naïve constructionism” when “our representations determine the world. Here, our mental map gives us the world. This results in a kind of happiness constructionism” (Hosking & McNamee, 2006 p. 112). Simply change the representation and you can transform the world. In the case of Cacho, what I think of him, my mental representation, makes him what he is: a wild dog, a well-behaved dog, a friendly dog. We put labels on reality. I am doing this myself, you could say, from an individualistic standpoint. In the third view, the social constructionist view, we must pay attention to the “jointly produced conversational realities”, so Cacho must be seen not as a representation or a static or finished something created in the individual mind, but he must be seen in the construction of this particular reality which we make in the relationships we have. It is a relational view we use. The interaction with the dog trainer made me realize that each time circumstances changed, we, i.e. the dog and I, changed in what we were doing. When I realized that Cacho had problems with people first entering the house, I would help him to respond better than I did before. When he was outside, in another context, he behaved well, he was a different dog. When we entered someone else’s house, he would only sniff and walk around. Not only did the dog change his behavior in different situations, so did the other actors in relation with each other. Gergen explains (2008, p. 6) “What we take to be true about the world is not born of the pictures in our minds, but of relationships. Understandings of the world are achieved through co-ordinations among persons – negotiations, agreements, comparing views, and so on.”

Getting more understanding

From this moment onward, I started to observe situations, both in private and in work settings, and I suddenly saw how easily we people look at reality, approach it with our representations, making things static as entities, and using them as some kind of criteria to judge situations. These representations (beliefs, assumptions, etcetera) lead to the next steps in thinking, and actions are made, very often on an individualistic basis, although many think they do it on a joint basis. I saw reality through other eyes, realizing more and more that it is not only the realistic view of facts (are we sure these are objective facts?) or the individualistic view (my representations, are we sure that this is reality?), but that there is a third way, not so say



there are multiple ways, to view reality. This third way, the social constructionist way or orientation, helped me to understand better that it is at a moment in a certain context with certain actors that some things have their meaning. This dynamic aspect causes each situation or context to have different meanings. These meanings may be different for the players, but the interesting thing is that by means of communication in the broadest sense of the word, by joint action new meaning or understanding can be given. As we will see later,

language, or the dynamics of language seems to be an important feature in the social constructionist orientation.

I suddenly realized that many issues, such as authenticity, leadership, dog's behavior, expert roles, competencies, learning, parenthood, truth, knowledge, and so on, and even change are not still pictures. This process of giving meaning differs in each setting. Instead of seeing them as entities I realized we can also view them as ongoing dynamics. An example will demonstrate this.

Charles Guignon (2004) in *On being Authentic* argues ultimately that being authentic is not about what is owed to me but how it depends on others. His works made it clear to me that the usual way of looking at authenticity is that it is some kind of property or habit I possess which makes me authentic. In literature this could be presented as a list of habits. By the way, I realize that a lot of management literature is written from this individualistic perspective. The work of Guignon shows that we can look at it in a different way and see authenticity as something that is given meaning in relation with or to others. So this authenticity may differ when contexts and actors change, as well in the meaning giving process. From this point of view authenticity is seen as a dynamic process instead of as a static something, an entity. It emphasizes the relational aspect to a greater extent.

What else can be said about social constructionism?¹⁰

Modernism and post modernism

Modernism

When we look at the way modernism views the world, some features should be mentioned. From a modernistic point of view the world is seen as a rationally defined reality. "There is a problem with reality", they explained in one of the workshops of Diane Hosking and Sheila McNamee, "There is a gap. And this gap needs to be filled". The gap can be seen as "what is", the present situation, and the filling will help to achieve "the ought", what ought to be, the future. Lots of efforts are devoted to understanding and analyzing the present situation, often the problem. The approach is problem-oriented. We collect as much data as possible. We analyze the data and draw some conclusions. When we understand the problem, we know what to do. We use evidence-based approaches, methods to fill the gap. Inquiring often with proven methods helps us to produce a rational basis for interventions. There is a strong emphasis on the *What*. What then happens is that we separate the "is" and the "ought", as if they were two different realities. But in reality the world is not separated into parts. The analysis of the problem delivers a description of how this

¹⁰ "We may view social constructionism as a continuing dialogue on sources of what we take to be knowledge of the real, the rational, the true, and the good, - in effect, all that is meaningful in life. You may find it useful here to think of social constructionist ideas as an umbrella under which all traditions of meaning and action are sheltered. The constructionist umbrella allows us to move across the traditions, to appreciate, evaluate, absorb, amalgamate and re-create. At the same time, constructionist ideas themselves must be given a place under the umbrella. They too must avoid claims to transcendent Truth." (Gergen & Gergen, 2004 p. 23)

problem can be seen, and how we can approach the problem to reach the desirable, and predicted, future. Experts, persons seen as people knowing what to do, help us to fill the gap. The power is given away to others. We will see this phenomenon in the educational reform where, for many years, others were making decisions about what changes teachers should make. Others were the producers of change, whereas the teachers and students stayed in the position of consumers. Their voices were hardly heard. The teachers had to fill the gap with approaches or methods developed by others.

Postmodernism

We see a different approach in the postmodern movement. The basic idea is that it is clear that we are not totally separated from reality. We are part of it. Instead of the individualistic view, it has a relational view. I am not a container in which I put all kinds of things, and that is what makes me who I am (the individualistic view), but I am, by the relation which emerges (the relational view). It is in the interaction, or in the relation, with others and the context that we give meaning. The problem, I think, is that we are often unaware of how much we still approach reality in the individualistic way. This is what Gergen & Gergen (2004, p. 30) describe as “the individual seen as conscious decision maker”. The individual thinks that with his knowledge he can control and manage change in predictable ways. The new way is however that we can approach reality in the relational way, that we look more at what people produce or simply do together.

To what kind of relations are we inviting each other? The central idea is that we should approach change not only by focusing on the *What*, but we can approach change from the *How*. The *How* refers to How and What we are doing or making together in the change process. The central question would be therefore: What do we construct or make together and which byproducts are produced by this process? In this way we do not focus on the predictable future that is achievable with set, smart goals, but we realize that in the change process the next question we ask will produce the next answer, so the meaning we give. We never know absolutely in what ways the other will respond. This not predictable or controllable. A famous statement of Einstein's is “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when creating them.” I would like to say it in this way: The meaning we give, produces the next steps we will take. The action will influence meaning and the new meaning will affect the next step we take. This process goes on continuously. As Einstein says, if we approach our problems with new ways of thinking there may be a greater chance of finding better solutions. Otto Sharmer (2010) uses the verb downloading to express that we easily stick in our patterns of acting and responding as we have always done. He emphasizes also that we need to change our social fields to find these better ways with more success. Social Constructionism seems to be a way of thinking, a philosophical stance, that aims to work in that direction. I experience this as promising. It opens up new possibilities by means of language-based processes, by giving space to multiple local rationalities, away from the Subject-Object approach. The following example will illustrate this:

A school I worked with as a school advisor wanted to improve its way of working with children and their social competencies. When I arrived they were disappointed because in spite of two years of hard work introducing a proved curriculum, they had not succeeded in creating the desired situation in which the climate of school would change from an aggressive environment into a friendly, respectful one. From the individualistic point of view, the staff had worked hard on the problem they found children and parents had, i.e. bad behavior, made re-presentations of the difficult population they had to work with and strengthened this way of thinking during formal and informal talks. Their assumption was that a good program, which had been chosen very carefully, would help them change the children's behavior. In fact, they got stuck in their own static pictures of the school. When I came to the school to work with them, I used the relational or social constructionist insights to work in a different manner. I slowly tried to make

them aware of being related to their own reality with children. In spite of the difficult home situations or the personal behavior problems of children, they were a daily part of the reality they worked and lived in. Instead of giving power away, we took power back by simply asking the questions, "What do I do" and "What do we do together in creating this reality?" The awareness grew in several meetings and workshops that, in the relation with each other and the children and the parents, different constructions were created. The new meaning or understanding grew, this time in joint action, that by looking differently at the experienced situation, new solutions seemed to appear. Instead of using proven methods devised by external experts, we used their own expertise to bring about the situation they desired.

Whereas modernism searches for the truth, and proven uniform methods, and works on the notion of an objective world, postmodernism questions these assumptions of the only truth, the objective world, and comes up with multiple local histories or truths. It is more interested in the local contexts and the meaning-giving processes that occur, which seem to be different every time. Whereas modernism separates the world into here and there, subject and object, postmodernism moves toward the tensions between them, as for example in dialogues.

So differences may exist and be appreciated, instead of being made greater by stressing here and there, and you and me. The power is given to a small group, often called experts in modernism. They have power over, whereas postmodernism tries to find ways to give power to those who are involved in the change. In the postmodernist view, teachers and students become the producers of change in their daily classrooms. They are seen as equally important as the so called expert. In fact, everybody in the process is seen as an expert in some way. An important social constructionist point of view is that power is constructed. The modernistic view is that we can have power over the other or the situation. The knowing subject (S) has power over the object (O). As in the experience with the school staff and the children's behavior in the last example the idea is that if the badly behaved students (Objects) are treated with a certain proven method or approach by the teacher (Subject), they will change. The idea is: give me a tool and we will change them. In other words, the problem is theirs and there, and I am here. You have to change, and the reality will be different. What happens in such a situation is that one blames the other for what is happening, for what is going wrong. The situation is closed to solutions. The social constructionist point of view, on the other hand, clearly says, no, there is no separation between here and there, or in my example between the students behaving badly and the teacher. They are all related to each other, react and interact in the specific local context. Seeing oneself as part of the constructed reality provides more openings for finding solutions.

Let us go back to the teacher at the school in the south of the Netherlands. He and his school experienced difficulties with students' behavior. He said, "20% of our students are misbehaving. They are wrong. Can you give me a tool or method so that we can change *them*." I could not make him understand that he had to look differently at the situation, that he had to see himself as being related to or part of the constructed reality, and that, once he did, this could lead to better and other solutions. I could not change his attitude; he was not open to it. The other staff members had more open minds and realized that starting to look differently at the situation and seeing it as a constructed, dynamic reality would lead them to a more hopeful and desirable future. Together, in joint action, we started to construct new meaning. This provided the insight to give power to the students, to appreciate their efforts to construct a happy community in the school together with the staff, head teacher and parents.

Instead of developing knowledge as static entities to understand reality, postmodernism and social constructionism in particular try to generate new ways of acting. It is a way of being rather than a box of knowledge. Meaning is not only created in the individual mind but also created in the flow between people.

Hosking & McNamee (2006, p. 9) cite Holzman “There is a ‘new’ psychology that presents a very different story of personhood in which people are seen to participate in the (re)construction of social realities – not as individual, subjective mind stuff - but as meaningful social practices.”

Other characteristics of social construction

A great deal has been written about Social Constructionism. I select some main characteristics which I think are important, realizing this will not be the complete map. SC does not aim to be seen as a certain method or system to work with. Hosking & McNamee (2006), Burr (2005), Gergen & Gergen (2004) emphasize in their work that we must take care not to create another dogmatic truth or a static something. This awareness should keep us focused or critical of social constructionism and how it develops. “A central premise of social constructionism is that social realities are social achievements produced by people coordinating their activities. This premise is thus very different from the more common narrative (often only implicit) that ‘reality’ is singular, ‘out there’, and knowable by the individual mind through a combination of sense data and individual mind operations. (Hosking & McNamee, 2006, p. 26)

The issue of relating as co-construction

This feature is an important characteristic of SC. What SC tries to show is that, in the contexts we work and live in, we interact with one another. These interactions may take many different forms. This should not be confused with good relationships, whatever they are. Of course, relationships are important. It is the way in which we relate to each other which determines or constructs that moment’s reality. It may be clear that this can and will be experienced differently by each player. Being in relation means that we do have the awareness to see that we are in relation with ourselves, the other and the otherness. We take part of the realities we are in, together with others. Instead of emphasizing the individual action and sense making, SC tries to focus on the joint action or joint sense making. Hosking and McNamee explain, “We are talking about the coordination of activities among people”. (Hosking & McNamee, 2006, p. 27) This co-construction must be seen as a process that is never totally completed, it is ongoing and changing. In their work they use a nice metaphor from Penn (p. 27) to illustrate these dynamics. “It is the elasticity of meaning that is important to recognize and this, to me, is what social constructionism is about.” Gergen & Gergen (2004, p. 48) say, “Language and all other forms of representation gain their meaning from the ways in which they are used within relationships.” So the shift is from an individualistic meaning to a relational orientation. We shift from the idea that meaning is not only residing within the individuals to the idea that meaning is constructed within or by the co-ordinations of actions we have with others. And that this process of meaning giving is never totally completed, but changes as soon as we have other co-ordinations. There is, so to speak, a shift from the individual rationality to the communal rationality. “As we speak together, listen to new voices, raise questions, ponder alternative metaphors, and play at the edges of reason, we cross the threshold into new worlds of meaning. The future is ours – together – to create.” (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 12)

The issue of multiple local constructions

In the more modernist view there is a one and only objective truth or at least scientists, the so-called experts, are trying to find it. "It honors the individual as the source of all meaning." (Gergen & Gergen 2004, p. 31) You could say the idea is to find this one and only construction. From this point the next steps are made. The reality is made into "the one thing that is so". That is what I often experience in the realities almost taken for granted. SC, however, focuses on the so-called multiple local constructions. In the constructionist opinion meaning, or understanding of the experienced reality, is constructed in the local context by people interacting with one another. There is not one construction, but there are many local constructions. So the relational orientation rejects the assumption of (and consequent interest in) a single, universal, trans-historical truth. An example from my work will illustrate this:

I worked at a school in the south of the Netherlands where they planned to work two afternoons on the pedagogic climate in school. In my approach, we spent time to really meet each other in ongoing dialogues". Instead of presenting some kind of definition of what "pedagogic climate" is, which they may have expected me to do, I used our multiple narratives (constructions) to exchange and interact. Instead of adapting each individual view to the desired "one and only point of view" the staff became aware that there were 17 different constructions and something wonderful happened. In the interactions, meaning was given to each one's own ideas and understandings, but simultaneously in relation with the other staff members, new or renewed meaning was given to their own narratives. We constructed, de-constructed and re-constructed meaning. Differences were appreciated, not judged.

From a social constructionist point of view, meaning is seen as a coordinated action in this example.

The issue of power relations

The people mentioned in this example felt energized, and could follow the entire process because it was their process of jointly giving meaning. I made it very clear in these sessions that the power was theirs, not mine. Power was given directly to the teachers to construct new meanings. From these new and shared meanings these teachers could start to construct new actions to achieve the wished change. The question from a SC standpoint is "Whose voice is heard?" This power question is an essential issue in SC. In the modernistic approach there is superiority of one position over the other (the Subject-Object construction), such as the experts or the scientists who know best what is right for others, or leaders and management teams that within their groups discuss what would be best for others, such as teachers and students. You could say there was a superior power relation. "The scientist's voice is privileged". (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2006 p. 37). SC is aware of this and of the impact it has and works from the orientation that power should be given to or should be with all those involved. I experienced this power play in all the different roles I have played in education. I still frequently observe the effects of superior power relations in my recent work as an advisor.

When I worked as a coach for a teacher in a small village in the north of my province the following happened. During the coaching process in which this teacher, almost at the end of his career, regained his inner power, the school board suddenly sent a letter. This letter said that there had been a complaint from one of the parents who wanted to remain anonymous. "We are not taking disciplinary measures against you, but you have to know that we are following this case closely". You can imagine that this teacher relapsed into his old state of frustration and disappointment. He wanted to stay at home for a

longer time now. The school board had not contacted the head teacher of the school or this teacher to talk about what turned out to be a rumor. It appeared that none of the parents were dissatisfied with him. The power play was on, fear was created. I wondered why a school board invested in an expensive coaching path, and next acted like this? I managed at the time to restore his confidence, urged him to talk to his head teacher straightaway and ask him to support him in making an appointment with the school board. Fortunately, they were able to make an appointment that afternoon. They discussed this case openly and came to an agreement. But the damage was done.

The issue of language

In the modernist view, language is seen as a carrier of truth or knowledge in books, articles, conversations etcetera. The representation that is made inwardly and the expression of it externally, is seen as language. How it is seen is illustrated by the words of John Locke cited by Gergen & Thatchenkery (2006, p. 37), "Our words are 'signs of internal conceptions'. They stand as 'marks for the ideas within the individual's mind whereby they might be made known to others and the thoughts to man's (sic) mind might be conveyed from one to another" (1825/1959:106). Language is seen as a static something. Hosking & McNamee (2006), Gergen & Gergen (2004) use the metaphor of a picture to illustrate that in the modernist view language is seen as a means to represent the World. Language is then used as an instrument to describe reality. But in the eyes of the social constructionist language must be seen as more than a way of representing ourselves. (Burr, 2007), Gergen & Gergen (2004) talk about the crisis of representation. SC sees it differently. The books I read often refer to the metaphor of language games (referring to Wittgenstein), expressing the dynamic character of language. Language is seen as social actions. It is in this social action or relational construction that the language really gets its meaning at the moment of being used in the interaction with others. So there cannot be a static mood where words express reality, but on the contrary, every time we meet or interact in the local constructions new meaning is born. Language does not describe action, but itself is a form of action". (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2006, p. 40). Language does not only describe the world, but it also makes things happen, it has effects. (p. 72) Language is seen as performative (we do things with words), responsive (we react or respond to what is said) and invitational (it invites the next action). "Language is seen as a form social action." (Burr, 2007, p. 8). How we describe ourselves, other people and events has consequences for our action, either as individuals or as a society." (Burr, 2007 p. 62)

Is this not what we often experience in our contacts with other people? "You said this at such and such a time", next using it as some kind of truth, making it static without realizing that we are using our own inward representations. I often tell teachers in my work, "make your mind empty", or "put your representations aside" or at least "be aware of your own representations" and talk about the way it affects our interactions. By doing so we can be more open to really listen and really meet the other person in the language game we play. As Sheila McNamee says in her speech (2008a), "We must recognize the enormous power of language to create the social world within which we live. Communication influences the well-being of people and genuine participation." As we speak together, we can bring new worlds into our ways of being simply by the fact that we are open to listen to the other. (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 4)

The issue of the openness to multiplicity and change

This leads us to the next issue of openness to multiplicity and change. The modernist approach with the one and only rational, individualistic truth or representation seems to emphasize differences. Your truth against my truth, my word against your word. We try to persuade the other person to understand our inward representations or perhaps even to agree with them. Because of this belief, discussion can be ended quickly. Is it clear? This is the way it is. That's final! No need for further discussion. SC celebrates the differences and realizes that there are many ways to view reality. This does not mean that we have to agree with all these different views, but we can be open to them, listen and interact. This opens many new ways to approach issues. By welcoming the other and the otherness, or what Andersen (1991) calls the 'not too unusual' we can critically question our own taken-for-granted realities. McNamee (2008a) says we then are making space for Multiple Local Realities. We could think of all our activities as invitations to different relational constructions. "We can then focus on how utilizing particular resources invites certain responses/constructions in specific relationships and how it invites different responses and different constructions in others. (Gergen, 2008 p. 14) My personal experiences are that this stance enriched my own view of reality enormously.

To conclude

What are the implications of the Social Constructionist view for reality?

I start with my own views based on my personal experiences. What I experience is that since I observe situations, social constructions, or realities in other ways, it helps me to better understand realities. I deliberately write realities, because I realize more than before that there is not just one reality but that there are multiple realities. To be aware of constructing and re-constructing these realities in a joint action, rather than in individual action, helps to create a better understanding of this reality. Instead of emphasizing differences, differences are appreciated more and contribute to better understanding. In this process of shared meaning making, *joint action* or *joint construction*, byproducts are produced. Trust, hope, new meaning, involvement, motivation, leadership and so on are coming out of these processes in how we are put in relation. Because of better mutual understanding, each participant in the process can make a contribution with his expertise or knowledge and is therefore equally important. There is not one single expert, but we are all experts in our own way. The power is given *to* people rather than exercised *over the heads* of people. Seeing that we are always related to others in the situation, helps in a way to restore power in hopeless situations. To control one's own reality gives power and seems to release lots of energy. Thinking from an individualistic point of view gives us the idea we are autonomous or independent creatures, but in fact we are always connected and, consequently, interdependent. Is it not funny by the way that in the 21st century, certainly in the Western world, we think that we have power *over* the World? And that old cultures already had this insight of interdependence for centuries?

In short, SC provides new openings in the work I do, to co-create and interact creating a better and more hopeful future. It helps to move away from the individualistic view to discover other ways of viewing reality by observing and considering all "constructions". "A relational perspective kindles a keen appreciation of our life with others, not set apart from or against them."(Gergen & Gergen, 2004 p. 45) I experience this as very hopeful. Gergen & Gergen (2004, p. 8) write "Social constructionism is based on one major idea, simple and straightforward. However, as we unpack the implications and consequences, this simplicity will

rapidly dissolve,” “From the (social) relationships the World has become what it is.” (p. 9) “The foundational idea of social construction seems simple enough, but is also profound. Everything we consider real is socially constructed. Or, more dramatically, nothing is real unless people agree that it is”. (p. 10) SC emphasizes the importance of collaborative participation.

In the next chapter I will pay attention to educational change seen from this new paradigm.



Suriname, Hester Jonkhout

4

Time for a new recipe?

"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)

Introduction

The domination of the individual orientation within the educational change

I was struck by the results of the research described in the previous chapter. In spite of the interesting language we use nowadays to claim that we are working at educational change, my literature review and present observations show that we are still eating the same soup. Perhaps we are using new ingredients, but the recipe appears to be the same.

In his New Year's speech in January 2011, the director of the school advisory service I work for in the Netherlands, said that he was very worried about the plans of our new Dutch Government: increased focus on the basic skills of language and mathematics; more testing with the help of new national tests for students aged seven (year 3) and those aged eleven/twelve (year 8) to monitor their achievements. This confirms my and Lagerweij's (2004) conclusions that in times of recession the government tries to get a grip on educational change by focusing on the controllability and predictability of change, based on planning to guarantee optimal results of students. This together with what Fullan and others in the 1960s and 1970s revealed as the intention of many politicians as far as educational change was concerned to claim success for their own benefit in the short run, which in many cases resulted in failure, shows that even today, the government is working on the basis of the old paradigm that change can be planned, controlled and predicted and that the use of *power over* will help to increase the quality of education. How different these ideas are, compared with the daily reality of education and change, where many reform efforts seem to fail. It is very clear that there is a great need for more successful ways to approach change in the field of education. In spite of more than 40 years of research on how to deal with educational change, it seems that we still cannot get it right. Although as Fullan, Hargreaves, Lieberman, Hopkins and their colleagues (2005) point out we are making headway with educational change and we are gaining a deeper insight, we are still not able to deal in successful ways with educational change. To put it in Fullan's words "That is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended - it is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most educational reforms." (Fullan, 1991, p. 4)

Branson (2010, p. 111) explains "Seeing educational change in human terms, rather than as a mechanic process, is about seeing schools as communities and not as hierarchical political structures." Branson cites Hamel (2007, p. 62), "Hierarchies are very good at aggregating efforts, at coordinating the activities of many people with widely varying roles, but they are not very good at mobilizing effort, at inspiring people to go above and beyond, when it comes to mobilizing human capacity, communities outperform hierarchies." Branson's opinion is interesting when he suggests that "in a hierarchy the basis for exchange is structural and political - you tend to only want to do what is assigned to you. In a community, where change is voluntary - you choose to become involved because you want the chance to make a difference or exercise your talents. In a hierarchy you are a factor of production. In a community you are a partner in a cause." (Branson, 2010, p. 112)

Although I feel what Branson wants to tell us, I think we have to be critical of it. I think it is not the this or that discussion in which *this* is better than *that* that matters. We should appreciate both views because it is not only a case of hierarchy or community, but more a case of how we approach this: what we do together to make the change work, seeing it from the relational constructionist perspective. The construction of the mechanical way of approaching educational change - just set some goals and make a perfect plan or

strategy, fix the broken parts, - seems in a way to be a key deficiency that has consistently compromised efforts, this together with the preassumptions of controllable and predictable change based on planning. Furthermore, as a result of the individual view that I came across in many books on educational change, we are still eating the same soup. Quite often I think we are even not aware of it. In spite of Branson's great insights and efforts to get a better understanding of how to deal with educational change wisely, Branson has a tendency to approach the leading of educational change from this individual view. In his vision, the leader should act wisely, and in doing so, it seems in his view that the leader has almost the power to change others, the followers. It is not the experience I had while being a school leader. My insight from this experience is, that although I acted wisely, it did not mean I had control over my staff members. On the contrary, my insights are that in acting wisely and being attentive to relationships and giving power to my staff members they influenced me as a wise leader. So in my experience we should turn it around: the followers and the leader constantly influence each other and in doing so turn leadership into a dynamic process instead of a static thing. Branson's phenomenological ideas have a tendency to focus fairly individually with an attempt to be objective about subjective (i.e., consciousness) issues. From a social constructionist point of view we should question critically whether we can be objective about subjectivity. Social constructionism sees this reflective process *not* as a private consciousness operating in the individual, but as an internal dialogue that is populated with others (relational).

Lagerweij (2004, p. 107) states that the difficulties we experience in change processes are inherent in the character of educational change: it is a social process, in which many people play a role. People have different interests and people have different personal histories and experiences. This is why people all look differently at the same change process and at what is asked for. The advantages and disadvantages are judged in a personal way and, especially when people do not have any influence or voice, feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration can be the outcome of the process. Dialoguing about these differences, not only in a rational way, but also by giving voice to emotions, which Hargreaves (2005) promotes in his work, leads to a better understanding and helps to give new meanings to change (Fullan 1991, 1993, 2005). Schools are non-rational, but we tend to treat them even hyper-rationally. (Wallace, 2005) Hargreaves (2009, p. 109) is very critical about the way we still approach educational reform. "The three converging yet somewhat slippery paths of the autocracy, the technocracy, and effervescence that made up the New Orthodoxy beyond the Third Way were ultimately only about deliverology." We need to shift to new ways of approaching educational reform. Hargreaves ideas are clear when he states that we must stop taking the familiar well travelled path, even when this still doesn't benefit our children. "It is time to step up and step out in order to reach a higher purpose and a better place." (2009, p. 11)

Studying educational reform has convinced me that it is time for a new recipe and a different way of preparing the soup, if we want to move on to successful educational change in the future.

Time for a new recipe?

Are we still eating the same soup?

I can imagine that the reader is wondering whether it is true that we still use this mechanical or individualistic approach in dealing with educational change. I must admit that the picture I painted was perhaps a little too black and white. I am therefore happy to say that in my literature review I found many attempts of scholars or educators to view and approach change in a more postmodern way. The four *International Handbooks of Educational Change* edited by Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves, Ann Lieberman and David Hopkins (2005) give many examples of scholars trying to understand change in different ways. As I see it, we are in a kind of transitional phase where modern, individual approaches are influenced to a certain extent by postmodern and relational ideas. The balance in which the change process is held sometimes shifts to the modern side and sometimes to the postmodern one. So both aspects can be observed and should be appreciated.

Furthermore, when I reflect on my own work experience, I find that the teachers, school leaders and even school advisors I meet are often less aware than they should be, of the paradigm on the basis of which they think and act. "They think that they treat reality on the basis of this postmodern or relational orientation, but when I look carefully at their actions they illustrate the modern or individual point of view to a greater extent. This, combined with the tendency of the Dutch Government at the moment to focus on outcomes and results forces many leaders, unfortunately, to stop postmodern change, like experience-based learning and developmentally based learning and to start modern ways of fixing the machine by recruiting experts, buying high-quality programs and setting great store by test results. Schools in the Netherlands are now forced to achieve results within a short period, but what policymakers are less aware of is that this way of working cuts the umbilical cord of change: it breaks teachers' passion." (Log, January 2011)

Fortunately, in the last few years objective rationality and structured planning have been questioned seriously by many scholars, as is clear from numerous contributions to the four *International Handbooks of Educational Change*. Lagerweij (2004) sees a movement from the mechanic approach to a more organic or holistic approach. Hosking & McNamee (2006), in my opinion, go a little further by using the term ecological concept. I support her idea of interpreting change from this orientation. Lagerweij (2004) explains that there are more dynamic actions in the educational change process besides planned change. He mentions spontaneous and unexpected changes. Because of this he tries to describe school development or educational change as dynamic. "Schoolontwikkeling is het voortdurend proces van het toevallig, autonoom en/of bewust veranderen van het organisatorisch en onderwijskundig functioneren van de school." Lagerweij, 2004, p. 136) (School development is the continuous process of spontaneous, autonomous and/or conscious changing of the organizational and educational functioning of the school. (He sees school development as an organic-dynamic process. School development has often been seen so far as based on the idea of *autonomous agency*. (Lagerweij, 2004, p. 136) He emphasizes that we should be aware of the different views educational systems can have. Some have this organic dynamic view; others operate more on the basis of this *autonomous agency* view. Morgan (2006) has made this clear in *Images of Organizations* in which he illustrates that we can use different metaphors to read the change process of an organization. The fact that daily practice shows that although this idea of *autonomous agency* stimulates us to engage in school planning, curriculum programs etcetera, the daily practice of teachers and students is characterized by what is happening in the classrooms within the heat of the day, which is often not foreseen, planable or controllable. So many things happen unexpectedly in the daily practice of teachers and school leaders that there is less time for real school development activities. Most schools can at best spend only

15% of their time on educational change. The conditions to do so are inadequate. I dare say that in many cases there is not a single innovation but there are many innovations going on simultaneously in schools, and they all have to be carried out in 15% of the available time. No wonder that many reform attempts fail.

Creating generative transformation by taking a relational position

We need an approach that enables educational change to endure, be more sustainable and, hopefully, be more successful. Understanding educational change by reconstructing what change is or how change can be seen and experienced in the social constructions we daily make, will give us new insights and consequently new solutions and directions. The social constructionist or relational constructionist orientation, in my opinion, can contribute to finding these new ways.

Branson (2010, p. 4) makes an interesting statement when he talks about the leadership of educational change and its evolution in the last few years to a form which is more relational and adaptable. "It incorporates an understanding of a truly and sincerely shared approach to the attainment of a mutually desired beneficial outcome. The leader, and those being led are in partnership, striving as one to learn more about the organization, those they are working with, and themselves so that they can become more aware of what is best to achieve and how they can better help to achieve it. Such an understanding about the leadership of change views the process as incremental not holistic, proactive not preordained, and complex not linear. It involves a continuous commitment to review and reflect so that the change process is constantly attending to current pivotal issues - be they practical outcomes or human needs." He goes on to conclude that although we evolve to a new way of leading change, this does not eliminate its 'predecessor'. "The new understanding actually preserves those views that preceded it, the new understanding of educational change leadership includes its preceding view and then adds its own new and defining perspectives. This means that there are always elements of previous understandings still generally evident."

I think this insight makes it clear that we have to be fully conscious of the fact that these underlying ideas still influence strongly the way in which we approach educational change today. Once again, this is not a matter of the good and the bad recipe. We have to appreciate all these ways of understanding change processes. One idea or thought can lead to other or new ideas or thoughts, as long as we are able to be critical enough to look at it. This Ph.D. study has made it clear to me that as long as we do not understand this well enough, we will keep on trying new recipes or using new ingredients, but are still preparing soup in the same way. We keep on downloading our patterns. I am convinced that we really need to break out of this paradigm to succeed in understanding things better and consequently leading educational change more wisely. By taking a relational position we can shift from this individual orientation. Then we can create generative transformation within educational change processes.

Some educational reform that is compatible with relational constructionism

Reading the four *International Handbooks of Educational Change*¹¹, to which many scholars have contributed their experiences with educational change, fortunately shows that the light on the horizon is getting brighter and brighter. The need for a paradigm shift compatible with relational constructionism is expressed by many examples in these books. It confirms the need to change our way of thinking fundamentally. We have to change our mindset, and reinvent the school system and its *raison d'être*, or its right to exist, and match or adapt it to the uncertain world and uncertain, unpredictable future we live in and are moving to. (Day, 2000; Fullan, Hargreaves, Hopkins, Lieberman 2005; Lagerweij, 2004; Schollaert, 2007; Stevens, 2004) School systems should be ready and capable of strengthening our youth to deal with these present and future uncertainties. We need to fundamentally change our views about knowledge, learning and teaching. Finally, we need to fundamentally shift our approach to change processes by looking carefully at the many insights coming out of more than forty years of educational research, strengthened with the new insights of the postmodern insights.

Moving towards a new paradigm, and so towards a fundamental shift in our mindsets, will affect all participants¹². This is also what emerges from the international handbooks. More successful innovation seems to be the result of collective work done by many members of the community, instead of being done by an individual or an elite group of researchers, politicians or educational advisors. In a way this already shows the gap between the individual and relational point of view. Still, educational change is often either done by leaving it to teachers, with the viewpoint we are here and you are there, or by having it done by all participants of whom just a few understand and support the change. Fullan (1995) mentions the lack of meaning as one of the main reasons for failing reform. What is very painful is that the teacher is blamed for it when the reform does not lead to success.

In appreciating and respecting all participants, especially teachers and students, by really listening to them, by giving voice to them and seeing them as experts within the change, the need for relational approaches becomes very obvious to me. There will be no educational change without teachers and students; it is as simple as that. The new paradigm is not only intended to actively involve teachers but also to give voice to students and learn from them. As we will see, many changes are happening simultaneously and need to be done by many people and not just by an elite group of the so called experts. Relational approaches are needed for this. From the relational point of view one could say that we need many people to be put in relation, to work together, to succeed in creating more sustainable and successful changes.

I do not want to go into too many details about the many insights these handbooks give, but I will describe in broad outline some of the ideas about educational reform that are compatible with relational constructionism. By doing so, I want to highlight this new movement in educational reform towards the new paradigm of relational approaches. I will then elaborate on relational constructionism in the next few sections.

¹¹ 1. *The Roots of Educational Change* edited by Ann Lieberman; 2. *Extending Educational Change* edited by Andy Hargreaves; 3. *Fundamental Change* edited by Michael Fullan, and 4. *The Practice of School Improvement* edited by David Hopkins, 2005

¹² The word participants refers to all educators including parents, pupil, and even community members.

Approaching educational change from this new paradigm, some ideas

Many contributors in the International Handbooks state that the present school does not fit in with the future needs of reality. Wallace (2005) warns of the danger that we approach future change unwittingly with yesterday's comprehension of change. It becomes increasingly apparent that major transformations are necessary, amounting in effect to reinvention of the institutions of education. Keating (2005) states that this widespread perception of the necessity for change is in itself a substantial contributing factor to the likelihood that change will occur. Dalin (2005) is clear. He states that we should reinvent the school system. We are faced with not only purely technological changes, nor merely changes in behavior and attitude, nor structural changes, nor changes in norms and values. What we are facing is the changing of the entire school system's role in society. Its adaptability, its relationship to users and society alike, as well as internal changes in roles, content and methods. The school system will have to make fundamental changes before it can master its new role in the society of the future in close partnership with industry, church, media, the home, the health care system and the local community.

There is a shift going on in how we understand and view the educational system. To support this shift we need governments who understand educational change from this new paradigm. Unfortunately, I experience that our Dutch Government does not fully understand educational change from the relational perspective. Barber (2005) shows how important it is that national and local policies must transform, if we want to get on with more successful educational reform. The central issue for policymakers is to create a framework which increases the chances of success and reduces, and perhaps ultimately even eliminates, the chances of failure for all schools. In my present work, and also in Suriname, I experience the lack of willingness on the part of the government to approach education on the basis of this new paradigm, with the result that the government itself constitutes a major obstacle to shaping the necessary reform. It creates, as it were, a barrier that is hard to break down. I think Barber is right but I doubt whether we can eliminate the chances of failures. I see it differently. The nature of human beings in dealing with change and its dynamics is that we are used to solving today's problems with yesterday's or present insights. Sharmar (2010), Cooperider, D., Barrett F. & Srivasta S. (1995), Cooperider, D. & Whitney, D. (2003) give us an interesting idea that we should focus on the future possibilities which are potentially present in the now. It is one of the characteristics of change that we need to make modifications during the change many times. Failures are part of the change process. For that reason, I would prefer not to call them failures but lessons to be learnt. It is more like a failure if we do not see these lessons in time and act on them.

The influence of policies is where I think the power game comes in. Are policymakers fully aware that they should act as servants to focus on growth, and not as policemen to focus on control? By experiencing the *Believe in You!* process in Suriname, which will be explained in greater detail later, I am even more convinced that we must aim at all levels to construct reform which everyone believes will have impact (Reynolds, 2005). It is here where the first and second order of changes (Cuban, cited by Cuttance, 2005) or lower and higher order of changes (Schollaert, 2007) come in.

Schollaert (2007) states that the characteristics of reform have changed and that a different approach is needed. He has reduced the three types of change for education developed by Van Dongen, De Laat and Maas (1996), the first, second and third order to two categories: changes of a lower order and changes of a higher order. Changes of a lower order are mainly technical interventions such as implementing new

software programs, implementing new textbooks or offering teacher training in a certain subject. It is often easy to cover these lower-order changes by arrangements or training programs. Higher-order changes are fundamentally different. These are the complex changes which need paradigm shifts, which do not only question the usual practices and competencies of teachers and their leaders, but also their deepest assumptions and beliefs. Schollaert calls this the professional self. Professionals such as teachers often experience these higher-order changes as threatening. Examples of higher-order changes are new ways of learning, such as *participatory learning*, where teachers suddenly have roles that are completely different from those of providers of information or cabinet filers¹³ (Bereitner & Scandamalia, 2005). Instead they become coaches or advisors to their students who are now viewed as coming to the learning experience with expertise of a different nature that can be integrated with the teacher's expertise. Do teachers understand and have faith in these changes? If the answer is no, new changes will have a difficult start. Cuban (cited in Cuttance, 2005, p. 105) explains that first-order changes are those that improve the effectiveness of what already exists, without disturbing the basic organizational features, and without altering the way that students and adults perform their roles. Second-order changes aim to alter the fundamental relationships of schools, creating new goals, reorganizing structures and creating new cultures.

One of the elements that make changes difficult, is that one party can experience changes as lower-order and others can experience the same changes as high-order changes I observed this in one of my schools in the Netherlands, which had been working at implementing cooperative learning practices for almost four years. Still, many teachers experienced this as a technical, i.e. lower order, aspect at this school. They did not really believe in this innovation. Since these teachers were not able to connect to these new concepts of learning or teaching, little changed. They complained at the coffee machine and said that it would be easier if they could teach more formally to the whole group as they were used to doing. They said, "You see, my students are not capable of doing this, it is a mess in my classroom, or it is always the same group of students who do nothing ... it is a waste of time! Linear solutions to the extent that every teacher is obliged to work with these cooperative practices two hours a week have failed, so it will be only a question of time before the innovation effort at this school will fail.

Schollaert (2007) states that it is not only important to adapt the change process to the people who will bring about the change, but also to adapt the change strategy to the characteristics of change, low-order and high-order changes. By saying this Schollaert, as we have seen in the work of Lagerweij (2004), Fullan (1991, 1993, 2005) Hargreaves (2005) and Hopkins (2005), states that we can approach change with a blue-print approach (often the low-order changes) or with the developmental or evolutionary approach (high-order changes). In the evolutionary or developmental approach, people have to change their beliefs and assumptions, which can be done best by way of the process of learning rather than by forcing them to change. Learning in this view is seen as adapting mental models, deep rooted ideas and assumptions that teachers have built over the years. Fundamental change, or high-order change, means changing assumptions and behavior. We need to surround teachers with a community where these assumptions are told and can be put in practice, and a practice where these assumptions are appreciated. (Gladwell, 2000) It is shifting from one set of beliefs, assumptions, norms, practices, behavior to another. (Miller, 2005) As we will see later in the examples it means shifting from:

¹³ The idea of filing cabinets is that students are the consumers of knowledge which is presented by their teachers. Bereitner and Scandamalia (2005) say "traditional forms of knowledge are inadequate because they are based on "mental filing cabinets". New conceptions are based on enabling learners to construct knowledge drawing on a range of information enabling them to obtain greater depths of understanding which they can apply in new situations."(p. 5)

- Individualism to a relational position
- From teaching as the central point of change to learning as the central point of change
- From representing knowledge (filing cabinets, Bereiter and Scandamalia, 2005) to constructing knowledge
- From control to accountability
- From technical work to inquiry
- From managed work to leadership
- From individual work to collective work
- From power over to power with (democracy and participation)
- From classroom to whole school focus
- From known future to uncertain future
- From top-down change work to participative change work

Changing paradigms is not an easy job. As Wilson & Davis (1994) say it is the result of long and continuous redesign conversations. We are moving slowly in this new direction. (Reynolds, 2005) Relational constructionism shows how important ongoing dialogues and collaborations are to changing these paradigms. Let us look at some ideas that are compatible with relational constructionism.

Re-culturing

Re-culturing is an issue frequently mentioned. Changing belief systems is in fact a form of re-culturing. For many decades, efforts have been made to improve education by restructuring the system. In many cases this was the fixing-the-machine approach. The changes often concerned things, such as entities introduced into the system, the way subjects were organized, grade levels, introducing different school types where groups of students were divided among different schools or integrated into them according to ability, gender or race. (Fullan 2005, p. vii) It has become clear to Lieberman (2005), Barber (2005), Fullan (2005), Bereitner (2005), Fink & Stoll (2005), Smylie (2005), Keating (2005), Hargreaves (2005), that we need to do more than just restructure the system. Changing structures, as Smylie & Perry (2005) state is not synonymous with changing beliefs, knowledge and skills that deeply influence teachers' practice. We have to re-culture education if we want to deal or cope with the complex changes and demands we are facing nowadays and in the future. This shift involves moving from the emphasis on structures and formal processes such as school development planning, to a focus on the less tangible and ultimately more impactful aspects of schools such as school culture. (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994, 1995a). This shift in focus has been described as re-culturing. (Hargreaves 1994) Re-culturing is the process of developing new values, beliefs and norms. For systematic reform, it involves building new conceptions about instruction and new forms of professionalism for teachers. (Fullan, 1996a)

Re-culturing, as I see it, goes deeper than restructuring. It means that we have to dig deep into our belief systems and assumptions about understanding change, learning and teaching, about how we understand knowledge and about the real essence of schools for future society. I strongly feel that a main shift from the traditional paradigm where change is seen from an individual, mechanic point of view towards a new paradigm, where change is seen as relational and dynamic, will be essential to change the system fundamentally and more successfully. A deeper understanding of what learning is, of what knowledge is, will

affect our ways of teaching and organizing school systems. As Keating (2005) says, we need to re-invent schools.

The idea of re-culturing comes close to the high-order, or second order change which I mentioned before. Shifting from the individual position towards the relational orientation is, in a way, digging deep into our beliefs and understanding of what change is. Do schools have a right to exist in uncertain times with unknown futures? And what are teaching and learning and knowledge, really? These deep changes affect the minds and hearts of the human beings working in the system. Because of the complexity of these changes, they will affect all levels within the system as well as outside it. It is here where the relational orientation comes in, and where the individual position is not good enough anymore. Re-culturing will increase the need for joint action and collective approaches. Fink & Stoll (2005) see re-culturing more broadly than just as something that applies to schools. They say that cultures and counter-cultures must interact to find innovative solutions to complex and unpredictable circumstances. Because of the enormous impact on school systems, this re-culturing will affect the whole community. School re-culturing influences deeply the heart of the human attitudes and relationships that hold the school together and move it forward, or fail to do so. Re-culturing is not easy; it depends on committing to long-term change programs, on the support of excellent school leaders, on teachers who are prepared to become leaders, colleagues as well as teachers of their classes, on access to supportive networks outside the school and so on. (Miller, 2005)

Keating (2005) states that schools need to work well for society to prosper but that schools cannot do this alone. Stronger links to communities are needed. Competence develops along multiple pathways within and between individuals. If schools are to be effective in the future for all students, and to build structures which promote interrelationships and interconnections, then cultures must be developed which simultaneously promote collegiality and individuality. (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 33)

Better understanding of the nature of educational change

It may be clear that understanding the nature of educational change is important, but it is not an easy job at all. I observed some interesting things during a two-day training course, which I gave for ten school leaders of state primary schools in the south of the Netherlands (February 2011). I realized that the main focus had been on the management and leadership aspects of the job, and less on a deeper understanding of the educational change process and its dynamics. Training of school leaders there has largely focused attention on financial management, personal management, personal leadership, maintenance management, as well as on leading educational change processes but very often seen from an individual orientation. Working with these ten very motivated school leaders I noticed that there was enough drive for doing, for practice, for planning actions to improve their schools. What I realized was missing, was understanding of what educational change means and how the social constructs in their schools could be analyzed to understand and strengthen new change efforts. There is a big challenge for this group of motivated leaders to co-learn about change practices by means of relational practices.

Building capacity to manage change is seen as an important issue for future reform. (Fullan 2005; Hargreaves, 2005; Lieberman, 2005; Hopkins, 2005) To do this, I think, more is needed than just knowing how to manage change. There is a danger that we will approach it from the individual paradigm instead of the new relational paradigm. It is about gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of change by

reconstructing social events. Managing change, whether at teaching and learning level or at school level, requires a strategy that considers change as a dynamic and evolutionary process. Based on a clear shared vision of the expected results of the change, the strategy should anticipate tensions and difficulties but also allow for adaptations and adjustments as the change proceeds. The paradigm shift goes from the planned journey to the evolutionary adventure, in which improvisation and flexibility helps us to adjust to the unexpected and uncertain.¹⁴ Culhoun & Joyce (2005) also state how important it is to make modifications while being in the process. This is where the relational point of view comes in, by seeing change as dynamic, ongoing, continuously interacting and supplementing in all that occurs in the process.

Furthermore, it is obvious that a differentiation of school improvement is needed to match individual school development needs. Much school improvement work assumes that all schools are identical, i.e. that a strategy such as development planning will work in one school just as well as in another. Only recently, it has been recognized that schools are differentially effective. (Hopkins 2005) Strategies should fit the development phase of a particular culture of the school. Cuttance (2005) is in favor of adapting the support for change to the stage of the performance cycle of schools. Improvement programs should be tailored to the individual school context. (Reynolds, 2005) Schools must be seen as differently ready for different kinds of change. We need to be more sophisticated and critical of reforms which are applied to schools, which are at different stages of readiness for reform. (Slavin, 2005) We need to identify the needs of teachers and schools and provide for these needs, so that efforts of dedicated reformers are exerted where they really will do the greatest good for students. Understanding change is very important. Change takes place at different levels. (Wallace, 2005)

All these ideas are compatible with the relational point of view. Understanding change as social constructions shows how important it is to reconstruct these change processes, to realize how unique each construction of reform in each school and each classroom is. Each context is unique. Schools differ from each other, and in these schools many teachers differ from each other, in their work with unique students. From the social constructionist point of view, each situation where people are working together produces its own unique dynamics. Being aware of this uniqueness helps us to construct all these different situations as unique human realities, in which old and young people interact and coordinate with each other. All participants within the change process are brought together to construct unique dynamics in the daily situations in which they live, learn and work. It supports Hargreaves' ideas (2005) about using the cultural process for building effective relationships of collaboration and consultation.

The right conditions

Being a teacher and school leader myself, I had many headaches as to how I could ever satisfy the government's ongoing demands for educational change and school success, in spite of the fact that the same government had created poor conditions for achieving this. At some stage in the early 1990s, I had to deal with a decreasing budget while the amount of students was growing, as well as the demands of the government for improving quality. The government was not aware of the daily reality in my fast growing school. This is what West (2005) calls contrasting the potency of internally generated improvement activity

¹⁴ (Fullan, 1991, 2005: giving room to the unpredictable and nonlinear nature of change; Cuttance, 2005: the journey of uncertainty; Wallace 2005: flexible planning).

with the sterility of many of the externally driven reforms. I agree with Hopkins (2005) that the responsibility of the outsiders is to help, and to provide the best conditions for change and improvement for those who are in these change processes: the teachers and their students. When the need and purpose are there, when the conditions are right, teachers and students alike learn and each energizes and contributes to the learning of the other. This is where we see the ideas of social constructionism or relational constructionism. For a long time, within reform, different groups with different interests have worked separately from each other instead of being in connection, in relation with each other.

The next example illustrates how this separate or individual working still occurs in schools. In May 2011, a school inspector visited one of my schools. He advised the teachers to give more details about their daily planning, by describing for each lesson which goals, which approach for which students and which way of evaluating was used. Knowing that most of this information is described in the methods, the teachers wondered whether this advice would improve education. This individual approach, the here and there view, frustrated many teachers. They were forced to become more bureaucratic without knowing for what purpose. I agreed with the teachers: did this inspector really understand daily classroom practice and teachers' lives? A separation took place. Instead of collaboration to make the best of things together, or even to listen carefully and ask questions about practice, the gap between the inspector and the teachers widened. The inspector's actions did not indicate that he would work together with the teachers in some ways. In social constructionist words, he failed to put people in relation with his actions. Policymakers and other outsiders can be at their best, as I see it, if they are related to the school world, and if they are connected to the people who should benefit from it. Policymakers should promote strategies which enable schools to move forward from where they are, rather than apply strategies which remind them of where they should be. The task of those outside the school is to create a framework which increases the chances of success in schools and reduces the chances of failure. Barber (2005) makes it very clear that this is not only done by designing laws and regulations, but also by creating a climate in which policy development takes place. This includes the establishment of effective working relationships with the teaching profession, local education authorities and other producers of education, as well as the consumers, the students.

In addition to the conditions put in place by outsiders, the conditions in the school should also be put in place. Dalin (2005, p. 35) states "Teachers will be faced by a challenging job situation. Be sure there is enough time and room for discussions, collaboration, teamwork, peer support and peer review. It is by creating a group with a joined mission, with an open dialogue, that trust is developed to enable creative problem solving." Barth (1990 cited by Dalin, 2005, p. 99) suggests that schools will have the capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right. A major responsibility of those outside the school is to help provide the conditions for those inside.

The centrality of teaching and learning

Another shift is that school improvement is more and more seen as a strategy for educational change which is linked to student achievements. (Hopkins 2005) For many years, teaching and learning have not been the central focal point of educational change efforts. Educational change has been seen as general efforts to make *schools* better places for students and students to learn. The new idea is that new approaches are developed that enhance *student results* as well as strengthen the school's capacity for managing change. Hopkins (2005, p. 3) says it very clearly: "School Improvement is about raising students' achievements through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support this." In this way, school

improvement should be is more than just blindly accepting the edicts of centralized politics and striving to implement directives uncritically. I experience in my present work that, unfortunately, change is not occurring. Teachers follow the programs designed by others and do not dare to make modifications which would suit the student's needs or the group's development stage better. I agree with Fullan (1991, 1993) when he argues in favor of more of fearlessness in this. In focusing on teaching and learning it becomes more and more evident that the key players are students and their teachers. It is unfair, in my opinion, to blame teachers for the failures of the education system. If they knew how to teach more effectively, they would have started doing so decades ago. In the traditional paradigm, teachers and students had passive roles in the educational change processes. Quite often they simply had to do what others thought was best. They were not seen as the experts of the change process. Barth (1990) argues that we should base school reform on the skills, aspirations and energy of those closest to the school: the students, the teachers, the school leaders and the parents. Hopkins (2005) emphasizes this and says that those who live in schools must no longer be victims of change, but must be given more control of the process. They must in some way be supported to subject the specificities of change to their own professional scrutiny and judgment in the pursuit of enhanced learning for their students and students. McCulloch (2005) also emphasizes that the teacher and student role have for a long time been too weak and unsystematic to produce fundamental change. We need to pay attention to classroom organization and teachers' behavior, because that is what is experienced and consumed by students. (Reynolds, 2005)

What also becomes clear, when reading the literature, is that there is a need for new understanding of the nature of learning. Bereitner and Scandalia (2005) speak of the old paradigm that learning was and still is seen as filing cabinets. They promote the new paradigm of active learning and say that schools prepare mainly for yesterday. But schools' unique mission should be to prepare students for the unknown and the uncertain future. Fullan (2005) states that one of the points on the agenda of fundamental change should be, that macro strategies designed by the government should focus on supporting transformations in how learning occurs. Revolutions in cognitive science have enabled us to understand how learners construct their own deep understanding of knowledge. These technologies have also made possible networks of information and people, who directly compare the learning of students and teachers alike. These developments are happening in many countries. He, along with other contributors to the handbook, (Hopkins, 2005) states that learners will be more active in their producer role. Dalin (2005, p. 35) sees schools in a way more as *social laboratories*, where students experience the change process, learn the skills of solving problems, of communication in groups, and of leadership and membership. There they can gain security and strength to face the uncertain future. Whitford and Jones (2005) show that schools should now ensure learning, and should not just teach. Ensuring learning means emphasizing new approaches, including problem solving, reasoning and communication in real life situations.

After reading this, it has become clear to me that we need to change the beliefs and assumptions about learning. Doing so will affect the redesign of the curriculum. McCulloch (2005) sees curriculum reform as a strategy for educational reform. New models of learning are radically changing our conception of education. Education for human development in the learning society requires collaborative learning, and involves focusing on knowledge building. This all arises from fundamental shifts in educational goals, from increasing diversity of populations, and from new conceptions in learning and knowledge. (Keating, 2005) Lifelong learning, schools as learning organizations, and the integration of schools into a broader community that promotes learning, will be required for human development in the information age.

It is here where the relational point of view comes in. Changing our beliefs and assumptions, about teaching and learning, affects the school system in its structure and culture. A fundamental change would be to let

schools function as places where students become proficient in all aspects of knowledge, including its creation. The contributors state that traditional forms of knowledge are inadequate, because they are based on the idea of Bereiter cabinets. New concepts enable learners to construct knowledge by drawing on a range of information, enabling them to obtain greater depths of understanding which they can apply in new situations. (Bereitner & Scardanalia, 2005) The paradigm shift is going from focusing on educational change at school level as in the 1980s - where the notice was on strengthening the school structure, changing the financial structure, strengthening the school leaders' management skills or improving the curriculum - to educational change at classroom level: for example the learning styles of students and the instructional behaviors of teachers. For a long time little attention has been paid to teacher effectiveness at classroom level. (Reynolds, 2005, p. 245) Creemers (1994) strengthens this idea of changing the focus: the classroom learning level may have two or three times more influence on student achievement than the school level does.

We are trying, in today's classrooms, to put this paradigm into practice by shifting from the reproduction process in the classroom towards creativity and production processes in multiple environments. Social laboratories are created. It also means to change and create space for student and teacher initiatives. In this way, school reform is for all teachers and all students. *They* are put in the center, and not the glory of politicians and administrators. (West, 2005). The view shifts from the big picture to the small picture. (Bascia, 2005)

We need to have a new understanding of the concept of knowledge, new ways which are more consistent with current understanding and with the ascendant social importance of knowledge. The so-called objectification of knowledge began to take place in all the major civilizations a few thousand years ago. Professionalism in knowledge can certainly be found in many classrooms, but the literature on teacher professionalization would indicate that it is still to be fully realized. Seeing students as knowledge workers, engaged in adding value to knowledge, however, is virtually unheard of except at postgraduate level. (Bereitner & Scardanalia, 2005) Bereitner & Scardanalia show that the concept of the container is far from dead and has come under serious attack. There is a fundamental shift going on in how we view knowledge, from entity thinking to relational constructionist thinking.

A new role for the so-called experts

The changing view of teaching and learning, and the roles teachers and students play as active producers, affects the work of outside experts. Involving teachers and students actively in the reform (Dalin, 2005) means that we break the old paradigm, that the expert comes from outside, or that a little group organized within the school are the experts. Most of the theory, the advice, and leading of educational change come from those who have not themselves engaged in sustained efforts to work with schools collaboratively to achieve deep changes. To them, collaboration means that academics and consultants offer the ideas, and the practitioners carry them out. When the reforms fail, the practitioners are at fault. Dalin makes it very clear that in these days of rapid complex change no one can be an expert on future changes. Knowledge is built up, not from the expert group but from the knowledge learnt from the daily work of students and teachers. This also affects the roles of scholars, school advisors, and curriculum developers and so on. They have to look for different, relational approaches in which everybody can be the expert in the process.

Preparing staff for new roles

What is interesting is the shift to approaching teacher staff development, or professionalization, differently. The shift in seeing teachers as experts within the reform processes, in seeing school systems' role in society differently for tomorrow's future, in seeing how we understand the construction of knowledge and so on, does have an impact on how we prepare staff for their new roles. Contributors like Dalin, Fullan, Hargreaves, Hopkins, Lieberman, Louis, Nias and Smyth (2005) emphasize the need for fundamental changes in professional development. All these involve reconceptualization of professional development for teachers and administrators, recognizing their key roles in bringing about large-scale educational reform.

Louis & Miles (2005) come with interesting insights, in which she promotes closing the gap between research knowledge and practitioners' knowledge, reconnecting both. In the end, it is the teachers who construct knowledge as they go about their work, when they engage in professional discussions about their own practices. This comes very close to the ideas of the TAOS Institute to promote the integration between the academic and practitioners' worlds. Furthermore, she promotes the collective knowledge which is created by discussion, so that all or most members of the school share it. Joint efforts to interpret information must provide a foundation for challenging existing beliefs about school, or previous views of teaching and learning. She refers to the ideas of Huberman, that learning through interaction is important. From the social constructionist point of view it is putting people in relation to produce knowledge.

The metaphors Smith (2005) uses in his article also give interesting insights for teacher staff development. Teachers are seen as technicians, for example. In this metaphor, teachers see deficiencies in classroom life that have to be fixed – students are seen as inert materials to be worked on, and the way to do this is to bring in outside experts to diagnose the problems, and to provide a remedy in the form of knowledge and information which is missing from the teachers' repertoire of content. The second metaphor is that he views teachers as artists, crafts persons or bricoleurs. In this view, it has been said that what counts about teaching is what is learned tacitly through practical experience, and by following the lead voice of more experienced practitioners.

“The third metaphor is compatible with the relational point of view. It is the view which sees teachers as intellectuals and political actors. “In this view there is an emancipatory intent, as teachers work with others in staff development to use collective professional judgment as a way of connecting schools to society, with a view to changing the latter. Staff development of this kind is characterized by integration, diversity, uncertainty, ambiguity and excited confusion.” (Smith, 2005 p. 218) Smith has interesting insights for teacher staff development. He concludes in his article that there is still a tendency in teaching staff development to view teachers from a disabled view: the teacher who is weak. Smith proposes to use the language of probability instead of the language of problems. Nias (2005) argues in favor of seeing the workplace of teachers as a learning place. He states that an individual teacher grows best in his professionalism in relation to other colleagues. In this way he proposes to activate productive collegial relationships. In this way, schools become a learning place, not only for students and students but also for teachers. Collegiality assisted development is perfectly compatible with relational constructionism.

Changes in school evaluation

In the old paradigm, evaluation is often used to control the change process. This paradigm is still used these days. It is not that it is wrong to use evaluation to have control over what is going on, but we must not approach change on the basis of this idea of having control and power over. There are interesting ideas about approaching evaluation or quality assurance from other orientations. It becomes clear that a relational position can strengthen the change processes enormously. If we not only use evaluations for gaining information or data, there are more and other possibilities to connect, or rather, to put evaluation in relation to the change process itself. By doing this, evaluation does not become a static something or entity, but a dynamic instrument contributing to the change process. Evaluation is not treated then as separate from reality, but in these new ideas is seen as being part of reality. Inquiry and intervention are joined, as Hosking & McNamee would say. Contributors like Cuttance (2005), Lander & Ekholm (2005), Withford & Jones(2005) propose using school evaluation for school improvement, instead of gathering information and achieving control by policymakers. Their insights are interesting because they discovered that too much emphasis on goal-based accountability results in the reduction of professional commitment. One of their conclusions is that policymakers view evaluation more as a means of gathering information and achieving control, rather than as a tool for school improvement. In relational terms, I would say that they fail to see evaluation as part of reality, and by doing this they miss the chances for using this *in* the change process as a strong intervention means.

In the old tradition, evaluation is often initiated by the management in a top-down approach. The new ideas use evaluation from the middle up, not from above. Cuttance (2005) proposes to focus the evaluation or quality assurance systems not only on testing students' outcomes as they exit the system, because then there is no time to remedy cases where students have failed to gain the appropriate learning outcomes. Withford & Jones (2005) focus on what students can do with their knowledge in realistic situations. According to Hermans (2007), Aschbacher & Winter (1994) this focus requires students to actively accomplish complex and significant tasks, while bringing to bear prior knowledge, recent learning and relevant skills to solve realistic or authentic problems. They suggest that the arbitrary, punitive control-oriented system is replaced with one that is more collaborative, professional and improvement-oriented. It all depends on whether those who hold power over schools are able to move from a controlling role into a collaborative one. Another idea is, to mix the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, rather than use them separately. By putting these two methods in relation the outcomes will give a better idea of the situation which is evaluated. Some of the characteristics of this new wave of thinking are:

- There is an enhanced focus on student outcomes.
- Instead of focusing on changing the processes of schools, the focus is now on seeing if these changes are powerful enough to affect students' outcomes.
- Many more projects than before are adopting a mixed methodological orientation, in which bodies of quantitative data plus qualitative data, which are used to measure program quality, program effects and program deficiencies, are appropriate.

The traditional way was qualitative data for school improvement and quantitative data for school effectiveness, while the new paradigm adopts the belief of fitness for purpose and uses whichever methods are appropriate to the problem under study. The new paradigm uses knowledge from both the school effectiveness and school improvement traditions in its programs.

Turning islands into archipelagoes

The change demands emerging from these fundamental shifts in our mindsets seem to follow one another at an increasingly frenetic speed. The world of educational change is complex. As Fullan (2005) concludes, there are no single models or theories of innovation, there are only multiple innovations. As I see schools and their teachers trying to deal with these complex changes, while working in the turbulent daily realities, their focus is mostly on their own context, whether it is their classroom or their school. Efforts to deal with change by visiting other schools and learning from them are still scarce. As I said, multiple innovations require collective approaches. It is here where the relational position can play an important role. School systems still act like islands, missing the necessary connections with other schools and the community to learn and to strengthen the system. From the fundamental shift, in becoming aware that we need each other badly to deal with the rapid changes, it may be clear that we have to turn the islands into archipelagoes. Here we see again, that this fundamental change from islands to archipelagoes shows compatibility with relational constructionism. In the *Handbooks* (2005), we see many examples of this, such as the ideas of networking among professionals of different schools.

Networking among teachers and their schools is seen by Lieberman (2005), West (2005), as a way of building these archipelagoes. She sees forming networks as attempts of schools to come out of their isolated positions. These networks typically involve a sense of shared purpose, psychological support, voluntary participation and a facilitator. Lieberman recognizes the enormous power these networks can have, but also that they can be fragile, necessitating continuous negotiation of tensions. She concludes, in her article, that networks are inherent to human life. Think about news spreading out of the school systems by means of students and teachers, to their parents, families and into communities. When you need anything, networks are naturally used. These networks are a spontaneous and irrepressible part of our lives as members of a community. These natural networks thrive, because they operate outside any formal system and can evolve in immediate response to the needs of participants. When they cease to be useful, they fade, and are replaced by other networks that better fit the problem at hand. A constructed or facilitated network runs the risk of an inevitable emphasis on maintaining the networks as an institution, rather than keeping their innovative, problem solving stance (Parker, 1979). Lieberman uses the metaphor of the coffee machine at a factory: "Without discretionary time and stimulus from outside their building, or responsibilities that require collaboration, teachers have connected with each other in the way piece workers might at a factory – around the coffee machine and at lunch time, outside their work." Seashore Louis (2005) promotes the focus on informal and formal networks for transmitting knowledge between units. It is interesting that Lieberman (2005) promotes networks as vehicles for transformational change. When used in the right way they can put teachers in the center of change, give them voice and make them important for establishing change. "Since formally constituted educational institutions change slowly and reluctantly, reform networks are coming to serve as vehicles for the collaborative development of innovative and far-reaching solutions to educational problems that are permeating large systems". (Lieberman, 2005, p. 58) Louise (2005) promotes the focus on informal and formal networks for transmitting knowledge between units.

Barber (2005, p. 94) promotes partnership of the government with the educational field. He is very clear that the government task in the future is not only making laws and regulations but also to establish "a climate in which policy development takes place. This includes the establishment of effective working relationships with the teaching profession, local education authorities and other producers of education as well as the consumers." I am sure that building relationships based on appreciation and understanding will help to achieve success in educational change efforts.

Schollaert (2007) finds connectedness important. It is necessary for the complex change processes we have to deal with. Learning becomes, not an individual happening, but a relational happening; by interaction with others, a shared meaning is constructed. Positive mutual dependency is fundamental to change. Mutual understanding creates better connectedness. Again, forming archipelagoes is compatible with the relational work.

Power to teachers and students, empowerment with responsibility

I think it must be clear by now, that in the new paradigm we must transform our beliefs and assumptions about the role teachers and students can play in the change process. In his latest book *Mensen Veranderen (People Change)*, De Caluwé offers the wise insight that we cannot change others. We can create conditions to help others to change, but in the end each individual will determine whether he or she changes. In Levin's (2005, p. 158) words, "Change occurs because those who will be affected by the change are able to decide for themselves the future that they will work towards. In other words, we do not have control over others. At best we can provide a process to stimulate change and enable participants to work together productively on behalf of students and communities.

In the Netherlands, it seems that power is taken away from the teachers in the change process. Teachers and school leaders are afraid these days to make their own decisions. There is a lot of pressure from outside to achieve favorable results and learning outcomes in schools. Fullan(1991) promotes the practice of fearlessness; he means, daring to make choices although the government wants you to do more. Practicing fearlessness implies being prepared to take risks in pursuit of improvement in a changing world. Practicing fearlessness also means putting the power back where it belongs: in the hand of teachers and their school leaders. If we want to bring about change, we need to give the power to those who are involved in the change. They are the experts on their own unique local contexts. West (2005, p. 99) refers to Roland Barth, who argues that school improvement is most likely to succeed when it is based on the skills, aspirations and energies of those closest to the school. Schools have the capacity to improve themselves if the conditions are right. It is a major responsibility of those outside the school to help provide the conditions for those inside. West is very clear that if we want to be successful in change we have to give control to those who are involved in the change. The handbooks also give many examples of handing back the power to students, which can only be done if we change or transform our way of looking at learning and knowledge. Ingvarson (2005) confirms this by concluding that we need to transfer the control to the hands of the profession. Empowerment of the teachers and the students is crucial to achieving success. In this way, we give a central position to the actors of change, and appreciate them as experts. Levin (2005) calls this empowerment with responsibility. Communication between all layers in the system is seen as essential for active involvement and decision making. (Lagerweij, 2004)

Organizations survive and grow best when all members at all levels can actively participate in the collective learning process. Collective constructions, or we could call them relational constructions, are seen as crucial for sustainable educational change. The community, which has often been outside the change process as a result of the individual approach, is seen as a new and better way for achieving sustainable change and as absolutely necessary in these times of complex educational change.

As we will see later, in the analysis of *the I Believe in You! process*, the construction of widespread involvement was one of the important features of this durable change. Because of it, the leadership was

spread. Many members created changes for many other members within the process. More collaboration comes out of widespread collaboration. The quality of the coordination of all these actions is an important feature. (Angus 2005). Levin (2005) adds that, with this collective approach, the process can be more powerful by founding it on the strengths of the participants. Sterling (2001) speaks of response-ability. In his view, schools should be capable of responding to the changes in society. In my opinion, as I have also said in the publication *I Believe In You!*, it is the task of everyone who is involved in the education system to use response-ability. The student for his learning needs, the teacher for the students' needs, the school leader for setting the right conditions... etcetera. In my opinion, it is a relational-response-ability. I think this is best done when people are put in relation by giving them responsibilities. Schollaert (2007) emphasizes this and says that learning is not enough. People also have to take their responsibilities so that they have power over, or impact on, the important aspects of school life. This requires shared leadership. He explains that autonomy is a fundamental requirement for schools to respond to the social challenges. The biggest frustration of educational reformers is that teachers do not do things they do not believe in. Remember *the pocket veto* of De Caluwé. Every individual in a collective change process will interpret, respond to and use the innovation in a personal, unique way. Change, which in a way can be viewed as a learning process, is a social issue. This suits the relational point of view.

By giving power to teachers and students, ownership will be a by-product. This ownership can lead to involvement and empowerment, which is crucial for any change success. (Angus, 2005) We also believe that the impetus, the effort, the creativity needed to improve schools must come largely from within. In this, we find ourselves in agreement with Roland Barth, who has argued that school improvement is most likely to succeed when it is based in the skills, aspirations and energies of those closest to the school. (West, 2005, p. 99) West makes it clear that, by giving power back to schools, teachers and students can be more in control of the change. The need for and sense of change are born. Unique situations are constructed in each school because each school is looking for its own, unique way of improving school practice. By giving power back, democracy can act as a vehicle for change and school improvement. (Blasé, 2005) The formal and informal power of individuals and groups is restored to achieve goals in their organizations.

The overlooked dimension of the relational art

Looking at educational change with social constructionist eyes

By studying the literature, I became aware that the relational art has been overlooked for many years. *Being put in relation, joint action, or co-action*, seems to be deficient in the overall approaches. For many years, teachers and students, for example, were *not put in relation* to the change efforts in schools. The curricula or school programs, were made by experts who were separated from the daily school context, and decisions about educational change were made by others than teachers. Fortunately, there appears to be a shift away from this individual thought towards the relational orientation. Let us take up the challenge and try to look at educational change from a social or relational constructionist orientation.

Educational change seen as human work

Let us put it simply and clearly. Educational change happens in the day-to-day actions of all human beings involved in the educational system. These are the teachers and their school leaders, but also students and their parents, members of school boards, school advisors, school inspectors, and at the top the Minister of Education. It must be clear that, in the end, educational change should benefit those who are in the middle of the process: the teacher and his students. Mgloughlin (2005) makes this clear by saying that change is ultimately a problem of the smallest unit. What actually happens as a result of a policy depends on how such a policy is interpreted and transformed at each point in the process, and finally on the response of the individual at the end of the line. I think we should always ask the question, "Who benefits?" Although the answer is clear to us, namely that students and teachers should benefit from this in the first place, the reality is often totally different.

When we see educational change from a relational stance, we have to move away from the static, entitic, individualistic position. By seeing educational change or organizations as human relational work, we can better understand the dynamics of the change processes. Human beings are not machines, not robots which can be controlled. The work of Mitchell & Sackney (2009) made it clear to me that learning, thinking, changing, teaching, communicating, relating and even acting are not totally controllable things. They all are dynamic in nature. And they influence one another constantly, as well as we do. They are related to one another. Thinking about this, I noticed that much educational literature approaches education in ways such as:

- The school leader who acquires certain skills, competencies, knowledge, attitudes will influence or change others, such as teachers or students.
- The teacher who acquires certain skills, competencies, knowledge, attitudes will influence or change students.
- The student who acquires certain skills, competencies, knowledge, attitudes will influence or change his learning.
- The school advisor who acquires certain skills, competencies, knowledge, attitudes will influence or change others.
- The program developed by experts will guarantee positive learning results.
- Tests or evaluating will give the right answers and can even help to predict the future.
- The policymakers who determine for others what to do and what not within the reform attempts.

I do not want to state that this individual approach is completely wrong, but I realize that it is incomplete, or too one-sided. Approaching these issues from an individual point of view has produced many insights and has often been helpful, but what I miss is the insight as to how a relational view would throw light on what I think is very important in change, namely focusing on *what is constructed or made by people who are together in the change process; people who are put in relation*.

Instead of concentrating on change by detailed planning (the focus is before the change), or the intended, predictable results (the focus is after the change) the focus should be on the change process, step by step. By putting the focus within the process, we learn more of the ongoing dynamics of the change process *and* it forces us in a way *to be in relation* with those who are involved in the change: the students and teachers. So what would educational change look like if we approached it not from this individual standpoint, but from the relational standpoint? The crucial point is that the educational system is made up of human beings, and what

all these people do together creates or constructs their local reality. Branson (2010, p. 113) says, "The real power for change in a school lies in its capacity to generate positive working relationships". Weatley (2006, p. 25) states, "The issue is not control, but dynamic connectedness." Lists, strategic detailed plans, models, charts, can never capture this dynamic connectedness of all these people working within schools. Again, this pressure for control expresses our desire to have a grip on reality. Weatley's view shows how important it is to look at things in a different way. It emphasizes the human view and recognizes the need to build relationships and collaborations. "In this view of reality of schools relationships are not just interesting, they are all there is to reality." (Weatley, 2006, p. 34) He continues, "Leaders involved in educational change...need to learn how to facilitate positive and constructive interpersonal interactions." Lagerweij (2004) claims that educational processes are also social processes: done by people and for people. According to Hargreaves (2005), the complexity of educational change asks for collective approaches instead of individual ones. Their lesson is: teachers improve their schools; it is not done by policymakers, researchers or school advisors. Any school improvement initiative must therefore be to engage and to engage with teachers. We must give power to teachers and students. (West, 2005). We need to understand the teacher's life and their relationship to educational reform in better ways. Schools are human institutions, and as such they act not only rationally, but also emotionally. Change strategies that ignore the meaning, emotions and cultures of schools are doomed to failure. (Fink & Stoll 2005) This takes me to relational constructionism.

Relational constructionism

The explanation of my dog's and my problem, our problem in fact, in the previous chapter, made clear, I hope, what relational construction means. In the educational change process, we are related to one another in many ways. Although we often have different roles, the way we do things together influences strongly what happens from moment to moment: the process. The relational orientation helped me to understand that we are all in the same boat of reality. Together we create our daily realities, and it is obvious to me that what we create can differ greatly from moment to moment, from context to context, from relation to relation. We cannot be leaders of change without being in relation with our followers and their context. I do not like this word 'followers'. To me the word has too much of a modernistic ring. It shows the accepted idea that we can control others and that, if we demonstrate certain leadership characteristics or competencies, others will easily follow.

It is like the chicken and egg: which was first? That leads me to the question: Who follows who? As in the Shaman's metaphor, the crux lies in understanding the dynamics which are created between people when doing things together. Re-action, the word expresses what is happening: we constantly act and re-act in the processes of change. Although the mechanistic view has focused a lot on the so-called visible elements to keep a grip on change by setting goals, detailed planning, evaluating, testing, controlling etcetera, the interesting thing about the relational orientation is that it focuses on the acting and re-acting which occur within the relationships people form, in organizations like school systems or in change processes. Everything is connected and therefore influences each other. During this influencing, all kinds of by-products are produced. I like the insights of Mitchell & Sackney (2009) expressed in their latest work *Sustainable Improvement, Building Learning Communities that Endure*. They illustrate the distinction between holism and

deep ecology¹⁵ by using the ideas of Capra (1996). “The two terms holistic and ecological differ slightly in their meanings, and it seems that holistic is somewhat less appropriate to describe the new paradigm. A holistic view of, say, a bicycle means to see the bicycle as a functional whole and to understand the interdependence of its parts accordingly. An ecological view of the bicycle includes that, but it adds to its perception of how the bicycle is embedded in its natural and social environment – where the raw materials that went into it came from, how it was manufactured, how its use affects the natural environment and the community by which it is used, and so on.” (Capra, 1996, pp. 6-7) Capra (2008) is quite clear in stating that for the coming decades we need to develop *ecological literacy* - our ability to understand the basic principles of and to live accordingly - for the survival of humanity.

This distinction is interesting, also in the light of relational constructionism, because it makes clear to me that it shifts wholeness and interdependence past specific elements and connections. The ecological view goes further or deeper in pointing that an entire history of actions – such as interactions, transactions, and transformations that create, at certain moments and places, a particular set of conditions - shape human lives in particular ways. This fits in perfectly with the ideas of relational constructionism. From this perspective, we are not only focused on discovering what change looks like, or what schools, teaching and learning look like, but in exploring the totality of the mutual actions and interactions, influences, interconnections, reciprocal relationships, and active processes by which they came to be as they were. We must break through our own educational system by deeply questioning in which way it contributes human life and nature, going from *swallow ecology* towards *deep ecology*. We need to build in Naess (2008) words cooperative relationships at every level of our lives and society to solve the wide range problems and hazards we now face. Naess believes that each of us is capable to do far more we believe and that we usually greatly underestimate our abilities.

By this, we can better understand the consequential effects they had, and have, on the lives of the human beings – the participants in the change processes such as students, teachers, school leaders, parents, educators, school consultants. In fact, this shift of perspective moves us from the *what* towards the *how*, *why* and to the *what effect* considerations. Capra (1996, p. 8) calls this the questions of deep ecology¹⁶. In this way this fits very well in the relational constructionist orientation. When I worked on the analysis of the *I Believe in You!* process it helped me to analyze the process not only in terms of *what the process looked like*, but also in terms of deeper questions of *how people worked together in the process, what they did and made together, what relationships were built, how they were related or put in relation, to what effect, or what was socially constructed in that specific time within that specific context*. The analysis focused on the *how* of the process rather than the *what*. Mitchell & Sackney (2009, p. x) say quite clearly that looking carefully at the construction of the change process helps to understand change more deeply because it serves as a basis for thinking systematically about an array of complex and interconnected matters.

Educational change is such a complex matter. It is an intertwined process of changes at all kind of levels involving people from young to old. “Constructing the change process from a relational view allow(s) us to a)

¹⁶ An important aspect of deep ecology that Naess (2008) makes is that the essence of deep ecology is to ask deeper questions. *In The Way of Life* (Capra 1996) Capra refers to a "new paradigm that may be called a holistic worldview, seeing the world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts. It may also be called an ecological view, if the term 'ecological' is used in a much broader sense than usual" (p. 6). Distinguishing between "shallow" and "deep" ecology, he describes shallow ecology as "human-centered. It views humans as above or outside of nature, as the source of all value, and ascribes only instrumental or 'use' value to nature." Deep ecology, on the other hand, does not separate humanity from nature: "It sees the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent." It recognizes that *all* living beings have intrinsic value and views mankind "as just one particular strand in the web of life." Moreover, "Ultimately, deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness" (p. 7).

describe events and behaviors, b) understand and explain events and behaviors, c) anticipate future events and behaviors, d) plan for future events under particular circumstances (see Owens, 2001).” Capra talks about disturbances that power change processes. In doing so, they capture the attention of certain people at certain places and times, by responses that are meaningful and purposeful in and for that particular context. In a way, Capra’s ecological thought is rooted “in the appreciation of the totality of patterns, relationships, actions, interactions, and mutual influences that emerge among and between people and the natural and constructed environments in which they live.” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. xi) Wheatley (1992, p. 6) speaks of rejecting Newtonian images of the universe and that we should “embrace the science of our times”.

Schools are forms of human lives, and so are educational change processes. “...all human life, including life in schools, is part of a deep planetary ecology of which mutuality and interdependency are key properties, learning and renewal are key processes, and emergent networks are foundational structures.” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. ix) Is it not strange that when we look closer at our educational systems that it often seems as if they are forgetting to embrace humanity and become life-enhancing, rather than life-destroying? Everything we do in the game we play with the people in our communities is to move. How we move and how we play determines or affects how other people move and play.

The relational constructionist position

Let us now focus on the work of scholars such as Hosking, McNamee, Gergen and Anderson to have a better understanding of this relational position. It must be clear to the reader that I am not trying to describe a method of relational constructionism used for educational change. There is no relational constructionist method. Hosking (2002, p. 2) says, “relational constructionism does generate and validate some changed forms of change work. These involve practical acceptance of (a) actors as part of – rather than apart from – reality constructions (b) a world of multiple realities – as ontologies, (c) realities that might best be treated as non-consistent and non-comparable (and not as multiple subjectivities). It is important for a good understanding, that relational constructionism is trying to transcend the subjective/objective duality from an individual stance towards a relational one.” In saying that it is impossible to be objective, relational constructionism tries to be very much aware of the idea that by not being objective, it simply does not mean that relational constructionism is subjective, because subjectivity is seen as internal mental processes of individuals. The great insight of relational constructionism is that talking about relational processes shows the interconnectedness of humans in the change process, permanently influencing each other. Because of these dynamics, which change in every setting, the outcomes are based on mutual or shared internal and relational processes. These premises invite further development of non-hierarchical ways of organizing. This brings us back to the insights of Branson (2010), who also says that organizations, like school systems, profit more from a perspective like *community* rather than *hierarchy*. It is my personal belief and experience that sustainable change can only be built upon trustful relationships. Trustful relationships must then be seen as a by-product of being in relation in appreciative ways. Unfortunately, our present time shows lots of examples of the opposite approach, in fact reproducing more unequal relations.

I will use Dian Hosking's (2002, 2006) thoughts to illustrate these other forms of looking at change work. Hosking explains that she views ‘persons’ and ‘organizations’ – all constructed realities and relations – as produced and emergent in relational processes. This reminded me of what I experienced as a young school leader. People gave me the title (entity) of leader as soon as I was appointed. They thought I had the power

to bring about change. Being inexperienced and untrained for this job at that critical moment, I realized very quickly that in spite of being given this title, I did not like it. I was not a leader just by having this title. I felt deep inside that my leadership would only flourish in relation to others, the members of the school community. In my early leadership years, I realize now, I had an amazing experience, which I can now put into words. I never felt that my leadership was finished, or ready to be the perfect leader, as described in the many management books. I read about all these characteristics and competencies one should have or acquire. I never felt I was ready, finished or complete; it felt more like an ongoing process, dynamic, never-ending. Nowadays I explain this when I coach school leaders: One does not become a school leader, but one keeps on growing in this leadership and it is the relationship with others that will determine from moment to moment what my leadership will look like and how it will be experienced.

Hosking goes on to say that she focuses on the *HOW*, i.e. the processes of social constructions, rather than the *WHAT*. I mentioned this earlier within the ecological perspective. Since I have been growing in terms of social constructionist thoughts, I already experience the difference in my present school advisory work. The *HOW* question provides many new insights to all participants in the change process, including myself, especially from the relational position. It also seems to be free of judgments. The how questions simply want to analyze how people are working together in achieving their desired or wished-for direction.

The third focus is *on action* rather than on *how things are* or *how they must be* in order to produce objective knowledge. (p. 6) In trying to understand this, my insight in this PhD work is that focusing on action means looking at change *in* the action, from moment to moment, instead of looking at change before the action, when making plans, or after the action, when evaluating the plan but not the moment by moment change. I still feel somewhat uncertain or scared. To look at change work in this relational perspective is quite new and yet, as Hosking says, little explored.

Viewing change, and educational change, as a relational, dynamic process

Instead of the present view of separation, such as the subject-object, this and that, you and me, here and there orientations, relational constructionism tries to view change as social realities constructed in relational processes. This is an interesting idea, which I think can result in many new directions in the educational change. What would educational change look like if we approached it from this relational perspective? Is it not strange that in spite of many years of educational reform *and* the typical character of educational change, namely the human aspect, we have overlooked this dimension? Is it not strange that for many years we have separated those who are involved in the change, students and teachers, by placing them on the outside as objects which we do not put in relation at all. I think we have overlooked this relational dimension. The business-as-usual approach is to make things static: the teacher, the student, the learning, the program, the curriculum, the school leader, the training and so on. When we focus on one thing, such as the school leader, we think that by making him stronger things will change. When we try to train this school leader in acquiring the ultimate characteristics of leadership – you know all these lists produced in management literature – we proudly award him a certificate, which seems to guarantee optimal leadership. Another example: when we focus on learning, in making complete, uniform programs, training the teachers, we think our students will achieve the desired outcomes, often formulated by others. We use uniform standardized tests to check these outcomes and hope that the students will get good marks. But a change process, which learning actually is, is not helped with this common way of thinking that we have control, and can plan and

predict change or learning. Mitchell & Sackney (2009) state this very clearly. It is, in the end, the learner, student, teacher, participant in the change process, who will decide what he wants to learn, how he wants to learn, and what he wants to do with it. Remember the pocket veto of De Caluwé & Vermaak (2006).

Looking at educational change from the relational perspective provided new insights, and consequently a new direction, to my change work at schools. I will give some examples in the final chapter of this dissertation. It is in relation with others that we create, or construct our daily reality. We all have the power to decide whether we go along with or resist the change. Emotions have been an item overlooked, in the research into educational change processes, where for many years the rational, cognitive view was the mainstream. Hargreaves (2005) has done interesting research to understand the role emotions play in change processes. Let me illustrate this with a situation at one of my schools, which shows the more traditional approach, which Hosking calls the mainstream, modernistic, or individual approach, and on the other hand the relational constructionist approach. In this example, the school is implementing a program for social emotional development, called *the Peaceful School*. The school is in the second year of implementation. The program aims to establish a change of culture within the whole school community. All teachers work with the program and have been quite enthusiastic about the approach, but today in our steering group meeting some members indicate they have noticed a decline in motivation or enthusiasm. We are discussing the situation.

<p>In the individual approach, the discussion with the steering committee would have focused on what the process looked like. What do we see? What is it what we see teachers doing with the program? By doing this we generalize some impressions into an assumed uniform behavior of all teachers in school. By focusing separately on the teachers, we forget to focus on the steering group or the management, or the school advisor. We also focus on fixing the problem. We became aware in the discussion that we do not really know the individual personal histories, but we immediately try to analyze the problem and find a solution by trying to get power over or control over the process. When they change, or when they are more committed to the program, the program or rather the culture we are aiming at will change. Furthermore, at this specific moment everyone watches the expert, me, expecting him to say what should be done.</p>	<p>Being aware of what was happening as a result of this individual approach I shifted the discussion to the relational view. The main question to the steering group was, "What do we all do together with these teachers, which creates this situation? What do we discover we can do differently to move into the desired direction? If a culture change is what we want, what about our behavior, our beliefs, our ... What do we do to keep on being focused? What kind of communication is going on? In what manner are teachers interconnected or are they into collaborative practices about their own experiences? What has the steering group or the management done these last few months. And so on.</p> <p>By showing that the quality of the program can be strengthened by looking at it from this relational perspective it became clear that it is what we construct together in doing things, which made the actual situation.</p>
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This discussion brought it home to me once again that, as Branson (2010) states, the mechanistic or hierarchical way of looking at change influences our present discussions about, and approaches to, change. Looking at the plan, changing activities, setting new or improved goals, and working on the basis of the belief that we will have everything under control, is still a less successful approach than going into the change process itself, by dialoguing, setting up collaborative practices, stimulating purposeful and meaningful actions, and giving power to the teachers within the change process. This is where I come to the improvisational art, which in my opinion is overlooked, because of the great emphasis on the planned change approach. The study for this Ph.D. has made it clear to me how important it is to pay more attention to this improvisational art. In fact, I remember Lagerweij's words, that change also has spontaneous and unexpected dynamics. It is here where the improvisational art comes in.

Using improvisational art

When I was in Suriname in November 2010, to develop¹⁷ new ideas and views about the teachers' training colleges, *the Schools Inspectorate* and *the School Advisory Service* with the Surinamese participants, the experiences I had greatly inspired me. This is what I wrote in my log November 2010:

After working successfully last week with the complete staff of *the School Advisory Service* and *the Schools Inspectorate* of the Surinamese Ministry of Education, I have to give the same workshop about Vision Creation to a selected group of staff members of five teachers' training colleges. "Can we be equally as successful as in last week's workshops?" was a question I asked myself. I quickly realized that this would not be possible. We can be successful in a different way. Different people, different histories, different relationships, different experiences and different expectations will create different dynamics. At the beginning of this new workshop, I noticed the difficult behavior of some participants. The old approach would be to see them as obstacles to having creating a successful workshop. Just like the story of our dog Cacho. Throw them out of the workshop and the problem will be solved. Because of my new and strengthened insights, I became aware that it was my thinking that created these obstacles. Seeing these teachers separately from my reality created a powerless situation in which I would be out of control. Fortunately, I quickly saw what was happening. Seeing myself as part of this reality, I started to think about other ways of constructing the workshop setting. I changed the conversational practices, mixed groups in different ways, introduced several moments of reflection for all members to sense how they were involved in the workshop; in fact, to discuss what we were doing together at certain moments. Although I had a detailed plan for this workshop, I started to improvise at the moment of change. The energy of the group's dynamics changed more and more into vitality, playfulness, activity and commitment. From the social constructionist perspective this should be seen as by-products of the process. This experience really made me feel what it means to deal with change. Yes, a plan to work out the activities and strategy for the workshop was all right, but even more important was the art of improvisation in the change process. It is not either one way or the other. It is a wise use of combinations of possibilities seen and experienced at a given moment.

I discovered what Barrett (2006) calls *jazz improvisation*, and Branson's (2010) metaphor of *the traffic jam*. Branson argues in favor of the use of improvisational art to achieve successful educational change. It is not about following a clearly defined plan, like following a recipe, but it is improvisational art: more like driving down a busy main street during peak hour traffic. To me, being involved at the time in the Surinamese process of making *I Believe in You!* felt like careful driving, trying some ingredients and observing how they would respond, which was unplanned and unpredictable, and then driving on carefully and building the process together. It was the unexpected and spontaneous actions that strengthened the change process enormously. All this reminds me of the work of the wise shaman in Kwamalasamutu near the Brazilian border deep in the Surinamese rainforest. As described by Mark Plotkin (1994) in *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice*, he shows us that we have to deal with the visible *and* the invisible in the process of change. We can analyze what the shaman uses for certain treatments – our western technology will make that an easy job – but what we cannot handle is the reactions and energy that start to work between these ingredients influencing the change process in an unplanned and unpredictable way. That is still a secret, and (is) perhaps only reserved for the wise men who can observe the visible and the invisible. Branson's work and Plotkin's work were very inspiring. In *Leading Educational Change Wisely* (2010), Branson points out the

¹⁷ The participants in the *I Believe in You!* process were Surinamese educators, and also members of civil society like parents, students, business people, market vendors, politicians, district commissioners, village leaders and so on.

importance of using wisdom in leading change processes. Although I like the idea of using wisdom as an important feature in leading educational change in present and future complex processes, we should be careful not to make wisdom an exclusive part of leadership. In doing so we would approach wisdom from an individualistic point of view, separated from others. From a social constructionism perspective I would rather prefer to see wisdom as dynamic, getting its real meaning in the construction we make together in the specific local context, to see it as a kind of by-product.

Improvisational art can also be seen as a more flexible way of approaching the change process. Fullan (1991, 1993, 2005) calls it *evolutionary planning*. Wallace (2005) calls it flexible planning, in which it is important to make modifications during the change process to adapt the process more efficiently to the needs of the actors at that time. Wallace is in favor of continuous planning, instead of making one plan for the whole process. Flexible planning acknowledges, in his eyes, the limits to rationalistic planning in turbulent environments. It meets the endemic tension between the need (recognized in cycle planning) to sustain a long term direction and the need to respond to rapidly changing circumstances. What is needed for the dynamics of change therefore is a well coordinated, cooperative style of working that gives participants the confidence to improvise in search of the most appropriate responses to the situations they meet. In other words, we are seeking to create a system coupled by ideas and shared understandings of purpose, not one conforming to predetermined behaviors.

Dian Hosking mentions four themes which are interwoven in change processes.

- Act and supplement
- Multiple co-ordinations
- Local-social-historical constructions
- Relational realities

Act and supplement

Being put *in relation* can be seen as the action and reaction which occur within the social construction where people are doing or making things together. Hosking (2002, p. 8) refers to joint action (Shotter, 1993), co-action and performance (e.g. Bateson, 1993; Newman and Holzman, 1997). Realities are constructed by all kind of actions and non-actions, and from the ecological perspective, which is interconnected in certain ways. It is this interconnectedness which points to the relational aspect. By acting – which can be communication, a conversation at the coffee machine, an official meeting, nonverbal actions or even non-acting - there is a reacting, a supplementing, which can appear in visible or invisible ways. It is never a one-sided effect. People in a change process are put *in relation* to each other. Whatever they do, or do not do, affects the next steps in the process. As we will see below, the multi-complexity shows that these actions and re-actions happen simultaneously with different people, in different contexts, at different moments, in different speeds. These actions and re-actions can be in formal discussions, meetings, non-verbal actions, thoughts, memories, visualizations, emotions and so on. Seen from the relational constructionist point of view, each action generates new actions. New things are created in relation with the other. This acting leads to supplementing, which seems to be a never-ending story of generating new actions and re-actions. This is what makes all these processes dynamic and not static.

Seeing educational change from this orientation confirms that we must see educational change as an ongoing happening between people in interaction. Because of these dynamics and interchanges, we cannot fully predict what the next action will be or how the other will respond. A teacher can ask a student a question or teach a lesson but he will never be absolutely sure how the student will respond or what the student will learn from it. Sticking to the plan or program means that we are not open enough to modify our teaching. In my opinion, we miss precious moments. By improvising we can use these precious moments to be in relation with the other and the context. These acts and supplements – such as re-acting to the moment needs, which adds something to the process - can be viewed in the perspective of the findings of scholars described in the four *International Handbooks of Educational Change*. It has become clear to me that putting teachers and students in an active and productive role, rather than just in a consumer's role, results in different supplements. Being seen, appreciated and respected as important increases involvement and commitment in the change process. Being heard means that everybody else gains different and perhaps new information about the change process. This new information can lead to new actions of designing purposeful and meaningful programs when preparing students for an uncertain future. Changing ideas of teaching staff development, by turning workplaces into learning places or social laboratories, means that the supplement will have different forms of working together. Seeing teachers not as technicians but as intellectuals and political actors will affect the actions coming out of it. Giving students and teachers power will change the whole situation of reform. Changing the design of a curriculum, by giving students and teachers producers' roles, will change dynamics caused by the curriculum. It will affect teaching. New roles for students in the learning process will affect their ways of approaching and constructing knowledge and so on.

Multiple co-ordinations

I think education is full of multiple co-ordinations. Education is made by human beings for human beings. Education can be seen as a social process happening between people. All these human beings take part in the change process and have different roles and responsibilities. They therefore have different positions from which they give their own meaning to change. Seen from a relational orientation, it is particularly within the communication between those involved that we give voice to these different meanings. This is very important for establishing relationships based on mutual understandings. Multiple co-ordinations come from the multidimensional nature of educational change. (Hopkins, 2005) As a result, in my opinion, the educational change process also loses its predictability, which is not only caused by complexity and turbulence. Schools are complex networks of interrelated and interconnected forces, which define each school's uniqueness. These forces are often invisible, unseen and intangible, but are knowable by result. (Fink & Stoll, 2005)

It seems impossible to me, to be in control of all these different co-ordinations which happen simultaneously in daily reality. Hosking (2002, p. 9) makes clear that, "Construction processes consist of multiple, simultaneous and interrelated co-ordinations, many of which are tacit." This is why educational change is such a complex process. This insight of multiple co-ordinations is what is often overlooked by the traditional, often individual change approaches. They tend to approach the change process from a simple, linear concept and do not take in all these many multiple co-ordinations. "Educational change is rather a cyclic process." (Lagerweij, 2004, p. 121). Lagerweij sees educational change as a complex and multilevel process. The process happens at different levels simultaneously. I would say that educational change is a

multi-cyclic process. Change happens at many levels simultaneously, within students and between students, teachers, their leaders, and also in departments at policy level.

We have to change our mindsets as far as educational reform is concerned. There is no single innovation but there are multiple innovations occurring all at different moments on the timeline, influencing one another continually. This influencing, as I see it, does not only affect the content, but also the level of focus which differs all the time. And above all, everyone who is affected by the change process tries to understand this in their own personal way. Hopkins (2005) mentions the multilevel perspective of the educational school processes. Change is happening simultaneously at different levels within the school at different speeds or by varying degrees. There is no *single* innovation, but *multiple* innovations. (Fullan, 2005)

Improving the co-ordinations is seen as an important feature in the change process. Strategies, such as communication systems and procedures, and the ways groups are formed and sustained to co-ordinate improvement efforts across a range of levels of departments, are essential. It is of great importance that all the staff are kept informed about development priorities and activities, as this information is vital to informed self-direction.

Local-social-historical constructions

Local constructions are seen, from the relational perspective, as ways of relating, in which certain actions are warranted and others are not, within the communities concerned. The relational approach wants to show us that what we do is strongly influenced by our cultural traditions. We are often not aware of this anymore; it is all taken-for-granted. Hosking explains that our relational processes are influenced by how we view reality. Some actions are socially certified in this local context, but others are not. By being aware of these created constructions we gain a better understanding of the effects they have within the change processes. The ways of going on *in relation* may seem fixed, and may be taken for granted as how the world really is. Each local history is different. Each story is different. Stepping out of our local social historical constructions and looking at it in a relational way will give us many insights and therefore solutions to deal with the complexity of change. What also becomes clear to me, is that each school, when we are talking about educational change or reform, is situated in a different context. According to Slavin (2005), Hopkins (2005), Fullan (2005), we must adapt change to the stage of development or, as Slavin says, to the readiness of schools for change. Each school is different and it becomes more and more clear that there are many differences within the school as a human system. So improvement programs should be tailored to the individual school context. (Reynolds, 2005)

Louis (2005, p. 53) makes it clear that knowledge is also locally constructed. The knowledge existing in schools can become more powerful when it is developed in structures and cultures that encourage the development of a shared knowledge basis, guiding collective actions. The emphasis on developing school practice for self management should not only focus on the ability to manage budgets and personal policies, but should also attend to the creating of schools that can learn from knowledge that is generated inside and outside the school.

Relational realities

Relational constructionism sees 'self' and 'other' existing only in relation, as social realities. In other examples I gave, my dog Cacho is a well-behaved dog in relation to *the other*; my leadership quality is determined in relation to my school community and its specific local context; the success of *the Peaceful School Program* is determined in relation to the teacher and students, the other teachers, parents, and the community and my school advisory work differ from context to context, from moment to moment. It is therefore dynamic. The quality of my work depends on the local dynamics we all make together. We are all responsible for these dynamics.

"Identity and other assumed entity characteristics no longer need to be viewed as singular and fixed (a-historic), no longer function as defining characteristics of someone or something (transcendental). Rather, characteristics such as identity must be understood as multiple and variable (e.g. a different self in different relations), and something that is done rather than possessed." (Hosking, 2002, p. 10) Or as Lagerweij (2004, p. 116) says "All the factors influencing the change process are not static, not unchangeable; their working is uncertain. But it is possible to influence certain factors to be more positive and advantageous."

Hopkins (2005) states that when the conditions for educational change are right and when the need and purpose of change is shared, adults and students alike learn and each energizes and contributes to the learning of the other. What is needed is to strengthen the culture by improving the quality of the interpersonal relationships and the nature and quality of learning experiences. One of his insights of strengthening the educational change process is that curriculum development, organization development and decentralization of decision making have been treated individually, separate from each other. The new idea is to put them in relation, to integrate these sources which will create a synergy that will be more powerful to school improvement. Furthermore, he says that there are multiple realities alive during the change process with multiple perspectives.

It is of interest, (Hopkins, 2005; Louis, 2005; Smyth, 2005; Wallace, 2005) shifting from the individual approach to teacher staff development to a more collective approach. When teachers are put in relation to each other and interact around meaningful and purposeful themes, supported in the right way by externals, these powerful learning processes can take place. A powerful approach can be a new approach where teacher and students work together to establish change. Too often the teacher has the power over the change interventions, and students are only treated as consumers rather than as active producers. It also becomes clear from the handbooks that collaborative work is needed to cope with the multi-dimensional reality of school life. Wallace (2005) sees it as a precondition for the participatory development planning process. Nias (2005, p. 235) speaks of productive collegial relationships which enable teachers to grow in relation with others. In her work, she shows that colleagues play an important role in the professional development of teachers. Development also depends on collegial relationships. Another way of collaborative work is networks. Lieberman (2005) shows that these can mean a lot in the desired transformation of education: as the reform movement supports the transformation of teachers' roles into much broader areas of practice – developing curriculum and assessment, setting standards and evaluation practice, for example – these roles will carry powerful and authentic opportunities for teachers to work together and learn from one another. (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) It is these transformations that have fueled the growth of educational networks, even as networks themselves work to support, shape and sustain the transformations. West (2005) promotes partnerships that support the school and promote learning, particularly partnerships with students, with teachers, with parents, and with the school's various communities.

Constructing relational realities that contribute to the change process in a positive way means that the managing of change becomes more and more a collective process instead of an individual one. (Hargreaves, 2005) It also affects the roles of outside experts in becoming more partners in change. What Lieberman states in her article is important, that networking enables teachers, researchers, and administrators for the first time to come out of their isolated practices and take up a common cause with one another as colleagues. We see this more and more in the new reform efforts. By organizing collaborative and dialogical practices, everybody becomes an expert and strengthens each other. When we view this aspect of relational realities we see the increasing emphasis on aspects such as collectivity, relationships, collaboration, empowerment, uniqueness. The *I Believe in You!* process is an example of this.

Constructing educational change

The following ideas can offer some interesting new possibilities for educational change work (Dian Hosking, 2002):

Both change and stability are ongoing

If we see educational change in the relational constructionist way, stability and change are seen as both dynamic and ongoing processes. Although we have a tendency to strive for stability in the change process – it is this feeling we all want to have, that we are ready or have succeeded – this does not happen to be part of real educational life. Increasingly, teachers and school leaders say we are never finished, it always goes on and on! Assuming that both change as a process, and stability as ongoing re-constructions, form part of reality, increases the possibilities for dealing with educational change. It makes us realize that change processes must not only be seen as temporary actions or co-ordinations, but as ongoing processes, in which most of the change itself is hidden inside of people.

Entities and characteristics are suddenly not stable things, but are ever-changing within realities. When we look at the characteristics of school life we see the same. On one hand, schools deal with the complexity of the change process, which often looks more chaotic than structured. On the other hand, schools are organized in a very structured and stable way with roles, classrooms, curricula, time schedules, protocols, procedures and so on. In schools there is chaos and order, complexity and regularity. (Hargreaves, 2005) Taking this as an assumption means that we will approach the change process differently using evolutionary planning (Fullan, 2005) and flexible planning (Wallace, 2005). This means that we modify the change process constantly when necessary, and not at the end of the process when we evaluate it. Hopkins (2005) emphasizes the importance of selecting strategies for change which allow adaptation and adjustment within the change process. This implies that strategies should be flexible enough to suit the different school development and change needs. Many scholars call the issue of stability into question. Schools should prepare for an uncertain and unpredictable future, prepare for the unknown. (Dalin, 2005)

Wallace (2005, p 150) states that a critical feature of the context of innovation planning is the ever-changing balance between turbulence and stability in the internal and external environment of the institution where they are to be implemented. Turbulence refers to changes in information and practice relating to the internal environment of an organization, and to changes in information about pressures coming from the external environment. Conversely, stability means the continuance of existing practice, within the organization,

uninfluenced by internal changes or changes in external demands. There is a need for long-term coherence and short-term flexibility.

Change as a construction process of multiple realities

Working in many change processes, and especially analyzing the *I Believe in You!* process, made it clear to me that from a relational constructionist point of view we can see change as ongoing activities between human beings in specific contexts, which creates many new co-ordinations and realities. Wallace (2005) says it quite clearly: the core is a continual process of creation. Instead of thinking, I have everything under control, the opposite is true. I doubt whether we can have everything under control.

I realize that change constructs different realities, and that all participants will give their own meaning to it. These meanings are then influenced within the relationships built, and can change over time. So what impact does this have on educational change? Mitchell and Sackney (2009) explain that there is in fact very little control.

Change as power over approach

Many examples in the past decades illustrate this power over approach, which has often led to many failures of the reform. I observed it on many occasions in the different roles I played in education. But how would different educational change look, if we constructed it to give voice to teachers and their students?

What would educational change look like if we constructed “inclusive, nonhierarchical ways of relating that treat multiple different realities (in the ontological sense) as different but equal?” Hosking (2002, p. 11) It would be the community approach, as opposed to what Branson calls the hierarchical approach. How can we give free play to multiple local ontologies or forms of life without imposing one form or voice on others? One shared insight of the contributors of the four handbooks is that we need to give power to those who are in the change process: the students and teachers.

There is no resistance without force

It is interesting, working in a more open way, giving voice to people, letting meanings grow and sharing in collaborative practices. Striving for dialogues where people can really meet each other, and are seen by others, seems to decrease the resistance in the change process. This aspect is discussed in a lot of management literature. How can we deal with resistance? Labels are put on different types of resistance. Less attention is paid perhaps to what we construct, which leads to resistance. This item was discussed at a meeting with the management staff of a primary school. The opinions varied from unwillingness, negative attitudes towards change, to laziness, passivity, and so on; so mainly negative labels were mentioned. The individual view of the management staff separated the teachers' world from their own reality. The question was, how we can solve this problem? As in the case of our dog Cacho, should we throw him out of the house to solve the problem or should we use additional training or coaching? How should we try to get rid of

these difficult teachers? What was lacking was the insight to look deeper, and to use relational constructionist ideas of reflecting and dialoguing about what we do that creates resistance in this particular situation. What can we do differently to understand this resistance, and how can we dialogue with those teachers? That may give us new information about the reality we create. In the relational approach we see resistance as a by-product of what we all do together in the process.

What would educational change look like if we approached it from the other side, using force in a more constructive and appreciative way for change? When we look at the practices described in the handbooks, we see that there is a strong tendency to give power to students and teachers. We have also seen that just controlling those who are in the change process often leads to frustration, misunderstandings, and negative feelings. Separate and isolated actions do not lead us to sustainable change. These actions are not put *in relation* in a constructive manner. It seems logical to me, that when we give power to teachers and students and support their initiatives to improve education, resistance to change decreases. It is about *their* change and about *their* actions. It is not necessarily the characteristics of a particular teacher that cause resistance and the continuity it perpetuates, but the pressure on them and the limits placed on their involvement in making the decision to change. (Fullan, 2005, p. 13)

Generic themes in relational change work

Here are some generic themes, which Hosking & McNamee (2006) explain we meet in the construction of change, and which influence each other:

- **Knowing and influencing are joined**

All actions have the potential to influence change, to determine how processes go. Social constructionism sees to it that these interventions are not located in isolated people such as the expert, the change agent or even in the teacher, but are located in the ongoing change process, and come out of the relationships we build and construct. What becomes clear is that we need to be put *in relation* to deal with present and future needs, and questions within education. When this is done in a respectful and appreciative way, constructive perspectives can be built for future education. What is interesting is the opening to involve students and teachers more as active players and producers of knowledge, not only for their own learning, but also for their insight into the change processes. This better understanding will strengthen the change processes enormously. The openness to the other and the otherness, for example, by using collaborative and dialogical performances, literally makes space for knowing each other and the otherness in better ways. If these actions, knowing and influencing, join the process, they are closely connected to each other.

- **Multiple, equal voices**

We have seen in the examples of educational reform, which were compatible with relational constructionism, that giving space for multiple voices by using, for example, the voices of teachers, students, parents and the community, supports participative change work. An appreciative stance

on multiplicity strengthens the change process, because people are seen and heard. Their ideas are as important as those of policymakers, researchers or school advisors. Static procedures, or management drives to reach consensus, suppress or homogenize diversity. Space for multiple voices is created by working in nonhierarchical ways which recognize and support differences and which construct *power to* rather than *power over*. This includes everyone who has an involvement in some issue through participative change work (e.g. future search or appreciative inquiry). The challenge is to give space to these multiple voices. What I see in postmodern reform is an increasing understanding that we must give voice to students and teachers, to construct the power within the change processes. Broadening this, to involve the community and to use each other's strengths to contribute to the change process, will make the process really powerful. Dalin (2005) states that it is important to work with all expertise at all levels. This demands a horizontal organization, which means a low acceptance of power differences. Reynolds (2005). Teachers help each other. In fact they are seen as experts. Being seen as important producers of change will put teachers and students in a different and more active position. West (2005) emphasizes that widespread involvement in creating the development plan is more important than producing plans. It is the *link* between planning and action which, in the end, justifies the effort we put into planning activities. He argues in favor of greater focus on the impact of planning, rather than the technical merits of different planning systems. It is through collective planning that goals emerge, differences can be resolved and a bias for action is created. The plan is then really a by-product. It almost always has to be revised, quite often several times. The benefits of involvement in the planning, however, are more durable. (West, 2005, pp. 103-104). Allen & Glickman (2005) argue in favor of a democratic approach.

- **Emphasize possibilities and positive values**

This is another important feature of the participative change work. I have observed that when we construct realities and emphasize possibilities and positive values, the language we use changes. Instead of words like frustration, loss of energy, unhappiness, tiredness, other words are coming into our system, such as hopefulness, happiness, joy, success, connection, understanding, relation. In the relevant literature, a distinction is made between control and growth. Educational change has been influenced for too long, by the idea that we need to be in control of the process and the outcomes. The view is shifting more and more towards a more positive and constructive one, which appreciates growth and which treats control in a totally different manner. Dalin (2005) states that it is now time to use it. Smyth (2005) emphasizes that we should focus – even when working with weak schools – on the language of probability. We must give priority to teachers' and students' voices, instead of those of distant researchers, administrators and policymakers. We should adopt a more trusting attitude towards teachers in terms of acknowledging that they are the experts on their own daily practices. We should pursue processes that actively encourage and permit schools to redefine themselves as sites of democracy, community, diversity and social justice (Deever, 1996, p. 174). Curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation are regarded as capable of being constructed around experiences of students and teachers; the school is committed to engaging students with the big questions which fire the imagination, the spirit, the feelings and the intellect. (Clifford & Friesen, 1993). West (2005) also promotes using the power of schools. One of Reynolds' (2005) conclusions is that we should use a language of probability instead one of deficiency. We should not only focus on the sick and find a medicine, but focus on the strengths and find the characteristics. Joyce & Calhoun (2005) adds that we should focus on solutions rather than

problem solving. She warns against blaming *the other*, which in my opinion has often been the case in educational reform.

The positive emotions which are a supplement to these actions play an important role. Hargreaves (2005) has done a lot of research on the influence of emotions in educational change processes. He explains that emotions have never received much attention in research. A welter of excessively rationalist approaches to improvement and change has presented a view of learning, teaching, leadership and change that is overwhelmingly cognitive, calculative, managerial and stereotypically masculine in nature. Higher order thinking skills, situated cognition, reflective practice, problem-based learning, cognitive leadership and even organizational learning presume the separation of head and heart, and privilege the first over the second. Teachers with clear emotional goals and strong emotional bonds take very different approaches to their work and change. Emotions are an integral part of teaching, learning and academic results.

Nieto (2005, p. 157) expresses the need to value differences in a positive way. In her view, diversity can be seen as strength to be used in the service of learning. All students have talents, skills, insights, and experiences that can be used to promote learning. Educational reform and change strategies have to take these differences into account in a serious way. Diversity arises from differing developmental histories – cultural, gender, class, and individual. Diversity offers both challenges and opportunities. Care is highly important, not just creating a safe and orderly climate for learning. It is about infusing more passion into the classroom, reorganizing school structures, so that ALL teachers can provide effective care for students, and creating conditions in schools that spark feelings of hope and senses of efficacy among teachers, which benefit themselves and their students. (Hargreaves, 2005)

- **Inquiry and intervention are joined**

In relational or participative change work, inquiry is not seen as separate from outcomes or interventions. Inquiry and interventions become intertwined, continuously influencing each other. They become inter-actions. As a result, they are recognized as important features in the change process instead of being outside of the change process. I have observed this feature especially, while working towards this Ph.D. My inquiry has been an intervention in the way I have formulated questions, for example. This guided the interviewees in certain directions. The answers I received gave direction to the change process. This questioning and answering constantly influenced the change process. *The Handbooks* (Lander & Ekholm 2005; Cuttance 2005)) show examples of people who try to change the orientation of evaluation, assessment and quality assurance towards an approach where inquiry, in itself, is seen as intervention in the school improvement efforts. Evaluation is then not seen anymore as an instrument to achieve control, but as an intervention to improve schools. Cuttance (2005) emphasizes not only to use quality assurance systems on students' outcomes as they exit the school system, but also to use inquiry as an intervention during the school year, which will provide opportunities to modify the learning processes of students and the teaching practices of teachers. Whitford & Jones (2005) make clear that we need schools to move from a controlling role into a collaborative one. Joyce & Calhoun (2005) plead for lessons to continue, about inquiry and for its effect on learning.

- **Careful questioning and careful listening**

The questions we ask will lead us to the answers we are looking for. By being aware of the influence our way of questioning has on the change process, we will start changing our ways of questioning, realizing where they will lead us. Careful listening, as I see it, is more than just listening using our ears. It is a way of active or emphatic listening in which the other or others are seen, felt and heard, and consequently are fully understood. I have seen in relational approaches that careful listening and questioning helps us to build relationships. Trust is one of the by-products of these processes where careful questioning and listening are practiced. I am convinced that these relationships will affect the change process in a sustainable way. Dalin (2005) emphasizes in his article that teachers' and students' concerns should be taken seriously. Careful listening and questioning helps to reflect their real needs.

- **Constructing in conceptual and non-conceptual performance**

Hosking explains that realities and relations are constructed in conceptual and non-conceptual performances. Conceptual performances may be seen as language practices such as discussions, dialogues, presentations, meetings, debates, interviews. Non-conceptual performances are practices coming out of music, art or dance. The latter has been an issue that has been poorly researched in the change process. In educational reform, we see this in how students make their own portfolios with the help of teachers. In these portfolios, they describe, in many different ways, their growth in certain areas. The evaluation is mostly done in different ways, using art, music, drama or presentations with the use of new technologies. In my present work as school advisor, I use both forms of performance when I work with teachers, staffs or school leaders. The interesting thing that I noticed is that the non-conceptual performances introduce a different kind of energy into the change process.

- **A deep, ecological approach**

It may be clear that, in contrast to the mechanistic approach, the ecological approach tries to see change as a complex whole, acting and reacting in certain contexts and times. The relational thought helps us to understand even more deeply that all things are connected, and therefore influence one another in an almost never ending story. It is in these relations that each organization constructs or creates its own meanings. This happens by putting a simple question such as, "When more of the same does not seem to work well, how can we develop an alternative together?" Lagerweij's answer to this is to organize relational reflective practices in which our learning can take place with more depth to develop *the other*, and to shift to other ways of looking at our reality. I would translate this into organizing co-ordinations which help us to get an idea of what we are doing, and what we *want* to do. I think this can be seen as an active, participative, relational and dynamic process, as a co-creation of meaning-giving and sense-giving. Meaning-giving and sense-giving are the result of social constructions between actors and because of this the social construction has different meanings in different contexts. People act and interact with others and will therefore change. Dalin (2005) advises to keep the educational change project as a holistic concept, but then break it into pieces to work with it.

In this ecological approach, it becomes clear that there are no single innovations, but that schools have to cover unplanned change and multiple innovations at different levels. Wallace (2005) states that everything that happens in classrooms, in schools and outside schools, is interrelated. An

example of a reform model is the comprehensive reform model, which Slavin (2005) talks about in his work. Besides organizational development, or the single innovation model, he introduces comprehensive reform models for whole school reform. These models provide schools with specific student materials, teachers' manuals, focused professional development, prescribed patterns of staffing, school governance, internal and external assessment, and other features of school organization. Slavin shows that involving the community leads to more sustainability. In one of his examples he mentions the involvement of parents, by introducing one-to-one tutoring, family support teams to build positive home-school relations, and training facilitators to help teachers implement and coordinate all program elements. One of my present projects, called *the Peaceful School Program*, is also a program that tries to influence the whole school culture by working with students, parents, teachers and school leaders. West (2005) explains that it is important to help them to broaden the focus on improvement and to look beyond the details that need attention.

When I return to the two paradigms through which we can approach change, there are two perspectives. The first is the positional perspective, the other the dynamic or transformational perspective. The assumptions of the first are consensus, rational acting, timelessness, programming behavior. These are all old images of the concepts of planning and control. In the second paradigm, the idea about organization and change is more dynamic. "Hier gelden acceptatie van tijdelijkheid en spontaan gedrag, oriëntatie op handelen, interactie op grenzen (verbinding), processen van co-creatie, discontinue karakter, momentopnamen van handelingen (transacties). Organiseren in dit transactionele perspectief heeft plaats op basis van interne sturing, zelf organisatie en samen leren en creëren: organiseren met behoud van diversiteit (wisselende samenwerkingsverbanden), in een meervoudige wereld, een context voor co-creatie en competentieverhoging van mensen." (Here we find the acceptance of temporality and spontaneous behavior, orientation on acting, interaction on boundaries (connections), processes of co-creation, actions and transactions. Organization is best done where there is internal self-steering or self-direction, co-learning, co-creation, and preservation of diversity (changing and flexible co-operations). It occurs in context of multiple realities and co-creation, and results in increasing competence of people. (Lagerweij, 2004, pp. 157/158).¹⁸

To conclude

Relational constructionism and educational change

We are moving towards an uncertain and unpredictable future. Changes are increasingly complex. This process occurs all over the world and affects all aspects of human life, including schooling. It is obvious that a paradigm shift is needed, to break through old traditions and patterns which obstruct change processes and which, in many cases, have not succeeded in achieving successful educational reform. The way in which we have approached change in our school system does not fit in with future needs, and has long

¹⁸ Change or organizational development is, in this option no longer an implementation strategy that is qualified as an organized journey where a small group (management and experts) changes the whole organization for the larger group (the workers). The alternative is to use a whole system methodology in which many change the organization for many. One characteristic is that one tries to work collectively and in real time. The role of experts changes into supporting the right conditions for this.

neglected the central positions of those who should benefit from these changes: the students and their teachers. The relational position has been overlooked for many years. Studying and reflecting on social and relational constructionism has helped me to better understand its ideas. In chapter 71, I will show how I put these ideas into practice in educational change, when I worked in Suriname from 2007 to 2009, leading the process of the publication of *I Believe in You!* This process is still going on. Social constructionism, or relational constructionism, focuses on relational practices and the social realities they create, sustain and change. "A central premise of social construction is that social realities are social achievements produced by people co-ordinating their activities." (Hosking & McNamee 2006, p. 23) In their work (p. 10), they conclude that

- Change is an ongoing and emergent process, contrasting with the more usual view of change as a temporary aberration.
- Change has multiple social realities, rather than one 'real' world 'out there'.
- Change has powerful relations, (not just authority, leadership and 'dirty' politics)

An important focus of social constructionism is the relational orientation. It offers a relational discourse, "one that views meaningful action as always emerging within relationships (whether those relationships be real, imagined, or virtual). The metaphor of social construction as performance is useful because it makes a ritualized practice familiar. It shifts attention from meaning as individual cognitions, separate from action, to a process in which participants create social realities. These are processes in which we not only create a sense of self in relation to some particular others but also a sense of value. We create – we perform together – a world, a lived reality." (Hosking & McNamee, 2006 p. 31) As Branson (2010) explains, we develop a better understanding about one's self, one's external reality and one's social reality. Self-knowledge and self-reflection, as well as collective knowledge and reflection are important to collect the crucial knowledge needed for leading change processes in the right direction.

It is clear that we should not construct a plan that is too detailed, or as Fullan (1991, 2005) explains, a linear plan. The history of educational change has shown that this rarely leads to success. An evolutionary plan is needed, which gives clarity to the purpose of change and the responsibilities. I may call this planning "dynamic planning," which continuously adapts or is modified to the change needs. Although people do not like to be controlled and manipulated, they do wish to know where they might be heading. This gives the prerequisite sense of minimal safety and security that we all yearn for. (Branson 2010, p. 6) People might argue against and resist any proposed change, but at least they will know the ground upon which they are standing and this is a primordial need. Communication before, within and after the change is crucial to gain a permanent stream of narratives of meaning-giving during the change process. In this way we gain essential knowledge about the external reality. It is here where the formal and informal stories of organizations come in. The better this communication stream flows from the top down, and from down to the top, or even from the middle up and down, the greater the awareness we gain of the competing forces which are pulling and pushing the change. Branson (2010) makes the argument that it is important to be aware of all these forces, in order to lead people through the change rather than being led, unquestioningly and powerlessly, by the forces.

Educational change and the overlooked dimension

While reading the literature about educational change, I discovered that the relational dimension has been overlooked for many decades. The relational dimension is about all participants – and not just the leader – being able to develop the appropriate relational knowledge and capacity, so as to maximize the engagement of those who are in the change. It is about building communal understanding, trust, empathy, and collegiality. It describes resistance to change, not as interpersonal conflict, but as a search for shared wisdom, common understanding and strategic development. It seems to me, as in biographical coaching, that this is exactly the same in turning the process around: not starting with a predictable plan, but starting from more invisible elements of change. These invisible elements are: dreams and hopes, emotions, passions, experiences, and values. For too long, change has been approached in a unilateral way, as if detailed planning would keep us in control of change. Weatley (2006, p. 25) adds the interesting insight that the issue is not control, but dynamic connectedness. I noticed in my observation that we are in a kind of transition stage, where we see both the individual as well as the relational views occurring in the way we look at change processes.

Schools face a formidable challenge to meet the future complexity, which they cannot approach alone. According to Dalin (2005), schools have to cope with future challenges such as creating future curricula; moving from the traditional reproduction process in the classroom to creativity and production in multiple environments; moving from fixed images of the future to working with the unfinished images; changing and giving dramatical space for student and teacher initiatives; preparing staff for new roles, and drawing on human resources from all segments of society while using the best available approaches for staff development. Success depends on the extent to which each force can willingly contend with, if not embrace, *the other* as necessary for productive change. (Fullan 1993, p. 40) Paying attention to the relational patterns of schools, and within schools, Reynolds explains that we should strengthen each other by taking advantage of each other's strength, instead of competing with each other. Only by doing this can we make change more sustainable. To be successful, much more has to be done, especially in the provision of time and assistance in the development of collegial structures, and well-designed and extensive staff development. (Calhoun & Joyce, 2005)

The relational position, as I see it, can bring about great differences in educational reform. Fortunately, more and more scholars and practitioners are already approaching change on the basis of this new paradigm, which is scarcely out of the egg. If we want to deal successfully with tomorrow's questions, we need to work together; joint action is needed. As far as I can see, we need to appreciate what is, we need to build bridges, and to relate by coordinating collaborative and dialogical practices. I think that the social constructionist orientation will lead us to better understanding and therefore better, new or other ways to deal more successfully with the nature of educational change.

I will set the stage in chapter 6 for the participative change work which I coordinated in Suriname. Chapter 7 will contain the analysis of the process of *I Believe in You!* However, I will first, in chapter 5, deal with the collaborative and dialogical performances which have been important features in this change process. It will give the reader some more background information, which will help in understanding the process as well as the analysis, better.



Suriname, L. Schoenmakers

5

Collaborative and dialogical approaches to educational change

I realize that in working together we create life stories. These stories of life are ever changing.

In meeting the other by dialogue we may discover what IJsseling (1999, p. 38) says “that on a deeper level we all are equal.”

(Log, April 2010)

Introduction

The preceding chapter has shown that educational change work is people's work and that the many changes in schools have to be brought about by many people. The individual approach has not taken us far enough to change or transform the educational system sufficiently to meet the present and future complex challenges successfully. As Slavin (2005) puts it, the individual approach has given us many insights but has cost also a lot. We have seen in the preceding chapter that there is an emergent movement, in which many scholars are looking at educational change from a relational perspective. In the course of my research, I realized that the shift to this relational thought might give us new and more successful approaches to educational reform. The relational constructionist ideas make it clear that it is essential to stimulate the awareness of participants in the change process so that they are all part of the constructed social reality. It is not a *here and there* event, something that does not concern us, but it is a we event in which we all take part. What people do or make together in their specific reality produces the local change processes. *Being in relation, joint action, and shared engagement* are seen as essential to our constructed realities, from the constructionist point of view. It is by *being in relation* that we produce and continuously construct our realities together, with others. In terms of educational reform, it means that we should invite students, teachers and parents as equally important key persons to play active roles in educational reform. They live in and create these daily educational realities. They are the producers of the educational change in their classrooms, which for many years seems to have been forgotten.

My experiences as a school leader have shown very clearly that I could not do the job, creating the *best* school, on my own. I needed others, such as teachers, students and their parents, to produce this *best* school, whatever *best* might mean in our shared understanding. At the age of 27, I was too inexperienced to know it all and, fortunately, I had this insight of working together in appreciative ways, in which we would be open to differences and use them as strengths rather than shortcomings. In those days I did not know the language of social constructionism, as I do now, but in essence I was working in accordance with its ideas. My philosophical ideas of leading a school, by putting people in relation, influenced the culture of how we worked together in those days. To be in relation very soon became the underlying drive of my leadership and future work settings. From then on, these ideas developed increasingly, and became part of my being.

Collaborative and dialogical approaches, which are the subject of this chapter, in my opinion, are the means to set up the process in which participants are *put in relation*. This *being in relation* produces by-products such as new understandings, new ideas, trust, appreciation of differences, openness, involvement, commitment, and even transformation and generative change. These collaborative and dialogical approaches have been vital to putting people in relation to construct *the I Believe in You! process*, which I will analyze later. In this chapter, I will discuss both approaches separately, although I realize that they are closely linked to each other.

This chapter is organized as follows:

Collaborative approaches and change work

- Collaborative approaches, what they are
- Collaborative approaches, what we do together

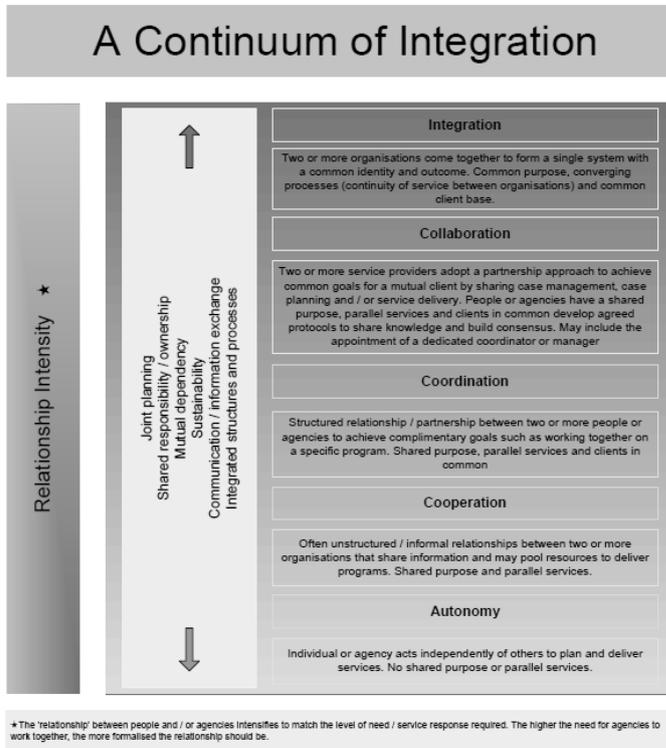
Dialogical approaches and change work

- Dialogical approaches, what they are
- Dialogical approaches, what we do together

Strengthening educational change processes by using collaborative and dialogical approaches

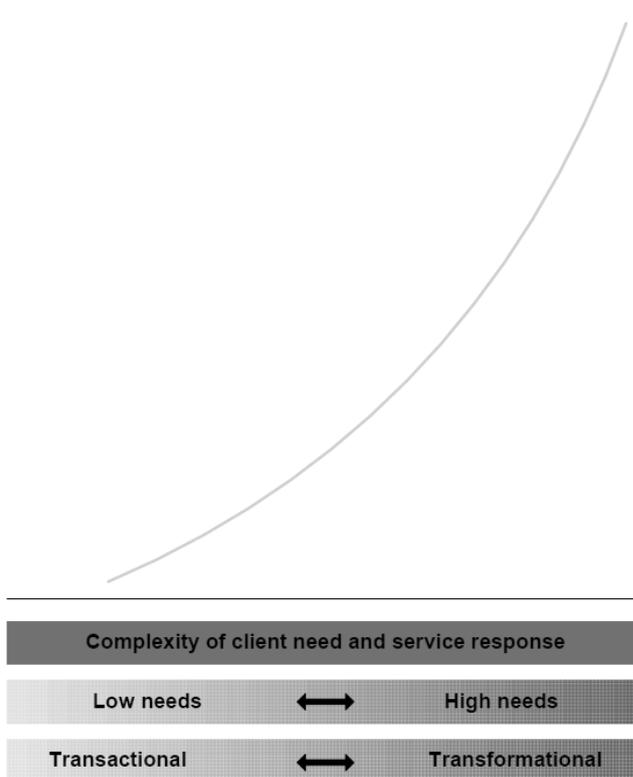
Collaborative approaches and change work

Collaborative approaches, what they are



Let us start with an example that shows that we must not see all group work as collaboration. Collaboration is often seen as people working together or people doing things together. It used to mean that people were put together in a group, and had to perform a task. These days it is often still like that. What I observed at one time was that people just did their job from the beginning to the end, then moved to the next job, which was exactly the same. It almost looks like the work in the early *Ford* factories, where cars were produced by dividing the job into little jobs done by many different people all working to produce the same product. There was certainly a common goal which gave direction to the work that had to be done and, certainly, there was a group of people working together to do it. So in a way one could speak of a form of team work or group work, but as we will see later this kind of work must be regarded as totally different from the collaborative practices I want to discuss in this section.

I think the way of working in the *Ford* factories can be seen as a metaphor for individual orientation. With the individual orientation, everyone contributes to the final goal; qualities or traits are seen as being in the individual and little attention is paid to the by-products coming out of this kind of working together. All these individuals with their traits or characteristics play a part in the machine metaphor (Morgan, 1992); they all contribute in delimited ways to the whole. Attention is paid to their individual contributions and these are often worked



out in protocols, procedures, roles or handbooks. Traits or qualities needed are strengthened by, for example, training these individuals to become stronger, but little attention is given to the relational aspects of this type of working together. Gutiérrez & Rogoff (2003) discuss this still-common approach of assuming that variations do not exist as traits of individuals or collections of individuals. In other words, they criticize the idea that characteristics are located *within* individuals or that these characteristics are static. They promote putting the focus on the experiences of individuals and groups in working together, and not on their characteristics. Mertl (2009) emphasizes that this kind of approach does not lead us to new repertoires of collaborative practice, because what is within individuals is not further processed or developed by encountering new collaborative situations. It remains more fixed or isolated in the individual. Put simply, this way of working together does not result in more effective collective learning.

The model I found in the work of Paton (2011) is interesting. This model shows collaborative practices in a continuum of relationships.¹⁹ The intensity of the relationship is used to distinguish different forms of working together. Although I think we must be careful not to put these forms into boxes, as though they exist separately or in a linear way, in my opinion they can emerge in many different forms or stages during the process of working together. The model helps to better understand that collaborative practices differ from other forms of *working together* in the way relationships are built and sustained during processes. The greater the complexity, the greater the need. The greater the transformational focus, the greater the need for building strong relationships. From the collaborative practices seen in this model, the working together can even reach a level of cooperation where, as I see it, the two become one.

Anderson (2008) made it clear to me that our responses to the other are critical to the development and quality of relationships. From the social constructionist point of view, collaborative practices must be seen as dynamic processes. Each response determines the next response of the other, and therefore determines the involvement of the relationship. Collaborative relationship refers to "the way in which we orient ourselves to be, act and respond "with" another person, so the other joins a (therapeutic) engagement and joint action that I call shared inquiry". (Anderson, 2008, p. 7) It is how we relate to each other which makes the difference between the ordinary working together or the collaborative one.

Collaborative practices, some definitions

In the literature there is a growing awareness of collaborative practices. Mertl (2009, p. 1) says that collaborative activities take many forms and are an increasing reality in the 21st century. It was interesting for me to explore these different methods and insights to acquire a more thorough grasp of how we can understand collaborative practices. This supports my understanding of the *I Believe in You!* process.

Many terms are used to describe approaches where people work together. In the literature I found many expressions: team work, group work, learning team, collective work, coordination, cooperation, collaboration, collaborative practices, collaborative actions, collaborative repertoires, joint action, shared engagement,

¹⁹ Adapted from Keast, R. (2001), 'Government service delivery framework: A new governance approach for Queensland', *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 51-58; Walter, U. M. and Petr, C. G. (2000) 'A Template for Family-Centered Interagency Collaboration', *The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, vol. 81, 1 5, pp. 494-515; and Himmelman, A. (2001) 'On coalitions and the transformation of power relations: Collaborative betterment and collaborative empowerment', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 165-191.

communities of practice and so on. I prefer to use the expression “collaborative practices”, because it shows that working together (to collaborate) is a dynamic process in action. The term ‘practices’ indicates to me that there is no uniform or general way of collaborating but that there are multiple forms of collaborative practices. There is not one cut-and-dried model, as Nicholson et al. (1998) found in their research. Each practice is colored by its local history and the way the different features react or respond to each other. Since these practices are carried out by human beings on the collective memory (experiences), each practice has its own dynamics and is therefore unique. Mertl (2009, p. 1) suggests that “repertoires of collaborative practices are developmental in nature, emerging out of experience of collaborating and the development of a metacognitive awareness of an individual’s ability to make changes to their own behavior, recruit the attention and interactions of others in the group, define a joint problem space, or draw on prior experiences and institutional practices to alter a collaborative episode.”

In the literature, I found various descriptions of collaboration or collaborative practices, which we could divide into types. One sort promotes the individual thought, e.g. “collaboration refers to individuals or organizations working together to address problems and deliver outcomes that are not easily or effectively achieved by working alone.” (Paton, 2011) These descriptions often have the tendency to approach collaborative practices as techniques or traits (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) which can be attributed to achieving collaboration. This is an instrumental way of looking at it. I would not say this is wrong. It is another way of seeing it. But I think we can gain more if we approach collaboration from a different angle.

The other type promotes the relational thought, which emphasizes to a greater extent the idea of collective learning or collective development taking place in which each participant contributes positively to the shared process, content and outcomes. They show how participants and contexts affect each other by *being in relation*. In this view, collaboration becomes more dynamic and is not fixed or made static. The relational way, as we will see later, shows that there is a better idea of the by-products coming out of the practice of working together.

In *Repertoires of Collaborative Practice*, Mertl (2009) elaborates on Bratman’s (1992) three aspects of activity that are necessary for collaboration. These aspects are 1) mutual responsiveness, 2) commitment to joint activity, and 3) commitment to mutual support. Collaborative practices as Mertl (2009, p. 1) defines them, comprise the “habitual behaviors that are engaged during a collaborative episode”. In social constructionist terms, one could say they are the typical actions and interactions people do together, given certain circumstances within certain contexts. Mertl also refers to Fauske (1999), who states that within the collaboration the interaction of stakeholders with shared language and values is activated, and movement toward collective goals takes place. The term “stakeholder” includes anyone who has an interest in, or who would be affected by the collaborative action. Anderson shows in her work that collaborative practices may appear in many forms, regardless of the designated system, the number of people in it, or their relationship with each other – this includes systems such as education, research and combinations of people called organizations and communities. (Anderson 1997, 2003, 2006, 2010) She refers to the work of Shotter (1994), who suggested that all living beings exist in joint action. How we respond to *other* and *otherness* is critical to the development and quality of the relationships we build. Participating, as I see it, the way or how we work together, will determine the intensity of the relationships we build. Looking at this from the social constructionist perspective, it also means that we must see this as a dynamic process which holds that these relationships are in an ongoing stream of interactions or performances. The more we are brought in relation with the other and the otherness in appreciative ways, the more the change process will be strengthened. It is like building bridges for dealing with traffic, for the benefit of maintaining relationships.

Collaborative practices, techniques and the philosophical stance

By reading the literature and reflecting on collaboration in the relational way, I became aware that collaboration is more than techniques put into practice. This leads to, what some writers call, the idea of seeing collaboration as a philosophical stance. It encompasses a positive attitude towards working together, appreciating each other for who the other is *and* for what we are together. It is where Shotter (1984) emphasizes the need to be open to being touched by the otherness of others, and otherness around them. In my work, this positive stance on collaboration, based on the assumption that giving space to all will contribute to the best outcome, has helped and still helps to build durable change processes. London, Mexico, St. George & Wulff (2009, p. 1) experience collaborating as a way of life, and see it as a deliberate and purposeful way of relating which is simultaneously flexible and responsive to others. In their experience they say that this process takes time, energy, dedication, and persistence on a daily basis; “it is a way to live one’s life in the world”. Anderson (2003, 2010) also sees collaborative practices from a philosophical perspective, where particular kinds of relationships and conversations naturally develop, again as ways of being. Perhaps one could say, using the words of Hosking (2002, 2005, 2006, 2007), that collaboration is a way of *being put in relation* together. I see this position as a tone, an attitude or posture that appreciates the other and the otherness, seeing the uniqueness, acknowledging the special importance of careful thinking, listening and questioning. This attitude invites and encourages others to contribute and participate on a more equal basis, and it reflects, as Anderson explains, a way of being with people. With this belief, connecting and constructing with others become more authentic, natural performances and not just techniques. (Anderson, 2008, p. 6) Anderson calls these collaborative relationships, which again reflect specific actions and dynamics. From the philosophical point of view, these actions support a space that invites and encourages conversations and relationships, in which we connect, collaborate and construct with each other. The philosophical attitude is a way of being that sets the tone for the way we orient ourselves to respond, and to act with another person. It invites shared engagement, mutual inquiry and joint action – the process of generative and transforming dialogue. (Anderson, 1997, 2003)

I have discovered the importance of flexibility. In the philosophical attitude, an ongoing flexibility is crucial to meeting the other, the otherness *and* the unexpected and unpredictable which always occur within processes. Flexibility could perhaps also be seen as improvisational art. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, expressed this by the words *panta rhei*, everything flows or changes. You cannot step twice in the same river, because the water is being continually renewed. So we need this flexibility to meet the new and the unexpected. It is what I often observe when working with people, whether it is in a one-to-one coaching session, an interview with a school leader, or when working with groups or a complete staff. Working with people means that we need to be aware of this issue of unexpectedness. Being flexible also means living with uncertainty. Harlene Anderson talks about flexibility as one of the basic features of collaboration. It is the importance of responding to what occurs in the moment; practices are guided by spontaneity rather than chained by infrastructure or highly detailed planning. We will see, later in the analysis, that flexibility or improvisational art, which I called the chameleon approach, has been an essential feature in the change process of *I Believe in You!*

Seeing collaborative practice as a dynamic, unique happening carried out by people means that, as in the case of the river metaphor, we will never come across the same process again in the next collaborative practice. In the literature they speak of collaborative episodes (Mertl et al, 2009) which, as in narrative, expresses that each story is unique and is told and experienced differently.

As I experienced in many processes, it is *within* the process that we need this flexibility. By collaborating, new ideas can emerge as viewpoints and are subjected to mixing and matching. We need to move with flexibility. London, St. George & Wulff (2009) observed in their work the importance of being sensitive to what occurs 'in the moment', and of responding to the participants' needs by being flexible. I think it is necessary for all participants, and not just the leader, to move with flexibility within collaborative practices. Many examples in *the I Believe in You! process*, and the many activities after the publication of the book, showed the importance of improvising and being flexible 'in the moment'.

Collaborative approaches, what we do together

It is interesting to highlight, from a constructionist point of view, some features that distinguish collaborative practices from the more traditional, individual process of working together. The question I want to ask here is: What do people do together in these practices, and what comes out of it? By doing this, I try to gain a deeper understanding which may be useful in the later analysis of *I Believe in You!* In this section, I will discuss some of the issues that contribute to this being in relation with others and otherness. These issues are: creating a cohort with others, having the attitude of openness and hospitality, constructing different forms of collaboration based on conceptual and non-conceptual performances, the aspect of equal voices contributing to these kinds of conversations and relationships, the by-products such as shared meaning-making, new knowledge, transformation and active engagement.

Creating a cohort with others

To start collaborative practices, we need other people to join in. This can happen in a natural way, as we see it happening in our private and family lives. We meet the other, start to talk to each other, get familiar and if there is a common issue to be resolved or something to do we start working together. Emotions play a prominent role in this working together. If the feelings are positive towards the other and the otherness, we are more open to relating to each other. I often experience in my private life, but also in my professional life, that as the openness towards the other and the otherness grows, the relationship starts to grow and get more intense. Positive and negative experiences are anchored in our collective memory and they are a basis for future collaborations. When working for some years in the Caribbean island of Aruba, I observed how this collective memory supported or disturbed the collaboration. In small communities, like those in Aruba or Suriname, there is always a chance that people will meet each other on another occasion. They remember the way they were in relation with the other and this will influence the next collaboration. In fact, educational communities also seem to be small. Teaching staff often work together for many years. In this micro community we see the same patterns of people working together on the basis of the collective memory they have built. The danger is that their being in relation in these situations becomes a pattern that is often hard to change. It is where Peter Senge et al. in *Presence* (2004) explain that we keep on downloading the same old song. It is where I have experienced that teaching staff are often not aware of how they do things together, and of which products result from their way of working together.

In private life we often create this cohort voluntarily. We are usually free to choose with whom we want to relate and with whom we do not want to relate. In professional life this is not always the case. There we are obliged to work with others, whether we like it or not. Having some choice in deciding with whom to work, has positive effects on the collaborations. When I can choose with whom I would like to collaborate in school, for example, I tend to choose those colleagues with whom I have built trusting relationships. This trust often seems to be a more important criterion than expertise. Emotions and positive experiences are important criteria for these choices. A philosophical attitude of openness to the other and otherness in the organization is necessary for establishing collaborative practices in which we can work with anybody within the system. Both in private and professional lives, collaborating means that we invite the other or are invited by the other, to join in and work together.

So a collaborative practice is formed by more than one person. In daily life, this group of people is formed naturally because they have common interests or a common problem to be solved. When the group is formed on a voluntary basis by a common interest or experience, of people's own volition, the collaboration will begin almost naturally and take its course. This can be quite intense; the group can have a strong and powerful influence on its members and its surroundings. A cohort develops sensitivity to the individual needs of its members, as well as to what is required for the group to retain its value and integrity. The individuals become part of something bigger than themselves. In organizations, a group is officially formed and at best based on willingness to participate in this specific group.

Collaborative practices can be small, such as one-to-one practices in coaching (formal) or in friendship (informal), but they also can be bigger, such as practices in a workgroup in an organization (formal), a family (informal), or even bigger as in the example below in Suriname, where nearly 400 people participated in different practices. But to be honest, just putting people together in groups does not mean that we naturally proceed into collaborative practices. More is needed.

A stance of hospitality and openness

Hospitality is an aspect of our attitude towards collaboration. Hospitality could be explained as showing the other that he is very welcome. This attitude demonstrates the willingness to meet the other and the otherness and it is crucial for creating the right atmosphere for collaboration. This philosophical attitude of really wanting to work with the other or others serves to construct this open, willing atmosphere. This is crucial for the collaborative practice. Westmoreland (2008) refers to Derrida's idea that hospitality is an unconditional welcoming of the other. It is, as he says, an unconditional injunction - to welcome the other whoever he or she is, unconditionally, without asking for a document, a name, a context, or a passport. This unconditional welcome is the very first opening of the relation to the other: to open my space, my home - my house, my language, my culture, my nation, my state, and myself - my mind and heart. I do not even have to open it, because it is already open; it is open before I make a decision about it. It is my attitude. I then have to keep it open or try to keep it open unconditionally. I agree with Anderson's ideas that when we meet and greet people the first impression is crucial for the kinds of conversations and relationships we can have together. (Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Gehart, 2007) It also means creating a noncompetitive context for professional, and personal development.

With this attitude to the process of our working together, openness is created to suit what the occasions call for. Constructing open space is an important aspect in the construction of collaborative practices. By this I mean the construction of an open, free, and creative environment where new ideas and spontaneous activities are welcome. The space is available and welcoming in order to meet changing needs and to take advantage of emerging and unforeseen opportunities. The *I Believe in You!* analysis will show that, in Suriname, being open to the unexpected strengthened relationships, and consequently the change process. Constructing open space also means creating space for dialoging and improvising. What I observed in Suriname is that creating this open space gave many opportunities to include the voices of others. When people have the feeling that they are heard, there will be a better chance that they will speak and show their contributions, whether they are students, parents or teachers.

Different forms of collaboration based on conceptual and non-conceptual performances

Collaborative practices can be constructed as conceptual or non-conceptual performances. Conceptual performances can be seen in language practices such as meetings, interviews, group work, discussions, debates, dialogues, coaching settings, evaluation sessions, and assessments. Non-conceptual performances are practices in which elements of arts, dance, music and poetry are used. The interesting thing about the latter is that by using these non-conceptual performances, being in relation with the other will be influenced in more varied ways, touching not only the minds of people but also their hearts (emotions). I will give some examples of these performances and their effects on the change process in the analysis. Constructing different forms of collaborations using these conceptual and non-conceptual performances shows that there is not one model of collaborative approach, but multiple approaches are possible.

Equal voices contributing to these performances

Another important feature of the philosophical attitude towards collaboration is the aspect of equal voices. It is the issue of equity. All members of the collaborative practice are given space for expressing their own voice. The freedom and openness to speak and to express ideas, to share them with others is typical of collaborative approaches. Within this attitude of hospitality, others are invited to express their thoughts and ideas, which does not mean that we should agree with everything that is said. We should, however, appreciate the differences we meet. From this openness, the by-products of new ideas or understandings are created. Collective wisdom and knowledge are shared. The voices of every participant are heard. The literature speaks of equal footing. Equal does not mean to me that we should be allotted the same amount of speaking time or that we should have the same expertise or understanding. This will always differ. It means that everybody is an equally important partner in the effort of the moment. A characteristic of human beings is that we are all unique, so in human work we always have to deal with differences in many forms. Different people certainly contribute different things to conversations and relationships. Because of this equal footing, the relative value placed on all contributions is equal. The more vocal persons are not considered superior to those who are more reserved. Those who are serious and contemplative are of equal value to those who are light-hearted and humorous. Contributions will be different but always appreciated. There is an understanding that if all partners brought the same talents and views together, there would not be the need

for all to participate. In other words, differences are valued. Paré (2009) calls this *non-normative acknowledgement*. By this she means that there is no judging in reference to some socially constructed norm in the collaborative practice.

Equal footing means that there is no power play, as there is in the traditional, individually oriented working-together setting. Leadership belongs to all, is shared and can move to the other. As coordinator, I had to lead *the I Believe in You! process*, but the leadership could change according to positions and moments and persons. This feature of equal voices is vital to constructing a basis of safety and trust among one another. It improves being in relation in the change processes.

Feedback and adjustment to feedback: relational reflective practice

Collaboration requires the ability to welcome feedback, and to make use of that feedback. Feedback is sometimes given spontaneously but sometimes it has to be asked for. Both listening to the feedback and then incorporating it are vital components for the strengthening of change processes, and neither is necessarily easy to do. In *the I Believe in You! process*, listening and using the outcomes of reflective practices showed participants in word and deed that their voices were vital to the change process. Hosking & McNamee (2006) mention this careful listening and questioning as an important generic theme in relational change work. Being heard causes people to want to be involved in the change process. By exchanging feedback, we construct reflective practices that support the mutual understandings in which we share experiences, ideas, concerns, possibilities, and emotions. Elaborating on Myerhoff (1982), White (1995, 2000) characterizes reflecting teams as "definitional ceremonies" in which members collectively engage in "making themselves up" (p. 177). "More than the absence of competition, this is a generative process of professional and personal identity development. In various ways they have become other than who they were before their participation in the reflecting team" (p. 192).

When doing my master's degree, I studied the idea of building reflective capacity within teams. From the relational perspective, I realized that our work in schools becomes better when we reflect *in relation* and not isolated as individuals. If we all experience that we can contribute in open and deliberate ways, if everything can be said or thought, if we feel equal to each other, we construct a climate of mutual trust and acceptance. Hosking & McNamee (2006) refer to the multiple equal voices as an important feature of collaborative practice.

Conversations and relationships

Collaborative approaches are characterized by how people communicate with each other and how they are *in relation* with the other. The many situations I come across as school advisor show that people communicate with each other, but I find more and more that their way of communicating is *out of relation*. They communicate about the other, who could be a student, a parent or a colleague, but their position is often an individual one. It is *here and there* communication. Even though it looks from the outside as if it is a relational position, when I take a closer look I often notice that the participants in the conversation continue to take their own position, the individual one. This is what happened in, for example, the Ford factories,

where workers did their job to produce cars, but they were not encouraged to be *in relation* with the other. Nowadays, I see this same pattern in schools, where people often meet *the other* at the coffee machine, and not in the formal settings like staff meetings. Homan (2001, 2005) explains that we see different stories unfold of how people experience a formal setting, depending on whether they talk about it in the formal setting or at informal moments like dinner or at the toilet. In collaborative practices we try to stimulate encountering the other. *Encountering* means to me that we meet each other and really get to know each other, as if we get a glimpse of what is below the surface. It is this aspect clearly explained by Anderson (2008) which we should bear in mind: we take who we are as a person with us into our professional lives. It is also my belief that when we take our *person*, our *being* with us into our professional activities we can really relate to *the other* and *the otherness*. Too often, we notice this individual approach in which we think we should leave our person at the front door and walk into our professional life as if we are suddenly different persons. Thinking about this, I am fully aware that the influence of the individual thought strongly influences the way in which we do our work, the way in which we are put *in relation* to the people we meet in our professional life. When I became a young school leader, I knew at once that the only way to cope with this daunting challenge was to take my person into my work, and to act and relate as one and the same person. I realize now that taking my person into my work enabled me to stay *in relation* with myself and to be *in relation* with the other, and so build strong relationships.

So, what makes collaborative approaches different from ordinary group work is the attempt to put people in relation with the other, and with the constructed reality. Meeting the other and the otherness, using the philosophical attitude, is what it is all about. As we saw in the model of Paton (2011), the relationships we build are more intensive within collaborative practices. *How* we work together and *how* we talk with each other determines to a large extent, as I see it, what our relationships will look like. It is therefore interesting, in the social construction of collaborative practices, to observe what conversations and relationships look like, what people do together. The next section, in which I will describe dialogical practices, will show what conversations contribute greatly to collaborative practices.

Van Kruiningen (2010) states that a lot of research has been done on the outcomes of collaborative practices, but little has been done on the interactional processes, which are at the basis of the process where shared meaning is developed. We see the act-supplement actions which occur in her work. Participants in collaborative practices construct in an ongoing process, targeted, incremental, in series of sequential conversation turns on previous turns, not only by agreement, connection or evaluation, but also by modification, nuance, and transformation. They construct shared understanding, shared knowledge, shared expertise, shared relationships, and shared meaning. Van Kruiningen uses the metaphor of a meandering process. One response follows the next. It meanders because we cannot predict the other's next response, nor can the other predict the next response. The process of collaboration continues always on the basis of the responses given, like a meandering stream. In this way, the participants create many actions or performances, and connections, or social constructed realities, between the spoken issues. Van Kruiningen discovered a future and solution-focused orientation in the collaborative practice, which relates to Hosking's emphasis on possibilities and positive values. All participants are active listeners and co-constructors of the interactions, where careful listening, careful questioning, careful responding, shared responsibility, and shared decision making is constructed. Participants navigate from one position to the other as owner-not owner, advice giver-advice receiver, expert-layman based on equity. Ideas and experiences are transformed into new ideas or insights, and collective thinking takes place, in forms of what Enfield (2006) calls *mutually calibrated*. Merti (2009) defines the aspect of *mutual responsiveness* as crucial to collaborative practice. St. George et al. (2009) mention the *embodied responsiveness*. Members attest to how

they are personally struck and are transparent about this, as they respond to the person who presents and also to each others' reflections; the process is dialogical and improvisational.

Van Kruiningen (2010), Anderson (2003, 2010), Mertl (2009) and Talevera (2009) emphasize the importance of observing and understanding the interactions in collaborative practices, and also see this as an essential aspect of the work consultants. Conversations and relationships are interconnected. *How* we relate and *how* we talk to each other determine the intensity of the collaborative practice. Mertl (2009) shows how previous experiences of collaboration influence our next collaborations. In her view we need collaborative experiences for people to learn how to collaborate. Or in other words, previous experiences of relationships influence the next ones. Shotter (1984) emphasizes the importance of openness to the other and the otherness, to create relationships that are constructive to the collaboration. "Lacking such shared moments, people in a specific situation cannot expect to understand each other with the unique precision required if they are to collaborate without confusion in the unique situations they occupy – such shared moments provide a shared 'rooting 'or 'grounding' for their shared activities." (Shotter, 1984, p. 1)

Positive interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 1998) in collaborative practices of each participant and the group, leads us to a belief that there is value in working with the other participants, and the belief that the collaboration will lead to better results. This belief alone is not enough for strong relationships. What follows is the awareness of the fact that ongoing interactions, particularly face-to-face interactions, are required for success.

In collaborative practices we are *put in relation*, and *how* we are put in relation, act and interact, determines the quality of collaboration and the intensiveness of our relationships. Ongoing conversation, dialogue, exchange and support, in a stimulating and positive way, is what Johnson & Johnson (1998) call *promotive interaction*. This all intensifies the relationships. So, openness to other(ness), careful communication in forms of dialoguing, a positive stance towards collaboration, promotive interaction, mutual responsiveness and so on, are aspects which increase the intenseness of the relationship and lead us to the construction of collaborative practices.

What helps to make the relationship more effective is the mutual agreement about the purpose of collaboration and what people want to try to achieve together, mutual expectations about outcomes and processes, openness or transparency about important values, commitment, coordination or leadership of the collaborative practice, regular and meaningful communication, flexibility to respond to change, and recognition of the strengths of participants.

The by-products of collaborative practices

When people are put *in relation* and work together from this philosophical perspective, many different by-products are produced, such as shared meaning-making, new knowledge, transformation, active engagement, and relationships. There is a shift from passive witnessing to active engagement of participants. There is a commitment to joint activity, a positive attitude to collaboration. The level of activeness differs among participants, but is accepted. In the process of *I Believe in You!* In Suriname, I observed this active engagement in forms of enthusiasm, the willingness to support, the ongoing stream of ideas people came up with, the active attitude to stay in contact or, in social constructionist terms, to stay *in*

relation, and hence a natural accountability of each member. (Mertl, 2009) Active engagement leads us to ownership and a sense of shared belonging. (Anderson 2008) Each party influences the other, and with the openness of relating to each other, mutual transformation can develop. This is where the responsiveness to the other and the otherness grows.

John Shotter has written widely about the ways in which useful knowledge emerges from the joint action of conversation (cf. Shotter, 1993a, 1993b; 1995). The knowledge is not handed from one to another through words but formed in the mutual responsiveness within the conversation. This practice is best done with other learners who may bear mutual witness to developments in knowledge and skills. An ongoing process of meaning-making starts to grow, from this active engagement, out of this relational responsiveness. David Paré (2009) writes that ongoing meaning-making through reflection also has to be accompanied by the performance of the new practices alongside others. This is what Schön (1987) has called knowing-in-action, a dimension of practical knowledge best developed working shoulder to shoulder with others.

It should be clear that in collaborative practices group members derive most of their learning by tapping into each other's expertise. This turning to local knowledge (Geertz, 1983) parallels the attention to client values, skills, and resources that is central to collaborative, social constructionist or relational change work. Learning, as Lave & Wenger (1991, p. 53) have said, "involves the whole person; it involves not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities". This tapping into each other's expertise constructs shared or relational expertise (Anderson, 2008), shared thinking and shared contents. Knowledge in all kind of forms is generated by an interactive social process. Knowledge is then a product of social discourse. In working with knowledge one should be aware of privileging local knowledge. I have often noticed in the *I Believe in You!* process that tapping into the local knowledge showed our appreciation of the many local participants, and by doing so it strengthened the relationships.

Dialogical approaches and change work

Dialogical approaches, what they are

It is not too difficult to take the step from collaborative approaches to dialogical approaches. As we have seen, in collaborative practices it is the way we work together which influences the relationships we build. We will see the same thing happening in dialogical practices: it is the way we communicate with each other which influences the relationships we build. Collaboration and dialoging can be seen as actions which both influence the process of relation building. We must not see the two practices as separated. One influences the other. I want to go a little deeper into these dialogical practices, to better understand what we mean by them. As in the case of collaborative practices, present research and literature pays more and more attention to dialogical processes. We will see in this section that not all communication can be called dialogical practices.

LISTENING

If I ask you to listen to me and you start giving me advice,
you are not doing what I ask of you.

If I ask you to listen to me and you start telling me

Why I should not feel what I feel, you are not taking my feelings seriously.

If I ask you to listen to me

and you think that you have to do something to solve my problems,

you are abandoning me,

however strange that may seem.

So, please, just listen to me and try to understand me.

And if you want to talk, wait a moment,

I promise you that I for my part will listen to you.

(Leo Buscaglia)

I like these words of Leo Buscaglia's. They seem to me to express the essence of conversation between people. The way we listen²⁰, question and think – as simple as it is – contributes to the relationships we build. When I asked people in Suriname during *the I Believe in You! process* which teacher they remembered best, they always mentioned those who really listened to them in the way Leo Buscaglia talks about. Now I would say we remember those people best with whom we were in relation. Stevens (2004) has

²⁰ Anderson (listen, hear and speak) also mentions the importance of the listening posture and manner involving respect for, having humility towards, and believing that what a person has to say is worth hearing. "Responsive-active-listening-hearing is a natural...manner and attitude that communicates and demonstrates sincere interest, respect and curiosity." p. 4

²¹ Hosking & Morley, 2004, p10, emphasize questioning and also careful attention to listening as important features of dialogues, "the point is to give space to Other, rather than doing something to or make use of Other".

written a lot about this basic need of human beings and emphasizes the importance of relationships in education. Anderson (2009) says that we are relational beings. We mutually influence each other and are mutually influenced by each other. I have often noticed in my work that *how* we construct communication seems to be more important than *what* we say (content). In my present work as school adviser I often meet situations in which relationships are damaged by poor or absent communication. People are out of relation in these situations. Interesting questions are therefore: What kinds of actions generate relationships in the communication between people? What do people do that affects relationships in a positive and constructive way? What does this mean for generative change processes?

We tend to look at dialogue from the individual view. Dialogue is then seen as an entity, as a means to change the other, like using a technique or a skill. In this way we isolate dialogue, making it static, as if it is something that happens without being related to the reality in which it gets its shapes, as something that happens in the individual. According to Hosking (2002), dialogue can be seen, from a relational constructionist perspective, as continually constructed, re-constructed and produced. In fact, from this perspective, dialogue is the specific dynamic that occurs between people who are involved in it. Looking at dialogue in this, to me, new way, I realized that there are many forms of dialogue. Certain features characterize the dialogue, but it is in relation with others that its particular (local, temporary) form is constructed. It is the meaning-giving within the relation that will decide how we define dialogue. And this differs from situation to situation and from context to context.

McNamee (2008b) refers to dialogue as a special form of conversation. Even though I sense what she is trying to express by saying this, I would prefer to call dialogue a certain, other or different form of conversation. Using the word 'special' could give dialogue a certain value, perhaps better than other ways. To me, dialoguing is another way of having a conversation, and many other forms or mixed forms are possible.

Dialogue, a different form of conversation

People talk to each other in all kinds of ways. Communication is a common expression for the exchange between two or more people. Dialogue is a different form of communication. It depends on our local reality as to what meaning we will give to it. The literature gives all kinds of descriptions which must all be seen from the perspective of our own local cultural and historical traditions. One mainstream approach is the modern approach, where dialogue is seen as an entity, an object. This is not wrong. Looking at dialogue as a separate object can help to give us ideas about some of the aspects that make this kind of conversation different from other forms. Looking at dialogue in a more critical, relational (social) constructionist way helps us to gain other or new understandings. By doing so, we will observe dialogue as the process between people who are communicating while being in relation. This can be a rich source of generating a deeper understanding of dialogical practices. The simplest definition I found was:

“A dialogue is a conversation between two or more people”. It is the composition of the Greek words λόγος (logos, word, language, discourse) and διά- (dia, by) or δι- (di, two).

After reading this I was a little disappointed, because I think a dialogue is more than just a conversation between two or more people. Communication can be seen as information going from one side to the other

side, re-acting in many forms, sometimes going back to the sender or staying inside the receiver (his own inner dialogue). Anderson (2010, p. 2) says that in a dialogue we are “conversational partners who connect and engage in an in-there-together, two-way, back and forth, and give-and-take process in which we act and talk with each other rather than to each other about the issues at hand and the desired outcomes”. She explains dialogue from the early Greek society as “generating meaning through the conversation and understanding it.” Historically, the process was more important than the product. Having space for dialogue and participating in the process seems also evident in indigenous cultures. From this perspective she explains her way of looking at dialogue in which she sees dialogue as a relational and collaborative activity. In dialogue, the search for meaning and understanding takes place. These are continuously interpreted and reinterpreted, clarified and revised. “Newness in meaning and understanding emerges and thus possibilities are generated for thought, feeling, emotion, action and so forth. Transformation is inherent in dialogue. True dialogue cannot be other than generative.” Anderson (2010, p. 3)

Dialogical approaches, what we do together

Let us have a closer look at the construction of dialogical practices. When reading the literature I found some interesting features.

Careful listening and questioning

We can make the world more complex than it is. But I think there is no need to. Careful listening and questioning are crucial to any conversation, but especially to dialogue. Listening, being open to the other and the content of the conversation, being nonjudgmental and appreciative is all we need. Hosking (2009, p. 16) refers to the work of Chodrun, who speaks of “compassionate action: as not shutting down on self or others; as being open and nonjudgmental; as letting go of fixed views; as being fully present on the spot.” Listening within the dialogue is ‘not *for* something’, to grasp something. It is a kind of listening to be *with* something or someone, in which the listener gives full space to the speaker to express anything he wants, without judging, interrupting or discussing the right or wrong of it. Listening becomes a relational action, contributing to understanding self and the other better, in the end supporting the relationship which is built in an ongoing process. “Listening is heart-felt, engaged, relating.” (Hosking 2009, p. 17)

In my work, I often advise people to be aware of their own thoughts and feelings in the conversation with the other, and simultaneously to park all these thoughts when talking to the other, to create this fully empty space we need to be really open to others. In doing so, we are in the *now* rather than in the *know* and not being distracted by other things, such as other thoughts which, unfortunately, is often the case in the conversation. Eckhart Tolle explains in the *Power of Now* (2006) how important it is to be centered in the present moment. To me, listening is like going back to the eye of the hurricane where there is absolute silence. It implies to me that we need to listen carefully, inside and outside ourselves, during dialoging.

Multiple equal voices

We have seen in collaborative practices that equal footing supports our relating. This is also an important feature of dialoging. Andersen (1991) explains that in conversations it is the level of equalization that will decide the outcome of the process. Participants are valued equally. As Hosking says, we are all participants within that certain local reality and we are all equally important with our own specific inputs. Andersen, Anderson, Hermans, Hosking and McNamee all emphasize equalization as important. In relational work we meet multiple equal voices which need to be heard. When I work with people I always explain that we are all experts in some aspects of the change process. Anderson says, "When we genuinely value the inclusion of all voices and the richness inherent in differences...less hierarchical and dualistic relationships and less technical and instrumental processes are invited." (Anderson, 2010)

Participants create a space of openness, a space of equal and mutual importance, as being seen by the other as important, as an important contributor in the dialoging conversation, as being worth listening to. Because of it, people feel safer and more at liberty to express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. The more this sense of equalization is experienced by participants, the greater the chance that people are open and really get to understand each other. Differences are better understood. Competition, rivalry, negative connotation etc. are not functional any more. Instead, trust, openness, sensitivity, empathy, cooperation, and appreciation are constructed. Anderson refers to how important it is to assure that each member has the opportunity to participate as an equitable contributor to the conversation, including the design of the designated activity and its outcome.

March 12, 2010. I suddenly realize what's happening. A school leader of a primary school and her staff are attending my training. The subject is effective reading, education, and researching methods for technical reading. In a group session in the afternoon, we discussed how to move on with limited time left in the meeting. We started an open dialogue, sharing ideas and meanings, looking for a meaningful activity to move us on to the next phase. The group was open and cooperating well. Suddenly, the school leader monopolized the conversation by putting forward her firm opinion on how to go on, using lots of words and lots of motivation. The group's openness transformed into closing up. Lots of non-verbal body language showed that they did not agree with the school leader's point of view. Nevertheless, the school leader stuck to her point of view, did not provide any opening and used her body language to express this. The atmosphere changed into non-cooperation. Not on the surface; they did, in the end, what the school leader wanted them to do, but it was obvious that inside, they were having totally different dialogues. (Log, 2010)

In this situation, de-equalization²² took place. I realize that as soon as people take up their positions, hierarchy comes into it and, with it, the power play. If this happens we are *out of relation*, which influences the change process. Reality is suddenly experienced as a here and there situation. In the example of the school leader, she thought of it in terms of a winning situation, but I think it was in fact a losing situation for all.

²² Hosking (in: *Change works: Constructing changes in relational processes. 2002*, p. 13) mentions *the dialogue trap*. As soon as we comment on someone else's actions it would implicitly claim superior knowledge or 'power over'; deequalization then takes place and the relation is disturbed.

Moving pictures, multiple realities

On the basis of the process of equalization, participants express more and more their map of reality to each other. Bateson (1987) explains that we all make different distinctions of the same situation or reality. We make different maps of the same territory. In social constructionist terms, one could say we construct multiple social realities. We start the conversation with our own picture and, as Andersen (1991) says, our pictures are mutually influenced by what is said, thought and felt in the conversation. The pictures move when one has the openness to be touched by the picture or story of the other. That is where I think transformation takes place. These pictures can be seen as stories, reflections, experiences, expressed thoughts. These moving processes are important in the relationships we build. It means that we are not stuck by keeping the picture still and holding on to our own picture. As soon as our pictures are blocked, the dialogue can turn into a discussion, a debate or even into fights about who is right and who is wrong. My own experience is that most problems seem to be caused by these pictures that got stuck. Unfortunately, many people are not always aware of their own view of reality, which is often seen as the one and only right view. That is also my criticism on the modern way of looking at reality and its search for the one and only truth. From Hosking's (1995, p. 6) point of view one could say that in dialogue "meanings are open, and have no ultimate origin or truth".²³

Andersen (1991, p. 20) cites the work of Maturana & Valera, who say that "certain people can only be just the person he or she is" and will therefore react with the possibilities he or she has at that particular moment, but this can also change in time. Old ways fade and new ways come in. The dynamics depend on how people are put in relation. If there is a disturbance in the conversation because something intrudes that is too unusual, the participant can react in one of two ways: either he/she can clam up for self-protection, or open up. This again shows the dynamic character of dialoguing. Andersen therefore emphasizes that we must try to bring in something unusual, but not too unusual, to avoid this closing up.

I realize that we all have our own ways of using language to express our moving pictures. In language we use our verbal and nonverbal expressions. We must be aware that there are limitations. Communication is a complex process. I can express my view of the map, using my words and nonverbal expressions. The other needs to translate, to understand my meaning-giving, and in response will use his own chosen words and expressions to give a kind of re-meaning. I think that when language is used in conversations, each participant makes his own pictures which move in time. The difference (Bateson, 1987) will always be a part of the language game we use in conversations. It emphasizes the importance of openness to listen carefully and try to understand the other. That is why dialogue is so important. In expressing our pictures, we choose what we want and do not want to say. It is a way of focusing. Within the dialogue a relational focusing takes place. We share our pictures, and in doing so our pictures can become one.

Focusing

Reality is complex; expressing it makes it even more complex, as soon as we make distinctions. In the dialogue, we will talk about certain issues, leaving other issues out. So, as soon as we focus, we make

²³ Hosking (1995), uses the word "multilogue". She explains that "we use the term multiloguing to refer to processes in which meanings are made in mutual relating, or referencing of texts to contexts. It is in these processes of multiloguing that realities are constructed". (Hosking, 1995, p.5)

distinctions and some things will be left out of the conversation. Questions we ask have the same effect. What we ask is given attention, but it also means that we leave out other questions. The response, the action after the question, decides the next step and is not predictable, although we often think it is. The act of focusing, or making distinction, means that each participant makes a distinction, or acquires a perception of reality, by giving attention to it. We all can decide consciously or unconsciously what we hear, feel or sense.

April 14, 2010. During the coaching of a school leader of a primary school, we discovered the following: The school leader had a bad feeling about his presentation to the members of the school board. He had presented his developmental experience of the previous 6 months, and one of the school board members had said "You didn't touch me with your presentation." In our coaching session one week later we looked back. One of the things we discovered was that in this case the expectations of this school board – which were not expressed openly – were the school leader's criterion for judging this presentation, which meant a lot to him. Apparently, the criteria of all participants were different. That's normal I think. But the interesting thing was that we discovered that this was a way of focusing (or distinction) which had certain effects on the dialogue. Closing up, starting inner dialogues, trying to find answers to what was happening, was activated at that moment. (Log, 2011)

This experience recalls the words of Harlene Anderson (2010, p. 1): "Collaborative coaching involves an authentic partnership between client and coach that values the possibilities inherent in collaborative relationships and generative dialogue". It is interesting that each of the six participants in this specific presentation had their own criteria for appreciating or judging it. Questioning, which is an important feature within dialogue, is a way of focusing. By asking questions, we focus on what we try to understand or solve. We are often not sufficiently aware that our questions are already presumptions of how we view reality. Hosking speaks of "Questioning and listening as formative of relations and realities". (Hosking 2004, p. 15) This focusing could perhaps be compared with the mindfulness in Buddhism. We need to focus internally as well as externally when we practice our dialogical approaches. Mindfully approaching the other and the otherness means to me that we are really present in the moment and are open to meet the other without judging. This mutual interest to be open to the other and the otherness within the dialogue defines the dialogue. I agree with Anderson (2010, p.1) that "an appreciative approach recognizes and encourages the talents and expertise of each person." The dialogue can then become a joint action or a shared engagement, in which participation, belonging and ownership of all participants are secured.

Power play

My first simple thought about dialogue and the aspect of equalization was that the power play would be an equal, perhaps even measurable, happening between participants. Each participant has the same influence, the same speaking time, the same speed, the same space for thinking. But reading about it and thinking further about it, I do not think this is the case. I think that in an open, respectful dialogue where equalization is in the mutual interest of participants, each participant has his own influence, his own power in the dialogue. Within the interaction, I can decide how I want to respond, but also – and this is the most interesting aspect of it - how I want to reflect *internally*, in fact how I *respond* internally. Nobody sees that part of the conversation, as long as it is not expressed, verbally or nonverbally. It is the owner's secret territory. Each participant also has the power to open up or to clam up in the conversation. Hermans²⁴ (2009)

²⁴ Hermans (2007) describes the "unstable equilibrium". By that he means that it may look like stability from the outside, but that in the meantime from the inside something is at work that is many times stronger so that you could say that there is an unstable equilibrium that suddenly disturbs the

emphasizes this in better words, by saying that there are no dialogues without power. He says that it is fertile to recognize this. He calls it differences in dominances. This is familiar to each action of dialogue. When I speak, I have the power to determine what I want to say or not say. *The other* has the power to respond or not to respond. In this way, there is an issue of power play in the dialogue. The only thing participants can do is the so-called taking turns, by turning from the position of speaker to that of listener. Remember De Caluwé & Vermaak (2006), who speak of the pocket veto. Andersen (1991) discovers that relationships are in charge of the person. People are influenced in the dialogue by the dynamics of relations or relationships. Integrity seems to be one of the key values. She is very clear about this. "Every person I meet has a major interest in conserving his integrity throughout the meeting. What I say and do determines his being open to a conversation (opening) or his closing up."(Andersen, 1991, p. 4) We will see in the next section that the act of observing plays a crucial role in it. Andersen adds an interesting aspect to the discussion by stating that the act of knowing also has a kind of power in it. It can cause openings or closures in the dialogue. "Knowing also risks maintaining or increasing power differences."(Andersen, 1991, p. 5)

When I reflect on my own experiences I try to be aware of this power aspect of knowing. It is important to let one's own knowing go, or to park it for a moment *and* to be sensitive to the moment when to bring in one's own knowledge, because it can often disturb the connection with the other. As I said before, it is being in the *now* instead of being in the *know* that matters. As I see it, power is a natural aspect of the dialogue. As long as it contributes to respectful and equal relations and does not disturb our relating to the other it is all right.

Careful observation

During the dialogue, we continually create pictures of each other based on inner and outer perceptions. Andersen (1991, p. 21) calls this mechanism the observing system. "We must respect the person's basic need to conserve his integrity. In order to do that, one has to learn to be sensitive to these signs." Sensing (feeling), knowing (corresponding to describing and explaining) and acting (saying and doing) fulfills the requirement of conservation of the ...integrity of the person. (Andersen 1991, p. 25) So the challenge is to secure the integrity of all participants. Each person has a perception, which Andersen calls the constructed perception, of the situation that belongs to a person. This perception is the person's reality. Reality only exists as the perceiver's reality (Andersen, 1991). I add that there is also a describer's reality. I totally agree with Andersen's statements when he writes "no reality can be said to be better than other ones. They are all equally real." (Andersen, 1991, p. 27)

As well as the act of observing, the timing of speaking, listening, thinking, and sensing, also seems to be an important issue during the dialogue. Andersen (1991), Wijsbek (2009), Hermans (2007), Anderson (2010) all point to the importance of pauses during the conversation, which should be long enough to enable all participants to think, sense, and feel. Let the mind of the other find words to react. This is also where the inner process of dialogue takes place, which Hermans (2007) speaks of. Neurolinguistic Programming calls this *rapport making*, adapting the communication to the rhythm of the other without losing one's own rhythm. It is also essential to observe our own inner state during the dialogue. We can sometimes be too pushy or too speedy; pauses occur less frequently than they should, or disappear in the communication. When this is

equilibrium and enables a turning point. The turning point is created from this inner process which becomes stronger. Hermans calls this the "dominant reversal", underlying I-positions take the power and you will suddenly see new behavior. Underlying processes are present which can suddenly lead towards the 'dominant reversal'.

the case, we need to recover ourselves during the conversation. It is my personal experience that my inner state of calmness and awareness helps to be fully open in the conversation in meeting the other. When my mind is restless, my inner space will be limited, not being fully open to the other. When my mind is in peace, I can be fully open towards the other. Kunneman (in: Wijsbek, 2009, p. 118) states that the quality of the dialogue is also determined by the way people feel inside, how they deal with their own personal development, what their ambitions are and where their damage is. Wijsbek and others call this open space *the interval* or the space in between. He uses the word *interval* with reference to Martin Buber's work. Interval could perhaps be called the act or moment of freedom. The process in which integrity is secured, and which is based on safety for all participants, leads to the experience of freedom to exchange ideas varying from usual to unusual to, perhaps, too unusual. Hermans (2007) writes about the atmosphere which is created in these moments of space in between. It is possible to create an atmosphere between the different I-positions in the outer and inner dialogue. If this is created, the different I-positions will meet and create relations. This space in-between creates an atmosphere that determines what can be put forward in the conversation, and this is negotiable. Hermans uses the metaphor of a virus which will spread quickly in the conversation and which is immediately felt by participants. When I think about this, and become more aware of the inner and outer dialogues we all have in the conversations with all these changing I-positions, it makes me more conscious of the fact that this inner space or the space in between forever changes during the dialogue. It feeds the relations (too little, enough, too much) which we are building, and dialogue is therefore a way of conversing in which we must be aware that this mutual feeding is an ongoing process. There is no terminal station at which the dialogue is finished. All these inner spaces happen perhaps more unconsciously than we might expect. My experience is that the level of inner space decides how many and which I-positions will be visible at a given moment – also the ordinary, taken for granted positions – and which not. The invisible I-positions are within us, often unspoken to the outer world.

Language and language games

In communication, we exchange information using different kinds of language. A distinction can be made between verbal and nonverbal communication. The latter is very important in our communication.²⁵ We are not always fully aware of the impact of the nonverbal aspects. Nonverbal language (body language and tonality) strongly emphasizes what we say verbally. Both receivers and presenters in conversations observe the other and it is my experience that nonverbal language – however subtle it may be – is constantly observed. This often happens unconsciously. We often think that we just respond to the words people use in the conversation, but that is just one level of the communication; we also respond to nonverbal actions.

Using language has its limitations. This can be a handicap in our conversations. For each word we choose to use, we do not choose other words. Finding the right word is a complex thing. Are my words, in which I try to express my understanding, also the words the other will understand? During my communication training sessions I often play the game “Think about Paris all of you, what do you see?” and participants always experience that they all have different pictures of Paris. This shows how careful we should be in communication in supposing that we understand the other one hundred per cent. I think that the interesting

²⁵ Andersen (1991, p. 21) refers to nonverbal behavior which gives lots of information during the conversation. To observe if someone is opening or losing in order to stay in conversation with a person, one must respect the person's basic need to conserve his integrity. In order to do that one has to learn to be sensitive to these signs...“One thing that helps is to go slow, to have time to let them know their responses and to have time to notice them”.

thing about the dialogue is that there is a lot of freedom to ask the other what he is trying to express when he is not understood. There is no fear in this game like the fear of appearing foolish. By selecting the words we use we delete other words, or generalize our experienced reality. This is, as Bateson says, when we see only the map and not the whole territory. Being aware of this incomplete re-presentation of realities by all participants, accepting and expecting that there are differences, helps in a way to understand others' stories as their stories and not as *the* story, as the truth.

Another interesting aspect Anderson writes about is that the use of so-called cooperative language contributes to the process. "Cooperative language (opening) is essential instead of uncooperative (closing) language (words and actions). Questions, opinions, speculations, or suggestions are offered in a manner that conveys genuine respect, interest, and appreciation for the client's expertise." (Anderson, 2010, p. 2)

In *Postmodern Collaborative Practice*, Anderson (2010) explains that language and words are relational. It is in the relation with the other or others that words, and the way in which they are expressed, get their meanings. She refers to Bakhtin (1994, p. 30) "No utterance in general can be attributed to the speaker exclusively; it is the product of the interaction of the interlocutors, and broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex social situation in which it has occurred." She continues that we must be aware that each person brings his own language and understanding into the conversation; by encountering and interacting, transformation by dialogue is possible. The local histories and different contexts can make it more complex, as I experienced when working and living in different cultures abroad.

Sense-making and meaning-making

When using language, expressing what we think and feel, we also express what meaning or sense we give to the experienced reality. In the dialogue, I think we often experience that a particular conversation makes sense to both parties. It is my experience that those conversations that felt special, or gave certain energy, were often those when I felt I was *in relation* with the other and the content of conversation. Perhaps this is one of the purposes of a dialogue; it makes dialogue an intentional way of having a conversation. Viktor Frankl, who developed the philosophy of logos, states that human beings are, in essence, meaningful beings. I feel that one of the powerful features of dialogue is that we can be who we are. De Blot (2004) speaks about the longing of the human being to find an answer to the meaning of life. It is the inner drive to be in harmony with oneself and one's environment. Andersen (1991) calls this *keeping one's integrity*. This sense-making in the dialogue can mean different things to different participants. I also have to be aware that I make meaning of what is said, and should check regularly if my meaning-making resembles the other's meaning-making. So sense-making and meaning-making seem to be essential to human beings and hence also to change processes.

Homan (2005) writes about the "meaning clouds" that people have when they interact. It is the challenge of the dialogue to give space to the expression of these clouds. The more freedom and safety is felt in the conversation, the more these clouds will appear. When there is trust in the conversation, the conversations are no longer *power over* but *power to* the dialogue. When we share ideas, thoughts and emotions, the issue is no longer that I try to change the other.

Creating something new, transformation

The literature (Andersen, 1991; Anderson, 2003, 2010; Hermans, 2007; Hosking, 2002, 2005, 2006; McNamee, 2000, 2008b; Wijsbek, 2009; and others) shows that creating something new²⁶ is a common feature of dialogical practices. This new something could mean new content of the issues discussed, such as new ideas, new information, and new aspects. I am aware that we must see this more broadly. *New* means:

- New ideas, new thoughts, new aspects, new views
- New relationships with the other
- New relationship with myself
- New and better understandings than I had before
- New means that I can put myself in the position of the other better than I did before
- New means more respect for the other, more openness
- New means that I and the other can better stay in position, better be ourselves

'New' means different from what was before. So both participants within the dialogue experience a kind of mutual, or shared, changed sense of meaning. In my opinion, 'new' can also mean that old, forgotten issues can appear on the surface. In Anderson's article *Postmodern Collaborative Practice* (2010) I found some answers to my puzzles about 'new'. She states that the transformation can be in forms such as a shift, modification, difference, movement, clarity, etcetera. Anderson uses the words *mutually transforming* which, in her opinion, is crucial in responding to our changing times. (2010, p. 18) I like this expression of Anderson's, the word *transformation*. In my coaching work, the word *new* would mean looking differently at the same experience, or looking at it from different angles.

The value that Hermans (2007) attaches to the issue of uncertainty is interesting. This uncertainty can be seen in three ways, according to Hermans. One way is that uncertainty can mean giving *new possibilities* or openings. This can keep you interested, and it can make you even more enthusiastic. Another uncertainty can also overshoot into *paralysis*: the uncertainty transforms into fear. Dialogue brings *uncertainty* which gives space to the unpredictable. Anderson also mentions this type of uncertainty. She says that a collaborative approach invites and entails uncertainty. We never know the outcome when we are open at the moment, open to newness, because this will develop throughout the process of the dialogue. It is mutually created and it is "uniquely tailored to the person or persons involved." (Anderson, 2010 p. 2). What will come out of the conversation will differ from situation to situation, and from persons involved to persons involved. The uncertainty is that we do not know how the dialogue will unfold and what outcome there will be. I often experience what Anderson calls the *mutual transformation*. In many cases, not only the other transforms, but I am also affected, which leads to transformation. Anderson (2010, p. 2) "We cannot predict the outcome of the relationship and the dialogue". So there are always aspects of uncertainty to the dialogue, because one cannot always be sure where the conversation will lead. I realize that this could apply to many conversations we have. We never know exactly how the other will respond to what is said or not said. Homan (2005) states that when the meaning clouds are expressed, new meaning clouds can be formed. Knowing and not knowing go, as it were, hand in hand. Since the transforming character of the dialogue perspectives changes, it is impossible to predict how the conversation will develop and what will come out of it. An attitude

²⁶ Anderson in *Responding to our Changing Times* refers to the work of Bakhtin (1981) "dialogue is the condition for the emergence of new meanings and other newness".

of not knowing, tolerating uncertainty, being critical and tentative about what you know and think you know yourself, openness to the natural accidental path, and freedom of expression, are essential to form these meaning-clouds. Dialogue is like a moment of travelling together, sharing thoughts and ideas, being touched by the other, having trust in each other, not knowing where the path will lead. You could say it leads to some kind of transformation. "Genuine dialogue is a social activity that is transforming for all participants". Anderson (2010, p.1) Knowing and not knowing go hand in hand.

The act of reflection

I spoke earlier about the act of observation. Observation and reflection are in my opinion closely connected. My thinking starts from the observation. Then I start to reflect, which must be seen as a cluster of thoughts and feelings. From the different *I-positions* within myself, a dialogue starts within me. This is my inner thinking and sensing. Parallel to this, I can also express my reflections outside to other participants, and most importantly, I can choose what to say. This act of reflection is a constant, dynamic process, happening within and after the dialogue. The more I can express my reflections in the dialogue, the more others can better understand them. Anderson in *Speaking, Hearing Listening* states that "dialogue involves the reflexive, intertwined process of listening, hearing and speaking ... (these aspects) are intricately woven and each is critical to the other."(2010, p. 2) The extra dimension is the intertwinement between these actions, and also the intertwinement of inner and outer dialogues of all participants.

Building relationships, building bridges

One of the best outcomes I think, of dialogue, is that we create healthy relationships over a longer period of time. I started this chapter with the issue that communication is one of the basic needs of human beings; it helps them to relate to each other. Relationships, or being in relation, is what comes out of dialogical practices. Anderson writes "What I learned from my clients is the importance of listening, hearing and speaking to relationships and dialogue...What I learned highlighted the significant importance of the relationships in dialogue or what I refer to as a therapist's way of being." (Anderson, 2010. p.1). When I look at my present school advisory work, I think this applies to every dialogical practice. "Dialogue involves having space for people to connect and talk with each other." The dialogue is "a dynamic generative joint activity different from other language activities such as discussion, debate, or chitchat." (Anderson, 2010, p. 2).

In viewing process, Hosking (2009) distinguishes the *ego-logical* view and the *eco-logical* view. The former entails a dominant *power over* relation. In the latter a *power to* relation is created in which relations are different but are seen as equal. They include the power to voice different selves, and not just one voice. When dialogue is seen as a relational and collaborative activity, the relationship of the conversational partners is of prime importance. Anderson refers to Wittgenstein, who talked of relationship and conversation going hand in hand. "Dialogue invites and requires of its participants a sense of mutuality, including genuine respect and sincere interest regarding the other. While at the same time dialogue invites a sense of belonging and ownership." (Anderson, 2010, p. 2) In the dynamic process, speaking, hearing and listening are intertwined as Anderson explains. I am aware that within these actions the response is

important for building relations. Like Anderson, I also experience that conversations with lack of response can give someone the feeling of being dismissed.

I felt energized when I drove back in my car after just having had a dialogue with one of my clients. Wondering about this, I discovered that it was this "mutual" listening which generated new meanings and understanding, not only for the client I visited but also for me as a coach. His response to my questions activated new actions or understandings in the outer conversation as well as in the inner dialogue I had... (Log, May 2010)

Anderson speaks of responsive-active-listening-hearing actions which are a way of being (Anderson, 2010, p.4). A way of being that invites "a metaphorical space which ... is a gathering place for the relational process of dialogue." What, in her opinion, invites dialogue is the full acceptance of each other, no matter how different we are within a safe environment to express this fully. I do not totally agree with Anderson's statement that "respect is a relational activity; it's not an individual internal characteristic." She explains that respect is shown within the relation with the other. But I think that apart from that, each participant's internal respect also affects the relational activity. So I think it is both an outside and an inside activity. The relation with the other is constructed in the dialogue itself, but also within oneself by the inner dialogue we have. It is a kind of double action. I experience an enormous deepening when this second layer comes into the conversation.

I like the relational point of view. We should look further and look carefully at the relations we build and the interactions we have. McNamee (2008b) also confirms the idea that appreciating differences can mean great changes in the world and the future. I agree that in these complex times we need healthy relationships to deal with the complex times to come. There is no other way. Anderson speaks of collaborative relationships. She states that these collaborative relationships are intrinsically interrelated with dialogical conversations (Anderson, 2010, p. 8). Shared engagement, joint action, and shared inquiry happen within the dialogue. It is there that collaborative practices and dialogical practices join together. It is like building constructive bridges between realities.

Stories in time

Stories told in conversations are about experienced realities brought back to the present moment, so they can be seen as stories in time. They are dynamic, changeable, as soon as they are influenced by new stories in time. Wijsbek (2009) points out that storytelling is an essential activity of human beings. Everything a person experiences is told in stories, is relived and retold. "The narrative gives us a viable form of identity". (Wijsbek 2009, p. 41) To me, dialoguing means more than the standard communication which Wikipedia describes as "Two or more people having a conversation". A major aspect of dialogue is that one really sees the other's reality by exchanging experiences, knowledge, information and feelings. Dialoging has the power to enable one to really take up position for a moment in the other's reality, realizing that it is just a glimpse of this reality, because we will never be able to really sense it as the owner does, without judging or criticizing the other's reality. In dialogue, we exchange our stories which express how we construct our realities. These stories are appreciated by the other or others in the dialogue. Differences are accepted and there is a willingness to really understand each other. In this way stories can be very helpful. They give glimpses of the

experienced reality and in this way give the other the possibility to understand these stories and to create his own pictures of that expressed reality. In this we must be aware that these are all constructed perceptions.²⁷

The interesting thing, I think, is that there is always an effective basic structure beneath the story told. This effective basic structure can determine processes of change to a large extent, and also the dialogue. Paying attention to the underlying effective values can provide an insight into how people experience realities. How does somebody feel in relation to the story told? The way we dialogue can make the other express his effective experience. We can thus experience the stories of others as if they were our stories. By means of the narrative approach there is space for everyone's story, which makes the process powerful, because in that way acknowledgement takes place of each one's meaning. In the narrative psychology, the human being is seen as a story. He tells a story about himself in one way, by the inner dialogue in telling the story to himself, and in another way by the external, or outer dialogue, in telling the story to others. The *relation* with the other determines what *color* the story will have. That is the relational aspect. You can understand more of a person and his situation when you listen to him as if you are listening to a story. It seems to me that this storytelling, compared to fact telling, leads to a better understanding of the other. Other dimensions come into the conversation, such as feelings and non-verbal expressions. These stories then seem to be a metaphor for what is felt and experienced by the other. The other feels he or she is really seen. This is a feature that is often characterized as very important in building sustainable relations. This story telling must not be seen as a one-way activity, I believe. It is relation building, if it is done on both sides. It is a relational activity.

To conclude

Strengthening educational change processes by collaborative and dialogical approaches

From the social constructionist perspective, change processes can be seen as constructed social realities in which people are put in relation. I like the way the process or organization, which to me is also a dynamic process, is called a meaning system (Andersen 1991). Wijsbek (2009) also describes it as a narrative constructed happening, in which people go *into relation* with each other and their context. The change process is not an entity or object, but an ongoing process with its own biorhythm and story. During the change process, new perceptions are created and from there each participant tries to shape his own functioning in these processes. In fact, they try to relate the meaning of this change to their own realities. As Weick (1979) explains, we can look at processes as a synthesizing happening, a permanent activity to construct a workable cohesion. I would like to call it connectedness. Wijsbek makes the remarkable statement that the more complex an organization becomes, and the less predictable, the less traditional control mechanisms will contribute to an effective control, and the more important the dialogical character of the organization or process becomes. (Wijsbek, 2009, p.8) When a process is regarded as a narrative construction, we can see it as a dialogical network of relations and interactions. The people within the

²⁷ Constructed perception is a term Andersen introduced, 1991

process can be seen as 'intentional' (Viktor Frankl), and 'dialogical' (Wijsbek, 2009) creatures or constructors. In such a process, people try to create with each other, the context and themselves, a common or mutual content for the 'mission' of such a process. The challenge is that these processes should be experienced by all participants as meaningful and sense-giving. The interesting thing to me is that, within this dialogical networking, shared sense-giving and meaning-giving take place.

The collaborative and dialogical approaches in the change process are features that generate this *being in relation* with the other and the otherness. There is openness in the collaborative and dialogical practices, a certain attitude towards the other and others that promotes relating, collaborating, a curiosity towards the other and a willingness to work together. This positive attitude towards differences means appreciating the other and the otherness, welcoming it. It does not mean that people have to agree with each other. It simply means that people are willing to ask each other generous questions for purposes of understanding and going on together, to be open to meet the other, to listen and to question each others' realities carefully. This *being in relation* must be seen as an ongoing process in which people are appreciated because of who they are and what they do. It is when each contribution to the process is seen and awarded. I am convinced that in this way healthy relationships come out of these processes which are, in my opinion, fundamental for sustainable change processes. By appreciating all these differences met in the multiple realities, we can support these relationships. Metaphorically speaking, we could say that in doing so, bridges are built to connect with the other and the otherness. In a relational world, we move beyond agreement towards coordinated processes of relating. And so the contributors to the International Handbooks of Educational Change, (Fullan, Hopkins, Lieberman, Hargreaves 2005), say that we must connect the isolated islands to construct archipelagoes, or even whole continents. This is necessary, given the complex and unknown future we are moving to.

There is a growing awareness of a need to shift to this new paradigm of relational orientation, but it is still early days. As I described in one of the sections, we are in the middle of a transitional period from the individual towards the relational orientation. Common practices in educational reform in change processes are still strongly influenced by the individual point of view. In my school advisory work, or educational consultancy work, for primary schools, I meet many situations where dialogical and collaborative approaches, as described in the previous sections, are absent. When I look at secondary education the situation becomes even more dramatic. School boards and local and national authorities seem to have overlooked the relational dimension, and are not in relation with the educational practitioners. Their approach is still from the traditional modern, individual point of view; and realities of the different players in the change process are separated and treated as entities.

I am fully aware that we must not see dialogical and collaborative approaches as instruments or as techniques which we can simply use to improve something or to get something done. By doing so, we would maintain the individual paradigm. Social constructionism shows that we should see these practices from a relational perspective. Acting from a philosophical point of view (McNamee, 2008b, p. 19) will lead us to healthier relationships which will help us "to craft liveable futures together". These appreciative practices generate enthusiasm, continual excitement, and revitalize all participants. Change processes can be seen as ways of going on together. The co-ordination of collaborative and dialogical approaches based on the appreciative attitude generates ways of being in relation, and therefore strengthens the change processes in sustainable ways.

There is not one right or correct way, but there are multiple ways

- It is clear that there are multiple ways of collaborative and dialogical practices. It is clear to me that *what* we construct together, and *how* it makes sense to us, or what it means to us, in the end will decide *whether* and *which* kind of dialogue and collaboration has taken place. The challenge is (Anderson, 2010, p. 1) “to listen, hear and respond to the other in such a way that what we bring to the encounter does not close us to their meanings, descriptions, and understandings of their lived experiences, but rather engages us in dialogue with them.” This is a nonthreatening way of generating and sharing ideas (Anderson, 2010, p. 25) or, as Marshall Rosenberg says, a nonviolent way of communication. In an open and safe space, participants will be encouraged to express their ideas, thoughts and suggestions without fear of ridicule or reprisal. I like the saying of Suzuki’s: “Your attitude towards your life will be different according to which understandings you have.” The transforming aspects of dialogical and collaborative practices are promising. The benefits of collaborative and dialogical practices are manifold: sustainable relationships; increased creativity, growth; mutual participation; transformation; broader innovation and flexibility to respond to change; relational knowing; shared responsibility; greater efficiency; improved quality and consistency and greater responsiveness to needs; growing organizational knowledge. Dian Hosking (2002, p. 10) summarizes some of her ideas as follows:
 - “Relational processes construct someone and something as real and (perhaps) good.
 - Entities with characteristics can arise and subject-object relationships can be constructed, as in mainstream narratives, but processes only construct the way someone or something is *here and now*; other relations are always possible.
 - Processes are constructed in multiple, *interrelated*, act-supplement (text-context) relations, and
 - Reference co-ordinations already in the process.
 - Act-supplement relations resource and constrain how a process goes on.”

Collaborative, dialogical approaches and educational relational change work

It will be clear by now that *being in relation* is an important aspect of change processes. Educational change work is people’s work. Traditionally, educational change work was done by a select group of people, such as researchers, based on the individual view to change *the far away* situation in the daily classrooms, of which they were not a part. It was the *here and there* approach which separated the producers and consumers of educational change. Teachers and students had to use the ideas of others to do their educational work more effectively or efficiently. Researchers or leaders of educational change communicated about best ways of change with each other but not with those who had to put the change into practice: teachers and students. As we have seen, this has not led to successful reform. Teachers and students were seen as consumers of the well-researched and well-designed products of others. In fact, this way of approaching educational change has put the main players in change on the sidelines; the players in the educational change were *out of relation*.

The movement in educational reform that began in recent years shows that a paradigm shift is taking place towards a more relational approach. Although we are in a transitional stage, it becomes more and more

clear that we should appreciate the roles of teachers and students as active producers of educational change. Without them there will be no educational change. It is interesting that using collaborative and dialogical approaches transforms the way people work and talk with each other. In this way, a new understanding of the educational world, and consequently of educational change, is growing. Collaborative and dialogical practices help to construct a reality in which people are heard and seen in what they think, feel and experience. These approaches are features to put all participants in the educational change process *in relation*. By doing so, everybody is equally important. Everybody is appreciated for their contributions within the change process. Everybody's voice is seen and heard. Collaborative and dialogical approaches are essential aspects within the participative change work.

Referring to the work of Hosking & McNamee (2006), we have seen the following features as generative of educational change:

- Knowing and influencing are joined.
- Multiple voices are given space.
- There is an emphasis on possibilities and positive values.
- Inquiry and interventions are joined.
- Careful listening, questioning *and* thinking are practice.
- Conceptual and non-conceptual performances can be constructed.²⁸
- There is a deep ecological approach.

I am convinced that the relational orientation towards educational change strengthens the relationships built. If we can bridge the gap between our individual or personal position and the interpersonal or relational position, the process as well as the outcomes will become more sustainable. In educational change work, there is a new challenge to construct actions and supplements that are supported by all members. I daily experience the difference between schools which succeed in constructing collaborative and dialogical practices in and outside school, inviting community members to join in, and schools that fail to do so. The need for these approaches is great, especially in complex change situations. I observe in my work as school advisor and educational consultant that we do not need to change the whole school system at once, but that we can start with little actions of collaboration and dialoging. When I was working with teaching staff in the south of the Netherlands (February 2011), who were not used to collaborative and dialogue practices in the ways I have described, I experienced that less complex work can also be influenced positively when people are put in relation by these actions. These teachers suddenly discovered a new world of possibilities, seen from the relational orientation, which was different from working from the individual perspective.

The contributors to the *International Handbooks of Educational Change* (2005) describe many forms of collaborative and dialogical practices. Schools in this new paradigm are seen as learning organizations (Senge, 1992), where the learning process of all participants is the issue, not isolated but in relation to other and otherness. Liebermann (2005) promotes networks to get teachers out of their "island mentalities" by connecting them with other teachers and schools. Keating (2005, p. 23) refers to the learning society. "This all arises from fundamental shifts in educational goals, from increasing diversity of populations, and from new conceptions of learning and knowledge." He uses 'learning society' because it connects a number of key themes essential for constructive change. One of them is that change is a continuous process and that it can be brought to conscious awareness in which goals are made explicit, that it involves the broader society

²⁸ These features are taken from Dian Hosking's work (2006) on relational constructionism.

and not just communities of experts, and that collaborative learning is crucial to effective societal adaptation. We need to help schools not only to encounter at the coffee machine or at lunchtime, but to meet each other inside their work. But, as Liebermann warns, without discretionary time, any stimulus from outside their building, or responsibilities that require collaboration, it is not an easy task to achieve.

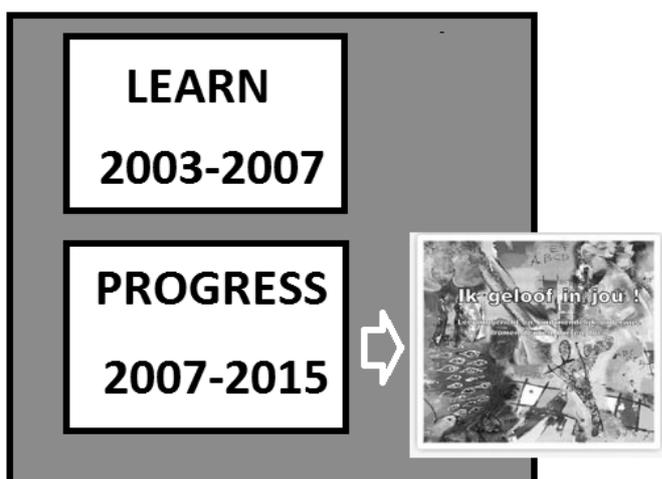
I talked earlier about lower and higher order change. It may be clear that we need collaborative and dialogical practices especially to achieve these higher order changes for the needed transformation of our educational system. West (2005), Sanders & Epstein (2005) promote the involvement of the community in these practices. They say that we equally place the notion of importance equally with partnerships which can support the school and promote learning - particularly partnerships with students, with teachers, with parents, and with the school's various communities. Many scholars emphasize the need for a well coordinated, co-operative style of working which gives teachers the space and confidence to improvise, in a search for the most appropriate responses to the situations they meet. In other words, we are seeking to create a system coupled by ideas and shared understandings of purpose. This is very much in contradiction with the present actions of the Dutch Government, where teachers are overwhelmed with increasing bureaucracy and a great emphasis on reading and maths results.

I would like to end with Andy Hargreaves, who is very clear about the need for collaborative and dialogical approaches in schools. "If schools are to be effective in the future for all students and are to build structures which promote interrelationships and interconnections, then cultures must be developed which simultaneously promote collegiality and individuality." (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 33) By using the *I Believe in You!* Process in Suriname as an example of educational change, I will try to illustrate in the next chapters how we can strengthen our educational change processes by using the relational point of view to achieve more successful and sustainable change. To be open to other ways of thinking, to multiple realities, has been a useful means of creating commitment and ownership from within in this specific change process. Collaborative and dialogical approaches have been essential features in creating an atmosphere in which participants in the process were put in relation in many ways, and by doing so, this educational change process has become not only successful but also more sustainable in the long run.



Setting the stage

*I love the interior.
If you look at the stars there at night,
you can hardly believe there are so many.
You feel you could almost touch them.
Everything's unspoilt, it smells different.
And the sounds...
When I sit by the river in the morning,
watching the day begin,
I realize how insignificant I am,
that I'm just one small link in the universe.
The beauty of Suriname always cheers me up.
Denise Jannah, jazz singer
(in: Fey, 2008, p. 165)*



Introduction

The subject of this dissertation is the study of an educational change process, seen from a different point of view (Social Constructionism). To this end, I have used my work experience, especially in the period (from 2007-2009,) when I worked in Suriname. For a better and deeper understanding of the process, I will describe the background to it. For this

dissertation, I analyzed the process of the development of the publication *I Believe in You!*²⁹ This publication expresses the local dreams and views about future elementary or primary education in Suriname. Designing and publishing this book was an important part of a long-term program called PROGRESS³⁰.

Setting the stage, i.e. explaining the Surinamese local history as well as Surinamese education, makes it easier to understand attempts to improve the quality of primary education in Suriname. LEARN³¹, a five-year pilot project (2003-2008) prior to PROGRESS (2008-2015), in which 15 primary schools were involved, was one of the attempts of the Ministry of Education (MINOV³²) together with VVOB³³, the Belgian development organization, to shift the focus of teaching to a more pupil-centered approach. The idea was that learning outcomes would improve if students felt better in a positive, constructive classroom environment *and* if students were more motivated or committed to learning by being challenged by meaningful approaches. I will explain this in greater detail in one of the next sections. From the social constructionist point of view, it is clear that we have to be very much aware of the specific local history. Every change process is a unique happening and it cannot be copied as a one-fix-for-all approach to other local contexts. Even within the 15 pilot schools, each school had its unique local history to be dealt with. After a brief introduction, I will describe my experiences with this attempt at reform using modern and postmodern orientations (social construction in particular).

The lessons learnt from the LEARN pilot (and also from other Surinamese reform efforts) were used to design the PROGRESS program. These lessons learnt also formed the basis for the content of the *I Believe in You!* publication. The focus of the change process shifted from piloting 15 schools (micro level) to an integrated long-term change program at macro and mezo levels. The underlying idea was that it would be easier to improve education permanently if we strengthened the working of relevant Ministry divisions, improved the quality of the teacher's training colleges, and set up a system for continuous professionalization and a system for monitoring and evaluation. It was within *PROGRESS* that we started to develop the views about Surinamese primary education that resulted in the publication of *I Believe in You!* I strongly believed that the educational change process in Suriname would be more powerful if it was based

²⁹ Chapter 7 Methods and Analysis

³⁰ PROGRESS= Program for Effective Schools in Suriname, a cooperation project between the Surinamese Government and Belgium

³¹ LEARN = towards a more learner- centered and experience-based approach in primary education in Suriname

³² MINOV = the Ministry of Education and Community Development of Suriname

³³ V.V.O.B. = the Flemish Association for Development and Technical Assistance. It has supported developing countries for more than 25 years. At the moment it provides assistance to nine countries in South America, Asia and Africa. It supports capacity building in local partner organizations.

on views shared and understood by all stakeholders, in which the learning triangle of pupil, teacher and environment were the central focus. *I Believe in You!* expresses the metaphor of pupil-centered education in which the learner and its learning process are the producers of change.

From the social constructionist point of view, it became absolutely clear to me that, to develop this view, we had to establish a process which would involve as many people as possible from all sections of society. So, instead of having views developed by so-called experts and using a detailed plan, we plucked up courage to go on an expedition full of challenges involving the Surinamese people as experts to attain this goal. The word *expedition* has been chosen carefully. We did not work from a detailed plan in which every step to be taken had been designed from the beginning to the end. We knew our goals, we had ideas about our approach and we knew the first step, not always knowing what the next steps would be. I experienced this as a wonderful adventure that suited my pioneer spirit. It may be clear that using *the I Believe In You! process* as a main source for this Ph.D. has given me many insights into the complex processes of educational change. As an actor on the ground, I find it of vital importance to do something with my experience and understanding of this change process. Integrating the academic and practical world in this Ph.D. study will show that, from a social constructionist orientation, every change process is unique and must be seen, addressed and understood in terms of this uniqueness. By looking carefully at this process, I came to the realization that the approach of the so-called planned change or the 'makeable' world is too unilateral a way of dealing with change. The insights I gained by analyzing the *I Believe in You!* process deepened my understanding of change processes. I appreciate the unpredictable, autonomous and spontaneous aspects of change processes which, in the end, strengthen the sustainability enormously.

The Surinamese context

Suriname is a republic situated on the north coast of South America, where it borders Guyana, French Guiana and Brazil. A green tapestry of broccoli was what I saw from the window of the airplane when I first arrived in Suriname. This together with the embrace by the warm and humid air (100% humidity, 35°C all day, 25°C at night) completed the tropical experience. Endless and almost monotonous, the rainforest covers 80 percent of the country. The dominance of the rainforest is easy to explain – after all, Suriname is only 250 kilometers north of the equator.³⁴ Rainfall in the hilly interior is spectacularly high and sometimes reaches 2,000 mm a year. Thanks to its abundant rainfall, Suriname boasts a huge variety of flora. To date, the number of known tree species is over 800, while for the whole European continent the figure has been stable for many years at around 100 species. The virgin rainforest is rich in a great variety of wild plants and animals, including 674 species of birds, 200 species of mammals, 130 species of reptiles, 99 species of amphibians and thousands of species of botanical plants, most of which have not been studied yet. The Central Suriname Nature Reserve covers 1.6m hectares and is one of the largest in the world.

³⁴ 163,270 square kilometers in size, Suriname is situated on the Atlantic coast of South America, just north of the equator, 4 00 N, 56 00 W. Neighboring countries are Guyana to the west, French Guiana to the east and Brazil to the south.

Suriname is a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), but also retains cultural and economic ties with the Netherlands, in part due to the fact that an estimated 321,000 people of Surinamese origin live in the Netherlands. The country has emerged from a long period of economic instability, through prudent fiscal and monetary management on the part of the Government and consistent economic growth, partly fuelled by high commodity prices. Between 2000 and 2005, the economy averaged a real annual growth rate of 4.4%, with inflation rates remaining below 10%. Gold and bauxite mining and oil extraction continue to account for more than 90% of total foreign exchange earnings. The informal economy in Suriname is relatively large. The term 'informal' refers to economic activities that take place beyond the official economy, and the conduction of economic activities, by companies and individuals, which do not comply with the legally established requirements. On the basis of estimates produced by the ABS³⁶, the contribution of the informal sector to real GDP (at marketplaces) amounted to 17.5 % in 2008. The contribution of the informal sector to real GDP at basic prices was even higher, namely 20.4%, in 2008.

Suriname is ranked 97th out of 182 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) 2009, with a HDI value of 0.769, which places it in the medium human development country category. It is ranked 46th out of 135 developing countries in the Human Poverty Index 2009 with a value of 10.1%. The MDG Baseline Report for Suriname 2005 indicates that in 1999/2000, 66% of the population lived below the poverty line. Qualitative studies show that the most vulnerable sections of the population live in the interior and in high-risk urban neighborhoods, with female-headed households being particularly vulnerable.

The Government of Suriname has acknowledged in the Long-range Development Plan (MOP 2006-2011) that increased prosperity has not reached all the people of Suriname, especially the poorest. Housing problems, a wide discrepancy in the distribution of qualitative health care, and a growing number of dropouts are some of the indications that economic progress does not reach all sections of society. The public sector employs about 40% of the total workforce and includes 120 state-owned enterprises. A decentralization program designed to facilitate inclusive planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring has been implemented in five pilot districts and is accompanied by a comprehensive planning process for the development of the interior. While working with the Surinamese government, I experienced the negative effects of bureaucratic centralization and the 40% employment in the public sector. A large proportion of the national budget is used to pay the salaries of the public sector. (MOP 2006-2011) The government may be characterized as top-heavy, with excessive numbers of workers in the lower salary scales and a shortage of senior staff. I came across this shortage on a day-to-day basis when I worked for the Ministry. On the one hand, there are too few staff members for management and coordination, and on the other hand, not all those in leading positions have the knowledge, skills or competencies to do their work properly. The few strong leaders, such as the heads of departments, often had too heavy a workload to do their work efficiently and effectively.

³⁶ ABS= Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek Suriname (National Statistics Bureau)

Problems are structural:

- Huge labor costs of government workers
- Impractical and inefficient government apparatus resulting in slow decision-making processes
- Outdated legislation and government procedures
- Extensive and overlapping tasks
- Shortage of qualified staff, especially senior staff
- Politicization of public service
- Ineffective use of available financing as a result of lack of capacity (r.g. donor financing, Dutch development aid, IDB financing)
- Weak management, steering and organization at almost all levels

The government introduced a Public Sector Reform (PSR) program to improve government efficiency. This was essential for a better investment climate and sustainable economic development. In the last few years, more and more critical questions have been asked about the effectiveness and sustainability of projects and programs financed by donors. In 2002 the Surinamese Government introduced a sectorized approach, which focuses on an effective and efficient use of human development financing. This sectorized approach is not an aim in itself but concerns above all a process-like approach to cooperation. This approach, it is hoped, will not only make structures and bottlenecks more visible, but will also offer prospects for really solving fundamental problems. The greatest challenge is to bring about dialogue. The Surinamese Government is aware of the fact that the mechanism of donor coordination at different levels is essential to growing towards a more integrated sector approach. But so far the implementation of the sector plans have been slow and weak. I experienced many reasons for the endless delays, such as the lack of capacity within Ministries, inadequate performance of the key tasks of several ministries, complex and tedious procedures. The main limitation of the development policy is Suriname's weak operational and implementation capacity. These problems require radical, structural solutions at macro level. The reform of the public sector is vital to achieving this. The present political climate does not bode well in this respect.

It should not be too difficult to imagine the implications of all these problems for education. I, myself, have experienced on many occasions that the complexity of the Surinamese context has an enormous impact on educational change processes. I have met many motivated educators, but the bogged-down system blocks many attempts at change. Local history combined with Dutch influence often seems to divide the politicians into two groups. One group is resolutely against any Dutch influence, however positive it may be; the other group is open to all those influences that can strengthen the system.

Education

The first impression I had, when I visited schools in Suriname, could well have been a negative one. If I had focused on the poor housing of schools, the lack of financial means for school leaders to run their schools, the photocopies of books which children used (if they were so lucky that their parents could afford to make copies), the lack of sufficiently qualified teachers and ongoing teacher training, the isolated position of schools in the interior, the large number of children in classrooms, the poor functioning of the Ministry of Education (MINOV), the shortage of senior staff, the inadequate use of financing provided by various donors

or banks (IDB), the low salaries of teachers and so on, my spirits could have sunk, but they did not. My sister-in-law once asked me, "Why do you do this work, when the conditions are so sad?" My answer was clear. "Where would we be in this world if we gave in to sadness?" So in spite of everything, and being an optimistic person, I interpreted the situation as one offering daunting challenges. I looked for little bright spots, which I mainly found within people. I felt deep respect for the resilience they showed working under such poor conditions. I met many motivated teachers, school advisors, school inspectors, parents, officials and so on, who only wanted the best for Suriname's youth and tried their hardest to improve education for children, Suriname's future. I think this positive attitude helped me enormously, later, to guide the processes I was part of.

It is important to have some knowledge of Suriname's educational context to be able to understand the *Believe in You!* process, which I will describe below.

The Dutch legacy and the dominance of the rainforest

As I said in the introduction, the Dutch colonial past and the dominance of the rainforest, with its isolated and poorly accessible interior, strongly influence the educational system in Suriname today. Dutch, as the official language, also continues to be a major influence.

Newly independent countries go in search of their identity, and often use educational reform as one of the means to establish it. I experienced this in my previous job in Aruba, and in Puerto Rico, as well as in Suriname. While I worked in Suriname, I noticed two camps in education. One camp was against almost anything that reeked of Dutch influence; the other camp was more open to Dutch influence in a constructive critical way. I am proud that as a Dutch educational specialist I succeeded in working together with the Suriname people, in building relationships, starting dialogue and collaborative practices, and giving the initial impetus to the reform, which we will see in the next chapters. There is no need to say that I felt sad to leave Suriname in 2009, because of our children's future and the better quality of their education in the Netherlands.

The rainforest is responsible for big differences between the quality of education in the interior and that of the coastal region, as we will see later. It is not only a matter of distance, but also of lack of capacity, of sufficient numbers of school inspectors, school advisors, trainers and so on, who are not paid well enough to travel to these remote schools, which results in hardly any inspection and hardly any guidance, help or training.

Let us first look at some general facts of the Suriname educational system. The section includes some statistics obtained from the MINOV Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Division which has also been strengthened by VVOB since 2003. They are now capable of presenting data annually.

General facts of Suriname's education

In 2008/2009, 17,695 children were enrolled officially at kindergarten level.³⁷ Although there is no compulsory education at that age, most children aged 4 to 5 attend school (87 % aged 4, 95 % aged 5; 99% aged 6). Regular primary education is attended by almost 97% of the students aged 6-11. Compulsory education covers students aged 6-11.³⁸ In the year 2008/2009, almost 71.074 students were enrolled at 323 primary schools, including kindergarten. There are more boys in kindergarten and primary schools than girls (51.8% boys, 48.2% girls). It is worth noting that till grade 5 (9-10- year-old students) more boys attend school than girls, but in grade 6 (11-12-year-old students) more girls attend school than boys. Fifty percent of the schools are state schools, the other half are denominational. About 1,800 students are enrolled in special education.

Secondary education distinguishes two levels: secondary education at junior level (VOJ) and secondary education at senior level (VOS). There is a serious gender discrepancy in VOJ. In 2008-2009, 15.708 boys and 16.675 girls were enrolled in VOJ (general education). Mainly boys were enrolled in technical education (> 90%: Source MINOV).

Fast facts about education in Suriname ³⁹		Source
Compulsory school age	7 – 12	
Pre-school attendance	38.5%	MICS3
Gross primary school attendance rate	116%	MINOV
Net primary school attendance rate	92%	MINOV
Interior	55%	MICS3
Net intake rate	95%	MINOV
Interior	71%	
Promotion rate grade 1	56%	MINOV
Interior	36%	
Survival rate to last primary grade	46%	MINOV
Secondary school age children out of school	18%	MICS
Interior	44%	
Literacy rate 15-24	93%	MICS3
Interior	45%	

Primary education is characterized by a very high level of inefficiency. The Baseline Report of Primary Education (BEIP 2006) gives the following data:

- Considerable disparities in the quality and delivery of education between the coast and the interior; Limited educational opportunities for children in the interior;

³⁷ Jaarboek Onderwijsindicatoren 2008-2009 MINOV (2010)

³⁸ It is interesting that the *Jaarboek 2008-2009*, page 55, states that high rate of enrollment does not mean that children learn enough. The educational system is not geared to the needs, is often academic, not contextualized and does not recognize the style of living, or the values of the local people.

³⁹ Source: UNICEF, UNICEF in Suriname. Quality Basic Education, Paramaribo 2009

- All children participate in the education system for some years. Students often stay in the system for a long time. More than 40% of the students need 7 years or more to complete the program, which should normally take six years.
- The percentage of repeaters is very high and fluctuates between 19% (grades 2-6) and 27% (grade 1). That is the reason why a lot of students aged 12-14 are still in primary school.
- Successful completion rate of primary school is low; 50-55% pass the school-leaving test in grade 6.
- The vast majority of teachers are women (93%); the average age of teachers is 35.
- There are 4,484 teachers in primary education (2006).
- Over the past 10 years, the successful completion rate in grade 6 has increased by only 11%.
- The drop-out rate is high, almost 8%.

This inefficiency in primary education is due to the shortage of qualitative methods and materials, outdated curricula, lack of high-quality training for teachers, insufficient number of qualified teachers, lack of supervision by the management and the school inspectorate and a weak system for testing and selection.

Within secondary education senior level (VOS, Voortgezet Onderwijs Senioren), there are four teachers' training colleges, which also face serious challenges. A great number of students do not want to become teachers, but they use these colleges as a stepping stone to higher education. Other challenges concern outdated policy on higher education, insufficient possibilities for qualification or professionalization for teachers and principals, lack of study material, lack of facilities, an outdated curriculum, inadequate salary structure, insufficient synchronization among the four teachers' training colleges, internal inefficiency (waste) and external inefficiency (poor coordination with the labor market). After all, well-prepared and qualified teachers are still one of the primary conditions for quality education.

MINOV is responsible for the administrative structure. This structure also poses institutional, managerial, operational and organizational problems. The increased complexity of the administrative structure requires better coordination, cooperation, communication, supervision, evaluation and monitoring. Vacancies are often filled by political candidates; quality is not always an overriding consideration. This affects the educational system in many negative ways.

With a view to dealing with all these problems more strategically, the Government has formulated the SEP (Surinam Educational Plan, 2002). This plan aims to determine a short, medium and long-term educational policy for the next 15-20 years, based on politically neutral views. The educational plan (SEP) of the Ministry of Education emphasizes the following starting points:

- quality
- equality
- equity
- continuity
- diversity

The educational goals are formulated as follows:

- A more effective and efficient educational system
- An equitable educational system, offering opportunities to everybody
- An internationally competitive labor population
- An educational system with quality service, which meets the set quality standards.

In an attempt to partly deal with the problems mentioned above, MINOV encourages durable, powerful learning environments, in which active, pupil-centered and competency-focused learning processes can take place. It also aims to guarantee equal opportunities for qualitative education, for all. This explains the firm commitment of MINOV to the

LEARN pilot (2003-2008) and PROGRESS (2008-2015). On the basis of the SEP, the following outlines of a 5-year educational plan have been drawn up:

1. Decreasing the knowledge gap within Suriname, and between Suriname and other countries
2. Focusing on schools and classrooms within the educational system
3. Full and costless participation of all children (4-15 years) in the educational system
4. Improving educational financing and management
5. Strengthening regional cooperation.

The most fundamental reforms are the following:

- 1) The reform of the educational structure. Suriname wants to integrate primary education (kindergarten and primary school) with the first three years of secondary education. They call it *de elfjarige basisschool* (eleven-year basic education)⁴⁰. The Government also wants to invest in early childhood education. The Ministry of Education developed a long-term program called BEIP⁴¹ to work on the reform.
- 2) The reform of the educational administration, which involves decentralization and increased autonomy of schools.

The infrastructure of many schools is poor. Most school buildings are 20-40 years old and are in bad repair. During the years I lived in Suriname, there was a shortage of classrooms in schools every year, mainly due to lack of coordination and planning by the government. School leaders often tell stories of how they collect some money for maintenance by selling sweets or food, or by organizing markets. The extent to which financial means provided by donors are used is alarming. Only 4% of the total budget is actually used. I found this quite shocking when I first heard it. How is it possible that Suriname does not seem to be capable of using the available funds, while there is such a great need for qualitative education? How unfair it is, to the children who are dependent on adults to create the best conditions for their future. It may be clear from the previous sections that this is explained to a large extent by the shortage of competent employees, as well as the corrupt political system. I have seen and, I hope, have shown the Surinamese policymakers, that change is possible in Suriname. The number of motivated teachers and school leaders, as well as employees in Ministry divisions is large. They all want what is best for the children, but they need the help and support from the Government to achieve the best education for Suriname's youth. The existing shortages are due to various causes. The most important are lack of means, inadequate educational structures and processes, and an ineffective organization and steering of this sector. MINOV is aware of the urgent need to address these problems, so that all children can receive quality education.

⁴⁰ De *elfjarige basisschool*- eleven years of basic education for children aged 4-15

⁴¹ BEIP= Basic Education Improvement Plan, financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

Some trends and comparisons⁴²:

Access and participation

Compared to other countries in the region, the access and participation rates of students attending primary education are reasonably high. Because of poorer access and participation in the interior the average figures are lower. The Surinamese Government should pay more attention to the interior. Early childhood education participation and access is also quite good compared to the region. Together with the Bahamas, Chile, Barbados, Argentina, Uruguay and Panama, Suriname is rapidly approaching a literacy rate above 95% for the target group of 15-19-year-olds. (see www.unesco.org).

Equity and quality

The gender parity in 2008/2009 was primary education 1: 1; However in higher education it is 1:2, which shows that more girls attend schools than boys. Boys in particular leave school early, often as early as primary school, and for this reason more girls are seen in higher education. In the interior, fewer girls attend school. The repetition rate of 17% in primary education (2008/2009) in Suriname is high in comparison with other countries. It is remarkable that more boys seem to leave school in their last year of primary education. The dropout rates are high and, as in the rest of South America, dropouts are mainly boys. The reason is often that they need to work and earn money. Another reason is the Pupil Teacher ratio (PTR), which indicates the average number of students per teacher. The indicators in the yearbook 2008/2009 show an increasing number of children per teacher which affects equity and quality in the classrooms. Suriname will probably not reach the MDG in 2015, together with Tobago, Colombia, Costa Rica and Trinidad, Suriname will probably not reach the MDG concerning gender disparity, either in 2015.

The situation of primary education in the interior

In spite of the progress made, especially in health services in the interior of Suriname, significant disparities remain between urban/rural areas and the interior in access to, and the quality of, basic services (health and education). Some of these disparities have been caused by the dramatic changes that have affected traditional social structures and life in the interior over the past 20 years. These changes were the result of the armed conflict, which disrupted life in Suriname between 1986 and 1992, and damaged or completely destroyed many buildings in the interior. Thousands of people were forced to flee to French Guiana. In addition, the gold rush and structural adjustment programs have had a considerable impact on the social and economic conditions in the interior. The main issues pertaining to education in the interior are:

Low density of pre-primary educational facilities and other early-childhood care facilities.

- 20% of the primary schools do not have a kindergarten.
- 71% of the communities do not have a kindergarten or kindergarten program, which means that young children often have to make long journeys to reach a school.

⁴² Based on *Jaarboek Onderwijsindicatoren 2008-2009*, MINOV, Paramaribo

- 700-900 children aged 4-5 are estimated to be out of kindergarten.
- Children are not ready for school.

Children enter primary school too late, drop out early or do not attend school at all.

- There are not enough schools in the interior.
- In Sipaliwini and Marowijne resp. 40 and 66 % of the children aged 4 and 5 attend School
- 26% of the children in Sipaliwini and 25 % of the children in Brokopondo repeat the first year of primary school (compared to 17% nationwide).

Poor quality of primary education

- 80% of the teachers of state schools in the interior are not qualified to teach in primary schools.
- Often they have a so called "bosakte" (a certificate for teaching based on a few days training for teachers). Most schools are private schools.
- Methodologies and curriculum are unsuitable; they have not been adapted to the local cultural context.
- The school environment is not stimulating and child-friendly; teacher/learning materials are lacking.
- There are few technical and financial resources to support special needs. There are no schools for special needs.

Virtually no opportunities for secondary education in the interior

- There are only 15 secondary schools in the interior; there are no secondary schools on the Upper Suriname, Marowijne and Tapanahony Rivers.
- Children are sent to Paramaribo for secondary education, but the concept of dormitories assumes that all children can adjust in the same way and it raises concerns about emotional stability, cultural appropriateness, disciplinary practices, erosion of family ties and support, and abuse. The cost of sending a child to Paramaribo is often beyond the means of many families.
- One of the secondary schools, VOJ Albina, had an exam pass rate of 5% in 2007 and 43% of its teachers are not qualified to teach in secondary schools.
- In the districts of Brokopondo and Sipaliwini in the interior, 6% of the children aged 12-18 attend secondary school, 60% are still in primary school and 34% are out of school.

At first glance, education in Suriname may appear to be doing well with its high enrolment rate in primary education as outlined above. However, it conceals the rather staggering reality of the low quality of education in the country; the survival rate for grade 6 (age 12) nationwide is only 63.1 percent. With its large enrollment, Suriname has the potential to make a substantial educational impact on a large number of children in the country if it improves the quality of education.

With regard to education in the interior, the disparities are significant and are exacerbated by the fact that it is extremely hard for the government to recruit trained and qualified teachers to teach in the hinterland, because of limited facilities, health risks such as malaria, and the high cost of living. A total of 80% of the teachers at state primary schools in the interior are not qualified. Many teachers in the interior use outdated

teaching methods, teach multi-grade classes, have low morale and are disconnected from the communities in which they teach. Teachers in the interior have not been trained in child-friendly methodologies and do not have the teaching resources to train themselves. Because of the remoteness of most of the schools, in-service training of teachers is very expensive.

Suriname is a middle-income country and it is on track as far as reaching the MDGs at the national level are concerned, but there are wide disparities between the coastal belt and the interior. Policies for health care and education do not extend to villages in the interior, where the Maroon and indigenous communities live with poor access to many basic services such as primary schools, clean water, sanitation and health clinics. One of the main problems faced by government social services is the difficulty in reaching villages in the interior, many of which are isolated because of lack of roads, and rapids in the major rivers; some can only be reached by small aircraft.

Loss of human capital

Something interesting is going on in the field of education in Suriname. The country spends about 5% of its Gross Domestic Product on the educational sector; it was almost 8% in the 1980s. That is much more than the 3-4% of most other Caribbean countries. Still, according to the World Bank, only 40% of the Surinamese children aged 12-19 attend secondary school. The figures in the Yearbook 2008/2009 even show an NER⁴³ of less than 50% for the students aged 15-16 years old. After Haiti, this is the lowest percentage in the whole region. The World Bank mentions causes like poorly trained teachers and principals, a poorly functioning schools inspectorate, weak government policy and management, too little attention for education in the mother tongue besides Dutch, and completely outdated curricula.

The loss of human capital and with it, the loss of economic growth, owing to poor education, can hardly be underestimated. The reality for countries like Suriname is even sadder. Countries with poor governance not only produce less human capital, but human capital is used less efficiently than in well-governed countries. The recent OESO study entitled *Human capital and growth: the cost of rent-seeking activities* proves this. According to the researchers Berthélemy, Pissadires en Varoudakis (1996), talented people in countries with poor governance have less chance to develop in productive business activities. They will waste their talents in government jobs. Or they will only be focused on their own financial benefit. The researchers figure that poorly governed countries, simply by this inefficient use of human capital, miss 1% growth annually. Suriname is faced with an enormous brain drain caused by the weak economic situation and working conditions. Senior staff go abroad to build a better future for their families. Almost 350,000 people of Surinamese origin live and work in the Netherlands. When I worked at the Ministry of Education (MINOV), I could count the well-educated staff on the fingers of one hand. This meant, in practice, that these people were often swamped with work.

⁴³ NER= Net Enrollment Rate, which indicates the numbers of students' appearance in schools.

The context of aid organizations

At present there is a wide variety of organizations working in Suriname, small and large, trying to improve the quality of the educational system. Owing to weak government management, the coordination of all these well-meant initiatives is poor. When I was working in Suriname, I met many motivated and qualified people from diverse NGOs and donor organizations, such as VVOB and UNICEF, as well as the Dutch Embassy. Small private initiatives taken by Surinamese emigrants or Dutch people, many NGOs, and hundreds of student teachers from the Netherlands and Belgium, are trying very hard to improve education. BEIP, the MINOV improvement program for the 11-year basic education system, which is financed by loans from the Inter-American Development Bank, still fails to improve the education system. The Ministry's lack of capacity, to coordinate and manage, results in ineffective use of all these good initiatives and means. Only 4-5% of donor financing is used annually. That is really depressing because Surinamese children and youth do not benefit as much as they could. Because of this situation, we, the initiators of *the I Believe in You!* process, felt the need for a shared vision created, not by some experts but by as many people as possible from society, all regarded as experts in some way. By designing PROGRESS, these shared views became the foundation for helping to connect all these different initiatives for educational reform. I strongly believed that in bringing all this power together, instead of splitting it up, we could give an enormous boost to the educational reform process in Suriname. Key figures from MINOV, such as the Minister and the Minister's advisor, as well as key figures from UNICEF Suriname, got together to create this vision. Chapter VII, Methods and Analysis, and Chapter VIII, Stepping back: What Do We Know Now, will show how important this joining of forces was for the sustainability of the change process. At the moment of writing (October 2011), the process of joint actions still continues.

The LEARN pilot 2003-2008⁴⁴

Towards a more learner-centered and experience-based approach in primary education of Suriname⁴⁵

I became involved in the LEARN pilot as one of the final coordinators, when I came to Suriname in 2007. At the time, LEARN was in its fourth year, and had experienced many ups and downs. I concerned myself with evaluating this pilot and analyzing the lessons learnt. It is important to mention this because in the closing years of this pilot we started to develop a new educational change program, which we later called PROGRESS. In fact, LEARN yielded many lessons learnt, which turned out to be very useful in developing the views on teaching described in *I Believe in You!*

Background and short history of LEARN

The LEARN pilot was a joint activity of the Ministry of Education and Community Development of Suriname (MINOV) and The Flemish Association for Development and Technical Assistance (VVOB); the ownership of the project lay with MINOV. It lasted from January 2003 to March 2008. Different coordinators headed the pilot; they often left because of internal problems. I was the last coordinator, and completed the pilot successfully in March 2008. Primary education in Suriname faced, and still faces, a great many problems, including a high percentage of repeaters and dropouts⁴⁶. In fact, the figures are among the highest in the Caribbean and South America. One of the causes is the weak results in language and math caused by low quality education. Various reports and classroom observations have indicated that teaching in the primary schools is based on the 'talk-chalk and copy' method, with little variety in pedagogical and didactical approaches. Students' well-being and their involvement in the learning experience remain abstract theories, very few of which have been implemented. The LEARN project started in 2003, with the intention to implement a more experience-based and learner-centered approach in primary education. The assumption was that a greater sense of well-being and an increase in motivation among students would lead to a significant improvement in students' performances. Teachers were trained to follow students instead of following books. Fifteen schools in the coastal area of Suriname were involved in this pilot for almost five years, nine state schools and six denominational schools (two Protestant schools, one Hindu school and three Roman Catholic schools).

In November 2004, MINOV published its Sector Plan, which elaborates the outlines of the S.E.P. (Suriname Educational Plan). This plan describes the highest priorities and reforms for the period 2004-2008. The educational mission of MINOV is described as: Creating and maintaining adequate conditions, facilities and means for education and public development for each Surinam citizen, in order to improve knowledge, capabilities, and values, to enable effective participation in the Surinam Democratic Society. With free participation in the multi-ethnic society, and a strongly developed environmental consciousness, citizens will be capable of optimal participation in the social-economic life of our country.

⁴⁴ For the interested reader there is more information in appendix 1

⁴⁵ A documentary was made about *LEARN* at the end of the pilot entitled *Deep Learning*

⁴⁶ For figures see Jaarboek 2008/2009 (MINOV, 2010)

With a view to accomplishing this mission, the educational system of Suriname had to be transformed into a more effective and qualitative educational system, capable of dealing with the demands of today's world. It is important to mention this, because these ideas influenced the educational reform process in a substantial way. The S.E.P. states that within 15 to 20 years educational reform should succeed in creating the possibility for each citizen to receive qualitative education. Increased quality or higher performance should lead to fewer repeaters and dropouts.

The LEARN project was implemented by a project team made up of Belgian and Surinamese people, under the supervision of a steering committee. This project team worked *in* the schools⁴⁷; it trained and coached teachers. They noticed very quickly that the fifteen school leaders were also crucial to the durability of this reform. They became aware of the need to change the approach from an individualistic view (training teachers will reform schools) into a relational or systemic view. Training teachers is not enough to ensure lasting change; they need the support of their colleagues and school leaders. So the school leaders were given special training to enable them to support the desired reform within the school. The project team was regularly supported by external educational experts, especially from the Catholic University Leuven in Belgium, which has a department of experience-based learning⁴⁸.

The so-called experts were flown in, almost like visitors, used their high-quality European concept, and dropped this into the local Surinamese educational context with its lack of expertise and capacity for guidance. In spite of their high-quality training sessions, experience and firm commitment to the project, the awareness of the impact of using an open concept for pupil-centered education was, I think, insufficient. It is not a good idea to introduce a European open concept that needs a lot of guidance in a thinly populated country, lacking knowledge of and expertise in modernist approaches, and capacity generally. Furthermore, people did not know what they were getting into. Some experts had chosen what was best for them. Instead of designing a concept based on the local historical context, matching local needs and meanings, a ready-made concept was used. Understanding educational change, on the basis of the historical review, I think it is clear that this approach could not be completely successful. In the end, 2 or 3 of the 15 participating schools were transforming in the desired direction, after five years of intensive piloting.

Moreover, we already know, from the lessons learnt from educational change attempts over the last fifty years, that giving some schools the privileged position of a pilot school does not guarantee success when the pilot is expanded to more schools or the national level. All the special conditions suddenly disappear like snow in summer, or the concept turns out to be too expensive for the government to finance. I do not want to be too skeptical about the pilot, because many people devoted their unceasing efforts to it, but I think that, in spite of all these efforts, we still have to be critical of it. The good thing is that the pilot raised the awareness of a pupil-focused approach, based on the well-being and motivation of students and teachers. The pilot demonstrated how a more pupil-centered and experience-based approach could be implemented in Surinamese schools⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ We will see later that just focusing on and working in schools is a highly expensive and ineffective way to bring about lasting change.

⁴⁸ The Belgian Organization for Experience-Based Learning (CEGO) is established in Leuven.

⁴⁹ The documentary *I believe in You!* gives a realistic idea of the achievements.

Some guiding questions were the following:

What do we mean by pupil-centered and experience-based education?

What does this mean for the students, or teachers?

What does it mean for the headmaster?

Which elements of this concept can be adapted within Surinamese schools?

How can we put these ideas into daily practice?

What means do we need (books, games, materials etc.) and how do we use them?

And, finally, does this new approach influence the test results of Surinamese students in a positive way?

The focus of LEARN

The focus of the pilot was to introduce a more pupil-centered and experience-based approach in Surinamese primary schools, as part of the search for solutions to the problems within the system. The aim was to shift the usual approach, which was traditional, competitive, frontal classroom teaching, to a more process-based, more pupil- and learning-focused approach, and by doing so to increase the students' well-being, involvement and motivation. When children are happier and motivated, it can lead to better results of the students (cognitive development). In the competitive approach, the teachers are more focused on the final achievements of the students, and less on the individual progress made by students. A process-focused approach emphasizes the individual development of each child. The teacher evaluates each individual's progress without comparing it with that of other students in the class room.

Process-focused	Result-focused
The purpose of learning is to create capability, autonomy and gain more insights	The purpose of learning is to achieve better than others
Mistakes are impossible, they are seen as lessons learnt	The results are interpreted as success or failure
The learning process is important	The result is important
Intrinsic motivation to learn	Extrinsic motivation to learn
Individual learning criteria: individual progress is important	Social or group criteria: to be better than others is important
Deep learning	Surface learning
Self-directed learning: students are active owners of the learning process	Externally regulated learning: others say how to learn

For the interested reader there is more information about the backgrounds of the LEARN project in appendix 2.

The PROGRESS⁵⁰ program 2008-2015

During the LEARN pilot, we also experienced that the quality of government support for schools was still poor. LEARN did not focus enough attention on this aspect. LEARN started with a more individualistic, modernist approach, which very soon created the need to work in a more relational or systematic (post modern) way. Teachers cannot improve their own teaching if the rest of the system lags behind. Training individual teachers, as LEARN was doing, does not automatically mean that they will be able to fully apply what they have learnt in their classrooms. The problem even becomes worse if their school leaders do not understand the change or do not support it. Many lessons were learnt and they led to the development of the new program PROGRESS.

PROGRESS was developed as an integrated program, and was meant to guarantee more lasting change and to be more effective and efficient. The idea that just improving teachers could improve students' results was replaced by a more systematic approach. PROGRESS began in 2008 and will last till 2015. The new idea was to design integrated programs rather than pilots, and to focus more on macro level (government) and mezo level (support departments) than on micro level (schools). We started to develop this new Surinamese program, which is still running today. We had many ideas about naming this new program. The main goal of Suriname's policy "achieving an effective and efficient education system" inspired us to call the new program PROGRESS, meaning PROGRam for Effective Schools in Suriname. PROGRESS also means improvement or advancement. I will describe the main issues of this program just to illustrate how the previous LEARN pilot influenced the program and, consequently, also influenced *I Believe in You!*

Central idea of PROGRESS

The central idea was to develop an integrated program for strengthening the Surinamese education system rather than to carry out separate pilots. At the time LEARN was going on, other pilots or projects were also carried out in Suriname. Exchange of experiences did take place but was badly coordinated. Some basic assumptions of the new program were:

- Strengthening institutional capacity of the school support services of the Ministry will lead in the long run to greater sustainability and efficiency and thus make it possible to improve the quality of schools at micro level (schools and classrooms). We selected five divisions of the Ministry of Education and chose the teacher training colleges as important stakeholders in improving the quality of schools. Furthermore, permanent, systematic training for teachers in their careers was considered vitally important to sustain change and to strengthen teachers to cope with rapid changes in the educational world.
- We will change our approach from a more individualistic orientation towards a relational or integral orientation.
- Lessons learnt at micro level, from LEARN as well as other pilots, will be used as much as possible.

⁵⁰ For the interested reader there is more information in appendix 2

- Capacity strengthening should be supported by an effective information system and permanent evaluative research. Important data can be collected and used for working out strategies or gaining new insights.
- Harmonization and coordination with other partners, such as donors, will provide strong joint support in improving the quality of education in Suriname.

Surinamese primary education is characterized by a high level of inefficiency, which is clear from the high rates of repeaters and drop outs. Only 61,3%⁵¹ of the students pass the final test in grade 6 at the age of 11 or 12). In accordance with the Suriname Educational Plan (SEP), the Ministry of Education has chosen to tackle the enormous problems in education by encouraging durable and powerful learning contexts, where active, pupil-centered and competence-focused learning processes take place. Guaranteeing equal opportunities for all children is also high on the reform agenda. Effecting changes in the so-called *Elfjarig basisonderwijs* (eleven-year basic education) requires a comprehensive approach. Not only teachers need to change in the new direction, but also their school leaders, the staff of the Ministry divisions, such as school advisors, curriculum developers, school inspectors, teachers of teacher training colleges, exams and test developers, and so on. By working with a clear innovation strategy, based on a clear definition of the Suriname basic education concept and strong coordination and coherence of the various projects, we can work actively at achieving quality education in Suriname.

Many activities were undertaken during the preparation phase, which lasted almost one and a half years. Given the relational orientation, it was essential to involve as many stakeholders as possible to design a program which was supported and understood by those involved. We therefore had to hear the personal stories of many participants to develop a deeper understanding of the reality. We gathered people's own stories and views about the present situation and desired future, by organizing numerous participatory workshops in small groups, feedback loops, interviews and so on. The results as to the present situation and personal experiences, as well as wished-for, realistic solutions, were included in the POP⁵² program plan. Together with Surinamese people, we tried to describe risks and opportunities. An external consultant was hired to support the process. Once again it became clear to me that external, European consultants have their own biased approach to the task. In using one's own reality as a conceptual framework, there is less room for local conceptual frameworks. Instead of establishing dialogues, discussions are the result. I had just arrived in Suriname, it was June 2007, and I often had to steer this process in the desired direction. Instead of losing people because of misunderstandings or misconceptions or by approaches which made them feel excluded, we wanted to relate and connect with people, to listen to their voices and to appreciate them as much as possible.

After collecting all these stories, we wrote and rewrote the POP, the operational plan, changed it again and again on the basis of the valuable Surinamese feedback, and checked the design every time with the local people: Is this what you meant and wanted? It had to be their plan and their program. Again, it is one of the fruitful insights of postmodernism that those who are involved in the change should be heard and seen and taken seriously. A group of experts cannot design a program for others. This would again be the subject-object approach (S-O), leading to separate realities. From the postmodern view, everyone is the expert and is valuable for designing change programs. I have often experienced in my working life that this way of working, i.e. connecting with people, approaching as experts and taking them seriously, is an important

⁵¹ Jaarboek MINOV, 2008/2009

⁵² POP may be regarded as the PROGRESS operational plan, in which the strategy is described in greater detail.

feature of creating a strong foundation for the implementation of the plan. In the meantime, VVOB started to recruit a new staff in Europe as well as in Suriname for implementing this ambitious program.

The design of the program

After collecting all these stories of insights, wishes and dreams, we started to design the program. It was quite a challenge to design this long-term integral program. Once again, we come across the two paradigms of a planned change, or, the evolving journey. Knowing our goals, knowing our strategies and knowing the four main groups in education we wanted to strengthen would have been more than enough to design a deliberately half-open planning. But the organization that financed the program had other ideas. Their rules were strict and involved detailed planning and budgeting. I had to work out in detail what we were going to do in the next five years, how many workshops and which groups needed to attend in 2009, 2010, 2011 and what they were meant to achieve. In addition, hundreds of indicators of predictable and especially controllable outcomes had to be formulated. And above all this, we had to determine foreseen risks by working out risk analysis. Drawing up this detailed planning meant a lot of work for the small team, the then program officer and me. We had to meet many deadlines and the guidelines for designing the program were often changed, which made things even more difficult.

As I tried to explain in the preceding chapters, it is not that planning as such is wrong. It depends on how we deal with this planning and how much we are aware of the so-called assumptions that change can be planned, predicted and controlled, and its effects on the change process. What I could predict was that the detailed plan would have to be changed many times to adapt it to the change itself, step by step. It would be interesting to analyze how much time and energy are spent in organizations and change processes on adapting detailed planning to the reality of change, how much attention is focused on the detailed plan rather than on the change process itself. I can see the parallel with the school context in the Netherlands these days, where teachers are obliged to make many detailed plans as if learning is predictable, controllable and manageable.

In 2010 the first cycle of PROGRESS had to be changed again for the next three years. Unfortunately, the approach was an individual one, a modernistic approach, where the program manager, with great effort and commitment, changed the plan by himself, took out some pieces as if it was a cake, and almost lost the commitment of the staff that had to carry out the plan. They were not part of it and could not agree with the approach or the effects of the redesigned plan. How can we adjust the plan, if we are not involved in thinking about redesigning it together? This approach to designing was in contrast to the way of designing in 2007, when we used a postmodern approach by trying to involve as many people as possible. How easy it is for a manager to lose his fellow-workers when realities are split or separated and no dialogical or collaborative practices have taken place. Fortunately, the staff expressed their criticism and concerns; the manager was wise to be open and to use them to finalize the new design. In a way, it shows today's reality in organizations where we often see a mixture of these two paradigms.

PROGRESS is divided into the following four components:

C1. Strengthening divisions of the Ministry of Education and Community Development (MINOV)

Strengthening the School Advisory Division
Strengthening the Schools Inspectorate
Strengthening the Curriculum Division
Strengthening the Examination Division
Strengthening the Research and Planning Division

C2. Strengthening the teacher training colleges for primary education

C3. Organizing systematic, institutional and permanent training for teachers

C4. Strengthening a system for educational planning, monitoring and evaluation

In my opinion, achieving improvement and change without a clear idea of where you want to go will turn out to be a difficult journey. As I said before, a great variety of initiatives has been taken within the Surinamese context without any coordination with the Ministry. For that reason, the idea arose to support the Ministry by developing this concept of child-friendly and pupil-centered education. On the one hand, it could be very useful in the change and improvement activities of the four components of PROGRESS, and on the other hand, it could stimulate collaboration with other partners in the education. The idea which was conceived here later developed into the publication *I Believe in You!* From the beginning, MINOV and UNICEF were in for cooperation. When I left Surinam in June 2009, I was pleased to be able to leave behind this publication as a strong catalyst for PROGRESS, but also for approaches in educational change in Suriname. The concept of vision *I Believe in you!* should be seen as the foundation of PROGRESS.

For the interested reader there is more information about PROGRESS in appendix 3.

The I Believe in you! process 2007-2009

Do you know what you are?⁵³

You are a diamond. You are unique.

In all those years, I have never met a child like you.

Your legs, arms and clever fingers.

Your eyes, nose, mouth and hair.

The way in which you move.

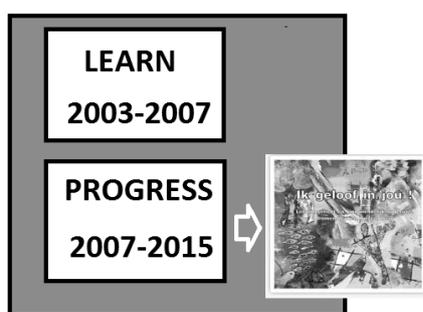
The way in which you look and laugh.

You have the power to do anything.

Yes, you are a diamond.

I Believe in You!

"Hearing something like that makes you grow. It makes you blossom. Every human being has that power to grow. It is wonderful to have the feeling that you are someone and you are able to grow into a beautiful flower. Education should be fully aware of it. I Believe in You! Yes, I really do!"



2009 when the book was published.

I wrote this text as an introduction to the documentary we made about the process. It is my experience that when you really believe in possibilities, they will become realities. As I said before, the *I Believe in You!* process was an important aspect of PROGRESS. By beginning early to develop a shared vision, we would have useful guidelines for the content of the educational change processes we wanted to get going within the four components of PROGRESS. I started with the first ideas as early as June 2007, and concluded this adventure successfully in May

Preparatory stage

When I started work in Suriname in June 2007, I saw all kinds of initiatives, small and large, aimed at improving elementary education. These initiatives were pilots such as the VVOB LEARN pilot, Kalbobis⁵⁴ for the interior, initiatives taken by UNICEF, big reform programs undertaken by MINOV such as the BEIP⁵⁵ program, or other projects set up by NGOs or private initiatives. A lot of good things were happening, so why this initiative to start yet another process for a shared vision? When we were developing PROGRESS together with Tille van Horenbeeck, the VVOB country coordinator in Suriname, and Surinamese people, I realized that the program would be more powerful if we had a clear idea of the direction in which the Surinamese Government (MINOV) wanted to go. This would mean that we could create or construct better activities for the four components in an attempt to strengthen the education system. A shared vision would

⁵³ This introduction has also been used in the documentary *I believe in you!*

⁵⁴ KALBOBIS= a pilot involving three schools in the interior to improve the quality and parents' involvement in primary schools

⁵⁵ BEIP= Basic Education Improvement Program, financed by the IDB, aimed at changing the educational system into an eleven-year program for 4-15- year- old students

also help to bridge the many gaps between divisions, NGOs, donors and private initiatives. Simultaneously, colleague Liesbeth Roolvink, an educational specialist working for UNICEF Suriname, felt the same need for a shared vision. Tille van Horenbeeck, who was my boss at the time, had established good relations with the government, in particular with the Minister's advisor Mr. Henry Ori. It was clear that we would need a strong commitment on the part of the Ministry of Education if we wanted to realize this shared vision. The various players in the field, the Ministry of Education, some NGOs, IDB, UNICEF, VVOB and the Dutch Embassy, had often indicated their desire for a clear orientation of education, which would focus more on the child and learning: pupil-oriented and child-friendly education. From the very beginning we formed a strong team (MINOV, VVOB and UNICEF). *I Believe in You!* became a joint initiative. We were fully committed and eager to realize this vision. I felt a growing connectedness among us in the nearly two years the project lasted. Lifelong friendships came out of it.

From a social constructionist orientation, shaping education should be a collaborative activity. It is not something you do on your own, and it is not done by some foreign experts who determine what is good for the group as a whole. The historical review has shown that this has often led to failures in educational reform. Creating a shared vision from a social constructionist point of view involves constructing meaning by coordinating relational approaches in the form of dialogical and collaborative approaches. 'Vision' must then be seen as a dynamic concept. Vision is *in* the people who are involved in the processes and it is *not* an eternal truth written down on paper, somewhere *outside* the people. It is not like creating a vision that will be there forever, without expiration date. In that case, a vision will become an entity, a static thing, as Diane Hosking and Sheila McNamee (2006) would say. Vision is alive and present in human beings, and also in organizations, but only thrives when we frequently dialogue about it and are open to development and changes. So all people have to be experts themselves, instead of being separated from the clever experts who know what is "right" or "wrong".

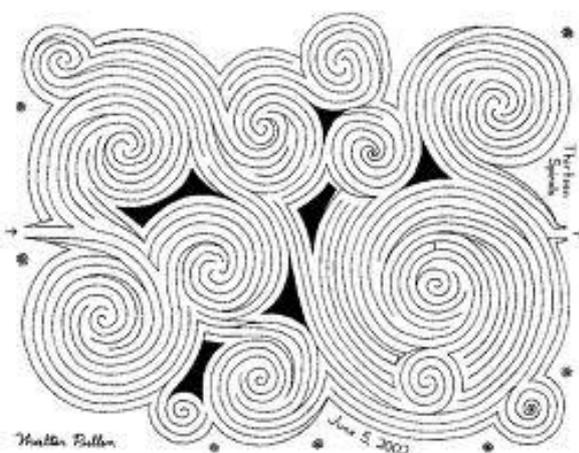
From the outset we were unanimous: We are going to start a positive process, which is going to involve as many different players as possible, and give them opportunities to join in and think along, to dialogue and collaborate. We wanted people to tell the many stories of positive experiences in education. Taking pleasure in learning and motivation are very important in this respect. The idea was that, in spite of the inadequacies of the educational system, everyone has had some positive experiences. How can education involve students? How can students keep their eagerness to learn? What energizes teachers or school leaders in their work? I was convinced that focusing on the positive aspects would energize people to look at their own context in a more positive way. I knew that opting for chances and possibilities would change the usual vocabulary used in the community from one of hopelessness to a hopeful one. We did not have to start right at the beginning. In the past few years, the government had drawn up numerous documents and texts on ideas about education. This information was supplemented with experiences gathered from the various educational projects carried out by different donors and NGOs. We also used international literature.

Right at the beginning, we asked the Minister of Education, Mr. Edwin Wolf, and the Permanent Secretary for Education, Mr. Ruben Soetosenojo, to adopt our idea. VVOB and UNICEF leaders supported the idea from the start. The commitment of MINOV, in particular, was crucial. As I said before, different camps had different opinions. The progress of the process often came up for discussion at weekly meetings. Since realizing this shared vision was one of the desired outcomes of PROGRESS, I became the coordinator of *I Believe in You!* We worked as a team, with Liesbeth Roolvink organizing the process within UNICEF and Henry Ori organizing the process within MINOV.

After some brainstorming we created a rough map, not a detailed plan. We knew our approach to the process involved using the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. We knew what our goal was, and we knew the initial activities we had to organize. I also knew that we could not predict how the process would evolve and that we had to be open to ideas of others on the way to our goal: the publishing of a shared vision. We realized that we would need the commitment of many people to successfully complete this expedition. We were therefore very happy with the firm commitment of Henri Ori, the Minister's advisor. He knew many people, had many networks in society and, above all, he was an expert on the Surinamese local context. He knew people in all sections of society, especially in political circles, and with the help of his insights we could battle against any wind during our expedition, while heading in the right direction.

I thought that producing a book that looked like a work of art would make Surinamese people feel proud. Being proud is a positive feeling. When it is shared by people it can be a powerful force in the change process. The feeling that you have worked together to create something that is beautiful and unique, and which you can give meaning to, generates lots of positive energy. I also knew that many people did not like reading and would not read a book if it were just a black-and-white textbook. Making the book colorful and attractive, and using Surinamese art, would make people curious. I had a vision of people browsing through the book, gazing at the interesting illustrations, and perhaps reading short passages here and there. Showing this unique book to friends and relatives, talking about it. Imagine 10,000 books and all these people sharing their feelings of pride with others, what impact it could have on raising the awareness of a different form of education for their children! We had never published a book before, and did not know at all the work it would involve. As we will see, this uncharted road gave us lots of possibilities to construct and reconstruct the process and to involve more and more people. The adventure could start, and now we are still as excited as we were at the beginning. We wanted to create a Surinamese product in a way people would identify with, and we wanted them to be proud of it. We wanted to achieve the best for Suriname's children.

Working in spirals, the main steps



I like to visualize ideas, and suddenly realized that the way we worked during this process could be seen as working in different spirals. The usual way to express dynamic processes is one spiral to show the movement or process of evolution. After all these years of studying social constructionism I strongly feel that we could see the change process as a multi-spiral occurrence. This shows clearly what Fullan (1991, 2005), Lagerweij (2004) and others mean with his statement that there is no single innovation, but multiple innovations simultaneously going on.

Because of the open approach, we could adapt the process to the questions we met and the many solutions found together with others. We organized several activities simultaneously. We worked out the content of the book in greater detail by reading documents and literature, we had talks with the district commissioners of the ten districts to ask them for their commitment and their logistic expertise, we started the complex

organization of numerous workshops, ranging from the coastal region to the interior, to gather people's stories about positive approaches contributing to the development of children. We had to organize training facilities throughout the country, select and invite workshop participants, organize transport (boats and airplanes), fuel, and so on. My ten years of experience as a school leader at a Dutch primary school helped me deal with unforeseen occurrences. We selected twelve trainers who we had seen training teachers, and who had a positive attitude. I trained these trainers in the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and used their expertise to improve my concept of the district workshops they would organize later, all over the country. It is interesting that these trainers became enthusiastic in the course of the process. As we will see later, more and more people became more enthusiastic and committed by coming up with new ideas again and again. Every new activity we undertook yielded more information to do the work better. Every activity seemed to increase people's commitment. The growing number of people also meant a growing network. The half-open planning offered many opportunities to use the ideas others came up with. The little seed we sowed was growing into a luxurious plant.

I will briefly outline the main activities. In chapter 7 *Methods and Analysis* the construction of this process is worked out in more detail.

Setting up the coordination group

In June 2007, the idea of designing a national shared vision was described as an essential foundation of the PROGRESS program. Very early, I found two important persons who supported this idea: Liesbeth Roolvink, who worked as an educational specialist for UNICEF Suriname, and Henri Ori, the ministers' advisor of MINOV. We met frequently, discussed problems to be solved and new opportunities detected. As a Surinamese expert, Henri Ori was of vital importance to us. He gave advice about the next steps and lobbied within the Ministry and among politicians. We appreciated his insights and expertise. In fact, we trusted one another and appreciated each contribution to the process. Liesbeth and I were Dutch, and given the history of Suriname, we knew we had to be careful and subtle in our approach. In the analysis I will show that our working together can be seen as a form of collaborative practice. So this coordination group consisted of three strong players in education: VVOB, UNICEF and MINOV. In August 2008, Lilianne Hercules and Carl Beel, who had started to work for VVOB, were added.

Determining the content and target group

We need little time to determine our content. It was quite clear from the beginning that we wanted to construct a shared view about pupil-centered education for elementary schools, by using participative change work. We had lots of discussion about who would be our readers. Would it be just teachers? Or would it be the broader public, throughout society? We chose to write the book for the teachers in the elementary schools. The content had to be comprehended by those who are dealing with change processes in their daily classrooms. Another discussion was about if the book needed to be a detailed guidance for teaching. We became aware that we wanted a lot, but the amount of pages limited our desires. In the end we succeeded in constructing a content which suited our teachers as target group, but also a broader audience of society.

Identifying important relations/key persons

We were new in the Surinamese society, so we needed others to help us establishing the process. The analysis will show how important this identifying of important relations and key persons were, to the process. In the analysis I used the term, *bridging persons*, to illustrate the essential function they had. The more the process evolved, the more key persons we found, and the further the networks expanded. Some examples of key persons were: Tille van Horenbeeck, (who was my chief at that time, and who had built many relationships within Surinamese society), the Ministry of Education, Henri Ori, the ministers advisor who also had many connections within society, politics and the ministries), the facilitators who knew many people in the districts, Monique Nouh-Chaia, who knew many artists, and the ten district commissioners who knew the possibilities within their districts very well.

Identifying ten Surinamese artists for the illustrations

There is no reading culture in Suriname, so there was a risk that people would not read the book. The idea was to design a book which would be very attractive. Designing a full color book, illustrated with art, would make the readers curious. It would tempt them to browse through the book and perhaps read little sections of it. I was new to Suriname, and had not built up any relations with Surinamese artists yet. As we will see in the analysis of the process, networking helped us to solve this problem. So we had to look for a person who had a network, and positive relations, with artists. My superior, Tille van Horenbeeck, knew Monique Nouh-Chaia, who runs an art gallery in Paramaribo and, consequently, knows many artists in Suriname. From the moment I contacted Monique, she was a great help in formulating the criteria for, and selecting twelve artists; the young, promising people should suit the spirit of the book. Through Monique, I got the telephone numbers of several artists. Without a moment's thought or asking for compensation, all artists gave us permission to use their works of art. Their fire had been sparked, and I was able to make them even more enthusiastic about the project because it also meant a tremendous PR opportunity for them: being seen in 10,000 books all over the country, and later (Jan 2011) in 1,000 English books throughout CARICOM.

Identifying fifteen key persons of society for personal interviews

It was clear that we wanted the commitment of the whole Surinamese society, so we came up with the idea to interview important key figures who had proved their worth in Suriname. Once again, Henry Ori helped us identify fifteen people. This was not an easy process either. We had to gain trust and build relationships with these persons, who were often strangers to us. After all, Liesbeth and I were new consultants, foreigners. Each interview was an interesting experience. We interviewed in a very open way, often not really prepared or really knowing who or what the key person was. We focused on talking about dreams and hopes, and successes in a positive way. By using this appreciative method, we could build trust and relationships with these key persons. We harvested lots of interesting stories, which we later incorporated into the book and the DVD.

*If you keep showing children that they really matter ... and I believe in you, I count on you.
You matter to me ... and I love you. That's vitally important.*
(Cynthia Rozenblad, managing director of 's Lands Hospitaal)

You can't keep dreaming, you have to act, and through your actions people will see part of your dream come true. And in that way you inspire other people.

(Gerrit Barron, writer)

Pupil-friendly classes, a sound pedagogical climate, have a lot to do with students feeling at home and protected and safe and that has a beneficial effect on education.

(Archie Marshall, principal of the Advanced Teachers' Training Institute)

Coordinating activities to commit important key players within society, MINOV and politics

The more the process evolved the more key persons we started to know. Whenever we found it suitable, we invited them for different activities. Some of the most important activities were the feedback sessions. During the process, we organized several rounds of feedback with these key persons and Surinamese educational experts. We found them, through Henri Ori, at schools, teacher training colleges, MINOV divisions, NGOs and other places. It was not an easy process, but it was vital. We wanted ownership and commitment from these important key players to the publication, especially to the process after the publication of the book.

Mobilizing the district commissioners of the various districts

We knew we wanted a broad involvement of society. On most occasions, educational reform was decided and took place in the main city Paramaribo. People, teachers living in the far away districts, were never asked what they found important. Their voices had not been heard and valued for many years. Thanks to Henri Ori, we were able to connect with the ten district commissioners at a very early stage of the process. Their commitment was crucial, when we invited people to join the workshops and for solving the many logistical questions we had.

Organizing Appreciative Inquiry training for trainers and workshops throughout the whole country

We knew we wanted to use a participative approach to this process. I had worked already with the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry for some years, and experienced its benefits within change processes. We decided to use its philosophical stance throughout the whole process. I have set out more details of this in Chapter VII, Methods and Analysis. When we organized the first workshop to train the facilitators in AI principles, we received useful feedback from this group. Thanks to this feedback, we were able to improve the district workshops. The fact that they were taken seriously and were appreciated made these facilitators very dedicated during and also after this process. They were also seen as experts, and had great insights and a lot of experience with the differences within the ten districts. Suriname's society has a great variety of cultures. Having some understanding of these different cultures is an important condition for building relations and willingness to change.

Organizing the AI workshops throughout the country

I had worked with the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach in different situations, and found this the ideal way to connect with people to hear their stories. A search for people's positive experiences, ideas, desires and dreams started. AI formed the basis for numerous workshops all over the country, looking together for what gives life in education, in development, and in learning. Thanks to the untiring efforts of all district commissioners and schools inspectors, a variety of people from diverse social backgrounds were invited from all districts. The result was astounding. People were enthused and energized. They could hardly stop talking about their personal, positive experiences. It was an impressive job both in terms of the workload, and in terms of the harvest we had. Dozens of workshops were organized. The trainers often had to go back several times, because people wanted more and felt good because they were heard. The information flow among the trainers was optimal, which helped to improve the workshops along the way. They also stimulated one another to go for the best results. We received vital assistance from the district commissioners, who had been approached early in the process. Their commitment helped us solve many logistic problems. We had to use all kinds of means of transport, such as cars, boats and small airplanes, to reach all the districts. The trainers had to be very flexible in their approach. Since they had chosen in which district they wanted to train, they knew the local contexts and already had networks.

The stories were always positive, enthusiastic and touching. People were eager for more. The insight to use skilled trainers with the right attitude was a golden idea. Their commitment was so strong, that they often solved problems as they went along. More than 350 people from all over the country took part in these workshops: teachers, school leaders, students, inspectors, board members, directors of organizations and NGOs, market vendors, officials, counselors and traditional leaders, mothers and fathers, fishermen, farmers and so on.

I thought teaching was great. You know, that you can pass on to children knowledge of certain things they did not know about. That was a pleasant experience.

(Carmelita Ferreira, Member of Parliament)

Organizing help to work out the hundreds of statements and the interviews

After the workshops, we had hundreds of anecdotes which were valuable for the book. We found two students to help our new colleagues digitalize all these statements, and group them by themes. The most touching statements, together with the names of the authors, were put into the book. By doing so, we wanted to show Surinamese society their commitment and ownership throughout the process. From all over the country, from the city and the coastal region to the interior, we selected hundreds of anecdotes. It was a tough job that has been done with a great deal of care and attention. The fifteen two-hour interviews were also recorded, and had to be summarized on one page in the book. My new colleagues, Lilianne Hercules and Carl Beel, did a great editing job.

Finding a printer within Suriname to deliver high-quality work

While the process was evolving at many levels and in many ways, it was time to find a printer. This was not an easy job to do. We wanted a high-quality full-color publication, printed on special paper, in the order of 10.000 books. Who could do this job, and most of all who would finish this job in time? Were the printing machines capable of printing on high quality paper, and so on? Via networking, we found three printers who applied for the job. In the end we choose the printer who showed the most commitment to this unique process. The analysis will show how this process of printing and illustrating developed, in a form of collaborative practice process, which resulted in a wonderful publication.

Developing a documentary/producing the DVD

From the start, we had the idea of filming the whole process. At the time we did not know what we would ultimately do with the film. The process yielded hundreds of hours of film which, at the end of the process, we made into a 30-minute documentary. We filmed the process without knowing at the time what to do with the material but it became clear to us in time that *showing* the process would increase the impact of the book. The DVD would introduce the process, the idea of child-friendly education, and also different views of well-known Surinamese people to the target group and society. As a Dutch national, I found it important to show those who were not involved in the process that the process was not a 'white' activity, or one of a small group of experts. By showing the process, we could show reality as it had happened, and especially show it to all these hundreds of Surinamese people who were involved. Hundreds of hours of film were shot. In the end we reduced it to:

- a) A documentary about the process
- b) Interviews with 15 well-known Surinamese people
- c) A 20-minute documentary about child-friendly and pupil-centered education filmed in an authentic Surinamese context, produced when we completed LEARN in 2008.

We produced 10,000 DVD's, which were included in the final book.

Recruiting editors

It became clear that, in the end, we would need editors to look at aspects such as readability, content, coherence, and correct language. Because of the expanding networks and effective e-mail traffic, we just had to ask a question and we received many responses, often within a day. The network was doing its work. The enthusiasm and the trust we were building were doing their work!

Communication and information

During the process we realized that, as a result of the growing number of interested people (from 3 we grew to more than 400), a well-organized system of communication was needed to keep everybody informed. We started to organize the dissemination of information within our own organizations: VVOB, UNICEF and MINOV, and Surinamese society in general. We did this by sending everybody a biweekly electronic newsletter, which we also sent to all participants who were involved in the process. It is interesting to note that the informal communication, in particular, provided us with lots of interesting insights that we could use to steer the process.

The final phase

All these activities involved lots of organization and coordination. When we had almost finished the writing of several chapters in January 2009, something fundamental happened. The new colleagues arrived from Europe to assist in PROGRESS, and they had, of course, their own way of looking at what had been done. They were very critical of the content. They found it too academic; it was too difficult to read or to motivate the target group, mainly teachers, to read. Even though we were almost ready for final editing and printing, we decided to put the whole process on hold, re-thought the content of the publication and started to re write every chapter of the book. We wanted the best, and in spite of all our efforts, what we had was not good enough. We appreciated the criticism and changed the whole concept of the book. This meant a delay of nearly three months. But it also meant better quality, and a growing commitment and ownership on the part of the new colleagues, who would be key persons in PROGRESS for the coming years. When the writing had been finished, we started to work on the layout of the artists' work. Fortunately, together with the printer, we had chosen a format that we would use for every chapter of the book.

Something interesting happened during the layout process. By collaborating with Harold and his assistant at the printer office, strong relationships were built and resulted in appreciation and trust, ownership and commitment. At first, the layout style we wanted was totally different from what the printers were used to. They had to accept this, in their eyes, strange and bold layout, and during the process I showed them even more creative ways of designing. We had to steer the process in the beginning, but later this steering approach turned more and more into a guiding approach, in which the layout editors came up with more and more of their own ideas. The printers also became more and more committed, and took the work home to work on it over the weekend. When the first pages were ready, we were really astonished by the result. This was the book we had been working at for almost two years and now it was going to be born!

We organized the last feedback activity with some of the important key players in society, MINOV and political circles. Once again, Henry Ori was a great help. After joint preparations, he conducted these workshops. We were smart enough to show the critical participants the first results of the layout, and gave them what had to be read, with some guiding instructions. When we had crossed this last hurdle, we used their feedback and proceeded to final editing, layout and printing.

On May 8, 2009, we launched the book at the Torarica Hotel in Paramaribo. Together with a group of children, we presented the book to the government and the public. The atmosphere in the room was very special. Everybody who attended had been involved in the process in some way or other. We all felt

somehow connected. Everyone was touched by the spirit of this book. For Liesbeth and Henry and me, it was a once-in-a-lifetime moment, never to be forgotten.

The process continues

“Will this book change education tomorrow? Will students and teachers like education better? We are only too aware that reality may sometimes be different. The book may be a stimulus to teachers’ training colleges and advanced teachers’ training institutes, to the structured professionalization of teachers, to policymakers and departments. We hope that it may help to bring together the numerous positive initiatives in education in Suriname. It marks the end of the project and a new beginning. The job is done, and the process of change may begin.”

I spoke these words in May 2009. In June 2009 I left Suriname to make a new start in the Netherlands. The fact that it took me more than a year to make this decision, together with my family, shows how committed I was to the work and life there. As I write this, it is October 2011, two years further on. I have been hired several times during those two years, as a consultant to support PROGRESS. In this way, I have been able to follow the process, this time as an outsider.⁵⁶ Since the whole idea of *I Believe in You!* has been integrated into PROGRESS, many activities still continue. VVOB cooperates with the Ministry through four components of PROGRESS, and UNICEF runs its long-term program in the interior on the basis of *I Believe in You!*

What else is still ongoing?

The process of sensitizing society

We introduced five radio programs based on the five themes of the book. It is interesting to note that this idea originated in MINOV Educational Radio and TV Division. Together we drew up a script. The division has excellent relations with radio makers and succeeded in recording five radio programs, including live interviews in six local languages. These programs can be heard all over the country. When I visited Suriname in November 2010, the suggestion was made to train the local radio makers to make new programs based on these five radio programs. In addition, we produced 15 television spots using the 15 interviews of the book. We showed the process of making the book, as well as the documentary about deep learning, on various TV stations for several weeks. We have finished five television spots, in which children representing the eight main cultures show society what they really need and what they want in education.

⁵⁶ This new role as an outsider makes it somewhat easier to look at the process.

Connecting to Caricom and international organizations

We had the book translated into English, and had 1,000 copies printed. This job was finished in January 2011. We did this to enable international organizations operating in Suriname to have a better understanding of the desired direction of education. Furthermore, it enables the Minister and his staff to participate to a greater extent in discussions within CARICOM, where English is one of the main languages spoken. Our strategy is that leading political figures, like the Minister of Education, will thus commit themselves to the views presented in the book. They will be asked questions and will have to answer them. In this way, the Minister is relating with others, becoming a relational resource which will support the sustainability of the process.

Component 1 Strengthening MINOV divisions

In May 2010, a delegation from the School Advisory Service and Schools Inspectorate visited the Netherlands and Belgium to deepen their own ideas and experiences. We supported them in making a documentary about their vision of the future. They have presented the results of this visit to their Ministry. Furthermore, we organized training sessions to strengthen the advisory service. Together we wrote several scenarios of a desired and attainable future, based on the main question: What will give us energy? The process has created more trust, more teamwork, more reflection, more collaboration and awareness. We succeeded in bringing together about thirty people from all kinds of educational backgrounds, and organized a two-day workshop to listen to their ideas and experiences, using their own specific expertise. This group will be employed in the context of component three, to visit schools in Suriname, and to help them or advise them on innovation work based on the content of the book.

In November 2010, I was asked to organize a process which would lead to a shared vision for the School Advisory Service and the Schools Inspectorate. By then, my understanding of Social Constructionism had deepened enormously and this enabled me to set up dialogical and collaborative practices, which lead to strong commitments, involvement and relationships. Helga, the head of the School Advisory Service, came up to me during one of the sessions and whispered proudly, "Loek, I am so happy that we have come so far!" Together we outlined different activities to give life to this new, shared vision. One of the new activities (June 2011) is my involvement in designing a training program, in Suriname, for special needs coordination. I will use this as an example in Chapter 9 to illustrate how this study and the constructionist thought has influenced my present work.

Component 2 Strengthening the teachers' training colleges

Carl Beel, a VVOB colleague working for the teachers' training colleges in Suriname, together with the staff and principals, drew up an eight-year reform plan based on ideas from the book. He did a great job, and succeeded in establishing full commitment and ownership within these colleges. It was not easy at all, because another attempt at reform in the teachers' training colleges had been frustrated by politicians some years previously and failed. One of the latest ideas is to put the book on CD, which will make it possible to disseminate the content among hundreds of student teachers at relatively low cost. In November 2010 I also

worked with these five colleges to arrive at a shared vision for their colleges. This process was also heartwarming. The dialogical and collaborative practices led to a renewed connectedness of the participants and institutes. Together we constructed views based on *I Believe In You!* These colleges are now trying to transform their institutes, which will take lots of effort and time. The good thing is that the newly trained student teachers will take the new ideas into the schools. There they will meet the teachers, who have been trained to understand the ideas of *I Believe in You!*

Component 3 Strengthening training of teachers

Lilianne Hercules, a VVOB colleague, together with MINOV, succeeded in formulating a policy for describing job profiles for the different players in education. She also organized several workshops, based on the content of the book, for over 300 schools in the whole country. Material was developed for schools to organize special training days for the staff. Two or three teachers of every school were trained. These teachers, in turn, will train their own colleagues. We experimented with this idea during LEARN. It is a way of dealing with the lack of trainers in the country. In the meantime, she hopes to succeed, in November 2011, in establishing *CENASU*, a National Institute for Professionalization.

Component 4 Strengthening planning, evaluation and monitoring

Prya Hirasingh, a Surinamese colleague from the MINOV Planning and Evaluation Division, together with her staff, managed to strengthen the division to gather annual data needed for developing policy etc. School mapping was carried out in the interior to identify school needs. The data will be used to draw up new plans. They are trying to establish an effectively working EMIS system (Educational Management Information System).

Cooperation with organizations

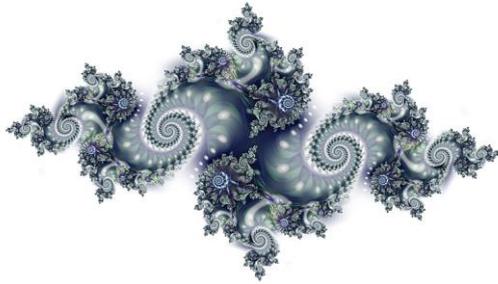
One of the goals of the book, connecting all the different players, has started to grow. UNICEF adopted the shared vision (of the book,) and has integrated this into their long term program. One of their activities will be organizing training for the entire staff of all schools in the interior, based on the content of *I Believe in You!* NGOs have been involved as advisors, trainers and as developers of training material for the workshops. Private initiatives ask for the book, to use it in their work. More and more people want to be part of the *I Believe in You!* process.

To conclude

Looking briefly back on this experience

All these experiences (in being involved in completing LEARN, developing PROGRESS, publishing a book successfully, and being evolved as a consultant several times) have enriched my being in many ways. My increased knowledge about seeing educational reform from the individualistic and relational orientations, strengthened by study and work experiences, has convinced me of the impact of both systems of thought. The impact of the relational approach has been high, to establish durable change. Without being immodest, I can say that the spirit of *I Believe in You!* is still at work. More than 8,000 copies of the book have been distributed to schools all over the country. This was quite a logistic challenge, but the enthusiasm of the colleagues involved did the job. By now, two and a half years after the launch of the book, everybody knows about it. PROGRESS, UNICEF and MINOV are really committed to the content, and many of the players act as ambassadors for the desired direction of primary education. The activities of PROGRESS in the four components in the next few years, and the crucial inclusion of *I Believe in You!* in the program, ensures that the process will go on. UNICEF has also integrated the views expressed in the book, in its long-term programs. MINOV is becoming more and more aware of the impact the book can have.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the impact is the following story. During one of the workshops which were frequently organized throughout the country in connection with *I Believe in You!*, one of the teachers suddenly got up and said, close to tears, "I am going to write a song, and I will call it *I Believe In You!*" How touched I was, in November 2010, when a little present was given to me. It was a professionally made TV clip, showing this teacher singing her song with a group of children. I was very happy when they told me that the new Minister of Education had embraced the song and the spirit of the book. *I Believe in You!* is becoming familiar language in Suriname's education community. So, yes, the process is still going on and will go on. I am realistic and optimistic. Yet, education for children has not improved one hundred percent; that is hardly possible. As Hargreaves and other scholars say, educational change is the work of generations. The book itself is not what will bring about change; it is the people's heart, emotions and passions in the end that will determine in which direction the change process will go. In the words of the constructionist vocabulary, I would say: the process will go on as long as we stay *in relation* with others and our constructed realities. Change is not predictable, but capricious, fitful, freakish, whimsical and wayward, as I found looking up the translation of the Dutch word I had in mind. Above all, we must see change as a wonderful learning experience for all. Working within the educational change gives of opportunities to construct successful reform, to support better future for our children.





Suriname, snapshots taken from the *I Believe in You!* documentary

7

Methods and analysis

We need to go from I (II) being towards we(II) being.

Quote heard at the annual day of Interconnectedness,
Amersfoort,
the Netherlands June 2011

Introduction

Economist W. Brian Arthur once said: *All great discoveries result from an intense experienced inner journey*⁵⁷. Although I see myself as a simple practitioner, this is what I experienced in my Ph.D. adventure. The development of this dissertation itself is almost a metaphor of the theme of this study: Change seen as a dynamic and unpredictable on-going adventure. In this chapter, we will see that *the I Believe in You!* process has been an interesting case to study, in which this metaphor unfolds itself.

What I have tried to argue so far, is that the complexity of the present and future world demands new and/or other sustainable solutions. Our society is rapidly changing, new influences from all over the world are coming in, and it becomes more and more evident that we must see our own constructed social realities as being related to other realities, instead of isolated in the individual realities. This reminds me of one of the history lessons when I was a child and my teacher explained that some centuries ago people believed that our world was flat like a pancake. Can you imagine the image of a pancake, with a beginning and an ending? Through my child's eyes I saw all of our brave Dutch adventurers sailing with their ships and falling from the edge of the pancake into no-man's land. It was quite a revolutionary thought when suddenly a totally different view came into people's reality; seeing the world round as a globe.

How happy I was, that the reality in my childhood some centuries later was totally different. It took quite some effort over centuries to transform people's view of reality, and it's quite clear that, from this new idea, new realities started to be constructed. In some way, what we believe constructs our realities. Or to say it in constructionist thought, what and how we talk about our reality, is what we construct as reality. Richard Bach (2009) has written a nice book entitled *Hypnotizing Maria*, in which he shows how our realities are strongly influenced by our suggestions. From a relational stance, it made it even more clear to me that we co-construct our realities *within* our relational engagements. Suggestions must therefore not be seen as fixed in the individual mind, but must rather be seen as co-constructed. We share and express these suggestions in our relationships, within the communities we are part of. What comes out of it, is seen as reality or the truth we believe in, thus seen from the community's eyes. The work of Otto Sharmar (2010) shows, however, that we should be very aware of finding and clarifying our blind spots when we are looking at our reality.

Something similar happened in the early sixties, when the first pictures came into our houses of Neil Armstrong saying his famous words: "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." Somebody was speaking from a totally different reality far away from Earth, showing pictures of this beautiful planet. Our image of reality changed, seeing planet Earth not as a pancake or a globe, but as part of and related to a huge cosmos. At that moment, we couldn't even imagine how this would impact the future social constructions of the world. But for sure it changed our minds. Or, even better said, it changed our awareness, or understanding, of our constructed worlds, our realities. It affected our language practices. More and more we are becoming aware that we are all related to each other. What happens on the other side of the world is in some way related to our own world. Still, we have this deep-rooted belief that we live in separate worlds. But the new awareness, that all is related, is growing and spreading out over the world.

⁵⁷ It is against this background that Otto Sharmar (2010, p. 14) explains that at deep level shared but mainly esoteric knowledge is a key is to meet the enormous challenges of nowadays crisis to get entrance to the collective learning to the source of mastery.

Today, the individualistic stance still influences how many of us construct own realities in the *here* and *there* realities, where people separate themselves from the experienced reality they are part of. It is quite obvious to me – as shown in chapters 2 *Business as usual* and 4 *Time for a new recipe* – that this has strongly influenced how we have constructed our educational system. We clearly need educational reform to meet the future complexity, but the problem is that the individualistic thought is deeply rooted in how we do things together within education. This way of thinking doesn't bring us far enough. We are limited by this way of thinking. Our expectations about teaching and learning have been crafted within this individualistic or modernist orientation. I hope I have shown why this is problematic, and that the relational orientation coming from social constructionism, which is somewhat a new paradigm, provides opportunities for successfully meeting future challenges and complexities.

In this chapter, *Methods and analysis*, I go back to the concepts that I introduced in the chapter 4 *Time for a new recipe*. I take each of the themes that I listed in the section titled: *Generic themes in relational change work* (page 98), using them to analyze the *I Believe in You!* process in Suriname. This experience provided the fundamental basis for this research. By analyzing this process, I show what it looks like when people are engaged in a change process, by being brought together, and how their interaction supports meaningful relations. In other words, it gives an example of what a change process looks like from a social constructionist orientation. The brief overview of this chapter is that I will continue to give the reader some insight about research, seen from social constructionist thought. It costed some hard thinking to understand research from a relational perspective. From here, I set the stage by explaining the *I Believe in You!* process, as well as the main approach used within this process, called the *Appreciative Inquiry*. Then I will use, *I Believe in You!* as a case study to demonstrate how the principles of relational construction are useful in creating a sea-change⁵⁸ in the educational context. I finish this chapter with a summary of the findings.

Research seen from a social constructionist orientation

As I said earlier, understanding research from the social constructionist orientation took some mind-boggling thinking. I often asked Sheila McNamee, my mentoring professor for this research, which method I should use. I remember, in the beginning of this Ph.D. adventure, my line of thinking was that I should formulate a hypothesis, looking for ways to prove the validity of it, and describe this in a paper. This is exactly what Sheila points out in her short article *Research as Intervention* (McNamee, 1988) as a typical understanding of what *good research is*: a well planned intervention. Then one must fit the hypothesis to it, carefully deliver it, and precisely execute it.

Unnecessary interventions must be avoided. *I've rewritten this section, see if you agree*: "The researcher separates himself from other people, so as not to be influenced, and searches for objective knowledge, the Truth. Gergen & Thatchenkery (2006, p. 35) explain how, in this tradition, the scientific investigator becomes the expert, "trained in systematic rational thought, who is best equipped to carry out such study."

⁵⁸ Sea change or seachange is an idiom for broad transformation drawn from a phrase in the song *Full fathom five* in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and connotes a transformation.

The scientist's voice becomes privileged. Social Constructionism is critical about this interpretation of *good research*. McNamee (2010, p. 10) explains in her article how this assumption of good research can be seen as the Received View of Science (RVS), referring to Woolgar's work. "The RVS is one that is often presented a) by scientists b) in particular contexts c) for particular audiences. She concludes that the set of assumptions of the RVS generates an orientation toward research that places the researcher in the position of knowing that something is x. Knowing that generally entails propositional conclusions (if then), unitary (right/wrong), relatively fixed (true regardless of history, culture or context). Knowledge within the RVS becomes an entity and is static – an object. Language is viewed as the vehicle through which this reality or knowledge is presented. In other words, language represents knowledge of the world and it's either true or false."

Within my own process in trying to understand the social constructionist stance, I started to understand the different ways we approach re-search more and more. Gergen & Gergen (2004) propose that research can simply be seen as the search for knowledge of *each other and ourselves*. They criticize the traditional search for knowledge to find the one and only Truth. Again, it is not that they are saying this is wrong, but they argue that we should be critically aware of the impact of viewing our realities like this. From the social constructionist, or postmodern view, there is no one Truth, or Truth for all. It seems so logical to me that there are many truths, multiple realities, but I still discover, in my present work at schools, that this assumption of the absolute Truth is still valid for many people. In the Dutch primary education system, an overload of testing is carried out. Teachers are pressured to use certain validated tests frequently, which helps them to find this truth. Truth is the outcome of these tests compared with certain uniform criteria. The danger is that teachers will change their teaching more and more towards test-driven teaching, to get the best outcomes on these tests. They adapt their daily programs to positively influence children's learning for the benefit of the tests, instead of using their insights, intuition, experiences, and their teaching-potential to follow the real learning process, and therefore their students' needs. Instead of carefully observing and interacting in the complex learning process, strengthening students' areas for improvement, and constantly adapting their inputs to the specific learning needs of each child, they are forced to focus on static test results, assuming that they will "tell the Truth" and describe the student's capacity best.

The social constructionist orientation understands knowledge as "the product of particular communities, guided by particular assumptions, beliefs and values". (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 71) Instead of the Truth for all, they speak of the *truth within the community*. McNamee (2000) talks about relational-engaged research showing that the relationships we build, when people interact, give meaning to our understanding of realities. The findings of Otto Shamer (2010) are interesting. He speaks about social fields and blind spots. In his view, people are more comfortable in their social fields⁵⁹, where they do things as they have always done. By being aware of our "blind spot" – that is, the invisible dimension which makes us do things - we can shift our social fields to realize innovation, constructing a new or different reality. This shows how social constructionism sees knowledge as dynamic and fluid, depending on the meaning giving by certain people within certain communities. It shows clearly that we cannot search for the absolute Truth and generalize this for all, as is often done. It shows a shift towards pluralities of knowledge.

⁵⁹ Social field is the social whole of mutually dependent 'players'. It refers to the totality and the kind of relationships which form the base of how people who take part of a certain system relate to each other, speak, think and act with each other, (Shamer, 2010, p. 515, 33) Shamer explains the field structure of attention, which is the relationship between the observer and the observed, the quality of our attention, our presence. The quality highly depends on the level of which our attention comes from.

Gergen & Thatchenkery (2006, p. 40) mention the shift from the individualistic to the communal rationality, becoming a culturally coordinated action. Rationality is then not seen in the individual, but rather as a certain dynamic between people, in a certain social context. The way I understand this, is that we search for knowledge by trying to understand our social realities, realizing that it differs each time and that the knowledge is unique because of the meaningful processes which occur when people interact and construct relationships. Research must then be defined as the co-search for meaningful experiences, thus, everyone in the process becomes a researcher. Furthermore, we must be aware that the way we understand our realities is strongly influenced by the community we are part of. The quote of Krishnamurti (1948) cited by Evelein & Korthagen (2011, p. 194) illustrates this very well: "Let's research the issue together, without recording and without concluding anything beforehand."

The findings of McNamee (2000) are interesting, about *the unexpected* information or unintended data which comes out of processes - research should be seen as a form of working together, as a process, which is more open to multiple possibilities for action. Using dialogue helps, to benefit more from the expertise and experience of the other. In *the I Believe in You! process*, I experienced this unexpected input of knowledge many times, for example when we interviewed the fifteen selected persons from Suriname's society, who played and still do play important roles. We researched for knowledge about positive learning experiences, and what specific elements helped the people to develop and grow into the persons they are today. We prepared just a few simple open questions to guide the conversation, but left enough space for their stories and used their input to deepen the conversations. The questions were formulated in such a way to encourage positive responses, based on the theory of the Appreciative Inquiry. During each interview, it was very important to build relationships and create a comfortable atmosphere that encouraged interviewees to share their own, unique personal experiences. This resulted in many unexpected ideas, experiences and surprising data. A remarkable moment was observed during the interview with Cynthia Rozenblad, the managing director of 's Lands Hospitaal, one of the main hospitals in Suriname. We asked her about the most important needs of children, and she suddenly and unexpectedly shared the following: "*We have to aim at making differences as small as possible, between children. We should stimulate children in disadvantaged situations by showing them how valuable they are. Say a little more often, I believe in you, I count on you, you are valuable to me and, even, I love you. That is extremely important. We have not been saying it enough so far*". (Ori, Roolvink, Schoenmakers, 2010, p. 89) At that moment, I didn't know that I would choose this statement for the title of the publication *I Believe In You!* At this point it became very clear that knowing and influencing, inquiry and intervention merged. By the specific approach that was used, a form of collaborative practice developed in which assumptions, ideas, opinions, experiences and interpretations were shared, explained and better understood. Looking back, I see that the semi-structured interview protocols provided many opportunities to follow the interviewees' individual stories, resulting in a wealth of beautiful, unforeseen insights in their lives, and the factors that made a difference to them as individuals in their personal development.

From the perspective of the individualistic orientation, our world is divided into separate parts or entities. It's like the filing cabinets metaphor of Bereiter and Scardanalia (2005), which I explained earlier. Each discipline within science searched for its own knowledge, isolated from other disciplines, and filled its cabinets with the newfound knowledge, which was seen as the truth. These cabinets were not put *in relation* with each other. There was no sharing or exchange. In addition, scientists have a tendency to look at the world from their so called ivory towers, isolated and not related to or interacting with other realities. In their opinion, construction of knowledge, or the absolute Truth, could only be done through specialized research methods, used by a specially trained group of people: the scientists. Social constructionism challenges this thought, by assuming that knowledge is constructed by the relevant community of knowledge constructors.

By assuming that there are multiple realities, we can enrich our own and others' understandings of realities. This is when co-creation of knowledge can take place.

One research method or multiple methods?

McNamee (2000, p. 2) makes it clear that “research that is relationally engaged approaches issues, topics, projects and so forth, as challenges in construction rather than as objects or problems to be solved, managed, and planned.” In her article (2010, p. 11) *Research as Social Construction* she makes clear that within our research we should question the research frequently, by asking whose rationality is dominant. Asking this simple question clarifies where the power is situated, within the relationship between researcher and researched. In most traditional scientific research, those with knowledge, the researchers, are rational and they have *power over* their subjects, the researched. What helped enormously in all of my analytical process in my working experiences is the simple question Sheila McNamee suggested: “*What are we doing or making together at this moment?*” which helps to construct the experienced reality. The focus of the constructionist is on *joint action*, and not on the individual and his or her personal, internal capacities or knowledge, as in the modernist tradition.

The social constructionist assumption is that there are multiple social realities; each *doing or making together* is different and therefore unique. Communication is a form of joint action⁶⁰ in which we give meaning to our reality. “Meaning to the constructionist, is an achievement of people coordinating their activities together. In this context language is seen *as constructing reality rather than representing reality*. In this way language becomes relational; it is coordinated action with others and in that coordinated activity, we create a reality.” (McNamee, 2010, p. 12)

Research from a constructionist orientation can be seen as a form of particular communication in a certain situation or context, where we use specific language to construct a reality, rather than to represent reality by finding the absolute Truth. Seeing research itself as an intervention – as part of or related to the process and the social reality – implies that there are multiple methods to research our understanding of reality or our search for knowledge or meaning. This is in contrast to the individualistic stance, which assumes that research finds knowledge by using standard methods, ‘truth through method’ (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 74) which is often done by specially trained people who we call *the* researchers. This is where the separation between the researcher and the researched appears. McNamee (2000, p. 2) says ‘to position our research process as relational engagement, invites us to foster a sensitivity to and respect for the varying constructions about right/wrong, good/bad, effective/ineffective, successful/unsuccessful, that emerge within different relational communities. This shows, in my opinion, that from a constructionist standpoint there is no one and only Truth. So I will not find this one and only Truth in this research. The research of *the I Believe In You! process* must therefore be seen as just one specific way or an example of how we can look at a change process.

⁶⁰ “Joint action is another way to describe what happens when people communicate; our joint actions construct on-going scenarios and routines. These routines (or patterns) give rise to standards and expectations that eventually construct what interacting communities to be real and good. These beliefs and values (realities) give way to future joint activities, sometimes changing the realities that had previously established and sometimes confirming and further reifying (literally, “making real”) those beliefs and values.” (McNamee, 2010, p. 12)

Some implications of this relational thought are:

- If all actions are situated actions, there is no longer a notion of an ethical or professional competency that is dislocated from those communities and traditions, nor from the interactive moment, itself.
- There are no specific techniques, methods or strategies that will *produce* valid research.
- Research is seen as situated practice. McNamee prefers to use the word *inquiry* rather than *research* to emphasize the multiple ways in which research can transpire.
- We orient our understandings of the research activity differently, when we view research as inquiry, with multiple ways in which it can transpire.
- We shift our attention to the ways in which participants are relationally engaged. There is a transformative dialogue, born out of the different stance we take in the interactive moment. Research is seen by McNamee as a form of conversation which is sensitive to reflexive critique and multiplicity of voices.
- Researchers engage with community when they conduct their investigations. Research must be seen as a constructing process which suggests practices that move us toward and reconstruct the descriptions of social life as we actively engage in the research process itself.

(abstracted from McNamee, 2000, pp. 2-3)

We need to be critical in how we construct our research for knowledge and understanding our realities, because what we do in research determines what we will find. Using the assumption of multiple truths (multiple realities), and involving all stakeholders in the research process gives lots of understanding, and integrates the so called academic and practitioner's world. By putting both worlds in relation we will see the realities differently. But still there is the threat, of our blind spot, being part of communities. As a practitioner, I do like the approach of putting different worlds *in relation* with each other. During this research, I personally experienced the close connectedness between both worlds, which enriched my understanding and deepened my awareness of the influence of different realities, and this has positively impacted my present work as a change management advisor in education. Reflecting on this process has helped me to understand the social constructionist stance of the methodology used in this research. In Bateson's words, *the map is not the territory*, meaning that the research for this Ph.D. should be seen as a particular construction related to the Suriname's community involved, including the researcher and the researched. In traditional research, the researcher is "distant", "objective" and "removed" from the research process, whereas in constructionist research, the research is very much a part of the entire process and thus is a part of the conclusions drawn. The researcher is included, and is therefore *in relation* with the process. This is how also this research of *the I Believe In You! process* must be seen. Both researcher and researched were included in the whole process. The methodology and analysis must be seen therefore as part of the entire process, in which I will not desperately try to find the absolute Truth. This process must be seen as an example or a way of constructing a reality which took place during a certain period of time (2007-2009), involving a local community (the Suriname's educational field) with their particular stories, researched by one of the members of the process (Loek Schoenmakers), who tried to better understand this change process which he had been part of. Gergen & Thatchenkery (2006, p. 43) say "*Methodology loses its status as the chief arbiter of truth,*" which quote is relevant to this process.

The concept of this research is broadened by the social constructionist stance. "Methods may be sought to generate new realities, to engender perspectives or practices as yet unrealized."(Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2006, p. 44) In *the I Believe in You! process* we used many dialogical and collaborative practices, which

incorporated multiple inputs. Many truths (realities) were given voice by coordinating these practices. It is here where finding the Truth loses its status as arbiter, because we appreciated everyone's unique story. In this Ph.D., I try to understand how the social reality was constructed and what generated change in this particular project. By doing so, I hope to gain a better understanding of change processes, which can be helpful in supporting future educational change processes, especially in the domain of education. The social constructionist stance has been fundamental for this research.

The I Believe In You! process and the constructionist stance

The I Believe In You! process has many characteristics emerging from the social constructionist stance. I identified the following important aspects:

In the process, I paid attention to the traditions, the Suriname's communities, and the situated practices of the participants at hand. This means that I tried to understand the local meanings of what they think, and of what becomes real, true and good. (*I am not quite sure what this last sentence means!*) As we will see in the analysis, it required constant flexibility to attend to these traditions, communities and situated practices on the part of those involved, including myself, in the different roles of coordinator, trainer and researcher of this project. The purpose of this specific process of inquiry was to explore the impact of adopting a way of talking and acting which focused on appreciation and relating. What I experienced in doing so was that, from this relational discourse, the researcher and the participants were put *in relation*, or came into joint action. We started with a selected group of people, who were immediately keen to develop a collective vision for elementary schools. In spite of the cynicism of some people, who thought at the beginning that the process wouldn't work in Suriname, we succeeded in involving more and more people in the process. The appreciative stance created an atmosphere of motivation and trust to proceed together. (constructionist inquiry)

For me as a (constructionist) researcher, the topic of the inquiry was actually created in the questions I asked (What did people do or make together in the process which generated a form of change or movement?), the specific Suriname's educational context selected, and in all the research choices made. By inquiring about the experienced reality in *the I Believe in You! process*, a world or reality came into being. This is what I think happened during the course of this research. By re-constructing what people did together, the meaning or understanding of the experienced reality came into being. Interestingly, during this research, my present work in the Netherlands as school advisor was influenced simultaneously. I will come back to this in the chapter 9 *Stepping back again, how this all influenced my present work*. (constructionist ontology)

We may see the knowledge generated in *the I Believe in You! process* as emerging from the relational interchange, as a product coming out of the collective process. The knowledge coming out of the analysis was constructed in interaction with others – including the interactions in the research context. In other words, the knowledge must not be seen as being situated in the individual mind of the researcher or the researched, like “mine” and “yours”. The knowledge I may draw from this research is a by-product of my

engagements with those who participated in *the I Believe In You!* process, including the research. I operated from the constructionist research community (the Taos Institute). (constructionist epistemology)

As I explained earlier, in the constructionist orientation there is no adherence to an objectified set of procedures and rules, in the used methodology of this research process. That was not an easy part of this research, because there was no detailed plan or hypothesis to be proved, such as in the traditional research. It felt like swimming in a vast ocean, in which many directions could be taken. I used the reflective approach, by continuously asking “What did people do or make together in the process?” Otto Sharmer (2010) *talks about a wondering, curious view, not looking for a right or wrong answer, or the right conclusions.* By approaching the research in this way, I experienced the process as a continuously unfolding one, in which I tried to anticipate and to focus on the appearing meanings and knowledge created. (*The last sentence is a confusing one. Please review to ensure I didn't mess up the meaning for you!*) This was the time when inquiry and intervention joined. I needed to make many critical choices to guide the process, for example, assessing what was pragmatic, what was responsive to the research participants, what forms of inquiry might be most compatible with the participants, and so on. By doing so, I used the inquiry as a way to construct the experienced reality, which enhanced the understanding of the process. Situated as a Dutch researcher together with the Surinamese, researching in the local history and context of the Suriname's educational system, we might see ourselves as cultural participants who occupy different discursive communities.

In the communal process of constructing the joint and preferred vision for Suriname's elementary education, the process showed a strong focus on creating meaning together, finding a way to formulate a vision which would represent the different groups in society. McNamee (2010) speaks of constructing meaning as a performance. She tries to explain that performances are always responsive to context and relations. “In fact performances require ‘a relational other’. As we engage with each other in inquiry, we not only create a sense of who we are but also a sense of what is valued. We create – we perform *together* – a world, a lived reality.” (p. 15) This is what exactly happened in *the I Believe in You!* process, where many different cultural groups were invited to share their ideas and experiences about good or better education, and what they thought the critical success elements were in their personal lives. These experiences were the building blocks that were used to create the vision. This resulted in high support and appreciation from the society as a whole, since most people could recognize their own personal experiences and could understand the meaning of this educational change.

In viewing the inquiry as a form of performance, and by using the appreciative and reflexive approach, this created an openness for listening to, reading, talking and writing about, each other's experiences. I think one of the reasons for the success of this process was that we were very open to each other, to invite them to contribute in their own ways, to value the differences in which everybody was seen as an expert. We remained open to the relational coherence of diverse ways of acting. What we will see in the analysis, is that this stance, this approach, opened possibilities for multiple ways of going on or progressing together, which were not always foreseen or planned.

McNamee (2010, p. 16) mentions some fluid and flexible resources to guide our inquiries:

- The emphasis on the constructed nature of relational realities. The unfolding nature of our performances together becomes central. As a constructionist inquirer, our positioning in the process was always open for amendment. Having the ambition to write this, Surinam's vision was quite a challenging task. We had never published a book before. Trying to do this forced us, I think, to

modify the process many times, based on new knowledge appearing during the process. “It would be more a local-emergent rather than an elite, a priori approach”. The preference is to work with minimal structures and improvisation. As we will see in *the I Believe In You! process*, this way of working, using a chameleon approach, gave space for the decisions which emerged from particular settings between people. We were more open to supplements (responses) from those with whom we were together, in joint action, in the process.

- The constructionist inquiry starts with the assumption that multiple communities, or stakeholders, populate any research endeavor. There is no attempt to find the one and only answer or consensus. The challenge is to open up to possibilities, and remain flexible and receptive for whatever is evolving.
- Furthermore, we were attentive to the many local and practical concerns of those who participated in the inquiry process”. For example, by understanding the difficulties of the Suriname’s reality, and by together looking for solutions, we could facilitate the process further and it became stronger and stronger.

To the constructionist, research is not a process of documenting or discovering what exists, but it is a process of construction. To that end, research is transformative and ultimately practical – it has generative possibilities for all participants (researchers and researched). (McNamee 2010, p. 17) In *the I Believe In You! process*, it meant that research was unfolding in its construction, not following a detailed plan. It was a work in progress, an unfolding story, like a book that has to be written carefully, page by page. It needs to be emphasized that this research or inquiry is not necessarily applicable to other change processes or contexts, but that it must be seen as specific for this particular Suriname’s community, in the particular cultural, historical, and situated context of the Suriname’s educational system. It provided a unique opportunity to initiate an interesting discussion about what is experienced in this process. A very important influence within this whole process, has been the idea of Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry can be seen as a way of putting social constructionism into action.

I Believe in You!, Appreciated Inquiry (AI), social construction in action

In 2006, a colleague at the Teachers’ College of Aruba introduced me to the work of David Cooperrider and Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Since then, these ideas have influenced my work a lot. In *the I Believe in You! process*, AI has been an important basis for the construction of the whole process. It is my fundamental belief that an appreciative stance towards *the other* and *the otherness*, especially when working in a different culture, is essential for building relationships. When I organized *the I Believe In You! Process* I knew from experience that the process could benefit from it highly. It was a big eye-opener when I first understood that the simple idea of one’s stance towards change - problem or solution oriented - would determine the next steps of the process, and in the end its outcomes, not only in end results but also in the way the process evolved. Appreciating *the other* and *the otherness* has had an enormously deep impact in the process where intensive relationships were built. McNamee (1994, in: *Appreciative Inquiry, Social Construction in Practice*,

p. 6) sees AI as an illustration of social constructionism in action, where its approach invites us to go on together to create new realities. McNamee is anxious to see AI practices as *options* not as *truths*.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciated Inquiry has been developed since the early 80s by David Cooperrider and his colleagues, at the Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, USA. From their conception of 'the appreciative eye,' Cooperrider questioned if one could locate beauty within any organization – no matter what its condition was. If this beauty could be found, it could be used as a basis for envisioning a new future. Thus, Appreciative Inquiry was further developed.

Appreciative Inquiry is built on social constructionism and the power of image. We can see social constructionism as a theory, that our perceived reality is the result of countless human *choices*, rather than laws resulting from divine will or nature. Our world is shaped by the many conversations we have with one another, in which we selectively make sense of our present and past and create shared images of what we anticipate in the future. It is here where we see the relationship of AI with social constructionism. The language we use, and the way we invite others to be in relation with us, is significant for the realities we create together. Centering these language practices, and what people are doing together in certain situations, has significant meaning for what they construct. In Suriname, I experienced people talking about frustration, demotivation, tiredness, sadness, negativism, and by doing so they were creating a reality of problems, shaping this with problem language. By constructing a new reality using Appreciative Inquiry methods – the *I Believe in You! process* - their reality changed slowly until people started talking about joy, enthusiasm, energy, happiness, motivation, and strengths. By using a new kind of language, a reality of possibilities was constructed. Now in 2011, two years later, I understand that this reality of possibilities is still going on.

The work of Otto Sharmar (2010) on this topic is also very interesting. It is his belief that the future is already present now, and that we need to be aware of this unfolding future. This future depends greatly on how we construct it, to become reality.⁶¹

The things we imagine and the way we talk about them have enormous power over our future realities. AI emphasizes possibilities and positive values, which can be expressed as working appreciatively. Working appreciatively invites participants to learn how to better improvise and imagine new ways of going on together. Stories of value, wonderment and joy, are valuable resources. AI uses these positive stories to put people into the motion of change. I experienced, in the *I Believe in You! process*, that careful listening, questioning and valuing differences generated enormous positive energy and increase in mutual trust by all participants of the new vision for primary schools in Suriname AI provided an excellent means by which people could move together toward a generation of new realities. By sharing stories of value, commonalities were discovered.

⁶¹ Otto Sharmar (2010) talks about presensing. Presence refers to our own presence as well as the future. Sensing means feeling. Together these words make the new term presensing. It is sensing the future's potential and with full awareness tuning to the highest future potential

Everyone, as children, had experienced the impact of positive behavior of teachers and parents. The participants moved from the *I and them* orientation to a *we* orientation. At a certain moment of the process, I suddenly heard people talking about *our* book instead of *the other's* book. For me, that was the moment that I fully sensed the philosophy and process of AI. AI must be seen thus as both philosophy and process, which engages people within the process in exploring the best of their existing experiences, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility for building on this in the future. This philosophical stance, using the best ways we know to create the best future we want together, meant that AI occurred in multiple ways, depending on the local context, the collective need for change, and the people involved.

The principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is based on 5 core principles:

- **The constructionist principle**
That the reality we know is subjective, and is socially created through language we use and the conversations we have.
- **The simultaneity principle**
That inquiry in itself is an intervention; the moment we ask questions we begin to create change.
- **The poetic principle**
That organizations, like open books, are endless sources of study. The fact that we choose to study makes a difference. It describes – even constructs – the world as we know it.
- **The anticipatory principle**
That human systems move in the direction of their visions of the future. Therefore, the more positive and hopeful the vision of the future, the more positive the present-day action will be.
- **The positive principle**
That momentum of change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. The practice of Appreciative Inquiry has shown that momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core of an organization.

What makes Appreciative Inquiry a different approach within change processes?

When organizations use a traditional approach to change, they normally start to identify their problems and issues. “What is wrong and what caused them to be in their current situation?” is the main question which leads first to undertake a strategic analysis to study the situation, and to generate data or more information about the issues. From this, they try to generate a range of potential solutions, and usually a detailed plan is developed to bring about the desired change. The characteristic of this traditional, and still common,

approach, is that difficulties within organizations are seen as problems to be solved. This starting idea - or philosophical stance – generates the next steps of action. It can result in lots of time and energy being wasted in trying to understand this problem, and individuals can feel that they are part of the problem or that a gap needs to be filled, which can suppress motivation and innovation. It is a broken machine that somehow needs to be fixed.

I followed the opposite approach by using the positive stance of AI, which is solution-focused to find the best for all, in many change processes as in *the I Believe in You! process*. AI tries to seek out what's right and desirable, and builds further on this by seeking out the positive history or issue, exploring moments in the present or past when issue X has given life to their organization. For example, in schools when we work with students, we may focus on the child's problem; we hire an *a psychologist* for special testing, we use lots of time to define the child's problem. We try to determine what caused the problem. Then we use specially developed programs to fix the problem, so that it can be eliminated. Alternatively, AI would choose to inquire into the stories of the child, the parents and the teacher, by giving them voice. The questions used direct us to the stories of situations and experiences which are perceived as strongly positive and exceptional. We would look for opportunities and possibilities which are directly related to the here and now, sharing knowledge about what works.

Because AI follows a different route, stating that in every situation there is something which works, it allows all those involved in the system to have a stake in its future direction. By this, the change process is seen as a *journey* rather than an *event*. AI sets a positive frame by starting from an affirmative standpoint. The process becomes an inclusive one which engages all parties in co-constructing the desired future.

The processes of Appreciative Inquiry

The five stages of an Appreciative Inquiry process are:

- 1) Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry
- 2) Inquire into stories as life-giving forces
- 3) Locate themes that appear in the stories, and select topics for future inquiry
- 4) Create shared images of a preferred or desired future
- 5) Find innovative ways to create that future

The process is well known because of its 4Ds:

- **Discovery:** appreciating the best of what already is, and what 'gives life' to the topic under inquiry
- **Dream:** challenging the status quo by envisioning a preferred future and describing it in possibility statements
- **Design:** constructing the social architecture and infrastructure of the organization
- **Delivery :** creating ongoing ways to deliver on the new image of the future

Appreciative Inquiry and its multiple approaches

There is no one single way or method of using AI, this would do violence to AI. As previously said: we must see AI as a philosophical stance which generates multiple approaches. The AI approaches are built on the five principles and the five stages mentioned. Choosing how to apply AI could be compared with choosing your meal from a menu card, to decide, for that day, the best meal to consume. Appreciative Inquiry chooses a form of engagement that best suits the change agenda, then experiments(s). AI is an approach, not a single methodology. In my work, I adapt Appreciative Inquiry ideas to the local situation I am working with. In each reality, I meet as an educational specialist, adapting the ideas of all to what is needed. The reasons for using AI vary, as do the approaches taken. Some processes take place over a period of days or even hours, while others unfold over a period of months or, as we see in *the I Believe In You! process*, over years. Some processes are complex, while others are more straightforward and simple. Some require coordination and resources, while others become self managed. *The I Believe in You!* process lasted for two years, with the result that the book was published in 2009, but it is still going on at the present time (June 2011).

Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Thought and *I Believe in You!*

In creating *the I Believe in You process*, I used the philosophical stance of AI for experimenting, constantly searching for the best, using the best experiences and knowledge available, and in building permanently positive and intense relationships. Within the process, AI helped to invite and involve as many people as possible to create a strong foundation for the preferred outcome, the publication of a shared and energizing vision for future elementary education in Surinam. At one stage in the process, we trained ten facilitators in the ideas of AI. Spread out over the country, they helped to reach into all the corners of Suriname, from the main city to the little jungle villages, as well as into more remote cities along the coastal region. The elements of AI focus on relational configurations rather than individuals; include multiple voices; generate participatory practices; envision effective futures; emphasize and coordinate strengths, abilities and passions. These have been important aspects of *the I Believe in You!* process. In the next sections I will analyze *the I Believe in You!* process by using the generative themes I mentioned in chapter 4 *Time for a new Recipe*, based on the work of Hosking & McNamee (2006). By using this frame work, I will try to develop a better understanding of the social or relation constructions within the process. I hope to demonstrate *what it is that people do or make together* to generate better sustainable change. In this way, *the I Believe in You! project* may be a case example of *HOW* the ideas of relational construction can be useful in creating a sea-change in the educational context. I determined, while analyzing, that these generic themes must not seen as separated from each other; they overlap and influence each other. For the analysis, it is easier for me to separate these themes.

The generic themes I will use are:

- **Knowing and influencing are joined⁶²**
- **Multiple, but equal voices**
- **Emphasize possibilities and positive values**

⁶² This is Dian's Hoskings typical way of expressing that these both are combined or influence each other (blurred)

- **Inquiry and intervention are joined**
- **Careful questioning and careful listening**
- **Constructing in conceptual and non-conceptual performance**
- **A deep ecological approach**

Before I deal with these generic themes, I will start with some analysis of the unfolding journey, looking at the construction of the coordination group of *the I Believe in You! process*, as an example of collaborative practice. I will follow up with an example of flexibility in the process, using the metaphor of the chameleon. This will show what McNamee calls *the nature of constructed relational realities*.

Planned event or unfolding journey?

The construction of the *I Believe in You! project* must be seen as *an unfolding, evolving journey* or as *an evolutionary planning* (Fullan, 1991) and not as a detailed, planned event. This experience - change as an unfolding journey, using flexibility – revealed its strengths for generating sustainable change within processes where people's initiatives constantly were given voice. (multiple yet equal voices). It became clear that a half-open plan would suit the process best. We knew what we wanted to achieve, namely, the publication of Suriname's vision, but not how we would achieve this, or *what* the content would be.

As we will see in this chapter, this half-open plan approach did, and still does, generate many initiatives from the involved participants, simply because they were invited to do so. Coordinating this evolving journey meant that my involvement required continuous improvisation and flexibility. It is here where the metaphors of the traffic hour (Branson, 2010), and the jazz improvisation (Barrett, 2006) came into the construction. It is here where flexibility (Fullan, 2005, Wallace, 2005) was highly needed.

Collaborative practice : the coordination group

We started the project by organizing a coordination group, consisting of three important members : VVOB in my person, Liesbeth Roolvink (the educational specialist of UNICEF), and Henri Ori (the minister's advisor of MINOV). From the very beginning, in June 2007 until the final publication of the book in May 2009, we met on a weekly basis, using **collaborative practices** based on **the philosophical stance**, which I described in the previous chapter 5 *Collaborative and dialogic approaches*. We focused on **the other and the otherness**, seeing the uniqueness, acknowledging the special importance of careful thinking, listening and questioning.

This stance encouraged a more equivalent contribution and full participation of all involved and it reflected – as Anderson explains in her work – a way of being with people that lead us into strong relationships and potentially life-long friendships. It is important to mention especially the participation of the Ministry of Education (MINOV), because the whole idea was to construct Suriname's vision of primary education **based**

on local history and knowledge, not just on the foreign experts – the European white people's knowledge. Henri Ori was able to constantly inform and motivate the people of the Ministry, including the Minister of Education, to support this project. His participation was also of great importance to mediate in the many difficult situations in which power play took place. One example of this power play was the politicians' influence, which did not always occur in appreciative ways. Due to lack of expertise and knowledge (brain drain⁶³), and also lack of sufficiently skilled people within the Ministry of Education, **open space** was allowed for the project. Fortunately, VVOB and UNICEF had **strong relationships** within the Ministry of Education, and these relationships had been based on **mutual understanding** for years. Not being competent of creating actions themselves, but giving space to those who could, meant in this project that we were free to experiment by constructing different conceptual and non-conceptual performances. I will come back later to this theme.

The question arises, How did we do this? How did we create the conditions to work together in a fluid way, instead of scrambling to define who is in charge or who is smarter? Well, this didn't occur magically. As mentioned, the positive stance of the coordination group was to create the best environment that we could, using the best we could get from ourselves and others, and sharing this in **an appreciative way**. We were always clear in our **on-going communication** in what we wanted to achieve (shared goal) and how we wanted to do this. This communication should be seen as a **constantly meandering process**, in which we looked for ways to inform all participants on a strict basis. Furthermore, within the coordination group we used **each member's specific expertise and knowledge**. Differences were communicated, and based on our shared ideas and expertise we could spread our responsibilities among the three of us. Time schedule differences, due to our busy other work activities, were easily solved and accepted. Making a book was new for all of us, and we experienced this as a challenging adventure. This collaborative stance produced a **growing shared meaning** and **trust** within the coordination group. In our approach, we knew **we needed others** to achieve our end goal. Here we used our **networks**. For example, when we needed facilitators for the district workshops, we selected facilitators whom we had seen working throughout the country. Sometimes they were recommended by others who had seen them working. Our criteria for these facilitators were: an **open, constructive stance towards others**, being expert in dealing with groups, and being relational oriented. After the selection, we shared our ideas using Appreciated Inquiry methods. We wanted our ideas also to be presented in the appreciative stance to others. We communicated, face-to-face or by e-mail, often, to be sure that these facilitators would understand the way we wanted to work. Using this **positive stance, a process started, of building relations** between the facilitators and the coordination group, like building bridges. The coordination group and facilitators started to act in **congruent ways**, based on this positive approach.

The coordination group was always **open for people's feedback**, always offering moments to reflect and evaluate. The feedback of others was always appreciated, and was used to make the process and content better. What appeared was that these facilitators had lots of expertise and understanding about the local histories. They knew how to approach the people in the districts. Some of them already had built strong relationships within the districts. In a way, **using their feedback strengthened and improved the workshop sessions, and thereby strengthened the relationship with the coordination group**. Selecting **new key persons**, who knew others and had broad networks, helped to invite new participants we didn't know, but who appeared to be very helpful and important for the process. When problems occurred, we could use others' experiences or knowledge to solve them, and often invited them to solve problems

⁶³ Due to local circumstances like low salaries for highly educated people, or local wars in the 80s an important part of the highly educated people left the country. This is why it is called brain drain.

together with us. In analysing this, I see that we often **used people who had Suriname experience**, knew the local context and history very well, and had their own **network of connections**. These key persons also brought in their own networks during the process. It happened in natural, spontaneous ways.

The coordination group assumed **the importance of others' voices** to make the process succeed, and our own enthusiasm and passion worked like a little fire...just enough to ignite other inner flames to join, to go on together in this process. It is like tapping from the inner source.

We were very clear to the participants at all levels, that we would **use previous work done in Suriname**. We **honored the cultural construction by appreciating the developments which had already taken place**. It was important to express this. We explained that we did not start the process from level zero, but that we wanted to use the good things which already were developed, such as official documents, pacts between other countries, experiences from local educational pilot projects, lessons learnt, and ideas and expertise from locals. We showed that we **appreciated this local knowledge**. It's here where we see some of the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. **The relationship** between the coordinating group and the Minister of Education and Director of Education was strongly positive, based on years of **positive collaboration**.

Trust seems to be an important by-product within this process. Trust must not be seen as situated in the individual, as though it is a commodity that can be given or taken, or as if it is static, or an entity. To the post modernist (social constructionist), trust is a relational, achieved, meaning. **Trust, in the social constructionist view, happens in the process of on-going, or relating of people**, it's a **by-product** of relationship. It means, being open to other's stories and critiques, being seen and listened to, by others, not criticized, judged or analysed by others, in a context in which people feel safe to open their hearts, to talk, and to share. Trust replaced discussions about right or wrong, battles about who wins this game, and power play. **Dialoging with others made each voice as important as the others**. Helping people to understand other points of views as equally important, prevented these power plays. **The decrease of these power plays and the increase in trust among participants**, led to a reduction in attitudes such as: I am better than the other, or right versus wrong, or, I want to express only my ideas because they are the best.

The coordination group was skilful in handling all these experiences and different views of participants, and **stimulated active listening, without criticism**. This gave room for language practices, **such as dialogues**, to share openly about hope and dreams, but also to speak about current problems within Suriname education and society. These dialogues were important because they **broke down the hierarchical positions** of participants within the system. We were always very conscious about the importance of putting people *in relation*, and tried to strengthen the growing relationships by ongoing communication within the appreciative stance.

The chameleon approach or the improvisational art

In one of the interviews, Henri Ori used *the chameleon* as a metaphor for the character of the coordination of the process. In spite of the fact that we had a clear vision about the result of the process, there was no detailed plan to achieve this target, which was the publishing of the book. Quite the opposite, because we had only the goal. This gave us lots of opportunities to introduce interventions at every stage, when needed, during the project. We, the coordination group, acted like a chameleon which changed color depending to the situation's needs. This openness during the process allowed us to match actions to needs at certain moments. This illustrates **the flexibility** and **the improvisational art** earlier mentioned.

So the question arises: What does this mean to generative processes? What does this mean for people coordinating these processes?

The *Chameleon Approach* means that the coordinator needs to have a deep trust that things will turn out right, even in the deepest moments of fear. It is like the mantra which people often use in this kind of work: *trust the process*. It means to handle issues from a deep belief of hope instead of fear. It means to act as a servant in these approaches: a servant who is prepared to disregard his or her actions to give space for others actions and to follow the process needs. This was happening, for example, when new members were added to the coordination group and came with feedback about the content of the book. At that time we had nearly finished writing. We stopped the whole process and used their new ideas to rewrite the whole manuscript, and restructure the whole book. It meant that the whole process was delayed for two months. It created much extra work. It was not always easy to balance this process. **To act as a servant**⁶⁴ seemed at that time to be the metaphor for this generative process. Each participant could act as a servant for, or in service of, *the other* and the mutual task.

Chameleon approach means to me that one can adapt or fine-tune actions to the moment. It means that one can color the approach to what is needed at that certain moment of the process. Generative processes are dynamic, ever changing, like water running past obstacles, flowing further, never ending. This describes the activity of this change process; it was never predictable or controllable and **urged flexibility and improvisation**. In my opinion and experience, if we want to guide these processes successfully we must act as chameleons. For me, as the coordinator, it was not always easy to guide the process because of this unpredictability, but I always saw the unpredictable as very challenging.

I have experienced this uncertainty in many processes, in being a teacher, a school leader, a coordinator or in being an educational specialist, especially in foreign countries.. Understanding this uncertainty and unpredictability as nature of change has taught me to be more in the moment, to improvise, and to be sensitive to chances which suddenly appear. Let's be a little bit more specific: from a constructionist stand point we must see this uncertainty as a product coming out of *joint action* or *being in relation* with each other. It's part of the nature of the process change. Improvising, as I express it often, is like seeing chances and opportunities and picking them like flowers in a field. Then, suddenly, the difficulty seems to transform into

⁶⁴ The phrase "Servant Leadership" was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in *The Servant as Leader*, an essay that he first published in 1970. In that essay, he said: "The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to *serve* first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature."

easiness: **seeing other people's potential and using it makes the process easier.** When I was a young school leader, being given a challenging task to lead a school in times of deep grief gave me the awareness that I could only do this together with others, using their potential, by *being in relation*. Now I understand that by doing so it gave others space to join in, to proceed together. It is my experience that people take up their responsibilities and can have active and productive roles in the change process. I also became aware that it is important to skip or park one's own ideas or assumptions, to give space for the *other* and otherness.

I experienced this when I was a school leader of a rapidly growing school, (which employed a new) group of young teachers each year. Very soon I became aware of the importance of being open to these new influences and not to stick with the old traditions, to listen to their ideas. This gave the new teachers the opportunity to be part of the school's processes. New members in the social field, for example, these new teachers, or, in *the I Believe* process, the new members within the coordination team, are often capable of expressing how they experience the community or culture – which are often taken for granted. New members will ask questions about the way we have always done things. This will break walls down. However, one has to be open to this, especially the leaders of social groups. **Openness to the other and the otherness is, as I see it, a great stimulant for generative processes.** It can break the pattern of downloading: singing the same old song on and on and going together into deeper dimensions in the process.

When we are open in the process to what occurs in the moment, the process can follow its course. It is referred to as **unfolding**. So, unlike traditional research projects where the researcher clearly articulates his already developed idea prior to the beginning of the research, in a dialogic inquiry process the researcher/facilitator/consultant starts with an idea of how to proceed, often informed by prior conversations with a wide range of stakeholders, but **enters into the process ready to improvise** – thereby **letting the process unfold in the moment in natural ways**. This is central, because it means that the researcher is being *responsive* to those present, to the context, to the historical traditions present, and so on. Another way of talking about this is to talk about taking a **not knowing stance** or a **curious stance**.

Another interesting question is, "What motivated others to get involved in the process? What are some ways in which a coordinator might "position" him or herself such that others feel invited to participate in constructing generative change?" An important way to position coordinator or facilitator was to place oneself as one of the participants of the change process. We were all, including the coordinator, involved in creating this vision in all kinds of ways, talking, inquiring and working with each other, contributing ideas, searching and sharing knowledge, trying to understand one and another. With this I mean: nobody in the process was more important than anyone else, or, in other words, **everybody's contribution was valuable**.

We all participated in the process to contribute the process, in our own unique ways, for the sake of the end goal: the publication of the book. Some examples of these ways of positioning were: everyone was important, everyone was an expert in some way, everybody could contribute with their own specific expertise, everyone could take specific responsibility in the process, **every voice was equally important**. The knowledge did not only come from the researcher, but could come from anyone, from any direction. Furthermore, the coordination group had easy access to the financial support of each organization.(VVOB and UNICEF), as well as **good lines of communication with key persons** in the organizations VVOB, UNICEF and MINOV.

Knowing and influencing are joined⁶⁵

It becomes clear to me that **all actions which took place in this process influenced each other**. In a way, each action gave new knowledge or ideas. Based on this, new actions could be planned and organized. These actions must not be seen as located in (individuals such as) the coordinator, or even people within the coordination group of this project, separated from the rest. *Knowing and influencing* came out of the process of doing or making things together. In this ongoing change process, the number of relationships was increasing. **Out of these relationships new ideas were born, which generated new actions**. Because this was always done in an appreciative way, new possibilities were built for further progress together. New actions and new possibilities created new knowledge. New knowledge was creating new actions, and so on. For me, this was an energizing and motivating experience. **When people started to share their ideas during the process it showed that they were involved in a positive, appreciative, constructive and enthusiastic manner**. Their ideas became these new actions and because of this, participants became active and started to commit to the process with these actions. These actions were not organized at *the beginning* or *the end* of the process, but occurred *within* the process.

I will illustrate this with some examples coming out of the analysis:

- **Co-Creating meaning**
- **Using existing, constructive networks**
- **Engaging in self reflexive and relational reflexive critique**

Co-Creating meaning

Co-creating meaning took place from the start of this process. At first, starting within the coordination group, the three of us key coordinators had to get to know each other, and to dialogue about how we would proceed. This process started when we met for the first time (June 2007) and finished after achieving our goal, the presentation of the book to the public in May 2009. From our shared understanding, the ideas started to spread out. We were soon related to others like an ink and block. During the process, **people with all kinds of backgrounds were brought together in all kinds of settings to share and create meaning**. We did this by organizing workshops in the ten districts of Suriname. Suriname is divided into ten districts. It's important to mention this number, because almost everything happens in the main city and district of Paramaribo, and people living in the more remote districts were never really involved in educational change process before. They were not seen as valuable to the reform processes. **Involving, inviting and visiting**

⁶⁵ All actions do have the potential to influence change, in how processes go on. Interventions are not located in isolated people like the expert or the change agent, but are located in the ongoing change process and come out of the relationships we build and construct. When this is done in a respectful and appreciative ways constructive perspectives can be build for future processes. In the I Believe in You! project we will see that "knowing", or "understanding" has been an ongoing process. Each new knowing, each shared knowing, influenced the next steps or actions in the process. In the process knowing became a way of shared understanding which strongly influenced the strength of the change process. The more mutual understanding, the stronger the process seemed to be. The expression *left joined* is what Dian Hosking uses in her work to express that knowing and influencing are closely linked to each other.

people throughout all districts stimulated their participation. Their ideas and voices, and their knowledge were seen as valuable and important to the process.

I assumed that **we all must have some shared experiences**, with appreciative guidance by older people, at certain moments in our lives. Using this as a starting point helped to create a collective or shared meaning about child friendly education. **Starting with people's own, positive experiences** was helpful in understanding each other and the process. It is where Michael Fullan (1991) says that **giving meaning is crucial to the success of the change process**. Within the district workshops, participants shared many stories about positive guidance during their childhood, or later as students. We read hundreds of these stories and gave a sample of them a central place in the publication. Some examples of these stories ⁶⁶are:

My sweet kindergarten teacher told us stories as if she was a mother. She was fond of everybody. She has been my role model and I have drawn my inspiration from her. I wanted to do my utmost to meet my teacher's expectations. I wanted to please her and that's what made me strive for perfection.

(Esmé Boschmans-Valies, Paramaribo)

I was not just a teacher but a nurse, policeman, and mother and father, rolled into one, to the students.

(U. Jiawan, Nickerie)

The teacher in my second year of primary school was an impressive teacher. She was so clear, humorous and pleasant that I always wanted to be the teacher, and imitated her whenever we played school. It also stimulated the urge and desire to become a teacher later on, which I did eventually.

(Monique Brown, Paramaribo)

Good teaching has been the foundation of my later career. (Soraya Descartes, Wanica)

What I always remember, from the time I was in Kindergarten, are the teacher's motivation and attention. (Anneke Djopawiro, Coronie)

Each time when a workshop was finished, the facilitators came back with their own and the participants' stories. This new knowledge was used to adjust the format of the coming workshops and processes. We collected many stories, which gave us a good idea of **the existing local knowledge**. Their stories were again used for new actions. By writing the names of the story tellers in the book, people felt seen and heard: **they felt appreciated and valued. Publishing their voices, making them visible and heard was a crucial intervention** in the process, and as this process still goes on today, essential for the process after the publication.

This process of meaningful productivity still goes on by organizing workshops throughout the whole country to give further meaning to the ideas expressed in the book. I was again surprised when I heard that people recognized many storytellers who were mentioned in the book, and who were from the small community in Suriname. This was an unforeseen event, which again strengthened the relationship to the other, and the commitment to the publication.

⁶⁶ These quotes are abstracted from the book "I Believe in You!", (Ori, Roolvink, Schoenmakers, 2010)

Using existing (constructive) networks as forms of being *in relation*

From the beginning of the process, we used **existing (constructive) networks, formed by relationships between people** within the local Suriname's culture. The method of detecting **key persons** within Suriname's society was interesting. Again, by being *in relation* with Henri Ori (the minister's advisor), Monique Nouh Chaia (the gallery keeper), Ruben Soetosenojo (director of Education Suriname), the ten facilitators, and so on, helped enormously to detect the key persons we needed during the unfolding process. **The expanding networks** meant that finding these key persons was getting easier and easier, the further the process came along, because of the increased number of participants. Out of the fifteen interviews we conducted, of important key persons within society, we needed to find the right people. For this, we used local knowledge such as the networks and relationships of Henri Ori, the Minister's advisor. We needed to find the right people, but what is *right from a constructionist point*? Here I want to make the distinction between someone (in authority) assuming that the right people are those who some organizational chart indicates are the right people, vs a more organic sense of who is right to participate – making these decisions based on relationships rather than structures. Our decisions were made based on the **relationships of these key persons within society**. The key questions were "Which people within Suriname Society can be very meaningful to our project? Which people have a meaningful relationship to education and society? Which people are related to the people we want to involve in the process, and how can we get in contact with them?"

Meaningful for the process could mean meaningful because of political relationships within the Ministry, or because of relationships of their positions within the system, such as director, district chief or Minister. It could also mean because of logistical relationships with people such as boatmen, taxi drivers, restaurants, or students of computer work. It could be meaningful because of specific knowledge, such as teachers from the Teachers' Colleges, workshop facilitators, meaningful because of specific competencies such as editors, writers, artists, meaningful because of recognition by others, such as famous book writers, ex ministers, people from society. So there were **multiple reasons to feel important** in supporting the process.

We selected key persons because of their formal roles in Suriname culture/politics/education. But we also selected people because they were active users or participants in the educational system, such as parents, students, and teachers. By also including key people, many of whom were not formally recognized as spokespersons for education, **we created an opportunity for different understandings to emerge**. In the Suriname society we needed these **formal key persons**, because of their roles within politics or because of the hierarchy within the department, and that became very clear later in the process. I am fully aware now, that by doing so **we honored the cultural constructions**. We – Liesbeth and Loek, the coordinators – were inexperienced within this Suriname Society, so we needed the participation of Henri Ori, the adviser of the Minister of Education. We knew beforehand that he had **strong connections within the Suriname society and politics**. During the whole process, which took two years, he was fully committed and helped in a very constructive way to use and **indicate existing networks** for making things possible. This was important for us, because of the sensitivity about European, especially Dutch, white people, working within the process, due to our colonial history. Henri could adapt ideas and approaches to the Suriname's way of doing things (culture). **We used his knowledge about sensitive relationships to bridge the other and the otherness**. Henri Ori detected the fifteen key persons within society, and supervised the fifteen interviews of important Surinamese for the publication. We did a double check to prevent too much political selection, a one-sided selection.

Henri was also politically involved in the Suriname's Society. He was very positive about this double check of the listed people. We asked the Director of Education, Mr. Ruben Soetosenojo, to check the list. This was important, because we wanted to be approved by the Ministry of Education when the book was published.

By doing these things, we honored the existing social, cultural constructions. We also thought it would be crucial **to give voice to the active users of the educational system**, the teachers, the parents and the students, so we invited them too, to participate in the process. We knew that these active users of the educational system would be, and still are, the main players within the educational change process (and would be valuable) when we wanted to implement the ideas of *I Believe In You!* after the publishing. We can create many changes, but in the end the active field players - the students and teachers - will determine if this change will become reality in their daily activities/ways of life/methods of operating). We have seen this in chapter 4, *Time for a new recipe*, as one of the important outcomes of the educational research: there is no educational change without active participation of the students and the teachers.

During the unfolding process, **the network of relationships was expanding**. The more people who got involved, the easier it became to ask for specific knowledge. One email sent meant, on many occasions, that within a few hours we had the necessary contacts or information. Often, we asked all kinds of people who were respected in society, to help us to locate key persons. We needed to find a printer, a photographer, a cineaste, editors, students, facilitators, logistic key persons for organizing the workshops, eight artists or educational professionals for giving feedback about the content of the book, participants for the district workshops, students for the presentation of the book and so on.

So throughout the whole process there was ongoing input of new key persons which we needed for new actions, knowledge or insights. This is again an interesting feature: **We were open to new people getting involved in the process** at the times we needed them, which was often not foreseen. It happened almost naturally.

Finding committed key persons was a crucial aspect throughout the process in its different stages. We needed them, for the simple fact that they knew the ways, they knew the local history and culture, and they had the relationships (networks) which could be useful for the success and the strengthening of the project. Using these key persons broadened our **working field of influence**. They knew little things which were important in local relationships, like allergies, pitfalls, specific habits of certain people and, most importantly, the political sensitivities of people. Furthermore, **we used the knowledge of our Suriname colleagues** for identifying constructive positive facilitators. In this way we selected, via word of mouth, ten facilitators who were later trained in Appreciative Inquiry methods.

These facilitators also knew people in the different districts and could even speak their local languages. These facilitators were touched by the central focus of the project and the underlying positive drive. During the process, they became more and more involved in **delivering constructive contributions for driving the process forward**. The fact that these facilitators had long-standing, good relationships with people of the specific districts was helpful for expanding our unfolding network. One of the things we did was to give them the **freedom of choice** as to which district they preferred to facilitate. They chose districts where they already knew lots of people with whom they had been *in relation*. This also meant that **these facilitators could help to identify important participants** for the Appreciative Inquiry workshops in the districts.

I didn't know what we would encounter when we started the workshops throughout the country, but the facilitators' knowledge and relationships within the districts helped enormously to solve many logistical

problems. These facilitators worked in the cities, and also in the rural areas in the rainforest, which were not always easy to reach. This made the work of the coordination group a little bit easier. The facilitators always had the most appropriate answers when we faced local problem situations. The more the process evolved, the more committed these facilitators became.

Seeing that we used their suggestions and ideas, **they strengthened their relationships and further commitment** to the project. We were **giving voice to them**. Still, after finishing the book in May 2009, the process is continuing, and some facilitators are at this moment (June 2011) active in developing materials for new workshops, handbooks, and are facilitating workshops throughout the whole country.

Henri Ori helped us to connect with the ten District Chiefs. Within Suriname's de-centralization of government, these ten chiefs play key roles within the government of the Suriname Districts. They knew the in and outs of the local contexts and were very useful **in creating a committed base** among the people within their districts. The participants' lists for each workshop were checked by these chiefs. The chiefs were also a great help in the logistic organization of the meetings and workshops in the districts. For example, they began to search for locations for the AI workshops, and they offered help to organize transport for people from little villages in the rural areas in Suriname, by sending boats or busses. They were always present when we started the AI workshops, to introduce the project, to participate and to motivate their people. This again strengthened the mutual commitment.

Because of **the expanding relationships**, people started to help, increasingly, to develop these useful networks. One such person was Monique, from the Art Gallery, who connected us with eight young artists. This help was important, because these artists didn't know the coordinating group; we were foreign - Dutch, and new in Suriname society. **This connection helped us to bridge the first steps to participate in the project**. It made the work to attract people into the project easier. We just needed to make one phone call my boss was Monique's friend, and was able to get the number from her, and the project machine began to run. Within a day, I had a list of artists we could contact. **We didn't make the choice** as to which artists would be selected for the bookwork. We simply asked Monique, **What would you advise us to do?** Can you help us to formulate the arts-focus of the book, considering the idea behind the book? And within a few days, Monique had compiled a list of artists, young positive working artists who were not well known at time or who were just beginning to be recognized. We used this guideline also to provide positive) answers when people asked why we had selected this group of eight artists, and not others. Based on Monique's advice, we worked with these selected artists. Phone numbers and e mail addresses were used to contact them. During our visits with each of the artists, we communicated frequently with Monique, or asked for her advice. Although I had not written any pages of the book, at that stage, every time I visited the artists, they were immediately in for participation. The idea that their work would be published in 10.000 books was very attractive. I think that **the skill (of being) in relation with others** helped to motivate these artists to contribute with their works.

Engaging in self reflexive and relational reflexive critique

(i.e., entertaining doubt about our own taken-for-granted ways of being in the world).

Engaging people in reflexive actions has also been also an important issue. The coordination group reflected weekly on the progress of the process, about the content: What will be the content? And for whom? We had to consider which actions to take, as well as the quality of the relationships involved. The coordination group was open and accessible for feedback during the whole process.

From a social constructionist stance, it is important to see these reflexive moments as *NOT* just happening in people's individual minds. Again, it is in the relation with the other, in sharing reflexions together, that these actions take place. At one of the supervisory periods my advisor, Sheila McNamee, named this sharing of reflexions, **relational reflexivity**. For this project the coordination group **organized different kinds of relational reflexive actions**. Meanwhile, within the coordination group, it was a method we used within the facilitators group, when we visited the meeting of the districts officers, when inviting key persons from society and politics to discuss the content of the publication, or in discussions with the end editors, and so on.

There was always this reflexive stance, **to be open for feedback in the formal as well as the informal moments. These reflexive moments did gave new understandings or meanings**, which influenced our actions on a permanent basis. **Many times we fine-tuned the process to the needs of the moment.**

So, what is helpful relational reflexive critique? What is its influence? How do people put this into practice (in action)? Do multiple reflexive actions occur? What does this mean for generative processes?

Helpful reflexive critique is – as I see it – critique which is **not threatening or judging the other**. It is not *I am more important than you are or I know better than you do*. It is about reflecting one's own position and actions openly, being a role model to the other to do the same. It is like what people do when they are dialoguing. Careful listening to and questioning of each other. Not judging. What it didn't mean was that we needed to agree with the other. I think it is important that **leaders of change should be capable of constructing these relational reflective practices** on a regular base. The best way to put these reflexive actions into practice was to create safe settings, small groups of people talking with each other, or to put people who knew each other together, with the appreciative stance.

Multiple reflexive actions happened during the whole process. They happened in the coordination group, within staff meetings of VVOB, UNICEF, MINOV, in the district workshops, between individuals, at the Ministry level, between international donors, when visiting the eight artists, and when interviewing the fifteen selected key persons for the publication. It seemed that when people openly showed their reflexive actions, this created connectedness, more understanding, more willingness to be open, better understanding and from this, new ideas and shared knowledge. Reflexion on my part and by others, multiplies mutual insights and understandings: shared knowledge and meaning. So, this could mean that **increasing relational reflective actions at different levels leads to more understanding**, especially when this is shared openly, which strengthens relationships. Doing things in this way helped us all to see that we have good intentions, and that we are only looking for the right way to achieve this. These relational reflexive activities help us **to find deep resources within ourselves which vitalize the co creation of change.**

I am influenced by my working experiences, (see my Masters work about Building Reflexive Capacity Within Schools), which showed that this is an important feature within the generative change process. **From these**

relational reflexive actions, we construct our collective memory. (Gergen 2003, p. 134) So, in the social constructionist view, this memory is not an individual act but a collective one, coming out of the process of going forward together.

The coordination group organized **a constant stream of information.** This was done by two-weekly electronic newsletters, by organizing formal meetings and presentations, and during spontaneous informal settings.

Due to the lack of knowledge and expertise in Suriname, we started to **inform people about current developments within education.** This helped them to keep on track, to have better understanding about present developments. Informing people helped to keep them on the track and to put all hands on deck. Because the “change train” speeded up along the way, this was very necessary to do, to make the process not only successful, but also **to maintain the relational involvement of participants.**

Often the mistake is made in traditional change processes, that the people in the fore-front of the process, such as the coordinators, the management, the leaders or managers, have more knowledge than the followers. Then, these leaders may have to make quick decisions and interventions, which affect these followers,) within the process, forgetting to involve or even inform them. For these followers, it becomes harder and harder to understand simply what is going on. The risk is that, in the end, they will give up participating fully in the process. They are dis-connected, not *in relation* anymore. The joke is that **expertise is situated in all of us**, and by being *in relation*, doing things in appreciative ways together, we can all benefit from this knowledge and generate new, shared, knowledge coming out of it.

To conclude, (these things have been important actions in which knowledge and influencing took place:)

- **Co-creating meaning**
- **Using existing (constructive) networks (as forms of being in relation)**
- **Engaging in self reflexive and relational reflexive critique**

Multiple, equal voices⁶⁷

The process shows in many ways how an increasing number of people were involved in many different actions by this particular work of change. These ways **to generate and work with multiplicity** drove the whole process forward, in a desirable direction, which became reality when we succeeded in publishing ten thousand copies of our book, *I Believe In You!* in May 2009. In this section I present some examples coming out of the process, which show what it was like **to work with these multiple voices in non-hierarchical ways, that recognized and supported difference and tapped into the power within people.**

Working with multiple voices is a complex whole and cannot be done – in my opinion - from an individualistic orientation. The relational orientation showed its benefits. It showed how we can make use of all these different voices in an appreciative manner, to co-construct sustainable change just by being *in relation*. **A non-hierarchical way** means to me that we do have an open stance to each other within the change process, based on respect and appreciation. This respect and appreciation is from relational or social constructionist thought, not situated in the individual, but in a way it is the product which comes from being *in relation* or going forward with each other. It is the mutual sense of being appreciated by one another, regardless of one's background, knowledge or position.

Still, **we have to challenge the existing hierarchies** we meet when we are doing our work of change. I think these hierarchical positions are part of how our communities are constructed; it must be seen as a way of being *in relation* with the other. They are part of the reality. In *the I Believe in You! process*, it meant dealing with ministers, directors of departments, districts officers, politicians, but also with teachers, employees of departments and even the market woman on the street. **We cannot deny these existing positions**, they are part of our realities, but again **it depends on how we do things together**, how we use our positions to go onward with each other and to build these relationships. In Suriname this was not always easy. Being European, of Dutch origin, meant for me that my history could influence the relationships I built. I write especially *could*. I believe that in my working career, especially when working in Aruba and Suriname, my open stance towards *the other* and the otherness helped me to create a bridge over this issue, and to build sustainable relationships within the local community.

In the following sections I will highlight the following issues:

- **Expanding the domain of participation**
- **Who is in control in the process?**
- **Attempts to coordinate multiplicity and divers worldviews**
- **Feedback in a constructive and respectful way**

⁶⁷ Looking for ways to generate and work with multiplicity rather than suppress or homogenize it through the application of static procedures or through management drives to "consensus". Space for multiple voices is created by working in non-hierarchical ways that recognize and support difference and that construct 'power to' rather than 'power over', This means including everyone who has an involvement in some issue e.g., through participative change-work (e.g. future search or appreciative inquiry). The challenge is to give this space to multiple voices, which not always an easy job. We will see in the *I Believe in You!* process many ways to give space for these multiple, equal voices. And again in doing so I realize that also this theme strengthened the change process.

Expanding the domain of participation

During the process, the coordination group was very open to participation of anybody who had ideas, knowledge or constructive feedback. Although we needed Suriname's educational experts specifically, for the educational foundation of the bookwork, **we also believed that anybody who would get involved in the process could give constructive contributions.** The focus of the publication was on child-friendly education. Everybody has learning experiences in life, we all were once children and therefore everybody has important knowledge of the best ways of being guided by others.

The issue of **expanding participation** is an interesting one. The process started with three persons in the coordination group. Fifteen selected key persons from society followed. We visited the District officers' monthly meeting to introduce the idea of working collectively with this shared vision throughout the whole country—and succeeded in pulling them into the process. Again, **the open, positive, appreciative stance supported the process.** This meant that twelve more key persons were admitted. Early in the process, I contacted eight artists, to use their work in illustrating the publication. We also selected ten facilitators who worked in the whole country, organizing more than twenty workshops with 25-40 participants each. Then there was a growing group of the Ministry's departments and the four Teachers Colleges, writers, editors, and students, who contributed to the process. In the end, more than 350 people had been involved in realizing the publishing of the book *"I Believe In You!"*

What helped to expand this participation was:

- the appreciative stance
- the mutually felt hope for a better future
- the mutually felt need for change
- the openness to others and otherness during the whole process, by using dialogical and
- collaborative approaches
- continually inviting others, who represented the different layers within society, such as students, teachers, teacher trainers, educational specialists, members of departments, ministers' advisers, and members of the civil society, to participate in their own unique and personal ways
- increasing the number of people involved which also meant increasing the numbers of actions and networks
- the insights of selected participants from civil society representing all kinds of different views
- broadened networks of relationships (as a result of expanding participation)
- the by-products coming out of this process, such as positive mood or energy, increasing mutual trust and pride to be part of all this
- active feedback from participants: mainly by putting new ideas into actions; using their voices in respectful and visible ways
- involving people, from the stance that everyone is important and needed
- organizing adequate communication, using means such as meetings, newsletters, websites, e mail and so on, in formal and informal settings
- not least, the use of relationships, such as existing networks, to build bridges to one another

Using people's own ideas, based on their knowledge and their personal and shared understandings, meant that **they were seen as equally important and as equally meaningful**. We expressed their importance many times by giving feedback, by communicating directly. **It made them feel proud, committed, included and respected**. The idea that each person was important for the whole process, was an important and powerful feature for the process. **Differences were appreciated and valued**. This all helped to build relationships, to connect people in positive ways, it **built bridges** between one and the other. People met in workshops or meetings, and started to share their dreams and ideas of the best education. **They shared their life stories**, which were easy to understand by others. They were stimulated to ask questions, to gain more understanding **using the Appreciative Inquiry principles**. Questions such as: tell your best experience as if you are describing a picture or movie. What do you see, feel, hear? Who was there besides you? What effect did the situation, or the action in the situation, have for you and others? What would you like to carry on from the past to the future? What was vitalizing for you and others? And so on.

The climate was safe for speaking and sharing openly. People were asked to be attentive to discussion **and to turn discussion into dialogue practice**, mostly set up in little groups of two or three persons. During these dialogical practices, we and the facilitators were there to help them, for example by participating in the dialogue, and to demonstrate the use of careful listening and questioning. For generative change processes, it means that getting to know each other at deeper levels establishes or improves relationships. This is where Otto Sharmar (2010) talks about **the collective tapping into the inner source of meaning and purpose**. Sharing each other's view of reality resulted in better understanding. **When there was no threat** of losing one's own view, but a chance to win new sights, **people started to come closer to each other**. Relationships were built. The effects seemed to be on the soft side (subjective side) of relations, such as such as an increased warmth, love, openness, sensitivity and respect. It also worked on the harder side, (objective side) producing effects such as producing texts, more effective organizing, delivering the content for the publication, establishing a structure for logistics, creating networks. To be respected and included did play an important role within building these relationships, literally giving space for participation, being taken seriously, and being heard and seen. It seems to me that the first moment of connection with the other(s) is of great importance in starting and establishing open conversations, in getting to know each other, and in building good relationships. It is what McNamee and Andersen calls **the moment of feeling welcome**. Non-verbal expressions within the communication contribute a lot in these relation building processes. Giving this space to multiplicity and participation, contributed to sustainable change. The existence of multiplicity and difference may, in fact, be our best strategy for sustaining the human project! (Gergen, 2003)

Who is in control in the process?

Another issue coming out of this analysis is the issue of power. Who is in and who is out of control? What does it mean to the participants involved in the process? What does this mean for leadership? What does using multiple and equal voices mean in the change process?

Analysing the process, it became clear to me that **inviting people to participate, to co-create meaningfully and to give space to multiple voices** did effect this power issue in a positive way. Power issues are nature of change processes. As the coordinator of this process, I had to deal with many power questions. Although I was the leader or coordinator of the whole process, I did not have the power to create

change in or for the other(s). **Being *in relation* as a coordinator with other(s) – as a participant - the process of relation-building started.** Because we see this *being in relation*, from a constructionist stance, as dynamic and ongoing, dependent on where we are and with whom we are, this leadership changed color as the situation needed. Leadership was not in me as an individual, but **leadership was coming out of this joint action with others.** As De Caluwé (2006, 2007) said, people have their pocket veto. They can say yes, but do no. That is out of **the leader's control. Real leadership shows up when people feel that they can have their own part of control in the process.** It is the discussion of power *with* or *to* rather than power *over*.

In the traditional processes, the approach of leadership is often seen from an individualistic stance. The idea is that the leader is ascribed some leadership characteristics, as being able to control processes or people. Sometimes leaders even try this by being dominant, or by setting rules. In reality, people may follow such leaders, but often it is the in and outside picture. From the outside it looks as if the followers follow their leaders by doing what they ask or even demand, but from the inside, they use their pocket veto and do not really follow by heart. It what I explained earlier when mentioning the work of Homan (2001, 2005), which happens in formal and informal moments. The leader thinks, when he meets his people in a formal setting, that everything is as it shows up in these formal settings, but in the informal settings, the real story can be totally different. This is especially the case when there is a power *over* stance, of leaders. The power question is not situated in one person or one group who have, or think they have, control, but **the power issue is focussed on everyone, being in this specific relationship in all kinds of ways.** Being seen or heard in the appreciative way seems to eliminate this power issue.

In the coordination group, for example, it grew out of the relationship, and the context that I took the lead at particular moments, but on other occasions other members took the lead. It was almost a natural happening. When leadership was asked for, in the final feedback workshop, where critical local politicians and MINOV staff were invited to participate, Henri Ori took the lead to deal with their criticism. In the districts workshops, the facilitators took the lead. In making radio programs, Loes Trustfull the head of *the Department of School Radio and Television* took the lead.

There is a lot of difference between power **over** something or someone, and power **to issue**. Within generative change processes, it is clear for me that **power to and power with contribute towards durable change.** I experienced this when people were seen and heard, and taken seriously. Then they started to commit themselves and put themselves in relation to the process. They could also have part of power in the process by telling their stories, sharing their ideas or organizing activities. We often organized feedback periods in one to one settings and in workshops. At these times, they could **easily share their feelings and ideas** but also **have power to contribute to the process.**

At one time I started to talk with Loes Trustfull. It was a very open conversation, in which new ideas were generated. The idea of making five radio programs in six local languages was born. Loes was given the power to organize this. A few months later, it was realized. The facilitators were given power to adapt the workshop content to the local needs, and to help us with organizing the logistics in the districts. Norman Deekman, our cineaste, was given power to develop a DVD with the documentary of the whole process. The fifteen interviewees were given power to come with their ideas and stories within the open frame of the interview. The participants of the workshop were given power in telling their own personal stories without any limits. The director of Education and the Minister of Education gave power to us to organize this whole process.

Giving power to the other(s) has been a tremendous feature contributing to this change process.

People started to commit and to support the other. People came with many ideas to strengthen the process. When I looked further into the issue of coordinating and leading this change process, I discovered how important it is to construct ownership for all. Relational leadership at all levels has been crucial within this process. The question arises: How was this leadership role performed? How did we act as leaders within these kind of processes? Being *in relation*, being flexible, being a “*chameleon*”, being in service of the change process and the whole is an essential stance for leaders or coordinators. The basic idea that **we need everyone to achieve the best goal, without excluding certain groups**, as we have seen in many educational reforms, contributed to the sustainability of the process. I experienced this aspect of leadership in many occasions, but especially in this *I Believe In You!* process. Living as a new guest in an unknown foreign country (Suriname,) I realized that we needed others to achieve our goal.

In this project, I worked with the idea of **relational responsibility**. What I mean is that we can all be conscious within the change process: have a part in it and have influence in it, but also take responsibility in it. As written and explained in the bookwork, we all do have our own responsibility. This can be visualized as a circle of influence or responsibility. By taking on this responsibility, **we are all interrelated and interdependent to each other**. I strongly believe that we have a task in life, and that we should do the things we can do within our own circle of influence at certain times and places. We should take responsibility for being *in relation* with the other and the otherness. During the process of creating *I Believe in You!*, I asked the Minister of Education a question. If he had to undergo an important surgery, would he choose the surgeon who had stopped learning forty years ago, or would he choose the one who had had training every year of his working life? No doubt, he choose the latter, but why do we forget this when we are talking about students or young pupils, our future? How would life change, if we all took our responsibilities in a relational way? This is what I mean with relational responsibility: everyone contributes the best for all, being *in relation* with each other. We no longer live in a world where we can act as individuals. The world's problems are far too complex for that. **We must become more and more aware that we are *in relation* with each other, depending on each other to keep our planet liveable for now and for the future.**

For Morgan (1992), a manager's success depends on his or her becoming skilled in the art of seeing and understanding situations in different ways: and “thus to be able to move forward on the insights this generates”. In his view, the effective manager must be able to imagine multiple realities and put them into use as he or she negotiates the world with others. (Gergen 2003, p. 177) But for many constructionists it is not enough to improve the capacities of organizational managers. **Much needed are ways for increasing full and productive participation in the meaning-making process.**

Constructing our realities by being *in relation* with each other gives power to the social constructionist stance, and is, in my opinion, necessary for our future on this planet. We all live within our communities, in which we have our “way of doing things together”. When we really want fundamental change, we need to shift our social field by doings things together in different ways. The social or relational constructionist orientation is an example of **shifting the usual paradigm of individual orientation towards the relational orientation**. When we succeed in doing this, we change our social fields and therefore we can really approach our future differently, and hopefully, more successfully.

Attempts to coordinate multiplicity and divers worldviews

(as opposed to reaching consensus or determining one "correct" way of doing things).

At the start of this process, we only knew by talking with the local people that there was a high need for Suriname's Vision for elementary education. We sensed this at all levels within the educational system and society, from teachers to the Ministry departments, including the Minister of Education. We started with this open question or this need. This mutual wish, this dream, connected people. There was no doubt that - in light of the bad conditions of Suriname education - all people wanted the best education for their students. **This common need generated energy to** strive for something better. So **the uniting wish** to create a vision for elementary education, and for creating quality education for Suriname's youth, helped in a way to open doors and realized, or re-realized, relationships in which open conversations took place. How this vision would look like, was open during the whole process and is **still developing after the process**. This **openness** (or emptiness) **gave all participants room for delivering ideas, knowledge and experiences and sharing all this together**. We didn't talk beforehand about one correct and unique approach within primary education, but just started to talk with people, or let them talk together about all kinds of ways and personal experiences of positive approaches within education. Starting **dialogical and collaborative practices helped to coordinate multiplicity** and divers worldviews. Interesting also, is the fact that Suriname's society is constructed of eight different cultural communities and many tribes. So dealing with multiplicity and divers worlds views is very common in Suriname. The fact that in the main city Paramaribo, a mosque is situated next to a synagogue illustrates this.

We organized many feedback meetings during the vision process **to give space to these multiple views**, which also helped us to understand them. This was not always an easy process. Lack of expertise, lack of knowledge, lack of good practices, but also the sometimes negative influences of politics, sometimes caused problems or misunderstandings. It is interesting that the power of positivism solved some of these negative attacks to the project. It was also interesting that, in these feedback meetings, the higher the positions of participants in the hierarchy and political system, the more severe the power play could be.

When I look a bit more closely at this, lack of expertise and knowledge meant that people could not always imagine how the desired future would be. Their way of looking at education, or looking at any process, was limited by their own social fields. They looked at their own reality as they had always done, and took it for granted. Because we tried to create the opportunity for people to come together and share their ideas of how things can work, we created another sort of climate, in which **openness and appreciation were the key values**. By doing so we could **break open these taken-for-granted orientations**.

Another attempt at multiplicity occurred when I met Loes Trustfull, head of the Department of School Radio and Television. She became increasingly committed. When I noticed her enthusiasm and positive energy, it was easy to drag her into the process. As soon as the idea arose that we should film every moment in the process, I asked her for help, knowing that she had the needed expertise and connections. At that, Loes was developing her department into a television station for education. We offered her to improve her department with special equipment which they greatly needed, in exchange for her expertise and coordinating role in the filming of our project. She explained her department's needs, and we arranged the finances for supplying these needs. As well as equipment, she also asked for special training to develop her staff. It is here where we see **the unpredictability of change processes**. **New ideas or possibilities seem to pop up**. At one time we talked about the fear that people in the hinterlands would hardly read the book. Loes came up with the idea of developing radio programs in different languages. While discussing this, the idea came to mix the programs with personal stories of people. It is here where multiplicity comes in. Another idea of Loes' was to introduce Norman Deekman, the local cineast. He would do the technical work. Norman

Deekman was a very positive and committed person in the process. For him, the project offered work and needed money, but also lots of freedom to film. Again, we pursued his ideas (his voice) to make it better. In the end, after two years of filming, he was so involved that he was very eager to make the documentary. He was **proud and happy**, but most of all **we were *in relation* together**. In the images of the film, we were very alert to show multiplicity, by showing people of all cultures within society. Another action, to meet multiplicity and divers worldviews, was organizing the workshops for the ten district workshops in the whole country. Instead of the normal way of doing things in Suriname, by concentrating just on the main city Paramaribo, we choose to visit all ten districts, from main city to coastal region to hinterland. Listening to people's own stories, quoting them in the publication and adding their names, illustrates how important we found their stories were. It cost many hours to work through hundreds of quotes. Two students did great work for us. We found these students, again, by using the existing networks.

Feedback in appreciative ways

People were invited after the workshops, and in meetings, to tell each other about their feelings, thoughts, ideas, and experiences of the workshop, but also about the whole process. Because there were lots of different settings, this feedback differed all the time. We always asked them to come with feedback which could be useful for the process and project, to make the project as good as possible, and to make future actions better. Tom Andersen (1991) writes in his work about **the equalization of relationships**. This is done **by inviting all participants or persons involved to express their thoughts and feelings in a respectful way**. A respectful way must not be seen as a certain method or structure which guarantees this respect; a respectful way must be seen as a way of acting, by appreciating the differences which always exist within groups. We are all unique and have our own stories. These differences (in Surinam) were heard and seen and didn't need discussion but were seen as other ways of viewing realities. This is an example of using multiplicity and equal voices.

Communication



When I reflected on **the power of dialogue**, I became aware that **we didn't have a single approach for communication, but multiple approaches at multiple levels**. The metaphor comes up like a drawing of the famous Escher, who sketched a room with lots of stairs going everywhere. Communication took place frequently at different levels, at micro level (schools and teachers), mezo level (Departments of Education and Teachers' College) and macro level (policy makers, Minister of Education and his advisers). This process went up and down, down and up and in between, suited to the requirements of the moment.

During the process, more and more people got involved, so more and more communication took place. Communication took place by different methods) and means: in formal and informal settings, workshops, meetings, presentations, trainings, on paper, by internet, telephone, fax machine or face-to-face. During informal settings, such as during lunchtime, under a tree, in a boat or spontaneously in the jungle (when facilitators missed the airplane!), and also in the corridor when leaving the building of the Ministry. **In many occasions, in these spontaneous moments, new ideas arose.** Communication also took place between key persons such as the members of the coordination group, the staff of the Minister, representatives of international donors like VVOB and UNICEF, the ten facilitators of workshops, different departments, the chiefs of the ten districts.

The power of dialogue was very significant, such as when the little airplane, which flew to the hinterlands of Suriname, could not leave on time for a combined picnic and workshop. Meanwhile, the boats were collecting people at different spots, and communication with them was not possible. People arrived right on time at the picnic and workshop spot, but the facilitators did not, and neither did the food and drink supply, which was a very important issue within the Suriname culture. When the facilitators finally arrived at the spot to start the workshop, a group of people, not really knowing each other, already started to dialogue which each other about positive learning experiences. Food was provided by local people, and the workshop could begin, or, rather, continue.

Emphasize possibilities and positive values⁶⁸

Appreciative Inquiry and its positive stance has been the leitmotiv during the whole process. I experienced that focusing on possibilities affected this change process dramatically. The work of Victor Frankl, and others, shows that we human beings always have the freedom of choice in whatever situation we are. I am convinced that choosing for the positive leads to different answers, than choosing for the negative. At the age of 27, I had to choose if I wanted to be the new school leader, when my friend and school leader suddenly died, at the age of 37. At that moment, after some time of grief, I realized the freedom to choose. Whatever others might think of my decision, I would have to choose for myself. Keeping my mind and heart open for possibilities and opportunities from that moment onward, showed me that this stance introduced me to new life experiences. It comes to close to Naess (2008) insights that we are capable of far more than we might believe.

It was clear to me, when I started this process, that a positive stance, such as in the Appreciative Inquiry approach would set the tone as a whole. It also suited my own personal stance. In this section, I want to analyse what people did together when employing appreciative thought (methods). What comes out of this process when people are in joint action, and what does this emphasis on possibilities and positive values mean, in change processes?

⁶⁸ When we do construct realities and emphasize possibilities and positive values the language we use changes. Instead of words like frustration, lost of energy, unhappiness, tiredness, demotivation other words are coming in to our system like hopefulness, happiness, joy, success, connection, understanding, relation, motivation and so on. In the I Believe in You ! process these language practices (what people do together) started to change from a reality seen as problematic, to a reality of possibilities and chances. Still today (2011) this process is going on.

I will highlight the following issues:

- **The appreciative stance**
- **Focus on future**
- **Identifying positive key persons**

The appreciative stance

We, the three members of the coordination group were **constantly looking for possibilities** during the whole process. Our appreciative stance towards each other helped us to discuss problems and situations in constructive ways. The more we worked together, the more we were becoming skilled in this language. The differences between us were positively valued, and used during the process. By doing so, the state of *being in relation* became stronger and stronger. Our language practices were focused on possibilities. We were talking about chances, solutions, possibilities, hopes and finding the best outcomes together. The more we got into this process, the more our language practices affected others. I realize now that our **positive stance attracted others to join the process**. When I look closer at how this positive stance appeared, I notice that we had a **constructive, open and positive attitude towards inviting people to join the project**. During meetings, workshops and training we used **this “possibility language”**. Every time we met others, we made it clear that we wanted to talk about possibilities and opportunities, to find the best possible ideas which could contribute to the publication. We did this, for example, in the way we solved problems, **by focusing with others** on finding the best and by giving space to express our feelings and to share other’s feelings. We were also not afraid to ask for help and were congruent in actions and thoughts. By demonstrating this, others were encouraged to act in the same way and contributed in constructive ways. I strongly believe that this has strengthened the change process.

By being *in relation* throughout the process, an atmosphere of hope and trust was created among the participants. There was an openness when meeting each other, and when sharing (and appreciating) thoughts and ideas. People experienced that they didn’t need to agree with everything said, but the openness created in some way a growing atmosphere in which differences were accepted. This was quite different from what people usually had experienced. They experienced this new kind of working together as positive and constructive. During the activities and in evaluations they expressed many times how different this new approach was, than what they were used to. The way activities were constructed made it easy for people to bring in their knowledge, and to share this in open and appreciative ways with others. **People were invited to be *in relation* with others.**

These actions were often forms of dialogical and collaborative practices. In these practices I observed **growing openness and respect and mutual understanding, emotions which were shared and understood. Pride, trust and enthusiasm were by-products of these processes.** People were open to others in sharing their hopes and dreams without hesitation. There were no discussions about right and wrong. **Willingness to be in service for the other, or to be in service for the goal of the project,** increased rapidly.

The fact that we visited **all** districts showed the local people that we were interested in *the other*, that we wanted to hear, and above all **wanted to appreciate all these different voices** throughout the country, and publish them in the book. This was different from what they were used to because, in most previous change processes in Suriname, only important persons in the main city Paramaribo were heard, often the so called experts, an elite group. Now, in the *I Believe in You* process, people saw that we really wanted to hear their voices. They didn't need to come to Paramaribo, but we visited them in the districts. **This idea of recognition**, seen by others as important, appreciating every single idea or contribution, **resulted in people coming into action**. A new kind of energy for change, a mutual understanding and a deep feeling that we were all working together to make something good, started to grow. At one point I heard people suddenly talking about **"Our Book"** instead of *the other's* book. When facilitators came back from the district workshops, they were affected by this enthusiasm. On some occasions, participants asked them to come back for more workshops, or to be interviewed for radio and television stations. When I listened to and saw these programs, I noticed how touched everybody was by these new experiences. **I am convinced that an appreciative stance towards the other and the otherness contributed to sustainable change**. Al emphasizes these possibilities and positive values, which became visible in working appreciatively in this process.

Focus on future

Another issue coming out of this process is **the focus on the future**. One of the principles of Appreciative Inquiry is imagining the future. In the process, I experienced the enormous power of constructing images of our future realities. This possibility shift, of **future dreams**, invited participants **to learn how better to improvise and imagine new ways of going on or going forward together**. Stories of value, wonderment and joy were valuable resources. In using these positive stories, people were put into the motion of change. To focus on possibilities and opportunities was new for a lot of participants. As described in chapter 6, *Setting the stage*, the Suriname's educational context is weak, and is characterized by negative experiences and bad conditions. When we listened to language practices in the educational field, words such as these were used: frustration, de-motivation, tiredness, hopelessness, negativity. **Focusing on a better future** (whatever better would mean was filled in by the participants in sharing their stories) **energized participants**. People felt free to talk about their desired future, released from the past frustrations and failures of their educational system.

It was a new way for many of them to look at possibilities and opportunities. **It broke down the existing patterns of problem thinking**. This is remarkable. They were used to looking at their own context in negative and frustrated ways. This new and appreciative orientation was breaking walls down in some way. At the beginning of the AI workshops, people were hesitant, waiting in a comfort zone to see what would happen but, very quickly, when they started to understand the different approach of the conversations, they seemed to switch on to positive and constructive contributions, and they couldn't stop! The usual *problem* language practices became *possibility* language practices, in which people used words such as motivation, joy, happiness, hope, energy, and so on. **The pattern of the frustrating past was turned into imagining a hopeful future. The energy which came out of this attitude generated the mutual power for change**. What happened within the conversations was that, suddenly, people didn't talk about the enormous problems within Suriname education, and this decreased the negativism in meetings. **It was as if we had opened a window with fresh air, to breathe again**. Supportive to generative change was the basis behind

our process, and we used this positive future focus from beginning to end. People recognized it more and more as time went on.

Actions arising from this premise became better seen and understood. In the AI workshops people became more and more enthusiastic, until they couldn't even stop to talk with each other. During the presentation of the book in May 2009, people even started to cry when they were listening to, and watching the drama acts of, the students, who introduced the book to the public.

Focusing on possibilities

The whole project was constantly focused on possibilities. Appreciated Inquiry was therefore a good orientation to keep this focus. The mutual goal, to construct together the best future vision for primary education, based on positive experiences and positive images of the future, was an important focus to put people *into relation*. I had made a documentary of the experiences of the LEARN pilot (2003-2008), which had resulted in a documentary showing an existing local school working from these positive principles. In this way **we could show real images in the local context, of how the future could look** This documentary was made in such a way that it just shows an example and not the example of what it should be like. When we finished the book ("I Believe in You!") we made 10.000 copies of this documentary and included it with the book. By doing so, we could show the local people that from a frustrated experience in education, a new and positive future was possible.

Another example of focusing on the positive, was the **choice for positive and constructive, open minded facilitators**. We selected ten facilitators, who we already had seen working with groups. We had seen how they were *in relation* to the local people, and also saw and heard their way of expressing themselves. We, the coordination group, were convinced that selecting these positive facilitators would help to keep the positive stance within the process. What we observed that led us to view facilitators as positive and constructive was:

- their training backgrounds, within the Suriname education field for some years, which gave them their relational knowledge.
- their district experiences, which gave them their local knowledge of the "ins and outs"
- their openness to the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry
- their ideas and skills to activate people
- their ways of communicating (verbal and non verbal), inviting others to be part of the process, from the idea of equal voices.
- their active listening stance, and ways of giving attention to others (eye contact, warmth, openness, creativeness, appreciation, commitment)
- their ways of observing (and) facilitating group processes, and intervention by using improvisational art and flexibility
- contributing to the process with their new ideas, to create better AI workshops or actions within the process
- their ongoing readiness to solve problems, to get the best results, to come with solutions and possibilities
- the positive feedback from others of their way of working
- their existing networks of relationships, within the districts and the educational community

From a constructionist viewpoint, **the qualities of these facilitators must be seen as coming out of their joint actions with others, as relational by-products.** Therefore we observed these facilitators when working with others, to see what kind of by-products emerged. We saw that their connection to the others was built on mutual respect, mutual knowledge and positive feelings, which grew out of the relationships between facilitator and participants. All these facilitators were focused on constructing a desirable, positive future for Suriname's students.

The positive dream – the future's dream - of better education **bond people together.** It collectively activated positive feelings and hopeful dreams, for example, when we remembered dreams we all had had in our lives. Sharing this with others was almost like a party. **By carefully listening to the other** it was easy to recognize the different stories of others. **Recognition, being seen and heard, openness to the other and the otherness** (different stories, without the need to agree with them all) were **helpful features in building relationships.** I think that in this way we meet our selves *in relation* with the other. The facilitators of the workshops stimulated dialogical and collaborative practices. They were trained in AI, had helped to construct the district workshops in better ways, and could use the handouts to support the needed dialogical and collaborative practices.

Positive stance, the focus on future and possibilities using collaborative and dialogical practices, brought people into relation. Giving them voice and using their ideas started to built trust, hope and openness. Communicating and making results visible (in the end, the publishing of the book), were powerful features in this change process. By **creating positive conditions** we supported the process: finding financial resources; training facilitators in the appreciative stance; communicating with and inviting key players such as the ten district officers, MINOV staff, politicians; hiring special expertise such as the editors, the cineaste and the photographer; and buying equipment such as computers and software for *the Department of School Television and Radio.* **Using language practices,** in terms of hopes, dreams, future, possibilities and so, helped others to understand in which direction we wanted to go, and became a model for those who were not yet familiar with this. It motivated others to follow the process (and not only the leader) so in a way this "possibility language" attracted others to connect and work together for the desirable future.

We noted that if people were not kept well informed, miscommunication and misunderstanding could trouble the process, and threatened the relationships of the participants.

Actions, based on the ideas and feedback of participants, helped to build commitment and active involvement. Kroon (2009) writes in her book *Relation First*, how important it is, within change processes, to make choices for building positive relationships among others.

Building bridges between people from the start, and keeping these relationships healthy, is what made this change process more sustainable. It is not something that happened automatically; we had to permanently invest in it. An appreciative stance contributed to this.

Identifying positive key persons

By inviting fifteen key persons from civil society to talk about their dreams and hopes for Suriname's education, we **emphasized the local positive values**. The idea was to re-search for local knowledge about positive approaches to students. We wanted to identify those key persons who had already showed positive and constructive contributions to society in their private and working lives. In their stories, we hoped to find positive values which could be useful for our publication. The idea was to put these inspiring interviews in the book, as well on the additional DVD. When people read the book or watched the five-minute movie clips, **the fifteen different stories would help them to come out of their taken-for-granted stance and start to develop multiple perspectives**. "A conversational domain was built, where people can talk in different ways about the same old issues."(McNamee, 2008)

With the help of Henri Ori, we selected a group of fifteen well-known Suriname people, from a broad part of the community, to talk about their positive experiences in learning. The characteristics of these people, which qualify them to be called key persons, are as follows:

- they were all Suriname's inhabitants
- they already had shown an critical, constructive stance within either the Suriname society or the educational field.
- they all had a positive stance when looking at the future's possibilities
- they had shown positive contributions in society within their own life and working environment
- they had positive presumptions about change
- they were very aware of the bad conditions in education and the consequences for Suriname's future
- they had rich life experiences in failure and success, and knew how to overcome difficulties
- their critical thinking,

The positions of these fifteen key persons were varied. We invited writers, a clinical and psychological specialist, the chairman of the Board of the University, the director of the Advanced Teachers' College, educational advisors, the manager of the State Oil Company, the chairman of the Suriname's Business Association, the management director of 's Lands Hospitaal, and so on. All these people had their own **networks of relationships** wherein they played key roles. This helped to create a broad base of participation within society. Suriname society could be compared metaphorically with a village, where people know each other well. The relational lines between people are short. Because of the small population group in Suriname (450.000 people) there are many intertwined relationships between people. These relationships could be positive or negative. Often, people had pre-conceived ideas about others, because of these relationships. I experienced, after having worked for almost 6 years in the Caribbean, that **these societies seem to function based on these relationships**, rather than on competencies. Perhaps I could better discover this phenomenon while living in a foreign culture, because this was totally new for me. Now, being back in my home country, I can relate to this, having lived in developing countries myself!

Another aspect of **identifying key persons** is that it often **occurred spontaneously**. At informal times, when we were sharing ideas and concerns about the process, people started to come with names of persons who could help to solve issues. Loes Trustfull, head of the department of School Radio and Television came, with her ideas about making video clips and radio programs, and she introduced Norman Deekman, the cineaste who would prove to be of great help in making the documentary of the whole

process. Tille van Horenbeeck, VVOB's country manager in Suriname, could give names of key persons within the artist world. Henri Ori, the minister advisor, was of great help in connecting us with the Minister and the district officers. Whenever we needed extra expertise, the expanding participation helped us to find these key persons very easily. **As soon as they understood the appreciative stance of the process, they were committed to do their best.** One important characteristic which made them key persons, was that they had knowledge within their networks. Using these key persons (let's call them **the bridging persons**) helped us to connect more easily with many different people within society. Because of these expanding relationships, stories spread quickly throughout the society. People found it easy to make their way into the coordination group using phone, e-mail, personal visits and were more spontaneous in meetings. Yes, I will conclude that **identifying these positive key persons and adding them to the project strengthened this change process.**

To conclude:

- **The appreciative stance**
- **Focus on future, focusing on positive values**
- **Identifying positive key persons**

have been important features which strengthened this change process.

Inquiry and intervention are joined⁶⁹

Maybe we can see inquiry as a form of action where we try to find answers for our questions, new knowledge and understandings. Working with the ideas of AI made (it) clear to me that the first question we ask determines the next step we will take. In this way inquiry and intervention are left joined (blurred) and influence each other. In the I Believe in You! Process, inquiry meant that we constructed many actions in forms of small or large meetings, feedback rounds, interviews, visits, workshops, presentations and so on, to search for contents for the publication. Each action meant an intervention in the process, and out of these actions new ideas and insights, or new understandings, were found. The appreciative and future stance continuously influenced inquiry as well as interventions. With this, the process unfolded moment by moment.

In the coordination group, we had to find many answers during the whole process. None of the three of us had had any experience publishing a book before. When I look back on this, after finishing the whole process, I realize how little we knew about it. In one way we were coordinating the whole process, and in another way we were learning too -wanting to publish the book. **We didn't know and therefore couldn't predict how the whole process would evolve. This uncertainty pushed us – as I explained before – to**

⁶⁹ Inquiry is not seen as separate from outcomes or interventions. In a way they become intertwined, continuously influencing each other. In a way inquiry and interventions do become inter-actions, by doing this they are recognized as important features **in** the change process instead of **outside** of the change process. In the I Believe in You! process we will see that our inquiry lead to new answers (knowledge or understandings) for new actions. Inquiry and intervention became intertwined. This is where I experienced the power of acting in the change, improvising on insights unfolding, instead of being separated from the change process. Shamer (2010) talks about the field of attention which we should be aware of.

improvise, and to turn unexpected questions and issues into chances to find the needed answers. This **was an unfolding process.** Step by step we could take new actions, based on the knowledge and insights we gained. An open stance and appreciative orientation, combined with the expanding network of participants, helped us to inquire about, and to find, the necessary answers.

Some examples of these actions are:

Inviting Henri Ori, the Ministers advisor to join the coordination group. By doing this **we could inquire into the formal system to find the right answers.** We had questions such as: How can we involve MINOV in this process? Who are the important key players within the system? What is their vision about education and the future vision? What do they think of this process? How can we deal with situations in which some of the key players expressed negativity? How can we connect with these persons? What important documents do we need? Who do we need to invite for the feedback rounds? And so on. The answers found helped us to construct new initiatives.

Inviting the facilitators to organize the district workshops helped us to reconstruct the set up of these workshops with their knowledge. Questions arose such as What could improve the set-up of the workshops? How can we construct our interview protocol, based on the Appreciative Inquiry thought, in a way people understand? Do the exercises stimulate people to participate actively? Which people are important to invite? How do we reach them? And which logistic arrangements do we need to make? Who do we need to organize this?

- Finding Suriname's artists. How can we connect with Suriname's artists? Who can help? What will be the criteria to choose those who we want to invite? Where can we find these people? What is their background? Who can introduce us to them?
- Henri Ori helped us to connect with (the fifteen people we were looking for). The insights coming out of these interviews were helpful to construct the vision of the book. It also helped to find answers for questions we had. Such as: How can we involve others? What is necessary to make this process a success story in this local community?
- During the district workshops, participants were **using an interview protocol**, based on the ideas of Appreciated Inquiry. These protocols acted also as interventions, because they helped to fine-tune the stance upon finding more possibilities and opportunities.
- When we visited the meeting of the District Officers in Groningen, again, **this appreciative stance in questioning helped to invite** the officers to find the answers we needed. We asked: How can we organize these workshops better in your districts? Where can we find locations for the workshops? How can we organize transport? Who should we involve? Can you help to connect us with all these people? The appreciative stance, in being willing to work together to create the best result, influenced the next steps to be taken.
- Working with the printer, I experienced the traditional, or usual way of setting out a manuscript. In working together on a weekly basis, we found answers in how to illustrate and design the book to show the positive stance by using colors (the rainbow as metaphor), pictures, and different lettering. In this collaboration there was, after some months, a turning point in which Harold and his colleagues started to design the book in the way that suited us.
- When Loes Trustfull came in with the ideas of making a radio program, we collaborated together. The main question was, How do we want to construct these programs to show the appreciative stance? The idea arose to interview local people, to use their local language, and to weave this into the program with music. In doing so, the next step for Loes was to connect

with local radio workers, who could identify and invite *those to be interviewed*. Loes asked me to write the script based on the publication. In writing this script, we developed an interview protocol based on the AI ideas, searching for the positive. After a few months, Loes showed me her results in the form of five programs translated in six languages.. She was very proud and happy to show me this.

- We were working through the night at the last, on the documentary of the process, with Norman Deekman, the cineaste. We sat together and examined the many hours of film we had made, choosing clips which would illustrate the process in the best way. His technical knowledge, his local knowledge of Suriname's society combined with all the situations he had been, together with my knowledge of the AI orientation, helped to find the right answers to design this documentary. Norman knew also persons we could use for the under voice in the documentary.
- Organizing feedback rounds, to inquire into meanings of others, helped us to fine-tune the content of the book, but also gave us many insights as to how to modify the process.

The inquiry, based on this appreciative stance, helped us to find the needed answers to design the next steps of this process. Because we were *in relation* with all these people, we found their answers. From many formal and informal conversations, **we learned a lot about how people were operating in this process, about how people view their own communities, and about how people wanted to proceed together in this change process.**

With this knowledge, we could design the steps to be taken. Using **the appreciative stance as (an) under layer affected our inquiry**, and was an important intervention. It is also here where I experienced that inquiry and intervention were closely intertwined *IN* the process. In using this awareness, the actions could be designed step by step during the unfolding of the process. Here I saw the power of it, using insights *in and during* the process instead of *before or after* the process. The traditional way of detailed planning often focuses before the process begins, trying to describe every step to be taken and to detect risks which could appear. It also often focuses on planning evaluation forms, at the end or in the middle of the process. By doing so we could miss many chances to fine-tune the process in the moment which would make the process more powerful. Our focus, in the traditional way of planning, is on prediction and control. The open approach of *I Believe in You!* and the unknown future pushed us into this moment-by-moment approach, where inquiry and intervention were joined *or* combined.

Gergen's thoughts on action are interesting - he does not think of action by itself, but of joint action within processes. Somewhere in the process, new and shared meanings and understandings were created. We used our history of relationship to get our vocabulary of action and supplement. That's mutual. Gergen calls this the dependency of the future unfolding. Meaning is subject to continuous refashioning. It never stops. It always continues. **We do not have this in control, although we often think we do.** We need to see dialogues as special kinds of relationships in which change, growth and new understanding are fostered.

Careful questioning and careful listening⁷⁰

Within the process, we organized many dialogical and collaborative practices. In chapter 5, I explained the character of these practices. In this section, I will give some examples of these practices where careful questioning and listening were basic features. When I apply this to change processes, I realize **that careful listening and questioning overall contributed and strengthened this change process**. To be heard and seen is a fundamental feature in participative change work. As soon as this is disturbed, it affects the way in which we are *in relation* with *the other*. In this section we look closer at:

- **the dialogical practices**
- **the collaborative practices**

We looked at what people did in these practices and how it affected the change process.

Dialogical and collaborative practices

Careful listening and questioning were basic actions in these practices. By doing so during the whole process, it helped to understand *the other*, to really meet and relate to the other. McNamee (2008a) explains, from the constructionist philosophy, the emphasis *on what people do together – we call that communication*. Communication must therefore not only be seen as verbal actions, in which we talk with one another. The most important aspect of any communication is the interactive moment. It is the moment when we influence each other by being *in relation*. There is no described route towards a pre-determined goal in this moment, but an openness to the possibilities that emerge within the interactive moment. McNamee (2008) explains that in **good communication we are more attentive to what we are doing together**, we are **open to the diverse understandings** which are the by-product of co-ordinations among participants. Although we may think we know what will come out of our conversation, we can never predict it. **“Meaning that emerges within the interaction, is always open to further supplementation and thus to construction of new understandings.”** (McNamee, 2008a, p. 3) I think that when we are more attentive to what we are doing together and which by-products are coming out of it, we contribute more to our change processes. In constructing these new understandings, we can re-connect with each other. This does not mean we needed to agree with everything the other says or means. But on many occasions I have experienced that as soon as this openness towards differences has been built in appreciative ways, the differences don't seem so big anymore.

By creating open settings, there were more possibilities for giving voice to all participants. They helped people to be recognized and seen. It seemed that our approach, the AI approach, helped to stimulate a sense of personal safety, openness, curiosity to the other and the otherness, and thus to interact with each

⁷⁰ *The questions we ask will lead us to the answers we are looking for. Being aware of the influence our way of questioning has on the change process, we will start changing our ways of questioning, realizing where they lead us to. Careful listening is as I see it, more than just listening using your ears. It is a way of active or emphatic listening in which the other(s) are seen, felt and heard and by this fully understood. In the I Believe In You! process we will see the strength of this theme in the many dialogical and collaborative practices. This careful questioning and listening contributed in establishing relationships, which again strengthened the change process a lot.*

other. The social constructionist literature speaks of the importance of creating situations where *dialogue* takes place. It's through dialogue that people can build (new) **relationships give voice to their own meaning**, and simultaneously **appreciate** the meaning of the others. **Bridging differences** in a constructive and positive way can, in the end, help us to create better futures. The settings we organized to invite people to feel safe to speak, to be recognized and seen, and to meet differences were characterized by features such as:

- **Building a positive climate when opening the sessions.** By positive I mean building an atmosphere where differences were appreciated, and not discussed in a sense of true or false, wrong or right. By drinking coffee or tea together at the beginning of the session to give space for informal opening chats between little groups. To welcome people, greeting and shaking hands at the beginning. By doing little exercises together. Or to play soft background music of local artists during the start, the breaks, and at the end of a session.
- Telling them in the opening speech of the workshop or meeting that they were really **welcome** and that their contributions were of great importance for the success of the process and achieving the best end-product.
- By participating in, and using stories of experiences **to connect within, their own context**, which they would easily recognize. Starting with questions such as: What are your expectations of this meeting or workshop? What would you like to contribute? and sharing the answers with all participants gave many insights to adapt the workshop to the participants' expectations.
- The facilitators told their own personal stories at the beginning of the district workshops as an introduction of the workshops. These stories worked like metaphors and enabled the facilitators to visualize their own experience using anecdotes in **ordinary, everyday language. It made it all comprehensible and understandable.**
- **Being a participant of the process**, not acting as the expert. By this I mean showing and telling that we all **have valuable knowledge** in forms of experiences, stories, feelings, insights, and lessons learnt, but also the pains felt by bad experiences. Emphasizing that we were all experts and inviting them to be equally responsible, resulted in a good workshop.
- Giving space for **stories, narratives.** With **open questions** about positive experiences in life, work or learning, we invited them to share their stories. We used **global questions** which encouraged people to fill in with their own stories. Each participant could choose what and how to tell their own story, but also what they didn't want to share; there was no pressure or strong guidance in any one direction.
- We set up practices **such as small group conversations** to exchange ideas and meanings, which increased the sense of personal safety. In the beginning they chose their own partners, but later in the meeting or workshop we started to mix up the whole group, and stimulated communication among many of them. We invited people to meet others, to form groups and learn from each other. Participants worked with interview protocols, based on Appreciative Inquiry. So the **prepared questions** structured the interview and the content, and guided in the direction of the desired atmosphere.
- As explained earlier, we chose positive facilitators, who were people and relational oriented.
- Connecting to the **awareness of the Suriname contexts**, while trying to avoid miscommunication often caused by different (political) agendas. In a way, dealing with the particular aspects within the Suriname (political) culture.

It felt safe to speak and work with each other in these **small groups** instead of talking to the large group. The participants were **instructed to listen carefully to the others'** personal stories, not to criticize, analyze or judge these stories, but to hear them with an open mind and heart. Participants expressed in the evaluations at the end of the day that they left these meetings or workshops with happy feelings, with positive energy, in the notion that they all wanted to create the same dream. Interestingly, Suriname's society is characterized with all kind of differences. We knew we would work with all these differences, so an appreciative stance was a good choice to deal with this. Giving open space and **appreciating everybody's voice and differences** created a safe environment to speak and share. People could recognize each other better, were invited to talk with each other by telling their concerns, their hopes and dreams, their positive experiences focused on achieving the best. New to most of the people was not to talk in problem language, but in **possibility language**. In the beginning it felt weird, but as soon as they started, people got more and more excited to talk about the positive future and their experiences. People liked to talk about their experiences and to share this with others. **The mutual base was their hope** for better education, but also their awareness of the weak conditions of Suriname education at the present. In sharing all this together and in the growing awareness that we were working in the whole country with the same focus and methods in our workshops, mutual understanding was growing. Views didn't seem so different in the end but, appeared to be more equal than people ever thought. Recognizing the concerns for Suriname students and their future and the meaning of education, strengthened mutual ties.

Careful listening and questioning was a way to appreciate all these different voices and to commit, or relate, participants into this change process. It created and improved relationships between people. It helped to create better understandings. Gergen (2003) says that this is the challenge of dialogue as a transformative medium, not just to exchange views, but moving beyond alienated co-existence to a more promising way of going forward together. Being included was a crucial key. When people feel included, respected, listened to, etc, they are willing to work hard and work together – even if they disagree.

How did this process open the possibility for mutual understanding without turning into a 'gripe session' where everyone just blamed and complained?

We emphasized the relational approach: we – the coordination group – wanted to create this vision together and not as a group of individuals who were very enthusiastic and skilled enough to do it by themselves. **We emphasized that every-one's voice was essential in the process and the end product.** We even expressed this in the design of the book by including in it the names of all those who had contributed in whatever way to the process. Mutual understanding was stimulated by telling stories, by sampling these stories, and by using them in the publication and documentary (the narrative approach).

Constructing in conceptual and non-conceptual performances⁷¹

Hosking & McNamee (2006) explain that realities and relations are constructed in **conceptual performances** which we call language practices, such as discussions, presentations, meetings, interviews and dialogues, as well as in **non-conceptual performances such as** art, music, poetry and drama. The latter have not been explored enough to see how they may contribute and affect change processes. In this section I will first focus on the conceptual performances, then go on with the non-conceptual performances, and illustrate each with an example of how it contributed to this change process.

I now understand the significant impact of these non-conceptual performances in strengthening the change process. Whereas the conceptual performances have the tendency to focus on language practices, where the intellect has its main influence, the contribution of the non-conceptual performances gives voice also to body and heart (emotions). In this way it seems to me that **using both kinds of performances**, within the Suriname's change process, added extra value in the form of more possibilities. I will briefly describe some of them, trying to show their value to this change process.

- **Conceptual performances, formal and informal**
- **Non conceptual performances**

Conceptual performances, formal and informal

The conceptual performances in the *I Believe In You!* process can be seen as forms of language practices. As McNamee (2008a, 2008b) has already said, good communication can be seen as ways of doing things together. When I analysed the process to investigate these conceptual performances, I divided them into the formal language practices and the informal language practices. **The formal language practices**, as I see it, are consciously constructed performances within a certain reality, which are influenced by the cultural traditions concerning how we are used to relating with each other (how we communicate). Within change processes, we often see these language practices in forms as prepared meetings, official interviews, organized feedback rounds and thoughtful presentations. In most cases a small group will have designed how these formal performances will be constructed and put into reality.

The informal language practices can be seen as the more spontaneous, unprepared moments, in which **people meet each other in a non-constructed or un-prepared reality**. Examples in the process were, the waiting moments when people came into the workshop, the conversations while dining together, and even moments at the short toilet stops, where people have their little chats. These spontaneous moments, which

⁷¹ People do perform within change processes in many different ways. Hosking & McNamee (2006) outlines in her work the conceptual and non conceptual performances. The conceptual performances are language practices such as discussions, dialogues, presentations, meetings, interviews, debates and so on. Whereas the non conceptual performances come from music, art or dance. McNamee (2008a) explained that in fact all performances are ways of communicating, or forms of being put in relation. In the *I Believe In You !* process we will see both performances and their contributions to the change process.

occurred often in this change process, are often overseen and not given much attention. Still, we do have the tendency to mainly focus on the formal moments, and to interpret the content of the language practices as the truth. Often, the content of the informal practices gives us important information about how we really experience the change process. It is also here where body and heart come in.

In one of the workshops we evaluated the content of the workshop by use of official questionnaires. These questionnaires were designed by us to collect important information about the participants' meanings. These questionnaires guided the participants into advanced answers. The second day we didn't evaluate the workshop in this way, but suddenly, at the end, some of the participants were eager to take the microphone to share their experiences with others. The difference, with this second approach, was that we all could **sense the body, mind and heart expressions**, in which these participants gave insight, in their personal experiences. In this way, the information coming out of this second evaluation was even richer with information. It is interesting to discover that these formal language practices were constructed consciously and before needed, for specific purposes, whereas the informal language practices often occurred spontaneously, and were constructed within the moment. **Both formal and informal languages affected the change process in their own ways.**

Formal language practices

In analyzing *the I Believe in You process!* I found the following formal language practices: formal meetings such as the two weekly meetings of the coordination group, meetings within MINOV, UNICEF and VVOB, and mixed meetings with members of these three organizations), staff meetings such as meetings of the districts' officers, group meetings, discussions, feedback rounds, debates, one-to-one interviews, presentations, workshops, dialogical practices, collaborative practices, and reading and discussing official documents together. These all are examples of conceptual performances. I will give an illustration of one of these examples, as to how they were constructed and what effect they had on the change process.

The feedback rounds as an example of a formal conceptual performance

During the process, we organized several group meetings which we called feedback rounds. Our idea was that here space could be given for constructive feedback, which could strengthen the content of the publication and also would stimulate the commitment of the participants towards the process. The first time we organized the feedback rounds, there was little response. Participants were invited to the rounds by an official letter, also containing the concept publication, from the Director of Education. When we first met, not everyone had really read the content, and some of them didn't even attend this meeting. When we started to talk, the feedback given was literally flying in all directions, and was not always useful. We were slightly disappointed. When we discussed this experience within the coordination group, we tried to review this performance to learn what had happened. Henri Ori's knowledge of the local traditions helped to change these feedback rounds. What we discovered was that inviting people by letter, and asking them to read the attached content, didn't stimulate them to attend the meeting or to read the content. For them, the whole process was a long way from the program in which they had not yet participated. We **had forgotten to communicate directly** about the process and the content and **to invite them in a more personal way**. From a constructionist view, one could say that they were not put *in relation* to the process and content in the right way. Later, we designed a guideline with some prepared and open questions, which would help the

participants to better understand what we asked them, and to know what type of feedback we needed. We also built in some reading time, when we organized the next feedback rounds, to create an opportunity to read and respond the content more easily together with others. Talking about their suggestions to improve the publication in an appreciative way strengthened their *being in relation* with the process.

These feedback rounds were types of formal conceptual performances: people were officially invited to join the organized and prepared feedback meeting, in which we shared their meanings and opinions about the book. By constructing the workshops in other ways, using personal invitations, giving more information about the purpose and use of their important feedback, using a simple questionnaire as guidance, giving some reading time within the official meeting and last, but not least, constantly inviting them in an appreciative way, encouraged commitment to *process* as well as to *content*. People understood the whole project better and could give their voice a place somewhere in the process.

Formal conceptual performances do have their function within change processes. When their approach is to appreciate different voices, to carefully listen and question the meaning of others and to take this seriously by using the shared insights coming out of it – in other words to cooperate together in respectful ways by being *in relation*, then these formal performances do strengthen the change process. **By being in relation, the change process became more sustainable: all contributions were in some way heard and appreciated.**

On the other hand, these formal performances have a tendency to separate the different groups, such as the leaders and the followers, by using individualistic orientation (here and there, me and you and so on) and they can weaken the change process. From the outside, everything may seem to be okay, leaders think they know what their followers really think, but in reality they don't. The danger is in this case, that these leaders will guide the change process into directions they think is the right one, but the question is: for *who* is it right?

Informal language practices

In our process, there were many informal moments between people, which **occurred spontaneously and were unprepared for**. Examples of these informal practices were: periods during meal times, walking together before the workshop or meeting started, the time when airplanes were delayed and people had to wait, moments when we visited our printer, drank coffee, and leisure times after the meetings or workshops. At these times and others, we talked about our dreams and wishes, and there were also many unseen and unheard chats when 8.500 books were delivered at schools and organizations. People were surprised by the colorful publications, which included their own personal stories. Because there was an increasing number of people joining the process, we expected that an increasing number of informal chats would be going on between people.

The **informal language practices gave us important information** about this change process and how people experienced it. I will illustrate these informal language practices with an example.

The district workshops, an example of an informal language practice

When we organized the district workshop in Sipaliwini, which is a remote district in the hinterland of Suriname, the facilitators had to use little airplanes to get there. Due to the weather conditions, the planes left very late in the morning but, in the meantime, the districts officer had organized boats which collected the people living along the river. Fortunately, the facilitators knew some key persons living in the district. By mobile phone they arranged some simple food and drinks arrangements for the participants, who had arrived earlier and had to wait for some time till the facilitators arrived. Food is an important element in the Suriname's traditions. When the facilitators arrived at the workshop spot, they found the participants in a happy and appreciative mood, ready to start the workshop. During the time they had waited, they had started their informal chats, getting to know each other a little bit better, being *in relation*.

Informal moments can contribute to the change process enormously. Within these periods, participants seem to lose the formality of the workshop, and in the informal, safe and relaxed atmosphere they more easily express their thoughts about the workshops, the process and its content. I used these times to listen carefully to what people talked about I used the knowledge coming out of this to fine-tune the content and approach to the needs of the participants. By listening to and appreciating these informal voices, people felt even more heard and seen, with benefit to the process.

Non-Conceptual performances

Hoskings & McNamee's (2006) view, of the construction of change processes in highlighting non-conceptual performances, is interesting. By adding non-conceptual practices to the change process, our way of interaction changed and a different energy and understanding came out of these actions. We also constructed realities in other ways than language practices in formal or informal ways, namely by means of arts, music, drama and poetry. These non-conceptual performances constructed realities and relations in ways other than by talking. The interesting idea of using these non-conceptual performances helped us to **decenter the body and mind split. We included the body, mind and heart in our performances.** By doing this we **added new dimensions** to the change process.

In *the I Believe in You!* Process, I noted the following non conceptual performances:

- art/drawings, such as the use of art work in the publication; drawing techniques in the workshops, imaging or visualisation exercises of the desired future
- music, such as creating songs, singing songs, presenting songs, using music as background, or during introduction, of workshops, to create an atmosphere
- language, such as in writing poetry, storytelling, raps, reading poems, using and finding metaphors, mind mapping
- dance, such as presenting the book with dance and music, by *the Art Lab* and their students, and spontaneous dance moments, when we turned the music on to energize people in the workshops
- media, such as film, tv, radio, internet - such as the documentaries of the making of the book and the desired future, video clips, radio programs, electronic newsletters, e mail, television programs such as talk shows, and the DVD which accompanied the book
- gaming – such as energizers used in the workshops

I will illustrate these non-conceptual performances with an example.

Developing the DVD, an example of non-conceptual performances

In June 2007, at the very beginning of this process, the coordination group felt that this process was going to be a very special experience. Almost from the beginning, we all agreed that we should film all kinds of moments during this process, not really knowing at that time what we would do with it in the end. Loes Trustfull, head of the department of School Radio and Television, was helpful in finding a committed film maker, Norman Deekman. At every single moment in the process, he or one of his colleagues were ready to join us with the camera. At the end of the process, we collected hundreds of hours of movie. It was then that the idea arose to make a documentary, to add to the final publication, which would show the Suriname's community the process of the making of the book. Being Dutch, I knew that in this way we could show that the procedure was not a solely European, white man's affair. **The community (could see) that using an appreciative stance would enable sustainable educational change in Suriname, in spite of negative experiences and conditions.**

In the meantime, we had also filmed fifteen interviews with the selected key persons from society. We decided to edit the one and a half hours of film back to six minutes, for each interview. By adding them to the DVD, it allowed for the readers to view these interviews.

At the end of the LEARN project (2003-2008), I developed a documentary about pupil-centred education. This documentary helped thousands of teachers to envision a positive, pupil-centred education, which had been filmed in their own environment. So, by the end of this process, we had created a DVD showing the making of *I Believe in You!*, the fifteen interviews, and the documentary of pupil-centred education. Later, when all of this was published, we used this material for making new PR in forms of television clips, and radio programs. We even bought broadcasting time from the different local stations, to broadcast these films frequently over several months. Our collaboration with Norman Deekman was special. We had built a strong relationship during these two years. On the last day we worked till late in the morning to finish the documentary, ate our roti (Indian food), drank our coke, and exchanged formal and informal chats, as friends.

The power of the non-conceptual performances in this process was that **new dimensions** came into the change process. These new dimensions **gave voice to body and heart expressions**, and helped the participants to better understand the process, as well as the content and **stimulating creativity** of new or shared ideas. In a way, these non-conceptual performances helped us all to be connected, **to be *in relation***.

A deep ecological approach⁷²

Meaning and sense giving is the result of social constructions between actors, and in this, social construction has different meanings in different contexts. It is created in the moment, of being *in relation* with others within certain contexts. In the ecological approach, it becomes clear that there are no single innovations but, within (educational) change processes, **we have to cover unplanned change and multiple innovations at different levels to make the change sustainable.** In *the I Believe in You!* process we **worked with many levels or layers** within society: students, teachers, members of Ministry Departments, NGO's, politicians, key persons of society, artists and so on, within different environments. With **relational responsibility** we made it clear that we are all part of the constructed reality of the educational field in Suriname, and that we all have our own responsibilities

Different levels of responsibility

The processes of teaching and learning occur in the daily work in the classrooms. It's in this primary process, in the relationships between teacher (teaching), student (learning) and classroom (a powerful environment) where development of *both* teacher and student takes place. I want to emphasize *both*, from the ecological and relational thought, as it is within the interchange between teachers and student where learning of both takes place. It is therefore no single or isolated happening in the student. We even should be aware that as Mitchell & Sackney (2009) state, we do not have control of the learning processes of others, although we have this headstrong thought that we can. We can create conditions and stimulate development by certain actions or performances but it is, in the end, the learner self who will decide what, when and how to learn. In *the I Believe in You!* process, as well as in the content of this book, we worked on this issue of **relational responsibility** and **interrelations**. The ecological approach meant that we tried to approach every level within the educational system, and even to broaden this, by working with people who were not active users of this system. By this we touched on **the natural and constructed environment**, which Capra refers to.

In this section I will talk about:

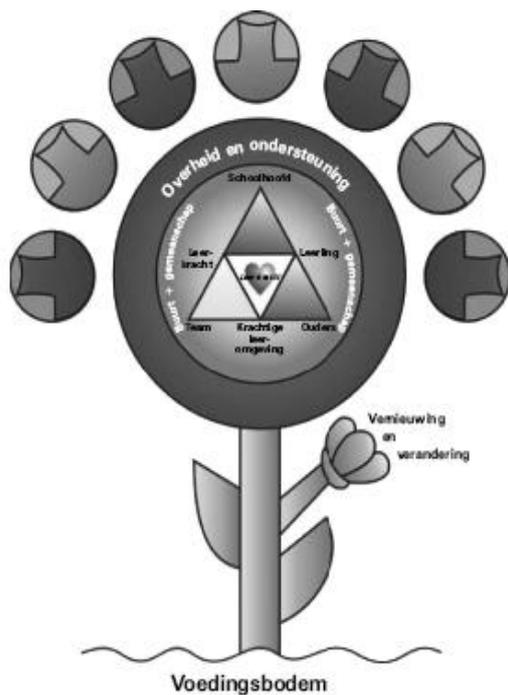
- **Working with different layers**
- **The chain of responsibility**
- **The natural and constructed environments**
- **What contributes to the change process?**

⁷² It may be clear that in contrast to the mechanic approach, the ecological approach tries to see change as a complex whole acting and reacting in certain contexts and times. I refer to Capra's who states that the ecological thought is rooted "in the appreciation of the totality of patterns, relationships, actions, interactions, and mutual influences that emerge among and between people and the natural and constructed environments in which they live."(Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p xi) The relational thought helps us to understand that everything is connected and by this influences each other in an on-going, dynamic process. It is in these inter-relations that each organization constructs or creates its own meanings. This happens by putting a simple question as "when more of the same seems (not) to work well, how can we together develop the other? Naess (2008) is quite simple by stating that deep ecology needs to ask deep questions.

Working with different layers

We worked within the following layers:

Nano level	Students
Micro level	Students, teachers and environment Parents
Mezo level	School leaders School boards Supporting department of the Ministry of Education, such as such as <i>the department of School advisory and School Inspection</i>
Macro Level	The NGO's and international organizations The Directorate of Education The Minister of education The Caricom



In the book we visualised this with **the bromtchi model** (the flower model) in which the foci of all involved are *in relation*. This **relational understanding** should support the power of growth of our youth. It is explained in the book, that all participants in this web have their own responsibility to actively support the development of our students.

In the *I Believe in You!* process we worked:

At nano level (the student and the learning process)

We influenced the nano level students' learning, by using the knowledge coming out of the LEARN project (2003-2008), as well as from other experiments of school improvement in Suriname. After five years of piloting, we could show the Ministry of Education that using the pupil-centered approach, in which students' well-being and commitment to learning influenced the results in positive ways. **This new knowledge, which came out of local experiments**, was an important basis for *the I Believe In You! Process* to build on. We presented the outcomes of a five year scientific study to the broad public, and invited the press to inform the local community. Furthermore, we developed a documentary of this LEARN pilot, **to portray a real situation within the Surinam** Educational field using a new approach. There was no possible doubt that it would work in Suriname: it worked and we could show it! This documentary was based on the ideas of Appreciated Inquiry: envisioning the possible, positive and desirable future. We copied 10.000 DVD's with this documentary and included one in each book. Later, we used these images from the DVD in the different workshops. We organized the broadcasting of this documentary on various television stations in Suriname.

From an ecological orientation, it is clear that the student himself has the responsibility to be active in learning, but also that he needs supporting 'others,' such as parents, the teachers, the school leaders, and the Minister of Education, to better succeed in this.

When the book was published and spread out over the whole country, our facilitators started with new workshops to assist understanding the philosophical stance (*I Believe in you!*), as well as to strengthen different teaching skills, which would influence students' learning at the nano level.

Micro level (the classroom and school)

The Nano level is connected with this micro level. The student in the classroom is related to the teacher, his fellow students and the class environment. In this dynamic of going forward together, a process that is supportive to learning should occur. Indirectly, the school leaders influence this process, and research (see Marzano's work 2007) has shown that school leaders play an important role in affecting this learning process. They set the conditions for structure and culture within schools, organize materials, teachers and team work to produce the best result together, with the rest of the school community. We have seen in chapter 4, *Time for a new recipe*, that there is an increasing awareness, that community involvement has positive effects on the outcomes of learning in schools.

At micro level we invited students, teachers, school leaders and parents to participate in the district workshops, to give voice to their understanding of first-class education. We selected the best of many anecdotes, and gave them a prominent place in the publication. As I wrote earlier, the people in more remote districts were not used to being listened to and questioned. Now they were, suddenly, important. Many times we confirmed the importance of their voices. In the final publication, we put their names to the quotes. The last pages of the book were filled with more than 350 names, of the people who contributed to the process. When the book was published, people were proud of having their names in the book and started to talk about it. In this small community, they also recognized the voices of others who they knew

well. A selected group of teachers, school leaders, parents and members of school boards, were invited for feedback rounds to talk about the conceptual content of the book.

Mezo level (the supporting system outside of schools)

Mezo level is what we call the supporting system outside of the schools. In Suriname, the “mezo level” consists of, mainly, the different departments of education, such as school inspection, school advisory, curricula development, teachers’ colleges, school boards, parents’ participation organizations, NGO’s and international donors. From the ecological and relational orientation, schools at micro level are connected to this mezo level. Educational reform is complex, and there are multiple innovations going on at all levels. Therefore, schools need sufficient qualitative support.

We found it important to invite members of the different organizations and departments to join workshops and feedback rounds. Our idea was (that) the more this group were involved, the higher the chance would be that they would be *in relation* with the process, instead of separated from the process. Our goal was to implement the vision after publication. We needed this group to stand behind the ideas and support them with their own specialities. In doing things together, such as by using dialogues and collaborative approaches, we could achieve our goal with this project. We achieved not only publishing a book, but also generating a growing process of awareness and commitment.

Macro level (the government, policy etc)

At macro level, the government strongly influenced the educational system at many levels. Developing policy, financing schools, strengthening their own departments, quality control, working together with international donors like UNICEF, VVOB and the Dutch Embassy, and so on can contribute, when it is done well, to the education of students in their class rooms.

We invited members at these macro levels to our presentation of the results of this process, to inform them about the Appreciated Inquiry approach, and to involve them in discussions about the desired vision. We used the existing official documents and long term planning of the Ministry to show that we would use local knowledge and ideas to create this vision. Furthermore, Henri Ori, the ministers’ advisor, was involved in the process from its early beginnings. Ruben Soetosenojo, the head of the Directorate of Education, was closely committed to this project and, like the Minister of Education, supported the whole idea of the project.

Our hope was to construct a vision, in service of the Ministry of Education, which would be placed in the government’s policy, to make it official. When we succeeded in this, the vision could be used as guidelines for all involved in the educational reform. Suriname, as a member of the Caricom, in the representation of the Minister and his staff, could show their new vision to other partners abroad. Therefore, the book was translated into English. Members of this organization became curious about this unique product from Suriname, and started to ask questions. By answering them, the Ministry became more and more committed to this new concept.

Relational responsibility

All these levels are, in the ecological view, related to each other. In different ways, they influence each other and also the learning of students in their daily classrooms. In every meeting we had – with the facilitators, the districts officers, the departments, schools, parents, NGO's, donors, MINOV staff and so on - explained and communicated this relational responsibility.

On May 8 2009, we proudly presented the book to the community. Six students from *The Artlab*, who had studied music, dance and drama, showed their relational responsibility: the different students represented all the different persons of the mentioned levels, in their dance. The main role of Minister was played by the Minister himself. The book was passed from hand to hand, accompanied by dancing and singing and, when it finally reached the Minister of Education, the students shouted loudly, twice: *Minister do you believe in us! Minister do you believe in us!* That was a great and emotional moment.

Natural and constructed environments

Outside the educational field, people from civil society were also invited to presentations and workshops, and were interviewed in the same way as the fifteen selected interviewees. The ecological, or relational field, was in this way expanded by inviting people with all kinds of backgrounds, not only the educational one, into the districts' workshops (captains of villages, police officers, nurses, doctors, writers, psychologists, market women, entrepreneurs, fishermen, farmers and so on). The idea was to broaden the discussion, and with this, also the awareness of developing and imagining this new vision by using *possibility language*. We constructed environments in which different voices were appreciated and taken seriously. I also hoped to influence the natural environments. I was almost convinced that as soon as the book was spread out over the country, people would start to communicate with others about the book. By doing so, they influenced the natural environments through the constructed, educational ones. Teachers would come home and show this book to their partners, students, friends, and more communication would come out of it. And so it progressed. When, during a three-month period (May, June and July 2009), the different documentaries were shown at divers broadcasting stations, people started to talk even more about this project.

How did this ecological approach contribute to the change process?

Involving all these different layers, emphasising the relational responsibility, and giving space for people's voices by dialogical and collaborative approaches, showed that, from a constructionist view, we are all important and all related in some way to each other. Becoming aware of this phenomenon, and stimulating the understanding of what it means *to do or make things together*, contributed to the sustainability of the process. In the *I Believe process!* the continued emphasis on this relational responsibility helped participants to understand what it would mean within their own circle of influence. Of course, we need to be realistic here: hearing these ideas, and discussing them did not mean that they transformed their ideas immediately from the individualistic into the relational orientation. This process needs time, and needs to be continuously fed. It is only from a growing awareness, a deep understanding and interconnectedness, that we can shift our thinking, leaving our existing paradigms.

Failures, or difficult, missed opportunities in the process

Did everything proceed smoothly during the whole process? I can imagine that, while reading this analysis, these thoughts arise. The answer is no, not everything went smoothly and easily. As a coordinator, I had to be continually flexible within the complexity of this change process. Change processes are not fully structured, controllable and predictable as I discussed earlier. In the *I Believe in You! Process*, we knew our starting point and we knew our goal, but the path towards this goal was paved with many unexpected moments. I think this is, in fact, the nature of change processes. They never go exactly as you would like them to develop. From a constructionist stance, the process had to evolve, step by step, moment by moment. Each step was taken after careful listening and questioning, collecting knowledge from others, and by constructing knowledge through discussions and feedback.

We started within the coordination group, and the first problem we encountered was the difficulty of knowing which persons should be invited to write the content of the book. The advice of Henri Ori was to start writing concepts of the content of the book, and in this way it would be easier for others to support the writing. We divided the book into chapters, and the three of us started to write. At certain moments we invited others, such as teachers from the teachers' colleges, educational specialists, members of MINOV staff and departments and so on, to use these concepts as a basis for further writing. It was frustrating when the response was very low. People said that they would complete their writing tasks but in the end most of them didn't. The other risk was that we, the three of us, would act in isolation from each other. It could give the impression, at the end, that we had been the experts, and most of all that our target group would not feel, seen and heard; in other words, they would be *out of relation* with this end product. When we were far along with this writing process, new members were added to the coordination group. They were critical about the content. Although we had written 90% of the content, we decided to use their constructive remarks, and re-structured, rewriting the whole content, which took us two months extra. In several feedback rounds, we invited people to read and discuss the content critically. Again the same thing happened as once before, some of them read the manuscript, most of them didn't. People were, as I analyse this, not very related to the whole development of the book at that time. Sometimes, too, our instructions on how to give feedback were not well formulated.

To the final feedback round, we invited the most important key persons selected by Henri Ori. Based on these previous feedback rounds, we decided to visit these key persons, to bring them the concept document in pieces, and ask them to contribute to the book work. This seemed to help more. When we discussed the concept during a specially organized meeting, Henri Ori took the lead and asked the group for their feedback. Again, we saw great differences among these participants. Most of them had read the concept, and reacted with their voices. For some of them, criticisms were not based on the content of the book, but on their own emotions, and interpretations... they were not always constructive... It is here where the power play came in. Saying something just for the sake of saying it. Because of the small community, people knew each other. Especially when there was no trustful or respectful relation between one and the other, there was a kind of closing up in the conversation. Instead of being *in relation* with the other, some of the feedback persons started to give feedback from their individualistic position. In way they were at that moment isolated from the other.

In this, power play and politics played a role. When the process became more well-known, it became part of the political system. Some key players within the system tried to block the process by telling negative stories. The negative influence of politicians caused the process to stagnate by being absent when they were invited for meetings or workshops, delaying making decisions, or saying one thing and doing another. Sometimes they would openly tell different truths and have hidden agendas. Fortunately, in our coordination group, we had Henri Ori, who was a great advisor for us in how to deal with these things.

The logistic organization was enormous. When we saw that this was a big job, we decided to hire an extra logistic staff member to support the organization. Saskia Plein had a lot of work to do in contacting people, locations, restaurants and so on; the facilitators met many logistic little problems to be solved, but succeeded in solving the (difficulties) with the help of the local people in the districts.

When the group of participants expanded, I decided to write a two-weekly newsletter. The reason for doing this was to provide the group of participants with quick and reliable information about the progress of the process. By doing so it helped to keep involving other in the process. But, of course, these news letters were not always read by all of them. That was the situation with the MINOV staff, perhaps because they were more distanced from the process, or had too many other important things to do. On the other hand, people who did read these letters reacted spontaneously about the content, and came with new and interesting ideas.

It was interesting that, during the whole process, another big innovation program called B.E.I.P. (Basis Education Improvement Program) was going on. It was financed by the IDB in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The character of this Program was almost the opposite of our project and didn't lead to any success after five years of work. Some aspects were:

- lack of dedication and ownership by the “owners” (president of Suriname, political leaders, Program coordinator). Lack of political commitment, Saying yes, doing no.
- lack of social marketing to society. Society was poorly informed about this reform plan and didn't understand what the government wanted to construct. So people didn't understand the purpose and content of the BEIP program and started to speculate about the program using a lot of problem language.
- there had not been a good introduction of this program to the people in the educational field, the main players
- people of the educational field from all levels were not, or were hardly ever invited to be involved in the process. Often they even didn't know if there were activities (at all), or the invitations came too late.
- important members of vital departments of the Ministry of Education were hardly invited to participate in the process.
- too big a change program, with no little steps
- lack of capacities, expertise and knowledge
- there was a lack of vision
- the meaning or content of the program was like an empty box
- there were less dialogical and collaborative practices organized. A selected group, mainly from Paramaribo city were invited but few from remote areas. International donors like VVOB and UNICEF were seldom invited
- There was a lot of confusion in roles people played

- The program is based on problem solving instead of *possibility* approaches
- The coordination was weak, the *leaders* of the program were almost invisible

There was a long list of issues which weakened this BEIP change process, and what I realize now is their failure to put people into appreciative relationships. People were often not invited (to participate), there was no openness to their voices, contributions of others (such as VVOB and UNICEF) were not appreciated. The leaders and participants were continuously *out of relation*.

So after analyzing this process, where we are now?

When I put all the paragraphs in one list, the following is the result:

- **Knowing and influencing are joined**
Co-Creating meaning
Using existing (constructive) networks
Engaging in self reflexive and relational reflexive critique
- **Multiple, equal voices**
Expanding the domain of participation
Asking, Who is in control in the process?
Attempts to coordinate multiplicity and divers worldviews
Feedback in a constructive and 'respectful' way
- **Emphasize possibilities and positive values**
The appreciative stance
Focus on future and focus on possibilities
Identifying positive key persons
- **Inquiry and intervention are joined**
Finding new answers, unfolding the process step by step
- **Careful questioning and careful listening**
Dialogical practices
Collaborative practices
- **Constructing in conceptual and non-conceptual performance**
Conceptual performances
Non-conceptual performances
- **A deep ecological approach**
Working with the different levels
The relational responsibility
The natural and constructed environments
What does it contribute to the change process?

In the next chapter 8, I will reflect on this analysis. The main questions will be: where are we now? And what can I learn from this analysis when I try to understand (educational) change processes? With reference to this, I will also talk about how this all affects my present work as a educational consultant in Suriname, as well in the Netherlands. (Chapter 9)



Suriname, Hester Jonkhout

8

Stepping back What do we know now and how can we move forward?

Without trust, people are likely to close up, to keep to themselves. To even close ranks in cliques or special interest groups. Without trust, issues are seldom discussed and never resolved. Without trust, a school cannot improve and grow into the rich, nurturing micro society needed by children and adults alike. The reward of a trusting environment is immeasurable, yet the price of a lack of trust is dear.”

(Blase and Blase, 1994, p.20).

Introduction

The results from the analysis of *the I Believe In You! process* in the previous chapter were based on the Suriname's experiences in the specific context of the local educational field. The knowledge coming out of this reflection must be understood as "the product of particular communities, guided by particular assumptions, beliefs and values." (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 71) This knowledge must not be seen as the Truth, but rather, as constructed by the relevant community of knowledge makers, as one of the multiple realities we lived in. From a constructionist view I dissected this experienced reality rather than presenting it. By doing this, I try to understand how this particular social reality was constructed and what this means for generative change.

In this section I will "step back" by looking closer at the analysis described in the previous chapter, and how the knowledge coming out of it might contribute to the educational change work in more sustainable ways. In chapter 2, *Business as usual*, I started with the Chinese saying, *the ingredients change, but the soup remains the same*, ending with chapter 4, *Time for a new recipe*. I concluded that if we really want to deal more successfully with tomorrow's questions of the educational field, we need to work together in joint action. We need a different recipe and a different way of cooking! The most overlooked dimension of leading the educational change is, in my opinion, the relational one. It is here where Weatley (2006, p. 25) says that the issue of dynamic connectedness is important. This made it clear to me that a relational constructionist view of the educational change processes can add new possibilities and ways to establish change more successfully. In the analysis, I expressed the hope that the paradigm shift towards the relational orientation might help us to meet future challenges and complexity in better and more successful ways.

So the main question at this point of the dissertation is: What do we do know now and how can we move forward in more hopeful and successful ways?

Sustainable change is *being in relation*

When I review the summary of the analysis of the process in chapter 7, *Methods and analysis*, as well as the outcomes of the literature review in chapter 4, *Time for a new recipe*, than it becomes quite clear to me that *being in relation* with the other and the otherness was a leitmotiv and a crucial foundation for establishing sustainable change in this particular process. In the analysis we see issues as relational responsibility, using existing networks, identifying key persons, co-creation of meaning, relational reflexive critique, participative change work, collaborative and dialogical approaches, ongoing communication, expanding the domain of participation, coordinating multiplicity and so on, which all direct us to this important aspect of the change process: *being in relation* and *coordinate joint actions* to get us there.

This study has deepened my understanding of what is meant by *being in relation*. The way I see it is, that we must not confuse this *being in relation* with the idea of having nice, friendly contact with the other. By doing so we could make the mistake of seeing this *being in relation* as simply having fun or doing good things. A leader might think that by walking around the workplace and having friendly chats is what is meant. Doing it this way, we might act in a way that we see *making good contact* as a technique or a skill. *Being in relation*

stays in this way on the surface of our behavior towards the other - still, there is a threat that we will stay in the individualistic stance I have talked about, being not fully aware of it. I notice this very often in my educational advisory work. This is the blind spot, which prevents us from shifting to new paradigms, mentioned by Otto Shamer (2010) in his Theory U. The social constructionist thought helped to step out of the system and to become aware of the fact that we mainly focus at improving, changing elements within the system. Reading Hargreaves (2009) *Fourth Way* I realized that even the work of school advisory offices is caught within the dynamics within the educational system. We are supporting schools who are trying to handle the many change efforts coming from outside (government), and too less we are using our strengths to step out of the system, change and above all supporting the needed shift in paradigms.

Studying the social or relational constructionist orientation has shown me that *being in relation* or *putting people in relation* must rather be seen from the philosophical stance, which goes to deeper levels than skills or techniques. It is the paradigm shift I have talked about, going from the individualistic towards the relational orientation. It means becoming fully aware that we are always related to the other(s) in the certain contexts we are working and living in. We are always part of the reality we meet. I have had my own struggles in this study, to make the shift towards this relational orientation. The more I did, the more it changed the way I approached the realities I met. In chapter 9, *Stepping Back Again*, I will show how this all affected my present work in the Netherlands, and in Suriname.

It becomes clear also, from the literature review, that the individualistic orientation has not brought us far enough to establish sustainable successful reform in our schools, whatever success might mean to us. The relational dimension in the educational change processes has been missed for many years and it is just recently that we are becoming more aware of this. This Ph.D. process made me more aware of the fact that we need to be *in relation* within the reality we live, if we want to meet the complex future challenges. I experienced, in the different roles as student, teacher, school leader, consultant, advisor, parent, partner, teacher trainer, that *being in relation* from this philosophical stance and not just as a technique, contributes to the sustainability of the change processes we are part of. Trust, confidence, openness, participation, commitment, pride, new knowledge, meaning and so on are all by-products coming out of this process of *being in relation* in appreciative ways. I am convinced that when we continuously invest, we are able to change in more successful ways. As we have seen in chapter 4, *Time for a new recipe*, recent educational research already shows this shift to relational orientation. Success⁷³ must, from a constructionist eye, not be seen as static or as an entity. Success is a dynamic happening, something which we achieve together in certain periods and contexts. The way we look at success depends on how our language games are in our communities. An example is the Dutch Government, which at this moment is focused on outcomes of the school systems, such as the test results of reading, writing and maths, used as parameters for success. Depending on what the outcomes of the school are puts them in different categories, such as weak or strong schools, or sand and brick schools (Slavin, 2005). This is one way of looking at success, but in my opinion it is still a view which is one-sided and is based on an individualistic orientation. And, perhaps most importantly, it does not represent the whole view of the active users, such as teachers and students. The individualistic approach is to see the problem isolated at school level, or better to say at class room level. The teacher again is blamed for the failing educational reform, and by doing so we isolate these different realities, instead of using the deep ecological approach and working from the insights of relational

⁷³ In the view of the social constructionism there is no one definition of success. What might be seen as successful comes out of the process of co-meaning within each specific community. Therefore there are multiple ways to look at success. Educational reform seems to overlook this idea these days. In the Netherlands, and also in Western Europe, government sees success one-sidedly, for example as hard facts in increasing test results.

orientation. The teachers and students are not given power enough to be the producers of change. I am convinced that this way of thinking doesn't bring us further within educational reform.

It also became clear to me that change processes - learning can be seen as a change process - are seen from the constructionist eye to be unpredictable, uncontrollable, and unable to be planned. This is why *the I Believe In You! process* is a good example to illustrate this. The construction of this process must be seen as an unfolding and evolving journey. We need to focus more with *in* the process rather than just focusing at the beginning or the end of the process. Improvisational art and flexibility are necessary to guide the process. They will help us to be better aware of what is really going on and to intervene in the moment directly. As a coordinator or leader, it means acting like a chameleon and changing colors where needed. It means that in doing so one can adapt, fine-tune or match actions to the moment. The analysis of the Suriname process shows the richness of the many unexpected, unforeseen moments when participants came in with their ideas and unexpected knowledge - giving space for this strengthened the process a lot and made the process a little bit easier. *The I Believe In You! process* could follow its natural path by being in the moment and letting the process of change unfold. Understanding this uncertainty and unpredictability shows how essential it is to be in the moment, to improvise and to be sensitive to opportunities which suddenly appear. We have seen the many examples of these opportunities in *the I Believe In You! process*. Again, from a constructionist eye, this uncertainty is a product coming out of joint action. We never know absolutely how people will respond in change processes; perhaps we should try less to get a grip on it. It is part of the nature of the change process. From our growing awareness we only need to pick up on all these unforeseen opportunities, like picking flowers. Using participants' ideas strengthens the change process simply because of the fact that their expertise is necessary and is used for meeting our future and achieving our success. It is here where relational responsibility can grow and by this we all become producers of change. Everyone is valuable in whatever role or position they hold in the process. From the constructionist view, it may also be clear that there is no one method, but there are multiple methods to approach change. When I step back again to reflect on the outcomes of the analysis, I detect four important features which strengthen the change process highly.

These four features are:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| A Appreciation | working from the appreciative stance |
| B Building bridges | connecting with the other and the otherness, connecting with reality |
| C Collaborative practices | working together based on the collaborative stance |
| D Dialogical practices | talking together based on the dialogical stance |

In the next four sections I will look more closely at these features.

A Appreciation

I think there is little doubt to the reader, at this point of the dissertation, that the appreciative stance has contributed to and strengthened this change process enormously. Using the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry, which are built on the social constructionist thought, has been a crucial red thread. Emphasizing possibilities and positive values has generated powerful energy; I am fully convinced of this. Within this change process it means that the problem language was shifting towards possibility language. Centering these language practices and what people were doing together in certain situations had significant meaning for what they constructed. In *the I Believe In You! process* it meant that language practices were slowly changing into practices in which people started to talk about hope, possibilities, chances, strengths, enthusiasm, happiness - a reality of possibility was constructed. Using conceptual and non-conceptual performances gave new and broader dimensions to this process. Therefore the Suriname people could face a new reality of possibilities. By working from the AI thought the process became an inclusive one for all, one which engaged all parties in co-constructing the wished for, positive future.

Change processes can be seen as a cluster of actions of people doing things together. In this doing things together, we are in relation with each other and the experienced reality. When we are in relation in appreciative ways, by-products like connectedness, trust, confidence, pride, enthusiasm and solidarity result. People moved in the process from thinking *I* to thinking *we*. One of the many examples of this was the moment when I heard people talking about *our book*. In using this appreciative stance as a leitmotiv, people felt seen and appreciated all over the country instead of just in the main city Paramaribo. When the book was published, the process which followed could go on, based on a strong foundation.

Again, we must be aware to see this appreciative stance not as a skill or technique, but as a philosophical stance, perhaps even as a lifestyle. It is a deep fundamental awareness. There are many examples of disturbed relationships which show that as soon as we are not in relation the sustainability of the process is in great danger. On the other hand, there were examples in Suriname in which we constructed and maintained healthy relationships where the sustainability went on. There will be moments when our relationships will be disturbed by misunderstandings or by de-motivation. That is natural in change processes, which are overall human processes of going on or getting along together. When we invest in healing these disturbed moments by looking carefully what we are making or doing together, the process can go on and can even become stronger. Difficult moments are part of the nature of human beings in relation. The positive stance helped to discuss and to solve problems together! It is interesting to consider Gergen's statements regarding joint actions within change processes, using the history of relationships and the dependency of the future unfolding.

In Suriname, we tried to detect positive, key people within the society, and trained ten facilitators to help expand this appreciative stance. By doing so we emphasized the local positive values, and by using expert local knowledge and local documents to construct the content of the book, we honored the cultural constructions. We really wanted to hear the voices of the local people and even gave them a central place in the book.

B Building bridges

This brings us to the next feature – building bridges. From the appreciative stance, seeing differences as possibilities rather than problems helps us to build bridges, to connect with the other(s). In doing so, one of the by-products is a sense of future which is not experienced as threatening. Building bridges must be seen as a verb, we need to be constantly active to build and to maintain these bridges. Too often people think that this happens automatically. Maintenance often happens too late when these bridges collapse and we are asked as consultants or advisors to fix them. It is my own experience that we must maintain our bridges continuously before they collapse, perhaps especially when they are in good condition. It is like putting money in the bank account, saving credits, to use when we are in more difficult moments. Trust, confidence, hope, and *being in relation*, as credit in the bank account, will help us through these difficult moments.

Looking back at the process, some issues helped to build these bridges. In the analysis we find: identifying key persons, seeing them as bridging persons, using existing networks, expanding the domain of participation, relational responsibility, and building bridges.

Using existing networks of participants has been an interesting feature. By doing so, we could use local knowledge and expertise to direct the change process *together* in the wished-for direction. The identified key-persons within society, and specifically in the educational field, such as the gallery keeper, the ministers' advisor, the facilitators, the fifteen interviewees, the head of the department of school radio and television and so on, were important in these networks. I like to call these key persons the bridging persons. The permanent stance of openness for others at the moment welcomed all these persons to take part of the process. During the process these networks of relationships were expanding in size and enhanced the process greatly. It broadened our working field of influence.

When we built these bridges we had to deal with the existing hierarchy within the Suriname's communities. The challenge was how to build good relationships with the key persons within this hierarchy. They were part of reality, we could not deny this, but again it depended on *HOW* we did things together with them which decided what kinds of relationships were built. The history of our organization (VVOB) in working for some years in Suriname had founded a strong base of important relationships within the Ministry of Education. Our open stance towards the other and the otherness helped to maintain these bridges. When we dealt with these hierarchies the power issue appeared. These power issues are nature of change processes. The leadership of this process came out of the process of *being in relation*. This leadership was dynamic and changeable depending on where we were, with whom we were and what was needed in the joint action with others. Again, it is my experience that when we were in relation with each other throughout the appreciative stance, the split between formal and informal knowledge became smaller. Having multiple sources of knowledge in this way, instead of just formal and often one-sided knowledge, helped again to direct and match the process to the moment in better ways. Participative change work as described in this dissertation constructed power with and to, instead of power over, realities. Within the generative change it became clear to me that all participants were given the opportunity to be the producers of change. When we transfer this to educational reform it illustrates the urgent need to make students and teachers these kinds of producers within their school systems.

During the process, the domain of participation expanded. Some important issues to expand were: people feeling appreciated as important and valuable to the process, and inviting a broad selection of people all over the country to co-produce the process. They were not only the consumers, but were offered

opportunities to be producers. Differences were appreciated, valued and used. Better understandings and giving space to multiplicity and participation contributed to sustainable change. Gergen (2003) says the existence of multiplicity and difference may in fact be our best strategy for sustaining the human project.

Focusing on the desired future encouraged people to improvise and imagine new ways of proceeding, and getting along together. Using real images of child-centered education from the LEARN pilot created a dream of excellent education. Stories of value, wonderment and joy coming out of the AI approach were valuable resources to connect with one and the other. Using these stories touched people in many ways and supported their commitment to the process and its outcome. Looking for opportunities and possibilities seemed to erase boundaries and opened doors to build these bridges. Dialogical and collaborative approaches helped to break down walls and to make people open to each other. The shared positive dream arising from many activities bonded people together.

Relational responsibility, as described in the section *The Deep Ecological Approach* (see page 98 and 224), was also a feature useful for actively connecting different levels within the system. It was, again, a way of *being in relation* with the other, and strengthened the interconnectedness. By working at all levels, we showed that everyone was important and that we all are interdependent and interconnected to each other. Here, the relational orientation strongly emerged. The more we appreciated everybody's knowledge, the more trust, confidence and support came out of it and with this we could achieve the best outcome. Above all, by this we could strengthen the relationships. Our *doing or making* together became better. It was this process that needed to be fed and to be modified continuously. It was a process of growing awareness which was achieved by using the collaborative and dialogical approaches.

A relational stance from the leader or coordinator of change processes was also an essential feature to promote the relational change work. The work of Anderson (2008) made clear to me that our responses to the other and the otherness were critical for the development and the quality of our relationships. We need to invest in maintaining these bridges, from the beginning to the end of the process, it even goes on afterwards, and this was what made the change process sustainable. A constant stream of communication was important to maintain these bridges. In this we were sensitive, in both formal and informal moments. By communicating in many ways we could keep everyone on track, preventing the construction of too big a gap between leaders and followers.

C Collaborative practices

Working together and doing things together contribute to the change process. To me, this is an obvious issue. Change processes occur in many situations where people are doing things together. These performances require the relational other. *How* we do things together determines highly the impact of what we will achieve. We have seen in chapter V, *Dialogical and Collaborative Practices*, that doing things together is more than just working together building cars, as in the Ford metaphor. Collaborative practices have this extra dimension when we approach them from the constructionist or relational view. Where the relational dimension comes in, collaboration is seen as a philosophical stance. Here, London, St George & Wulf (2009, p. 1) experience collaboration as a life style and see it as a deliberate and purposeful way of relating that is simultaneously flexible and responsive to others. Again, it is the appreciative stance which invites others to contribute and participate in their own ways, without judging who should contribute what and to what level. Andersen (2008) speaks in her work about the collaborative relationships in which we connect, collaborate and construct with each other. She says that it is in these collaborative relations that we find

ways of dissolving problems and constructing possibilities. Out of the analysis, we see that these collaborative practices can be seen as attempts to coordinate multiplicity and diverse worldviews in appreciative ways. Power issues seen in the traditional ways are totally different. Power *over* transforms to power *to* or *with*.

The collaborative stance produced a growing, shared meaning. When people started to share their hopes and dreams in collaborative practices, new possibilities were built for further progress together. It was an energizing and motivating experience for all. Their ideas became new actions, new steps in the change process. Boundaries between knowing and influencing were blurred. Expanding relationships increased the motivation for co-creation. Starting dialogical and collaborative practices helped to coordinate multiplicity and diverse worldviews. Inquiry and intervention merged also in the process. By collaborating to produce new knowledge in forms of ideas or answers, it was found that new interventions could be taken. It was like tapping into the others' expertise. (Geertz, 1983) The not-knowing stance of the coordination group gave openness for others to help to find answers, which strengthened their commitment. This must be seen as intervention.

In the section about Conceptual and Non-Conceptual Performances, we have seen that many forms of collaborative practices were possible. They contributed to the change process by generating different kinds of energy and understanding to the process. The non-conceptual performances and their contribution to the change processes are insufficiently researched, but I sensed that they did strengthen the change process in many ways. Not only the mind is given voice, but also the body and soul (the "heart"). By doing so, new dimensions came into the change process which helped all participants to better understand each other, the process as well as the content, and it stimulated creativity in forms of new ideas. This matches one of Fullan's ideas (1991, 2003, 2005), that all who are in the process must be able to give meaning to what they do, in being active producers of change. These extra dimensions helped to better connect to the other. Shotter (1984) expressed in his work that we need to be open to be touched by the otherness of others and the otherness around them. These performances seem to fill this need.

In chapter 5, *Dialogical and Collaborative Practices*, I described collaborative practices from the constructionist thought, promoting the idea of collective learning or collective development which takes place. This is where each participant contributes positively to the shared process, content and outcomes. The three aspects⁷⁴ described in this chapter, 1) mutual responsiveness, 2) commitment to joint activity and 3) commitment to mutual support, have been essential features for these collaborative practices and distinguish them from ordinary group work. Collaborative practices appear in many forms, varying from two people working together to many people working together.

I discussed in chapter 5 that collaborative practices must not be seen as techniques, but should be understood as a philosophical stance. Here the relational orientation comes in. Then collaborative practices become a lifestyle, a way to live one's life in the world. Thus it becomes a way of *being*. (Anderson, 2003, 2010). This stance encourages others to contribute and participate in equal and appreciative ways. With this belief, connecting and constructing with others leads to more authentic natural performances, not just techniques used (Anderson, 2008, p. 6). This way, we create collaborative relationships.⁷⁵ Positive

⁷⁴ These three aspects are abstracted from the work of Bratman (1992)

⁷⁵ *Collaborative relationships* is an expression used by Anderson (2008). It sets the tone for the way we orient ourselves to be, to respond and to act with the other person. It invites us to shared engagement, mutual inquiry and joint action, the process of generative and transforming dialogue dialogues. (Anderson (1997, 2003)

interdependence (Johnson and Johnson, 1998) and the characteristic of promotive interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 1998) intensified the relationships in *the I Believe In You! process*.

What further helped to intensify the relationships in *the I Believe In You! process* was mutual agreement about the purpose of collaboration: what we wanted to achieve together, mutual expectations about outcome and process. Dian Hosking (2006) refers to the importance of multiple yet equal voices as an essential feature of the collaborative practices. We have seen in *the I Believe In You! process* that this aspect also strengthened the change process.

In the collaborative practices, such as the workshops and the different meetings, hospitality created an unconditional welcome to the other, which positively supported these relational activities (Westmoreland, 2008). From this, an active engagement, in forms of willingness to support, to stay in contact or to stay related, appeared. This active engagement led us to shared ownership and a sense of shared belonging (Anderson 2008).

D Dialogical practices

The analysis shows that communication, and therefore dialogical practices as a way of communicating, has been another important feature in generating sustainable change. During the whole process in Suriname, all kinds of communication took place. Communication can be seen as a way of people doing something together (McNamee, 2008a); in constructionist language it is a way of *being in relation*. Like the collaborative practices, dialogical practices have many forms. In chapter 5, *Dialogical and collaborative approaches to educational change*, I already wrote about the interactive moments when people are doing things together – such as communication - and that we influence each other by *being in relation*. In this influencing of each other we generate new meaning or knowledge. This is exactly where I think dialogical practices showed their strengths in the change process. Co-creating of meaning and co-constructing of new understandings, co-creating of common sense, and where the constructionist literature speaks of co-creating something new, which we call transformation. The work of Otto Sharmer (2010) has shown interesting ideas of going to this deeper level of *being in relation*, the level of generative dialogues, which generates the power for co-creation from the new paradigm of the relational orientation, shifting the social fields we are used to living in.

By the use of safety and openness, which are characteristic of dialogical practices, self reflexive and relational reflexive critiques were given voice. This helped us to understand and to appreciate differences in better ways. Knowledge coming out of these activities helped us to fine-tune and modify the process. This relational reflexivity is seen, from the constructionist standpoint, by *being in relation*, and not as just happening in people's individual minds. Appreciating the differences didn't mean that we needed to agree with the other, but it meant that we carefully listened to and questioned the other's experienced reality. In the end, this all strengthened the relationship with the other, and through this it contributed to the processes of change which we all were part of.

Dialogical practices are ways to appreciate the many different voices, to make each voice as important as the others, and to commit or relate participants to the change process. The constructionist stance makes people feel included and valued as important. The social constructionist literature speaks of the importance of creating these situations; it is through dialogue that people can build new relationships, give voice to their own meaning, and simultaneously appreciate the meaning of others. It helps to bridge differences to create better futures. Anderson also emphasizes that when we genuinely value the inclusion of all voices, and the

richness inherent in differences, there is less room for hierarchical and dualistic relationships and technical and instrumental processes. (Anderson, 2010, p. 2) Equal footing supports relating. The level of equalization will decide the outcome of the process (Anderson, 1991). Gergen (2003) says that we really meet the challenge of dialoging by moving beyond alienated co-existence to a more promising way of working together. This opens doors to people's hearts and minds and helps them to better understand each other. Out of these practices new knowledge comes which we can use to fine-tune the change process while going through the change process, rather than afterwards.

The interactive moment is important to grab! We need the improvisational art to deal with these unpredictable moments, to pick them like flowers and use them in appreciative ways for the change process. Careful listening and questioning and the appreciative stance are essential features in these practices. It is not that we should agree with everything the other says, but we are open to listen and to share these different ideas without judging.

This *being in relation* by using dialogical practices is an interesting finding. In April 2011 I worked with a teaching staff of a primary school in the South of the Netherlands. I started by asking them to remember a moment when they influenced the other or the other influenced them. When was it? What did they do together? What happened? How many times did this way of communicating with each other happen this year? It did have some impact when they became aware that these moments of encountering, of *being in relation*, were rare. It is also this issue, of not *being in relation*, that is missing in educational practice and this limits the success of educational reform. It is an issue which is underestimated and overlooked in the educational reform agenda. Although it is not difficult to understand the importance of it, our focus to improve this is often based on the usual individualistic orientation. Not *being in relation* does not let the river (energy) flow easily from one to the other. Thus we disprove the collective power for sustainable change.

In the literature and the analysis, we see that organizing dialogical practices helped us to be in relation in Suriname. Otto Sharmar, in his Theory U (2010), shows that when we organize dialogical practices in forms of generative dialogical practices, we re-connect to our sources of meaning and purpose. There we can tap into our energy to generate sustainable change. By being in connection with our own and collective sources we can co-create sustainable change. Within the educational field I think that this issue of being open towards the other and the otherness by organizing dialogical practices, instead of the usual individual-stance discussions throughout all levels of the system, stimulates the construction of relational responsibility and this again strengthens the sustainability of the change process dramatically. In my work as a school advisor I experience great progress within the primary schools, but am aware of much work which has to be done in the secondary schools. The importance of dialoging in vertical and horizontal ways, and bridging the different levels and hierarchies within systems, helps to open relationships instead of closing them (Van Leeuwen in Weisbeck, 2009).

How can we move forward within educational change?

From the literature review in chapter 4, *Time for a new recipe*, it became clear to me that the relational orientation has been an overlooked dimension within the educational reform for many years. I have illustrated that there has been a slow movement going towards this orientation over the past decade, but we still meet the individualistic paradigm in practice nowadays. In my daily work as school advisor, I meet the individualistic view almost on a daily basis, and the difficulty is that often educators think they act within the new paradigm but in reality they don't. The awareness is not yet fully present. For students and teachers,

who are the most important actors in the educational change process, it becomes hard to deal with the many influences from outside, such as government policy and politics, which limit their efforts to give meaning and voice to what they see as important in their daily practices. Here we see that within the present system we are out of relation. Policy makers are too far away and still miss the understanding of what is really going on in classrooms, which is more than just a mind business, it is also a heart business (Hargreaves, 2005); emotions do play important roles.

But it is not only the policy makers who are out of relation. In fact – as I see it – we meet this out-of-relation situation at every level within the educational system. The relational responsibility is still weak within the system, and this keeps many people in the individualistic stance with the question: How can I survive in this present system? I see that lots of precious energy in forms of commitment, enthusiasm, power, pride, joy, motivation and so on gets lost. This being *out of relation* is also a way of doing things together, but the educational research has shown us that this doesn't bring us the success we need.

The study for this Ph.D. enriched me with the possibilities we may have in approaching educational reform from social or relational constructionism. I have experienced that *being in relation* and using the appreciative stance generates motivation, enthusiasm, commitment, joy, pride, and so on, as important by-products to generate sustainable change. Students and teachers, in fact all participants in the educational change process, all become producers of change in many ways. By using collaborative and dialogical approaches we can build and maintain strong bridges to the other and the otherness. This kind of participative change work invites people to be part of the process, to be seen as important and equal to others. Inviting them into the process means that it generates increasing power as a byproduct of this change process. The appreciative stance opens doors to others, and creates a safe and open environment to celebrate differences which often appear in the unforeseen ideas of many. All participants in the Suriname project were given many opportunities to become the producers of change. They were heard and taken seriously. This meant that people were actively put into relation, and by doing so they *all* were generating change, instead of an elite group who might think they had the power for establishing change. It was actually giving back the power to those who are, and who should be, in charge of the change: the students and teachers. Here I experienced the power of the social constructionist thought. This convinced me that by using these methods we are better able to create better futures for our youth.

With respect to the Suriname's context as a middle development country, the work of Berthélemy, Pissadires and Varoudakis (1996) shows that talented people in countries with poor governance have little chance to develop in productive business activities. They waste their talents in government jobs, or they are focused only on their own financial benefit by using a lower profile policy in their poorly governed country. The researchers figure that poorly governed countries miss out on 1% of growth annually by this inefficient use of human capital. Add to this waste of talents the fact that the Suriname government is still not able to offer a qualitative and efficient school system for their youth, and this makes the situation even worse. This all highlights the need to work together to construct a more successful qualitative and effective system. It is a child's right, and an obligation for Suriname to do so. One of the greatest challenges of today is to define and manage change in a politically contested and multi-dimensional environment.

I like to conclude with Capra's (2008) insights: Sustainability, then, is not an individual property but a property of an entire web of relationships. It always involves a whole community. This is the profound lesson we need to learn from nature. The way to sustain life is to build and nurture community. A sustainable human community interacts with other communities – human and nonhuman – in ways that enable them to live and develop according to their nature. Sustainability does not mean that things do not change. It is a dynamic process of co-evolution rather than a static state. (Capra, 2008)



9

Stepping back again How this all affected my work

*“Working on real endurance and sustainable change
can only be based on trust.
Trust must be seen
as an essential byproduct of working together”*

(Loek Schoenmakers, log, May 23. 2010)

Introduction

At the end of this Ph.D. experience, which I experienced as an evolving and enriching adventure, I would like to show with some examples how this all influenced my present work as an educational advisor. As I wrote earlier, this Ph.D. process may be seen as a metaphor for this unplanned journey into new or better understanding of the educational reality of change. This Ph.D. study has deepened my understanding of my working experiences within educational change. By continually reflecting, reading and analyzing, I was able to shift my awareness of approaching reality towards the social or relational constructionist orientation. In fact I was in the lucky position to immediately use the gained insights in my daily work. It is exactly here where inquiry and intervention were blurred.

The positive stance and the hopefulness I felt by working in appreciative ways, combined with the effects I saw within my work, were inspiring and motivating, and it often felt as if my engine was speeding up. The social constructionist or relational thought strengthened my way of being in life and work. In this closing chapter I will show the reader some working experiences within the educational field in the Netherlands, as well as in Suriname. At the time of writing, I am still involved as a consultant in *the I Believe in You! process*. For this reason I have visited Suriname twice yearly, since my return to the Netherlands in June 2009.

All these experiences have shown me that working from the social constructionist stance really does generate change in more sustainable ways by *putting people into relation*. I am convinced that with this approach we can meet present and future challenges within the educational reform in better ways.

I will start with some examples in the Dutch context of elementary and secondary education, then I will continue with some examples in the Suriname's context, with respect to the *I Believe in You! process*. I will use the following framework to describe the examples:

- **A brief sketch of the situation**
- **A description of the relation constructionist approach I used**
- **The effects on the change process**

The Netherlands

The following examples were taken from my present work as a school advisor working in a School Advisory office in the south of the Netherlands. For the past few years, the school advisory offices in the Netherlands have been operating in an independently managed way, with no direct financial support from the government). Schools receive finances yearly from the government, based on their number of students, and they can use this money to improve and strengthen their systems in any way they choose. This support may be used to assist students with special needs, for example, by testing, advising and special treatments, and/or for other school improvement. This can have many forms, such as organizing training for teaching staff, coaching for individual teachers, school leaders or staff, (advisory assistance) for school leaders and school boards, presentations about specific subjects, presentations or workshops for parents, and so on. At present, almost a hundred persons, of which 70% are school advisors, work at the same office as I do. My specific work focuses on staff development, social emotional behavior, coaching individuals and advising school leaders, management staff and teaching staff.

The more I have worked with the ideas investigated in this study, the more my daily practice has been influenced. I was recently asked to personally coach a school leader, who had to leave his school because of problems with poor collaboration with his teachers. The traditional thought patterns of the school board, the school leader and his previous staff led them to believe that he was wrong, and that he was to blame for the failures at his school. Fortunately, I could use participative change work to put this leader back into his power. I used relational orientation to help this leader to become aware that his leadership was a byproduct of the mutual process of *being in relation* with his school board and teacher staff. So everyone was to blame, not just this leader. From an appreciative stance, however nobody was to blame. Although not all actions and behavior could be labeled as well done, they all originated from the positive purpose of everyone to make the best of it. During this process I supported this school leader by using *relational reflexivity* to change what was going on, and to understand not only how the actions had looked in the past, but also how his leadership could look in the future. During this process, the key issues of this leader were: *What did I produce together with my staff in the school system? How can I look differently at leadership and find new ways of doing things together? Should I follow the school board's mostly vague ideas of what they see as strong leadership, or should I follow my own path?* It was the latter which he chose, and with this he could meet the future in new and more open ways, not knowing what would come next or what the end result would be. Not at all an easy process, but he took the challenge. In the process, this leader became more aware of new ways to improve his leadership, and experienced new realities using relational orientation. We analyzed his personality together, to discover deep sources of strength which were essential for him, and uncovered blind spots to reveal hidden assumptions and beliefs. Doing this from the appreciative stance resulted in an open relationship towards me, as the personal coach. He also saw in new, open and appreciative ways how he was related to his own constructed reality and what effects this had. From this point he was able to better understand what was going on in this particular situation. After half a year, he presented his evolved journey to his school board as an evaluation, and the response of this school board was very positive. He was offered another job at a different school in July 2011 and was very happy to start with new eyes in a new and challenging adventure.

In the monthly meetings with my colleagues I sensed, within many discussions, the individualistic orientation most of them occupied, although they thought that they didn't do this. Leadership characteristics were approached using lists, success factors of schools were used in general ways for all schools, result-based approaches and test results were accepted as the absolute Truth, and impressive trend analysis and so on

were still strongly seen as right. There was insufficient fundamental awareness that many approaches must still be seen from an individualistic thought perspective. I think we must see this school advisory work in a totally different way to meet the future challenges of schools. A paradigm shift is necessary for this work. When school advisors act from the relational stance and clarify this different approach to their clients, they will affect school leaders' and teachers' thinking to become aware of this new paradigm.

I have become aware that the knowledge about change processes, or change management, is still highly present in the school advisor as an expert, but again we should emphasize this knowledge in comprehensible language for those who are in the middle of these processes. When we do not, the knowledge stays separated in the individual, the expert. Considering the many conversations I have had during the last few months, and my own increased awareness of the socially constructed realities in schools and in my office, I have noticed the difference between my view and that of others. This, together with the ideas of the participative change work, fine-tune my own approach within these situations every day. It is a process that goes on and on and as I said before, it has enriched my work dramatically. The key question for school advisors for the future will be: How can we be *in relation* with the educational reality of our schools and act in different ways based on relational thought?

In the next section I will present three examples. In these examples I will not go too deeply into detail; my aim is just to show how the relational stance influences the way we can *put people into relation*. The traditional expert role of the school advisor transforms into an expert role for *everyone* in the relational process. The expert becomes a participant in the change process, together with others. *The generic themes*⁷⁶ dealt with in this dissertation are along this line. In this way, change work becomes participative change work.

The four elements I identified in my analysis, *Appreciation, Building Bridges, Collaborative and Dialogical Approaches*, have been important features to support sustainable change in different ways. Change work is an ongoing, unfolding process, which in fact doesn't stop when the work as advisor or consultant is finished. There will be many forms of being *in relation* as long as people are working together within their communities, systems or organizations. As we have seen in this Ph.D. dissertation, these processes need to be maintained and to be fed continuously.

⁷⁶

- Knowing and influencing are joined
- Multiple, equal voices
- 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

Example 1 Changing cultures into communities, creating peaceful schools

A brief sketch of the situation

From 2009-2011 I supported five elementary schools, which voluntarily chose to strengthen their staff to deal better with the social and emotional behavior of their students. These schools cannot be compared with each other, as we have seen in International Handbooks of Educational Change (Fullan, Hargreaves, Hopkins and Liebermann, 2005). From the constructionist stance, each school must be seen as unique, and should therefore be approached in different ways. In the Netherlands, elementary schools can choose *HOW* they want to achieve the set goals of the elementary school. Often schools choose programs or methods which are specially designed to achieve these. In the Netherlands, there are many different programs for influencing social emotional behavior. These programs can be programs which are either common to all grades, 1 to 8 (4 to 12 years of age), or related to specific grades (for example Kindergarten or grade 8, the last year of elementary education). One of the programs I worked with at these schools is called *The Peaceful School*. This program is developed in Utrecht and is based on the work of professor Mischa de Winter from Utrecht University, Department of Child and Adolescent Studies. The interesting thing is that, contrary to the other whole school programs, this program of *the Peaceful School* tries to transform the culture of school into a culture of community, where all people involved can play active roles in establishing the wished-for culture. Culture can be seen from a constructionist thought standpoint as *what people are doing or making together*. One of the insights coming out of the literature review was that, involving the whole community within the educational reform supports durable change in schools. Most traditional programs focus on curriculum interventions, presenting lessons for each grade to work on the social and emotional behavior. The deficiency, in my opinion, is that in this way of working, which can be seen as an individualistic orientation towards change, teachers teach these lessons at certain moments in their program, but are not stimulated enough to transform the daily school life, or to be active producers and invite students also to be active producers. The teacher teaches the lesson, for example, from 10.00 till 11 o'clock in the morning. The students are invited to participate in the lesson, to discuss ideas and behave as the lessons propose. But as soon as the focus turns to lessons of other subjects, they – teachers and students - seem to forget all they have learned. Teacher and students are more consumers than active producers in this approach. The consequence is that teachers often complain that their students do not want to change or that the program doesn't work to change their students. It is here where we see the individualistic orientation of *the here and there*, where students and the experienced problems are constructed as entities within the others' reality. The other is to blame! What occurs is that the teaching staff, the management, the parents and the students do not experience any success.

The program of the *Peaceful School* tries to do it in a different way. It tries to influence the behavior of *all* people within the school community and to stimulate highly the practice of that which is taught during the whole school day. It turns teachers, school leaders, students and their parents into active producers of the change process. It is here where we see the relational orientation coming in. The program tries to make a paradigm shift from *I-(II)-being* towards *we-(II)being*. At this moment, almost 400 schools are working with this program throughout the whole country.

A description of the relation constructionist approach I used

In my approach to implementing this program, I used the ideas of Social Constructionism. From the start I used the constructionist thought model, when I met the teaching staff to explain the characteristics of this program, which differs from the other social behavior programs. The ideas of individualistic and relational orientation helped me to explain in better ways what happens in both situations. From the individualistic orientation viewpoint, we would try to change students' behavior by teaching lessons. It would be like working with split or separated realities. *From the relational orientation, we would try to influence teachers' behavior as well as students' behavior, based on the awareness that we are all part of the constructed reality.* What is coming out of the *joint action* is our mutually constructed reality. In fact, this introduction can already be seen as an intervention in the change process. Teachers were given time in this introduction to share their meanings and in the end to make a decision about whether to say yes or no to the program. What I wanted to make clear is that this program asks for a positive attitude towards carefully questioning the teachers' own beliefs, values and assumptions. The program wants to influence not only the students' behavior, but also that of teachers, the school leaders, and indirectly the behavior of the parents. A participative character invited teachers and students to be the active producers of change. In my approach I used the generic themes described in the work of Dian Hosking (2006).

The effects on the change process

A striking aspect in this process was the enormous enthusiasm of the students aged 4-12 years when we started this program. They were now seen as active producers of change, and their voice was heard during the whole process. Their enthusiasm influenced the teachers – who often were skeptical at the beginning, especially after many failures of educational reform – to highly commit to the program. Transforming teachers' behavior, or transforming the way we are used to doing things together – was an encouraging journey. Being included in the change process, by being carefully listened to and questioned, generated a power that slowly changed the language practices within the daily school life. The language was shifting from *problem-based*, to more *possibility-based* language practices. The program also tried to influence these language practices by introducing a certain vocabulary into the school practice for the students from 4-12 years old. Teachers discovered that all students started to use this language, which made it easier for the teachers to intervene when there were conflicts. Students and teachers understood each other in better ways. Suddenly students or parents' ideas were seen as new possibilities to change the usual culture within the school. Like in *the I Believe In You! Process*, these new ideas sprang up like flowers in the field. Within the five schools, this process evolved differently. In schools where the commitment of the school leaders and teachers was the highest, the effect on the transformation of culture was the highest. The better they were in relation with each other and their constructed reality, the stronger the effects were. Also, here I experienced that school leaders may be committed by speech, but not always by deed. Or, they were not aware of their individualistic stance towards the change process, and saw it more as happening to teachers and students who were split from their reality. Discussing these observations helped to put the school management back *into relation*.

Making students and teachers equal participants in the change process, and using relational thought, generated new ideas for dealing with certain issues in the school. For example, some schools dealt with problems of students' behavior in the playground. When students were outside the school having their

break, there was still fighting in the playground. From their individualistic thinking, teachers still saw it as a problem caused by badly behaved students, but when we approached the situation from the relational thought perspective— seeing themselves as co-producers of what students were doing together at the playground, new ideas to solve the problems emerged. One of the teachers invited the students to inquire of the school community about what other people did, or should do, together during their playtime. By using this essential question – what are we doing or making together? - the focus shifted from blaming others to constructing the experienced reality, without blaming anybody.

Out of this inquiry new ideas emerged, which could be used to improve the possibilities to do things better together. One of the ideas was to open a closed part of the play yard for all students. In this way, younger and older students could play together. The effect was a reduction in the negative behavior of students. Older students started to support the younger ones.

Another example was that, after several months of working with the students and teachers, the need arose to inform the parents about the program. New ideas emerged from the use of relational orientation. Traditionally, the teachers had decided and constructed the formal information for parents. They would organize the meeting and prepare their activities and would decide on the content. In the past, few parents attended these meetings, but when we approached the same situation from the relational thought model, giving teachers, students and parents active producer roles, these parents' meetings became very successful. At one of these meetings, the students were seen as the experts. Parents could go with these students into their classrooms and then the students gave information about the Peaceful School program and their own experiences. The teachers acted as supporters for these students, although support was seldom necessary. Parents asked their questions of the students. Instead of 15 parents, which was the usual number of people who visited the traditional meetings, more than 200 parents visited this special meeting. These meetings were constructed with conceptual and non-conceptual activities which, as in *I Believe In You! process*, generated new kinds of dimensions. The formal and informal moments gave many opportunities to meet each other in different ways. When I spoke with the teachers and their school leader, they were astonished with this success. From this *being in relation*, or *joint action*, enthusiasm, joy, motivation and pride were byproducts, and this all strengthened the process.

A striking moment was when I was training a group of sixteen student-mediators, aged eleven years, in conflict resolution. The head teacher met me very enthusiastically at the front door, saying that these mediators-in-training had already solved a big problem amongst students by using the new mediation techniques successfully. Although she doubted momentarily to allow these students to mediate because they were in training, she decided to listen to them and to let them do their job. Again, motivation, pride, a sense of belonging and so on, came out as important byproducts.

In this change process, students started to tell of their experiences at home, and some of them even advised their parents to solve their problems in better ways. Some parents even started to use some ideas from the programs in their homes. At another school, there was a little conflict between teachers. One of the teachers stood up and offered help. She had learned how to use the conflict resolution techniques. Putting teachers of different grades in collaborative and dialogical practices increased the exchange of new ideas. The effects of this program were positive; the features⁷⁷ coming out of this Ph.D. supported this process in more successful

⁷⁷ A appreciation; B building and maintaining bridges; C collaborative practices; D dialogical practices

ways. However, we must be aware that, although we achieved this success, people can easily fall back into their old patterns. We need to constantly feed the desirable transformation of culture. The adults, the teachers and their school leaders, are important carriers of the desirable culture, the desirable future. Teachers' behavior affects students' behavior. These processes do cost time, and as I expressed in my work, once started it will never end! This is in contrast to the individualistic thought model of behavior, which assumes that change processes do have ends and beginnings.

Interestingly, research shows that the productivity of students increased when using this kind of approach. In fact, this is quite obvious: when school communities are more at peace, more time is freed up to use for the learning process, instead of constantly using time for solving little and big problems which disturb these processes. Happy students and happy teachers do create happy schools! *Being in relation* and having positive experiences affected the schools work of change and, as idealistic as I am, I am sure that this will positively affect the students living in such school communities for the future!

Example 2 Help, I am losing control

A brief sketch of the situation

I am often asked to support teachers when they are losing control of their students. In 2010-2011 I was involved in three different situations. One situation was a classroom of 24 students of the age of eight, of which 21 were boys and 3 girls. Parents started to complain about the bad behavior of these students, and the school leader decided not to wait till the whole situation worsened. The second situation was in a grade 4 classroom with students aged 8-9 in the elementary school, where the teacher asked for help after the first term. This was a different situation. There was already a problem. Two different teachers were teaching the group of students on split days. One of the teachers had been highly frustrated for some years about her working situation. The third situation was grade 7, students' aged 10-11, where the teacher asked for help. After a burn-out a few years previously, this teacher was dissatisfied with her working situation at this school, with this specific student population.

These three settings were situated in the regular elementary schools in the Netherlands. Often these out-of-control situations are a result of the present education system: fewer challenging programs, students who are only consumers, increasing complexity because of the inclusion idea of keeping students with special needs in the regular schools, and so on. In most of these situations teachers and students are in some manner *out of relation*. The usual thought from the school board, parents or school leader is that the teacher or the students are the problem. Sometimes the teacher who asks for help thinks that the students should modify their behavior because they are the problem. It is *the here and there* approach, the other is to blame, the

individualistic thought basis. As long as we act from this thought basis the problem will not be solved in sustainable ways. It is here again where relational thought proves its benefits.

A description of the relation constructionist approach I used

I always listen to and question carefully all who are involved in a problem situation. I need the stories of students, teachers, parents and school leaders to understand what is really going on, when doing things together. From the constructionist thought basis, this is already an intervention. The idea that neither the teacher nor the students are to blame opens new ways for generating ideas. The appreciative stance creates an open and safe environment in which nobody is to blame—I make it clear that we are all in a game of constructed social reality, and that we need to take action, using relational responsibility, within our own circles of influence. It is my experience that students are often able to precisely tell what is going on in the classroom, no matter how old they are. They are highly skilled observers of the process and in many cases this is an overlooked dimension. Students read their teachers like books! Just by listening to and questioning the students, I gained important information which helped me to generate the next steps in the process. In this way the students are included as equal experts in the change process and are valued as important participants. The deep underlying assumption is that we cannot solve or change the situation without the active participation of those who are within the reality to be changed. We need to make them also the producers of change.

In the class with the 21 boys, I worked with the teacher to increase her awareness of what was going on. Together we discovered that her concept of teaching – which was an open one – was part of the reason why things didn't work in this boys' class the way she liked wanted. My approach was the non-judging and not-knowing stance, which created an atmosphere of openness and safety in which we together were getting *into relation*, using the local knowledge of the teacher, her school leader, the special needs coordinator, the students and their parents to co-create the interventions which were needed, step by step. It could evolve like an unfolding story. The ultimate aim of it all was to achieve a happy situation. This teacher started a dialogue with her students about the problems, and invited them to be co-producers to solve the problem. Using the appreciative stance, she was instructed to talk mainly about the wished-for objectives, or desired goals for the future. Together they labeled this project *The Happy Class*. By focusing on the desired goals and describing these together with the students in detail, all of them could better understand the meaning of the change they wanted to achieve together. We constructed very precisely, together with the students, how the wished-for behavior would look and how this would support the happy class. Instead of focusing on the misbehavior and punishing it, we started to focus on the wished-for behavior and imagined together how it would look and feel. The teacher focused together weekly with the students on this wished-for behavior, supporting this with motivational talk, by compliments and mentioning examples out of the daily class life, and by giving students a voice. She illustrated the progress by graphics. The rewards for the achieved successes were not for individuals but for the whole group. Traditionally, in the individualistic orientation, we are used to rewarding those students who are showing good behavior, and to punishing those who are showing bad behavior. We separate them into good and bad groups. They become consumers of either punishments or rewards but are not helped to be active producers. In this situation, we changed this by rewarding the group for supportive behavior towards others. We discussed rewards and consequences with students. Students who found it difficult to show the wiser, agreed-upon behavior were given a personal reward system, in which they could save special 'smileys' for the groups' account. Cooperative students started to support those having difficulties in achieving the best group result, saying, "Come on you can do it! Shall I help you?" instead of being disappointed (and negative) when they disturbed the environment. Again, using the generic themes helped to bring students, teacher and parents back into relation.

The effects on the change process

Slowly, the *problem language* of the school leader, the teacher and the students was changing into *possibility language*, in which they all became active producers. Not only the teacher came with new ideas to support the happy class, but also the students, the school leader and the parents came with their ideas. The involvement and commitment of the teacher were striking. Due to the appreciative approach, she was taken seriously, not blamed for being wrong or weak, as the tendency of the parents and the school leader was to do before. I detected the teacher's ability to put children *in relation*, and used this potential, combined with a more clear pedagogic and didactic approach. I gave her room to use her own ideas to change the class climate into a cooperative one. Together, in dialogical approaches, new ideas arose, and often her ideas were even better than mine. We also stimulated each other in appreciative ways. As in *the I Believe process*, I used the local knowledge of the teacher, the students, the school leader and the parents to construct new approaches. The teacher shared her problem with her students, parents and school leader, and invited them to be part of the change process and to think together about solutions. Her educational concept was strengthened by more clarity, and by this she could adapt of her teaching to the students needs. Her concept of teaching was transformed into a concept where relational thought started to grow.

Her *being in relation* with her reality changed. She and her students became the producers of the change needed. The school leader was pulled into this change process from the start. Her commitment to support this process and to *be in relation* with the reality of this class strengthened this change process. After several weeks, when the process was going in the desired direction, we started communication with the parents and invited them for an evening meeting. We divided this group of 40 parents into two groups, because we could have better opportunities for dialogue with each other. This would allow more careful questioning, and listening to each other from an appreciative stance. In contrast to traditional approaches, we started to dialogue, to welcome them and to invite them to be part of the change process, asking them for their insights and ideas which could help us to achieve the desired result: the happy class. The parents came in great numbers to our organized meeting. They were pleased with the openness of this situation, and started to talk about solutions rather than problems. Therefore, we used the appreciative form of questioning, which guided this process. In the introduction to the meeting, the school leader explained very clearly that she was happy with this visible commitment, and that the focus would be a solution-based one. By dialoging with the parents, they could understand each other better. New meaning and knowledge came out of this. I had made a compilation of some short video clips to show the progress in the classroom, where students gave their comments of the process so far.

As a byproduct of this meeting, these parents, like the students, were included in the process and started to support it at home. Now they could better understand the stories told by their children, and the teachers' approach. They started to support the change process. After this meeting, we invited these parents to keep asking their questions, at any time. By using e-mail contact we could simply update them weekly, which helped to keep them on track. After some time, the teacher and the students were happy with their results. There was more balance, and now more teaching and learning could take place. They decided to give their group a reward and to share tea and cookies together at the end of the week. Putting students, teachers and parents *into relation* had done its work. After three months of working intensively, I could close this coaching process happily.

In the second coaching situation, one of the teachers who asked for help stayed in her individualistic position. During the coaching, she remained very frustrated about her situation in the school. She had decided that the problem lay outside her reality: the school leader who had not listened carefully to her, the

special needs coordinator who didn't design the right plans, some students with disorders who should not have been there, some difficult parents and negative home situations, and even the school advisor (me), whose visits felt threatening. Her frustration was very obvious when she was teaching. During one of her lessons, which I observed, she gave two compliments in one and a half hours, but more than twenty negative remarks. It became very clear to me that she was out of relation with her reality, but it was very hard to open a dialogue to make this clear to her. There were some moments when I succeeded in breaking down walls, but the frustration of this teacher was at such a high level, that after two months of coaching I decided to have a break and to organize a briefing with all involved in the process. By doing so, I put this teacher in relation with her special needs coordinator and the school leader. In this way more knowledge enriched the whole situation. In the meantime, the frustration level had lead to the decision of the management to send this teacher home for a period to recover and to gain new energy.

Interestingly, in this situation the reality of this classroom differed enormously from the teacher's perspective. The frustrated teacher, who worked on Thursday and Friday, created an out of relation environment. The students were not motivated and the bad behavior didn't stop. It became worse. The teacher's negative behavior affected the classroom climate in negative ways. Problem language was the central issue. But when I observed the second teacher on Wednesday I saw a totally different situation. This teacher succeeded in being *in relation* with her students. There was joy and happiness and commitment of students. The students were motivated and the bad behavior was limited to little issues. Here we see clear evidence that *being in relation* in appreciative ways does affect reality dramatically.

The third situation, in grade 7, showed a teacher who had been frustrated for more than three years. She could not accept the behavior of her students. Her idea was: If they will change, I can teach in better ways. In contrary to the example of the teacher dealing with the boys' class, this teacher was open to reflect on her own behavior. By doing so, the openness created a safe relationship, with me as the coach. This lead to many deep conversations, in which this teacher became increasingly aware of her reality as seen through relational thought. At the end of the year she chose to leave her job and to start a new job at another school. She succeeded in changing her *frustrated* reality into a *possibility* reality. She had in this an active producer role, but needed time to become aware of this and to take action.

Example 3 Teaching staff: How we can work better together?

A brief sketch of the situation

Another part of my work is supporting teaching staff to improve their working together. In 2010-2011 I supported three groups of teachers.

One situation was in an elementary school which was labeled as very weak by the school inspections assessment, although the teachers did work hard and seriously. The staff consisted of 23 female teachers aged from 23 to 58 years old. (situation A)

The second situation was with a group of teachers who had worked for more than five years on an innovative project named The Independent Child. This group was comprised of 21 teachers, male and female, with many part-time teachers. (situation B)

The third situation was in a secondary school, where a team leader had asked for help to support his leadership and to strengthen the cooperation between his team members. (situation C)

Common to all these examples was that they all were out of relation in their specific contexts. In situation A, we discovered that the staff was divided into a younger group aged 21-26 and an older group aged 55 and older, who didn't understand each others' realities. In situation B, we discovered the *being out of relation* between management and staff, and in situation C we discovered a sick atmosphere as a byproduct of *being out of relation*.

A description of the relation constructionist approach I used

One important feature was to explain to school leaders and their staff that I would work from the idea of the unfolding process or, evolutionary planning (Fullan, 2005). Using the idea that inquiry and knowledge were joined, we would decide the next steps together, one by one, because this change process was seen as unpredictable, uncontrollable and impossible to be planned in detailed ways. The teachers were seen as the experts of their own reality and change process. I, as the consultant, would not act as a so called expert in the traditional view. We all would be included in the process, appreciating each person's contribution in achieving the desired result. Another important feature was, again, explaining relational thought and the appreciative way to inquire into better ways to work together. This was the aim, instead of blaming *the other* for the problems.

At one time the staff (situation A) had filled in a checklist, a kind of test, to inquire as to how they looked at their working together. The staff were quite shocked when they saw the results of this test, visualized with red bars in their charts, especially the one which depicted the level of cooperation. The first reaction was emotional. "What is going on? Help! Who is to blame?" What I first tried to do was to increase the awareness that, although all teachers had filled in the questionnaires, this result could not be seen as *The Absolute Truth*. Discovering, hearing the stories behind these red bars, would be more interesting. It would give the feeling to the teachers that their voice would be heard and taken seriously, and above all would help us to construct a shared meaning of the experienced reality: the shared story. I also emphasized that the way this test was constructed would lead to certain outcomes. Other questions would have led us to other answers and results. We decided to set up a dialogical and collaborative practice with the whole staff, in which they would talk about the stories behind these red bars. We informed them that what we would show in the graphics should not be seen as The Truth but more as a good motive to get into dialogue to understand each other in better ways. We then started to dialogue together in appreciative ways.

At first the teachers were shocked. The mystery was: *How could we not notice that our collaboration is seen as very weak (red bar) by fellow staff members? Have we been blind all the time? Are we playing a game?* In the dialogue, which started spontaneously, I waited for the right timing and the right intervention so I could get them to work in little groups. This took more time than foreseen. By using the *not-knowing stance*, I invited them to decide which steps should be taken. We were all experts. They asked for more time to express their emotions and their amazement about the results. So we gave them more time. Simply by

asking them if it was time to move on, I could go on further. What appeared then, was that they discovered together that the staff was divided in two parts: a group of teachers aged in their early twenties and another group aged in their mid fifties. Using relational thought, I could let them discover that being *out of relation* meant that they didn't know each other's stories of reality. The younger female teachers had their own dynamics, which were illustrated by characteristics such as uncertainty, jealousy, *being out of relation* with others, negative feelings and so on. The older female teachers experienced their reality based on different characteristics, such as positive feelings, being in relation with others, balance and certainty.

Relational thought was very helpful in this emotional time. I explained that we would not search for the black sheep who caused the problem, but that we would look at what we all had been doing together to construct this reality. At each level, I invited the teachers to decide on the next step. When they expressed that they were ready to collaborate to hear each others' stories, we decided to combine the little groups. This was when *being in relation* could evolve further. Using the ideas of dialogical and collaborative practices supported the process. After one hour they all came back with new and better understandings, knowledge that helped them to understand the other in better ways. Then I supported the process, by explaining the composition of the staff in these two different age groups, using the work of Bernard Lievegoed (2000) who has done research about the life stages of people and some typical life issues. These life issues differed totally amongst this staff. Explaining this, without judging, helped the teachers to understand their realities in better ways. It was a very emotional meeting with lots of confusion at first, but during the meeting we made great progress in shared understanding and creating new shared knowledge. From this shared knowledge, they were able to re-construct their *being in relation* with the school reality.

When I came back after two weeks, this process had evolved further. Teachers had taken initiatives as producers of change to get *in relation* with those which were not understood. This helped them to cooperate, in more sustainable ways.

The teaching staff in situation (B), who worked on the subject *The Independent Child*, showed little progress after more than four years' work. Many teachers didn't do the things they had agreed upon. I was involved in this process during their fifth year, and we mutually agreed at the beginning of the sixth year to finish this project at the end of the school year. It was quite a mind-breaking or mind-bending challenge for me, as to how to put this staff into better relation. I often opened the dialogue with the teachers and the management by asking what they thought the next steps might be. They were given voice to decide together, but still the progress was slow. In April 2011, at the end of the school year, we ended the process with a final study day.

The management staff asked if I could convince the teaching staff that change was needed. For me this individualistic approach didn't seem the right one. Change is not seen from the constructionist viewpoint as something to tell people to do. By convincing the staff to do what the management staff found necessary, would be working from the individualistic thought and the power over idea. I suggested that this was one possibility, but that we could also approach the staff in different ways. We started the day with a positive image of the desired and necessary goals, using non-conceptual performances in forms of video clips and music. At 9 am I invited the teachers to sing together a song called I Love Thee (Ik geloof in U). This was not what these teachers had expected; they hesitated to sing out loud at this time of the day. I used humor, and said that we would only leave school in the afternoon when they had sung this song loudly and full of joy! They laughed very skeptically, not really believing they would do so. Then I started with an appreciative presentation of what they had achieved that year, combining this with some interesting and motivating video clips which showed some dilemmas with which the education system was currently challenged. The individualistic orientation, being out of relation, became clear. By this also, the meaning of the subject they

had worked on for more than five years became clear. Through this, I introduced the ideas of social constructionism and the work of Otto Sharmer (2010). I organized collaborative practices in which the teachers in little groups dialogued with each other, trying to find their same old song and the blind spots which these teachers used to sing when working together in change processes. What are we all doing together, including management and school advisory; what constructs the change reality we are in? was the central question. Without blaming or looking for the black sheep, they started to talk with each other. What they discovered, was that they were out of relation: the management blamed the teachers for not doing their work as decided, and the teachers were blaming the management for not listening well and understanding their daily practice.

Working from the relational stance blew away all these judgments, and blame seem to vanish. The appreciative stance opened doors to meet with each other in these dialogues in new ways. Shared new meaning and understanding were some important byproducts of this process. In the afternoon this journey evolved further and, by making new groups, the teachers were asked to detect together a new song which would help them to cooperate to achieve the desired success. Instead of *problem language*, *possibility language* was used, and was written down on big pieces of paper. Relational reflexivity was constructed.

Suddenly, I had the idea of forming three groups, of seven teachers each. These three groups were given a new task, to design a real song based on the morning song I Love Thee, using the outcomes of the previous exercise. Within 45 minutes, they had to design a new song of the desired approach within change processes. They also had to practice this new song with the same tune of the song they had sung so carefully and skeptically at 9 o'clock that morning. After a slow start, suddenly the negative energy was changing into excitement and joy. They started to compose their texts together, being open to each others' contributions. After 45 minutes, they all came back full of pride and excitement. We started the song contest. The air was filled full of energy and happiness. All teachers were singing and clapping as each of the groups presented their new song. This felt so good, so positive and bonding. Fortunately, we could close this day in a very positive way: all teachers singing loudly, laughing and clapping. Of course they were happy, after a hard day of work, that they could leave school in time, but the last activity seemed to re-energize their deep hidden drives again. The difference now, however, was that they had shared their inner dreams. It is here where we see the non-conceptual performance doing its work. Extra dimensions of working together – in forms of body and mind – strengthened the process. A few days later, the school leader sent an email saying that they couldn't get forget these songs...they kept on singing.

In situation C, I started to talk with the staff's leader, who told me about the difficulties he found with his staff. There was a chaotic history of many changes in leadership, locations and composition of the staff. Again, it became clear to me that the individualistic stance caused them all to *be out of relation*. A very negative atmosphere was created and it seemed that they were not aware they were doing this together. I explained that the approach we would use would involve change, in many steps: an evolutionary plan. We could not set out a detailed plan with a beginning and an ending when approaching this situation. It was much too complex. I decided to start with an orientation phase which would give me the opportunity to get *into relation* with everyone involved in this process. I visited the school several times, talked with their leader and some colleagues, and observed the staff in several work settings. After hearing their stories, I realized that this situation was very complex and difficult. To move on further in successful ways, I needed to include everybody in the process. I decided to talk with all staff members in little groups of two, three or four teachers. Some of them chose to have an individual session with me. It was important to offer this opportunity to give the teachers space to decide how to get *in relation* with me.

After hearing all the individual stories, I was able to compile them into a universal story about their combined realities. By doing so, the end story would be a story of all involved instead of a little elite group. By interviewing all these people, I used *appreciative inquiry* ideas to imagine the desired goals and spend less time on the experienced negative past. What do we want to achieve together? What would vitalize our system and way of doing things together? Which ideas can we use from our past, to achieve this imagined future? What do we want to do together? Instead of the usual *problem language*, the language practices should transform into *possibility language* practices. Being open and in a *not knowing stance* in my role as consultant gave me many opportunities to carefully listen and question the participants' ideas and pick these ideas like flowers to construct the next phase in this process. One pattern came out of all these stories: not *being in relation* with the other, in other words, working from the individualistic position - that the other needs to change. They were not fully aware of the idea that they all were involved and thus were all constructing the experienced negative reality.

In June 2011 I finished the story of our conversations. This was quite a challenge. This intervention had delivered more than 20 solutions. The next step was that this report was sent to all participants to fill in missing pieces of information, or to change parts of the story which should be seen in other ways. This was an important intervention. This story would be the story of all, and from this the next steps could be taken in better and shared ways. These next steps were not planned in detail by the so called expert (me as the consultant), but by inviting members of the staff to co-design them. In September 2011, I presented the results to the staff, which was in the meantime divided into three little sub-groups. In this session, we talked about the solutions. Participants were given freedom of choice as to which intervention would be the next.

The effects on the change process

What I experienced in all these examples, is that changing the paradigm for individualistic thought towards relational thought slowly changed or influenced the way people looked at their experienced reality. This is a slow process because it takes time and effort to look at one's own reality in other ways than the usual way. It is like cooking a new recipe for the first time, not really being used to the taste it has, but slowly growing to like this new food.

Using the dialogical and collaborative approaches, the appreciative stance - to invite all to be the producers of change – began a process of building bridges and reconnection. The byproducts were: changed language practices, involvement, shared understanding, new knowledge, motivation and above all, a mutual hope for a better future. These kinds of processes are not easy processes to guide. They need to be maintained and fed continuously, especially as this *being in relation* is fragile. Using the improvisational art, and the flexibility to be within the moment, strengthened the process, as we saw in the *I Believe* process. Being active producers of change stimulated the awareness of relational responsibility amongst all. Again, I saw that being more aware of this overlooked dimension generated lots of new ideas to achieve the desired change. The deep ecological view made clear, within the schools' hierarchy, that we were all responsible and needed to achieve sustainable change by strengthening each other in the process. The simple question, "How do we communicate together?" made a lot clear. We changed the traditional meeting, which was experienced as ineffective and meaningless and which made participants passive, into an active, meaningful and collaborative happening. The management became aware that they were poorly connected to the work floor, and saw that they needed to invest in more visits. Some of the staff members became aware that they could

take action. They did. I received a very open email in which one of the teachers wrote that she had taken action in her group to challenge the future in collaborative and appreciative ways. From September 2011, we will go further with this process in the second phase, putting their ideas into practice.

Suriname

The *I Believe process* is still going on in Suriname; the project is extended to December 2015. I left Suriname in June 2009, just after the publication of *I Believe in You!* It was hard for me to leave the program and the country, but for personal reasons we had to go back to the Netherlands. Fortunately, I could apply for temporary consultant's jobs to support the program, and I have visited Suriname since then, two to three times each year. In the meantime, the PROGRESS staff have been working together with the local people to strengthen the educational system, based on the ideas of *I Believe in You!* Publishing this book does not guarantee that changes will proceed automatically.

Efforts to go forward together, undertaken by the people involved, were needed to achieve sustainability. In the next section, I will first illustrate briefly some examples of how this process is progressing. Next, I will describe two examples in more detail, to illustrate the way the relational work influenced my consultancy work in Suriname, using the outline:

- **A brief sketch of the situation**
- **A description of the relation constructionist approach I used**
- **The effects on the change process**

The impact of *I Believe In You!*

I can, without being modest, say that the spirit of *I Believe in You!* has done its job. In the meantime, more than 8,500 books have been spread out over the country from city to interior. This was quite a logistic challenge, but the enthusiasm of the involved colleagues and their existing networks have made it possible. Now, three years after the launch of the book, everybody knows the book. PROGRESS, UNICEF and MINOV are still committed to the content, and many of them act as ambassadors for the positive direction of elementary education.

The design of PROGRESS in the four mentioned components for the next few years, and the solid principles of *I Believe in You!* in the program, secured the agreement for the process to go on. UNICEF has also integrated the vision of the book in their long term programs. MINOV is also becoming more aware of the impact of this book. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this impact is the following incident, which happened when I visited Surinam in February 2010. In one of the workshops linked to *I Believe In You!*, which were frequently organized after the book was published throughout the country, one of the teachers suddenly stood up and said, with tears in her eyes, *I am going to write a song, and I will call it I Believe In*

You! I was deeply touched in November 2010, when a little present was given to me. It was a professionally made video clip, in which this teacher sang her new song with a group of students. How happy I was, when they told me that the new Minister of Education had embraced the song and the spirit of the book, and when I heard that this song rated highly on the song lists of radio stations.

I Believe in You became familiar language in the Suriname's community. So yes, the process is still going on, and will go on. I am realistic and optimistic. Education for students has not improved for everybody, that's hardly possible in such a short time, and as Fullan and other scholars have expressed: educational change is the work of a generation. The book itself is not what will change anything, it is being and staying *in relation* as described in this dissertation, that will determine in the end which direction this change process will go. Change is not predictable, but faddy, capricious, fitful, freakish, whimsical and wayward, as I found when translating my Dutch into English. Above all, we must see change as a wonderful learning experience for all, in which we really can achieve anything when we really believe in it and are capable of being *in relation* with the other and the otherness. Let's look a little bit closer at two examples.

Example 1 Working on the Vision Mission Statement

In November 2010, I was asked to support the development of a National Vision Statement, for School Inspection, School Advisory and the Teachers Training Colleges. This was an opportunity to use the insights coming out of this study. The usual way of constructing a vision statement would be that an elite group, selected from the departments or colleges, would design and describe the vision with nice, academic language. From the hierarchy, people with certain positions, such as coordinators or leaders, would have been chosen. Then, after discussing what the best vision would be, it would be put on paper and presented to the rest of the community as THE VISION. And then? Well, mostly such a developed vision statement stays well hidden in the filing cabinet for a long time. Using *relational orientation* brought me to a different approach.

A description of the relational constructionist approach which I used

This job was an opportunity to try out my new ideas of *participative change*. Because I already knew the local traditions, it was easy for me to step into this process. As part of the preparations, I invited others to co-design the two day workshop, to achieve the desired outcome: the National Vision Statement. Furthermore, I invited two local members, from *the department of School Advisory* and the Ministry of Education (MINOV), to co-facilitate these workshops. Finally, I asked the local people, who organized these workshops, to invite a broad selection of members from these departments and from teacher colleges. We recognized that change processes should include many members of the community in different ways so that they would feel included, and would be seen as important to the process. As in the schools, the producers of change working with this new vision would be those people who were already working at these departments and colleges. Interestingly, in this workshop, I had to facilitate two different two-day workshops, one for the two Ministry departments (42 participants), and the second for the five teachers' colleges (48 participants). We decided to organize these two-day workshops at an outside location, two hours' drive from the main city. There, participants could stay for two days and get to know each other. We used formal and informal conceptual practices, as well as non-conceptual performances.

The first two-day workshop was attended by almost the whole staff of both departments of School Advisory and School Inspection. Something special happened as we were preparing the workshop rooms in the early morning. One of the school inspectors invited the others to sing some songs and do some hand clapping games. From that moment onward, the spirit in the group was appreciative and positive.

During the workshop, I used the *chameleon approach* to adapt the prepared activities to the moment's needs. For example, enthusiasm was waning at one point, due to a failing air-conditioning system (we must take care of our health in the tropics!). I changed the activities from the prepared conceptual performances into non-conceptual performances, using dance, drama and music. This increased the energy and motivation again. People came alive, had fun, laughed, sang and danced, not noticing that while doing so, they were also working seriously to establish the mission statement.

We used dialogical and collaborative practices to feed the process. During informal moments, such as tea breaks, lunch and dinner, I used *relational reflexivity* to ask people how they appreciated the workshop, and what could make it better. Their comments were important in modifying the activities. The motivation stayed at a high level, and in the evening, when we organized some games relevant to the workshop, we all had great fun. The most important thing that happened was that people were constantly put *in relation* with the other(s) and their realities. In the evening, before dinnertime, we had a drink together and one of the school inspectors started to sing songs. Soon the whole group was singing and having fun. It was a great evening.

The second day of this workshop, we started by showing some video clips of the activities of the previous day. People were touched and amused in many ways, and this non-conceptual performance put them all very quickly in tune with their progress. The whole two-day workshop combined improvisation and flexibility, constantly fine-tuning and inviting all members to be the producers. I made it clear that the outcome of the workshop and its quality would highly depend on their collaboration. We were all responsible for the process and its outcomes. At the end, we were all happy and in good spirits, and we sang loudly as we drove home through the dark jungle to Paramaribo. Our *being in relation* had had an enormous boost.

The next week, I had to facilitate the second workshop. Would it be as great as the first one? My intuition said that this one would be totally different. I decided to forget the experiences of the first workshop and to start as if nothing had happened. The atmosphere was different from the start, from the first group. The participants of these five colleges didn't really know each other; in fact they were competitors in the same business: training aspirant teachers for elementary schools. Seen from the constructionist eye, these five colleges were not *in relation*. I needed to improvise, and not to copy the prepared approach of the previous, successful, workshop. For example, from the beginning I put all these members into short dialogical interactions, with little questions so they could get to know each other. The main questions were: Who are you? and, How can we benefit from your expertise? and What do you expect from these workshops? People were invited to connect with each other, to be curious and to (be) welcoming. This activity helped everybody to get to know each other very quickly. People were allowed a safety zone, and were permitted to share only as deeply as they wished to.

It was a good start. The room was filled with voices chatting, each person's body language was focused to the other, and careful questioning and listening took place. Some hours later, I noticed that two of the participants acted as consumers of this workshop, expecting me, in my role as facilitator, to be the producer of entertainment. As soon as I noticed this, I shared this in appreciative ways with the whole group, by inviting them all to be the active producers, and explaining why this was important to me. I used this moment to explain what the challenge and outcome of a relational approach could be. The level of relational

approach would determine the quality of the outcome. This explanation seemed to help all participants to be aware of the relational responsibility to make this workshop a success.

My challenge during this second workshop was to be constantly open to the moment, not stepping into the trap of expecting the same events as in the previous workshop. By always using relational reflexivity, I could collect the needed information to fine-tune the activities. I changed some of the prepared activities and transformed them into non-conceptual performances. For example, where the participants had to write a newspaper story in the year 2020, which had to be a success story of what they had achieved, I transformed the workshop room into a press conference meeting room. The group played out their press conference in many different ways. The story was serious, but the twists in the stories and the performances were quite hilarious. Especially when some of their present colleagues were suddenly ministers or presidents of the country. We had great fun; the divide boundaries, that I had noticed when we started this workshop, had vanished. By improvising, using conceptual and non-conceptual performances, the energy increased in positive and appreciative ways during these days and, when we left the jungle, this second group also, although different from the first group, sang loudly as we entered the city of Paramaribo.

The effects on the change process

The effects of the change process were that the process and the outcome were experienced as constructive and positive. At the end of the workshop, people started to express openly what they had experienced, and said how proud they were of the new relationships built. They expressed a growing awareness of how they could view a vision statement in new ways, and how they understood the need to keep this vision alive. To this aim, we had developed a simple path with activities designed by the participants themselves, as to how they would continue together in this process. They became aware that they should vitalize this vision constantly to make it work, and that the best way would be to do it *in relation* with others. During these next steps, there was a notion to invite others who would be important in designing the concept vision statement further. We had achieved our desired outcome: the concept vision statement. This didn't need to be the perfect formulation made by a selected group. In not being perfect, they allowed others space, to come with their ideas for strengthening the final statement.

The outcome was that all participants, including the facilitators, had a positive experience of moving forward together, in a complex process which I had called: *Going on expedition together!* The half-open approach, the awareness of using the moment, the courage to change the program while being in the moment, the openness to feedback from all participants during formal and informal moments, as well as the generic themes, had strengthened the process. All participants felt important in whatever contribution they had given. Again, I was struck by this experience by which we can put people *in relation*, using the relational stance and the ideas coming out of this Ph.D.

Example 2 Constructing a two year program for training Special Needs

In March 2011, I was asked to develop a design for a two year training program, for the special needs coordinator within the elementary schools. Again, this gave me the opportunity to design a program which was based on the local needs, instead of copying or using a European program and modifying this for the local situation. In the Suriname's elementary schools, there is hardly any coordination of the students with special needs. This is still in its infancy. Also, the training of teachers fails in giving aspirant teachers a strong basis to deal with these special needs. The effect is that the percentage of repeaters and dropouts is high. Students quite commonly fail their grades, and have to repeat some grades several times. In my work within the PROGRESS program, I had often worked with *the department of School Advisory*. In 2007, this department was weak and highly demotivated. This was caused by the weak conditions of their work setting, the insufficient support of their leaders, and the high number of schools which they had to support, while their staff was limited to seven school advisors for 340 primary schools spread out over the country. Most of all, this was caused by their being *out of relation*.

When I started to work with them, our relationships grew. By careful listening, and questioning about their needs and concerns, I could slowly design, together with them, some simple steps forward. The main challenge was to put them *into relation* with their colleagues and the working field, and to drag them out of the victim position, which was a byproduct of their individualistic orientation: we and them, here and there, *the other* is to blame for the reality I am living in. In other words, they saw reality as something outside themselves, which they felt they had no influence to change. I started the dialogical and collaborative practices to put everyone *into relation* and to acquire, in appreciative ways, the desirable goal. We designed scenarios of the de-motivating realities, and gave them names in forms of metaphors. The participants expressed their situation as, a house that is burning, but nobody is there to stop the fire, or, people who are drowning in a river screaming for help, but nobody listens. It was motivating to design the desirable realities for their future; this gave them more energy and dragged them out of the victim position into a new position, like the bus driver who takes control back over his bus, to drive in the desired direction. They chose the metaphor of the rising sun, which would symbolize the vitalization of their department by being active in building bridges with each other and the other departments.

The process continued, and this department transformed their way of doing things together instead of being separated in their work activities. Active engagement, relational reflexivity and relational responsibility were the new ways of their working together. They transformed their individualistic approach into a relational one. This helped them to be in charge of their own change process, rather than waiting for others to do the job. They felt a kind of shared happiness, energy, and pride as byproducts of this renewed *being in relation*. They were driving their busses themselves instead of being passengers!

Out of this scenario, one of the actions was to organize a network of special needs coordinators for the whole country. Yolanda Stella, a member of the School Advisory department, supported by her head of department, succeeded in re-connecting others, using her re-born passion. She started to organize all kinds of activities to achieve her aim. The design of the training for Special Needs Coordinators was one of these activities.

A brief sketch of the situation

Yolanda Stella, member of *the department of School Advisory*, recruited almost 54 teachers, who were motivated to join this special training. In the weeks of preparations I invited Yolanda to be the co-facilitator of these workshops, which she happily accepted. I wanted my role as external expert to be as small as possible, to give as much open space as possible to those who I saw as most important active users of the system: such as the local experts like Yolanda.

The way these special needs programs are developed in Europe, is that students are mostly seen as the problems which should be cured. It is the common individualistic orientation which splits reality into two worlds: the teachers' and the students' worlds. They are the problem, they have to be helped. What happens then is that these students are labelled in many ways, then tested to find and diagnose the expected deficiency. It is thought, from this orientation, that these problems can be fixed by special help in or outside the class room or even by sending these students to the special needs schools. It is not to say that this approach is totally wrong, but again, it is my experience that when we approach special needs from the relational orientation, the approach is totally different, and I think it leads to more sustainable outcomes for all. For me, it was quite an opportunity and a challenge to design a totally different approach using relational orientation as a fundamental base for designing this training.

A description of the relation constructionist approach I used

Strengthened by the insights of my own working experiences, as well as the outcomes of this Ph.D., helped me to develop the design of this new training. I will just describe the first steps in this process, because at the time of writing we are in the middle of the design stage.

As in *the I believe In You! process*, we searched for the key players in the field of expertise. Using the existing networks helped us to construct a steering group, for monitoring this training. By doing so, we could more easily design a training program, by honoring the local traditions and knowledge. Together with this steering group, who were the representatives of different departments and organizations, we started to design. We did not work with a detailed plan, but with the idea of an evolving journey. The tendency of some of them was the wish to immediately start training these teachers to analyze and diagnose all kinds of students' learning deficiencies. The usual individualistic orientation was strongly present. I then presented the ideas of social constructionism, and how to look at reality in different ways. I showed the difference in approaching special needs of students, seen from both the individualistic and the relational orientations. We decided to design the first two-day workshop based on these ideas. The aim was to make the participants more aware of the effects of dealing with students, from both orientations.

This workshop, where 54 teachers were present, also needed lots of improvisation. The tone was set by creating an appreciative atmosphere, and by starting with a warm welcome where people met with each other in many ways, via collaborative practices. Using conceptual and non-conceptual performances, by use of video clips, karaokes, drama and games, helped to build an atmosphere of cooperation, commitment and positive energy. I often asked the participants, during formal and informal moments, about their feelings and ideas at the time. I used the knowledge to modify and fine-tune the workshop's activities.

The effects on the change process

It was a big challenge to facilitate this workshop with such a large number of people. Yolanda Stella was facilitating some parts of it in her own style, using the prepared ideas but improvising on them by the moment. She did a great job. Out of our collaborative practices in the preparations and the facilitating of this workshop, pride, happiness, motivation, and full commitment were emerging. Yolanda stood straight, with her head up and a proud expression on her face. Her energy was sensed and appreciated by all participants. It mobilized and focused them even more, in the process. We used each other's strengths as well those of the participants. They were also seen as the experts of their local contexts. The non-conceptual performances helped to increase their energy, when it was decreasing due to high temperatures or fatigue from excessive concentration. For example at 10.30 am, the air conditioning failed to lower the temperature. We had our break, with drinks and a little snack. The temperature was 30 degrees C. One of my fellow facilitators had the idea to use karaoke to energize the group. Within a few minutes, we were all singing and holding hands while Michael Jackson's Karaoke was shown on a big screen: *We are the World*, was what we sang. This illustrates how well we succeeded in *being in relation*. The group was revitalized and we could proceed.

Linking the ideas of individualistic and relational orientation to their own contexts helped the participants to better understand these ideas. Later, I improvised dialogical practices where participants had to explain, in their own words, these ideas, and their understandings of the individualistic and relational orientations. They were challenged to show their understandings of these concepts, and helped each other to increase this understanding in better ways.

At the end of the first workshop day, we organized an evaluation using green and red cards to express what the participants had experienced. After they were put into dialogical practices, some of them were given the opportunity to explain what they had shared. We couldn't let them all speak, because of the limited time and the great number of participants. Interestingly, on the second day we had decided not to evaluate, because we expected to have the same outcomes as the previous day. At the end of the workshop, participants suddenly took the microphone to express their feelings and ideas about this workshop. This was done in an appreciative manner. This action was remarkable, because at the beginning of these two days, people were too shy to come to the microphone. Now, they were literally standing in a row, waiting to grasp the microphone out of the hands of previous speakers to tell their stories with much excitement. I realized that these moments are so authentic, coming out of this process of being *in relation*, that there could not have been a better evaluation than this. Creating this kind of atmosphere and letting things unfold, where people feel safe to speak and express themselves, is, in my opinion, the best way to establish sustainable change processes.

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Appendix 1. The LEARN project 2003, more information

The project phases

Of course, a lot can be said about this pilot. It yielded many good and many bad stories. The path of reform is not strewn with roses. It had its ups and downs, and many events were of course not foreseen. Actually, the LEARN pilot *itself* could have been a subject for this dissertation. Like the central theme of this dissertation, the LEARN process makes it clear that the usual idea of seeing change as something you can plan and predict is unacceptable. Many unforeseen things happen. The LEARN process shows once again that change is not just something rational and individual, but that change is a dynamic, relational occurrence. The human factor determined to a large extent how everything happened in the process. Perhaps it is this human factor which was underestimated during the pilot. Growing insight, spontaneous and autonomous actions were often used to change and revise the plan. And so the LEARN experience deepened our understanding and paved the way for the PROGRESS program. It was a good learning experience. I will briefly describe the 4 phases of the Project.

The preparation phase

During the preparation phase, staffing was organized. A group was formed consisting of Belgian qualified staff together with Surinamese staff, who were mainly teachers with little experience in educational reform. The preparations then focused on developing the implementation strategy and focus of the pilot. It soon became clear that the LEARN staff itself needed training in how to support schools and Ministry divisions on the road to the desired reform. They also needed training in the chosen Belgian concept of experience-based education. Furthermore, time was needed for relation-building within the staff as well as externally with other departments and organizations in the Surinamese local context.

In addition to the staff, a steering group was formed, made up of MINOV policymakers and the Permanent Secretary for Education, together with the VVOB country manager. I wonder why they did not decide to add representatives of schools to this steering group. This could have strengthened the process. Giving a say to those concerned with education, or those who practice, is a good thing in my opinion, and from a social constructionist point of view. It shows respect, in a formal way, for the group that is most important in the educational reform: the teachers and their school leaders. I strongly feel that the lack of qualified staff, specially trained or experienced in school improvement and change processes, affected the progress of this pilot adversely. Regular changes of coordinator, staff conflicts, as well as a lack of capacity to deal with the increase in activities, did not help the process either.

In addition to training all teachers at 15 primary schools (about 300 teachers), LEARN also wanted to support divisions of the Ministry of Education (MINOV), especially the schools' inspectorate and school advisors division. It soon became clear that they had to drop the divisions and focus more on teachers and their principals, because the capacity of the LEARN staff was too small to manage all this. This was seen as a lost opportunity to guarantee sustainability. Strengthening the support divisions, and taking them along the way of change, could have helped to build commitment to, and connection with, the desired educational change. This shows again that, from a social constructionist point of view, if we want to bring about permanent educational change we need to build systems and relationships, or networks, based on a relational constructionist idea instead of the usual individual idea. Just strengthening one wheel in the system (Taylorism) will not result in building strong mechanisms capable of dealing with the complexity of

change and educational change in the era we live in. LEARN soon noticed that this wheel, i.e. teachers and school leaders, could not work effectively because the other wheels in the system stayed in the same place and did not move. They were stuck, or perhaps even rusty. It demonstrates that a more ecological way is needed to effect sustainable change.

The operational phase

Following the preparation phase, the LEARN staff started to organize special training for the teachers of the fifteen pilot schools, at the end of 2003. The principles of experience-based education concept were the key to these sessions. The training was received with great enthusiasm. Teachers and school leaders were struck by the novel idea of giving high priority to the well-being and motivation of their students. The challenge for the LEARN staff and the schools was to move from the usual concept that learning is externally regulated (individual view) towards a more self-directed learning (relational, postmodern view), where students are active owners of the learning process. Unfortunately, all these efforts, as I experienced it, did not mean that all these teachers and school leaders really had a deep understanding of what it meant or what it demanded from them in their work in the classroom. One of the great insights I gained when working abroad in different cultures is that we very easily assume that others understand our models of reality, specifically educational models of reality. We can talk and read about ideas, but as long as we do not have our own experience and pictures of these concepts or models, it is hard to have this understanding. Primary schools in Suriname and Aruba are traditional; the talk-chalk and copy method is the only model teachers have seen. Writing the dissertation for my Master's degree, about the reflexive capacity of teachers, helped me develop a deeper understanding of the strong influence of the deep-rooted assumptions and beliefs that guide our behavior. The models we have experienced as children, and later as student teachers in schools, are deeply engraved into our system and, as long as we do not have other experiences, these are what often guides, almost imperceptibly, our actions in reform processes.

We saw later (2008) in the evaluation⁷⁸ that not all the teachers and principals were highly committed to the pilot. The headmasters had a strong influence on the sustainability of the process, and the negative stance of some completely blocked the process of improvement and change. On the other hand, the highly supportive stance of other headmasters and key figures in the school had a great impact on the results. A highly committed teacher told me that her headmaster had told the staff at the end of the LEARN pilot, "Well teachers, LEARN stops and so do we!". You can imagine that the teachers who were not keen on making extra efforts for change heaved a sigh of relief. They were happy. Back to normal: talk-chalk and copy, that's what we know and what we're good at. But others were very disappointed. They had experienced what effects pupil-directed learning had on their students and the test results. A few positive words from this school leader would have meant a lot for future reform efforts at this school.

During the operational phase, in 2006, it became clear that organizing training for more than 300 teachers, together with training for new teachers and their school leaders, was too formidable a task for such a small staff. Educational change is not predictable and cannot be planned. New insights, new awareness, and new experiences lead to new questions. One of the questions which arose was whether it was necessary or not to strengthen the capacity of schools for change and improvement. In 2006, the staff and the steering group decided to change the strategy of teacher training. Instead of training all the individual teachers it was

⁷⁸ Evaluation Report LEARN by Liesbeth Klaver et al., (2008)

decided to train two representatives selected from each school. From a social constructionist view, this was a good strategy, I think. School staff were given the opportunity to choose their best representatives. They were called *interne begeleiders* (internal coaches). They were regarded as the coordinating change agents in the schools. The idea was also that when LEARN stopped in 2008, they could play an important role in helping other schools in the new PROGRESS program.

This group, of almost 35 change agents, was then selected and trained in different skills in a very short time. Another mistake had been made. The idea was that when these change agents had been trained, they would be able to apply what they had learnt to their school contexts. Just fill the 'engine' with information and the 'car' of change will drive itself! These teachers had to attend four training courses in six months. It was too much for the LEARN staff to coach these teachers in their own context. It was like being on a roller-coaster. Experts were rushed in. New orientations hardly had time to be internalized by these teachers. As soon as they had grasped something, a new 'train' of information came in. Another problem was that these 35 teachers had no idea of what they were getting themselves into. Being a coordinating change agent would also mean more responsibility in the school and that is a totally different story from being just a teacher! It was not an easy process at all. Beside these change agents, the 15 school leaders were also trained in quality improvement in their own schools. LEARN was approaching its final year in December 2007.

Final phase and evaluation

When I joined the project in 2007, it was my task to coordinate the final phase of the pilot, to support the LEARN staff, which by then had been reduced to only four people, to organize the evaluation and final monitoring report. In the meantime, I was involved in developing the new 2008-2015 program, which we later called PROGRESS. It was fortunate that I was involved, in a way, in the LEARN pilot, because it enabled me to use my knowledge and insights in designing the long-term PROGRESS program. It is hard to change things at the end of a process when there is too little capacity to do so. I supported the staff in completing the training for change agents, and in producing some valuable training books which could be useful in the new program. Moreover, I assisted in finalizing the LEARN monitoring report, based on 5 years of intensive monitoring by the MINOV evaluation division with assistance from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. Even though this research was done with great expertise and commitment on the part of the researchers, I felt that it would not be enough. From a modernist, individualistic point of view it would be risky, I believed, if we used this scientific research to find the Truth. Figures are one way to show some things. But I felt we would have a better understanding of the change process if we heard the real stories and observed the actual reality in the schools and classrooms. I organized a qualitative survey and the collection of lessons learnt by all involved.

Five years of monitoring 2003-2007, the scientific approach

Professional monitoring was organized from the beginning. The intention was to collect evidence-based data to prove to the Ministry that a shift in the pedagogical and didactical approach would lead to better results. In the local and political context, the Ministry appreciates scientifically proved results in order to persuade the politicians' system to support the necessary changes. Using this kind of scientific research in this way, I think, is useful, but we still have to be critical. Yearly tests were used to collect data. The teachers' attitudes and views and students' well-being, involvement and motivation were measured. The cognitive results of language and maths were also monitored. The monitoring system was developed with the support of Marlies Lacante, a sympathetic professor of the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. Four instruments were

developed to measure a) the pupil's well-being, b) the students' cognitive development, c) attitudes and views among teachers, and d) attitudes and views among school managers. Monitoring also included a context-based analysis to research external factors (such as socio-economical factors and parents), which can affect the process of primary education. This intensive monitoring system enabled us to measure the progress of the project and to make adjustments in accordance with the principles of the PCM (Project Cycle Management).

The results of this research⁷⁹

A brief summary of the findings of the final report follows below:

- Teachers experienced their schools as more process-orientated than result-driven (competitive). Their own actions had also become more process-oriented and less result-driven. Teachers emphasized the individual learning benefits. This is what LEARN expected and hoped would happen. Contrary to expectations, the process focus of the school did not increase significantly. At class level it did.
- Strong schools had strong leaders. Weak schools had weak leaders. Weak schools had more result-driven teachers; students' well-being was limited. These students were less satisfied with their teachers and did not have strong relationships with their teachers. In schools with poor leadership, students felt less accepted socially. The results of language and maths were lowest at these schools.
- Students were more motivated when the teachers were process-oriented. They were more task-focused and had a more positive homework attitude.
- Students felt more comfortable at process-oriented schools with strong leadership. They were more satisfied and had more self-confidence.
- Result-oriented approaches were not necessarily negative for students, especially when process-oriented approaches were also used. The least favorable situation for motivation was when neither process-oriented nor result-oriented approaches were used.
- Students who were taught by teachers who were both result-oriented and process-oriented had the best results in the cognitive tests.

These results look promising, especially in view of our attempts to convince the policymakers that pupil-centered and pupil-directed learning are important in the transition to better quality education for children. Still, in spite of the positive results of this research, I want to make some critical remarks. On paper everything looks fine, but reality may be different. With my practical experience I am not totally convinced that the pilot as such achieved all these results. In reality, only few schools were fully committed to the project, intensive coaching for such an open concept was minimal during the pilot, and schools still had to deal with lack of materials and qualified methods. A great number of school leaders lacked qualified training. Schools were often far away, too far for frequent visits, such as the schools in Nickerie, 500km away from the main city. Change agents were trained in six months in many subjects. Too many, I think to be really implemented in schools. Within the change agent group, changes occurred regularly. The change agents began their adventure without really realizing what it would mean in their daily practice (more responsibility, confronting colleagues etc). The LEARN staff was reduced to four members in 2006. LEARN focused little, if

⁷⁹ These results have been were officially published and presented in Suriname in: Eindresultaten 5 jaar monitoring LEARN 2003-2007. MINOV/VVOB/KU(2008)

any, on implementing effective methods for language and maths to improve the results. Books and materials used by teachers were often old-fashioned or there were simply not enough copies for all children. Parents who could afford it copied books; parents who could not failed to support their children. And so on.

We therefore have to be careful in interpreting the data, or accepting this research as the absolute truth. From a constructionist point of view there is no truth. There are multiple realities and ways of looking at realities. This research was just one way of looking at the specific context, as there are also other ways to do so. It goes too far, in my opinion, to state that LEARN achieved these results in schools proved by these test results. So let us not say that LEARN achieved all these results; other aspects also influenced the results. And there are many ways to achieve the same or perhaps even better results. The so-called truth depends on who tells the story. And this can also change.

As we will see later, we were able to use the results as a basis for the PROGRESS program. The research and its findings helped to convince the government to support the transition to a more learner-directed and learner-centered education system. After all, this was our main goal. Realizing that there are many ways to look at reality, I suggested organizing a parallel survey in the final phase of the LEARN pilot with some very simple questions to be answered: "What does a layman see when he visits a pilot school on a normal school day?" "What does he see when he visits a non-pilot school?" "What do people do together?" At the moment (June 2011) I realize even more that this is really a social constructionist question So that is what we did. We organized qualitative research.

Qualitative research, what do people do in school?

So we faced a new challenge. On the one hand, we had these scientific monitoring results, which drew mainly on international and validated tests. On the other hand, I felt we would miss precious results if we confined ourselves to just these monitoring results. As a practitioner, I was interested to hear the real stories of school leaders, teachers, children and their parents. What stories would they tell us when we visited the school while functioning normally? We therefore developed a qualitative evaluation⁸⁰ around the questions: What do we see and hear when we enter a school on a normal day? What do people construct together? Together with a Surinamese and a Dutch school inspector, I developed instruments and questionnaires to observe teachers working with their children. We developed interview protocols for teachers, principals, students and parents to be able to hear and appreciate their stories. The good thing of this approach is that we could see, feel and hear whether things had changed. From a social constructionist view, we could let the community speak in their specific contexts, realizing that each story was unique and should be understood in terms of their reality. We could crosscheck results by asking teachers, parents, students, headmasters what they thought about the attempts to focus on the well-being and motivation of children.

The results were interesting. We discovered there were strong schools with strong leaders, and weak schools with weak leaders. On one occasion, the head did not want to be visited at all; she almost refused to admit the researchers to the school. She had openly said to her staff that she had never been motivated to take part in the pilot and wanted all activities to be stopped as soon as the pilot had finished. In the weak school, we discovered that the connectedness of school leader, teachers, students and their parents was poor and relationships were unstable. There was no dialogue and collaborative practices among teachers

⁸⁰ Liesbeth Klaver (Dutch school Inspector) and James Holingsworth (Surinam School Inspector) visited a selection of the pilot schools for 2 weeks. Before this, we grouped these 15 schools into Weak-Middle and- Strong and randomly chose 2 schools from each.

were almost taboo. The top schools were those schools with strong relationships among school leader, staff, students and their parents. In these schools, there was a warm welcome and an open climate to talk about development, change and improvement. Of course, these schools also had their weak points, but the great difference was that here was a positive attitude to solve problems together as a community. Students and teachers were most satisfied in these strong schools, as monitoring the pilot had shown. Writing this, I realize that the weak schools seemed to work from the individual, modernist idea, dividing school's reality into "this and that", "here and there". The school leaders seemed to be separated from the teachers' and the children's or parents' worlds. On the other hand, the strong schools seemed to work from a relational view, being strongly committed and connected, convinced that building fundamental change is based on commitment and connectedness of all: school leaders, teachers, children and parents. Kansanan et al. (2000) says something very interesting: It is what teachers think, what teachers do at classroom level, which ultimately shapes the kind of education young people get. I agree with him. In all the stories we heard, it was what school leaders, teachers, children and parents thought that created their unique reality. In some case this was sad, but in other situations it was very promising. The result of this qualitative research was great input for the new PROGRESS program.

The aftercare phase

The last phase was the aftercare phase. Such a phase had not been anticipated in the planned approach of LEARN, but I thought it would be essential to include it. After five years of close contact with 15 schools, just letting go from one moment to the next (31 December 2007 was the official closing date and the end of financing the pilot), in my opinion, would not show respect for all these motivated people. So in this phase we tried to withdraw slowly from the pilot and offer new perspectives to the motivated school leaders and teachers in the PROGRESS program. Schools did not like this phase, because they now had to stand at their own two feet and keep the reform going. It made most of them feel uncomfortable, especially because they had had negative experiences as far as support from government departments was concerned. Again, we were confronted with one of the failures of LEARN. Since LEARN had not succeeded in strengthening the various divisions of the Ministry of Education, such as the school advisory division, the schools inspectorate and the curriculum development division, the support system at mezo level for schools was still very weak. The LEARN staff finished their job and went home to Belgium. The chosen open concept of experience-based education required a lot of intensive coaching and guidance, which could not be provided in Suriname. When LEARN had finished, the possibility of going on with this concept was remote.

It is clear that just piloting was not enough to have a long-term effect on the change we wanted, to solve the numerous problems in Suriname's local context. I think almost anyone could have predicted that within one to two years little would be left of the achievements of LEARN, even in the successful pilot schools. Trying to solve this problem, I came up with the idea to establish a network of change agents and motivated school leaders who had worked in this pilot. I could arrange some money to support schools, with the help of the Dutch embassy. By creating a network, we could feed these change agents and bridge the gap between the end of LEARN and the beginning of PROGRESS. Furthermore, I looked for opportunities within the design of the new PROGRESS program. The main question was whether or not we could get around the strict rules of DGOS⁸¹ to create possibilities for the former pilot schools. One idea was to use strong teachers and headmasters as training partners, or coaching partners, in the new PROGRESS program. Another idea was to use these pilot schools as models of what "other education" could look like, or as learning places.

⁸¹ DGOS is the Belgian organization that financed LEARN and the subsequent PROGRESS program.

Appendix 2. The PROGRESS program, 2007- 2015, more information

Preparation phase

Many activities were undertaken during the preparation phase, which lasted almost one and a half years. Given the relational orientation, it was essential to involve as many stakeholders as possible to design a program which was supported and understood by those involved. We therefore had to hear the personal stories of many participants to develop a deeper understanding of the reality. We gathered people's own stories and views about the present situation and desired future, by organizing numerous participatory workshops in small groups, feedback loops, interviews and so on. The results as to the present situation and personal experiences, as well as wished-for, realistic solutions, were included in the POP⁸² program plan. Together with Surinamese people, we tried to describe risks and opportunities. An external consultant was hired to support the process. Once again it became clear to me that external, European consultants have their own biased approach to the task. In using one's own reality as a conceptual framework, there is less room for local conceptual frameworks. Instead of establishing dialogues, discussions are the result. I had just arrived in Suriname, it was June 2007, and I often had to steer this process in the desired direction. Instead of losing people because of misunderstandings or misconceptions or by approaches which made them feel excluded, we wanted to relate and connect with people, to listen to their voices and to appreciate them as much as possible.

After collecting all these stories, we wrote and rewrote the POP, the operational plan, changed it again and again on the basis of the valuable Surinamese feedback, and checked the design every time with the local people: Is this what you meant and wanted? It had to be their plan and their program. Again, it is one of the fruitful insights of postmodernism that those who are involved in the change should be heard and seen and taken seriously. A group of experts cannot design a program for others. This would again be the subject-object approach (S-O), leading to separate realities. From the postmodern view, everyone is the expert and is valuable for designing change programs. I have often experienced in my working life that this way of working, i.e. connecting with people, approaching as experts and taking them seriously, is an important feature of creating a strong foundation for the implementation of the plan. In the meantime, VVOB started to recruit a new staff in Europe as well as in Suriname for implementing this ambitious program.

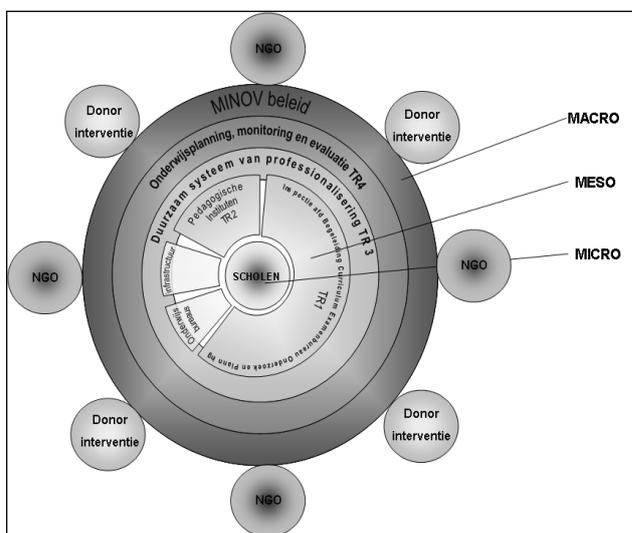
Designing the program

After collecting all these stories of insights, wishes and dreams, we started to design the program. It was quite a challenge to design this long-term integral program. Once again, we come across the two paradigms of a planned change, or, the evolving journey. Knowing our goals, knowing our strategies and knowing the four main groups in education we wanted to strengthen would have been more than enough to design a deliberately half-open planning. But the organization that financed the program had other ideas. Their rules were strict and involved detailed planning and budgeting. I had to work out in detail what we were going to do in the next five years, how many workshops and which groups needed to attend in 2009, 2010, 2011 and what they were meant to achieve. In addition, hundreds of indicators of predictable and especially controllable outcomes had to be formulated. And above all this, we had to determine foreseen risks by working out risk analysis. Drawing up this detailed planning meant a lot of work for the small team, the then

⁸² POP may be regarded as the PROGRESS operational plan, in which the strategy is described in greater detail.

program officer and me. We had to meet many deadlines and the guidelines for designing the program were often changed, which made things even more difficult.

As I tried to explain in the preceding chapters, it is not that planning as such is wrong. It depends on how we deal with this planning and how much we are aware of the so-called assumptions that change can be planned, predicted and controlled, and its effects on the change process. What I could predict was that the detailed plan would have to be changed many times to adapt it to the change itself, step by step. It would be interesting to analyze how much time and energy are spent in organizations and change processes on adapting detailed planning to the reality of change, how much attention is focused on the detailed plan rather than on the change process itself. I can see the parallel with the school context in the Netherlands these days (2011), where teachers are obliged to make many detailed plans as if learning is predictable, controllable and manageable.



In 2010 the first cycle of PROGRESS had to be changed again for the next three years. Unfortunately, the approach was an individual one, a modernistic approach, where the program manager, with great effort and commitment, changed the plan by himself, took out some pieces as if it was a cake, and almost lost the commitment of the staff that had to carry out the plan. They were not part of it and could not agree with the approach or the effects of the redesigned plan. How can we adjust the plan, if we are not involved in thinking about redesigning it together? This approach to designing was in contrast to the

way of designing in 2007, when we used a postmodern approach by trying to involve as many people as possible. How easy it is for a manager to lose his fellow-workers when realities are split or separated and no dialogical or collaborative practices have taken place. Fortunately, the staff expressed their criticism and concerns; the manager was wise to be open and to use them to finalize the new design. In a way, it shows today's reality in organizations where we often see a mixture of these two paradigms.

In my opinion, achieving improvement and change without a clear idea of where you want to go will turn out to be a difficult journey. As I said before, a great variety of initiatives has been taken within the Surinamese context without any coordination with the Ministry. For that reason, the idea arose to support the Ministry by developing this concept of child-friendly and pupil-centered education. On the one hand, it could be very useful in the change and improvement activities of the four components of PROGRESS, and on the other hand, it could stimulate collaboration with other partners in the education. The idea which was conceived here later developed into the publication *I Believe in You!* From the beginning, MINOV and UNICEF were in for cooperation. When I left Surinam in June 2009, I was pleased to be able to leave behind this publication as a strong catalyst for PROGRESS, but also for approaches in educational change in Suriname. The concept of vision *I Believe in you!* should be seen as the foundation of PROGRESS.

A little more about the educational context: the four components

Many discussions have been held in Surinam over the years, about the changes that would be needed to transform the education system into an eleven-year basic education system for all children aged 4-15. I will describe some aspects of the educational situation we had to deal with. It will give the reader a deeper understanding of the complexity of Suriname's educational context, and the need for strengthening at macro level and mezo level, the focus of PROGRESS.

Component 1 Strengthening the divisions of the Ministry of Education and Community Development (MINOV) in support of the reform of primary education

This component mainly focuses on the strengthening of the MINOV divisions by increasing quality and coordination. Well-qualified, well-equipped, coordinated and qualitative divisions within the Ministry would help schools better achieve quality education in the desired stimulating contexts. MINOV plays a major part in establishing quality education in Surinam. As explained earlier, the lack of sufficient qualified staff, political appointments, low salaries, weak management, poor coordination and operation at all levels, failing communication etc. lead to inefficient work within, and among divisions. Schools need support from the authorities to achieve the desired quality improvement. Schools need qualitative support and guidance from school advisory services. In spite of the prospect of a pension and a steady job, working for the Ministry is not attractive to people because of low salaries, long working hours, chaotic management, and so on. Many divisions are understaffed. A lot of work has to be done by a small group of people. Nine school advisors without any up-to-date training have to cope with 332 schools scattered all over the country.

A brief analysis of the various divisions of the Ministry

The divisions currently are inadequately equipped to fully support schools in the desired reform. Even though there are many differences between the various departments, they also have things in common. For this reason, we are in favor of strengthening the divisions as a whole, and in coherence with one another, in order to create a stimulating and supporting context for achieving quality education in schools. From a social constructionist view, it is important to mention this. Stimulating joint actions within the divisions and among them will have positive effects on their functioning. They will be transformed from isolated islands into archipelagos. The divisions will be supported in line with the educational concept described in *I Believe in You!* by developing a new policy, adapting and reformulating tasks, by developing necessary competencies by means of professionalization, improving coordination, communication and information exchange, and by organizing an internal quality system. Better-equipped and strengthened divisions at mezo level are necessary to support schools more effectively.

In our sessions, many employees (in the Ministries divisions) told us that they were not satisfied with their working conditions. It is very difficult to attract new staff, for the reason that they have to work longer hours within the Ministries divisions than in their schools, for little difference in salary. People frequently have several jobs to add to their basic income. There is a shortage of staff, so the workload increases. Staff feel overburdened because of this lack of capacity. There is also a lack of equipment, at the logistic level, such as computers, projectors, office materials, and means of transport. It makes it harder to work effectively and efficiently. There are hardly any possibilities to copy materials for training sessions for schools. People often asked me to give them paper, or make copies, and I saw colleagues drawing instruction cards by hand.

There is no human resources management. There is confusion as to who has what authority, and duties overlap. Schools inspectors organize training for teachers, because school advisors do not have time to do so. There is no policy as to professionalization. This makes it even harder to deal with the rapid developments. When we look at the knowledge about pupil-centered education or new developments within education, there is a wide knowledge gap as far as child-friendly education or learning-centered education is concerned. Hardly any training is provided for staff. All this causes problems in guiding innovation and change processes well. Before *I Believe in You!* there was no clear definition of child friendly-education. There is no well-documented library available for preparing work properly. There are hardly any recent books available in the divisions, and there are no files on educational projects in Suriname. When I participated in the analysis of the divisions in 2007, we found that people were working with books dating from 1975. Furthermore, there is no systematic exchange of information among divisions. It is often not known what projects aim to achieve. Communication, coordination and monitoring are weak. Regular reflection or evaluation within or among divisions does not take place. The heads of the divisions fail to put people to work in a collaborative way. Quality care is not systematically organized in all divisions.

Some illustrations of these weak conditions

School Advisory Service

This division is faced with a high rate of absenteeism, caused by illness and/or lack of motivation and cooperation within the division. There is a lot of dissatisfaction among the staff (2007). There are nine school advisors, most of them in their late fifties; just a few of them are competent to support schools. Just nine persons to cover 325 schools. Some of the metaphors they used in one of my workshops to describe the situation in 2009 were *drenkelingen in een grote vijver die niet geholpen worden* (people left to drown in a big pond), or *een huis dat afbrandt en niet geblust wordt* (a house that is burning down and the fire is not extinguished) or *een zinkend schip* (a sinking ship).

Curriculum Division

This division lacks the expertise needed for developing a new curriculum based on the concept of child-friendly education. Most staff members in this division are teachers and they do their best, but they are not qualified to cope with the difficult task of curriculum development. Suriname has not developed standards for designing curricula. I found that the group that designed history did not have contact with the group dealing with geography or biology. This has led to different didactical approaches in the guidelines for teachers. A missed opportunity, for the new books have been printed for the next ten years.

Schools Inspectorate

This division has to work with outdated laws (from 1961, drawn up in the Dutch colonial context), which results in ineffective quality control, and inability to impose sanctions on weak schools. School inspectors often do work they should not be doing. They call it fire-fighting. There is no administrative staff to support the school inspectors.

Component 2 Strengthening Teachers' Training Colleges

Student teachers that are better trained in the desired school concept of Suriname, i.e. pupil-centered and competency-based learning, contribute to quality education in the long run. Future teachers can be change agents in long-term innovation processes. Suriname has four teachers' training colleges.

A brief analysis of the teachers' training colleges

When we analyzed the situation (2009) there was little cooperation among the five institutes. One of the main problems they face is the great number of students who attend the colleges, but do not want to become teachers. Lack of other possibilities for vocational education at advanced level induces students to enroll at the teachers' training colleges. What is more, the level of many students is often substandard when they start teachers' training college. As a result, when they leave college their level is still not good enough for quality teaching. Materials, books and literature are often out of date or just photocopies. There is no system to monitor the quality of the institutes. Teaching methods are often out of date and do not reflect the desired models for modern education. There is an urgent need for collaboration and a competency-based curriculum.

Component 3 The implementation of a durable system of professionalization aimed at everybody involved in education

I can be brief about the situation of this component. There is no structured system to improve the quality of teaching and leadership by means of systematic training. Some schools are lucky because they are involved in private initiatives or NGO projects. But most of them lack regular training. In practice, this means that many teachers have hardly had any training after finishing the teachers' training college. Books are too expensive for them, or difficult to get, and there is no reading tradition. The great distances make the situation even more complicated.

A brief analysis of professionalization

We can be short with this analysis: there is no durable system of professionalization. Government has no policy to stimulate continuing in-service education for educators. In many cases teachers have had only their basic teacher training and were not encouraged to seek further training, even after 20 to 30 years! After all the different and often uncoordinated projects, only a small group of selected schools has had some training.

Component 4 Strengthening knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation

This component focuses on the efficient exchange of the ongoing stream of information during the innovation processes, and the coordination of research needed for policy development. The research data can be used as a basis for developing policies for the other components. The situation in this division is, I think, the best. Supported by VVOB since 2003, this division transformed from a sleepy office into a lively and vital division.

From all these analyses it became clear that we could bridge the knowledge gap by means of new approaches to teaching and learning, such as pupil-centered education, by shaping national views and by publishing *I Believe in You!* The great benefit would be that all educators would share the views that could lead to a common language for the education wished for in the future. From a social constructionist point of view, using language is how we give expression to our reality. By adopting views which are hopeful and energizing, we could perhaps change the common language of hopelessness, negativism and frustration into one of joy and happiness, hopefulness and appreciation. In all modesty, I think I may say that the positive process of *I Believe in You!* has contributed to this in some way.

Evaluation of the first cycle of PROGRESS, 2008-2010

VVOB organized an evaluation⁸³ in April 2010. Originally, the PROGRESS program was scheduled to start in January 2008. Because of a delay in funding by DGOS in Belgium, the time it took to create the new team with staff from Suriname (as well as from Europe), and the time it took to sign the new cooperation treaty between MINOV and VVOB, we actually started the program one year later. (In the meantime, we had already started the process of *I Believe in You!*) So PROGRESS really got going early in 2009. The evaluation took place one year and three months later. In fact, given the detailed planning, it should have taken place later, after PROGRESS had been running for two and a half years. Unforeseen occurrences, which are inherent in change processes, were not taken into account at the time.

The evaluation made by Stoop Consulting in April 2010 and commissioned by VVOB concerned an evaluation of the eleven VVOB programs in nine partner countries. PROGRESS was one of them. PROGRESS consisted of two cycles, namely 2008-2010 and 2011-2013. An evaluation halfway through the program was essential, to see what lessons could be learnt to consolidate and optimize relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. Outcomes can be used as guidelines, as a basis for strategy and operation of the second cycle (2011-2013). I was not involved in this process.

The results⁸⁴ of this evaluation of PROGRESS are, briefly:

Strengths of PROGRESS in general:

- * The educational innovation is highly relevant.
- * All stakeholders display strong involvement and commitment.
- * The strategy to involve all those involved in education is highly productive.
- * The publication *I Believe in You!* is a very powerful source and a good example of how PROGRESS uses experience gained from previous projects.
- * PROGRESS has made essential steps.
- * Working at different layers in the system supports the “multiple” approach.
- * PROGRESS provides a good route for capacity building of various players in the field.

⁸³Evaluatie van VVOB Ontwikkelingsprogramma's in de sectoren onderwijs en training, April 8, by Stoop Consulting Belgium.

⁸⁴ Derived from chapter 3.6 Suriname pp. 55-59 of the evaluation report by Stoop Consulting Belgium

Strengths of PROGRESS specifically, and positive appreciation of VVOB:

- * VVOB has made a good analysis of the present situation at this stage of project formulation.
- * VVOB stimulates partnerships with the Ministry of Education and Community Development (MINOV) and players in education, as well as donors.
- * A good use is made of previous experiences and results of various players, which is essential in educational innovation.
- * A good use is made of local expertise, and local ownership is actively supported.
- * Surinamese stakeholders appreciate the attention, as well as the adequate attitude of VVOB, in supporting local capacity building.
- * The players emphasize the firm commitment and dynamic approach of the PROGRESS staff, interacting well with the Surinamese context.

Important weak points that need improvement are:

- * There is a lack of integrated planning and monitoring, evaluation and coordination of the Surinamese Educational Plan; there is no division in the Ministry that is responsible for this.
- * There is a need for such a division, which should also be responsible for strengthening communication and interaction with the different stakeholders.
- * Weak management capacity, lack of decisiveness, lack of vigor, weak coordination and organization within MINOV Department of Education weakens the implementation of the SEP, including BEIP and PROGRESS. PROGRESS and others have not worked enough on these shortcomings.
- * PROGRESS, as well as the entire SEP, is characterized on the one hand by short-term ambitions that are too great and on the other hand by insufficient actions or interventions to improve the conditions for successful sustainable educational development.
- * There is still too little communication and stakeholder relationship management in PROGRESS.

The most important conclusions for each of the evaluation criteria are:

1. Relevance and coherence

The evaluation team assesses the relevance and coherence of the program as high. The program fits in with national strategies as well as national institutes very well. The coordination with international donors like VVOB, UNICEF and IDB is good. There is a challenge for PROGRESS to stimulate the paradigm of cooperation and partnership.

2. *Efficiency*

The program works highly efficiently.

PROGRESS works with a clear implementation strategy at mezo level, and while doing so guards the relations at macro level and micro level adequately.

The program does not always succeed in working within the planned time frame.

It is still a crucial challenge to use the personnel resources of the Surinamese education sector in an optimal and sustainable way.

3. *Effectiveness*

The program has achieved many significant results in the 12 months since the effective start of the program. One can say that in general the results versus means and possibilities are positive.

4. *Impact*

The program started effectively only a year before this evaluation, so it is hard to say something about the effective impact. The evaluation team could discern a growing basis and a beginning of capacity strengthening. *PROGRESS* has to be flexible to deal with new challenges.

5. *Sustainability*

The sustainability is regarded as positive. *PROGRESS* devotes a great deal of attention to knowledge sharing, capacity building, and institutional development, and uses the technical assistance well with attention to sustainability. It may be a good idea to implement stronger and better-focused strategies for capacity building and institutional strengthening. It is recommended, from the perspective of a long-term vision, that all partners take more responsibility in their tasks, to strengthen the sustainability, quality improvement and increasing effectiveness of Surinamese education.

I think it is quite interesting, from a constructionist view, that this evaluation shows that to become more effective in this second cycle of the change process, the issue of *being in relation* needs to be expanded. The new challenge, as I see it, will be to strengthen the capacity of the local people, as well as the European cooperants involved in this program, to become more aware of the thought of relational constructionism and its firm contribution for establishing sustainable change. The approach of the new cycle should not only be a technical one (the individualistic thought) but should also focus on increasing the awareness of shifting towards the relational orientation. As we have seen in chapter 4, the risk is maybe that the approach can easily fall back to the individualistic orientation.