

Dear reader,

Coming at the end of our series of letters, you may still be wondering what the reflective atmosphere and space, all these principles and guidelines have to with inner readiness? And what exactly is it? We will come more extensively to the definition of this concept later in the publication (see the chapter 'developing a concept of inner readiness'). In this final letter we just want to give you a general idea what it is about. We would like to do so by writing down two stories, one from formal education and one from non-formal education. Both stories describe moments which are illustrative for the change in the inner readiness of the learners involved.

Story one about a student of visual arts

During the first meeting of the theoretical course on 'community arts' at LUCA-School of Arts (Belgium) we discussed the artistic practices and art works made by a visual artist in collaboration with local communities. The main questions were: 'which collaboration processes were used, how did the artist relate to the participants, what's there to say about both artistic and social outcomes of these projects?' The aim of the course for the students is to elaborate a personal point of view on this topic. On that particular day somewhere halfway through the course, we were watching the controversial documentary 'Enjoy Poverty' (2008) by Renzo Martens. This Dutch visual artist is travelling to Congo, apparently in order to try to help local people. In a provoking way he states how poverty should be understood as the main resource for the Democratic Republic of Congo. He does so, only to explore how the mechanisms of politics, global trading, NGO-work, media and last but not least also his documentary are creating a system which creates and maintains poverty in the African country. And slowly it becomes clear how he's making a performance out of the documentary: he's performing how all help from the Western world (including his help) is eventually bound to be based on self-interest. In the central scenes of the documentary Martens is travelling to a remote Congolese village where he organises a party with the local habitants to celebrate his message. In the centre of the village he erects a kind of pop-up sculpture, using coloured TL lights communicating 'enjoy poverty, please!'. From our western point of view this is highly ambiguous: African people, living in what is clearly a poor village with no electricity, are partying to Martens' slogan. Who's benefitting from all this? The people themselves? The artist? Or the Western public at home who can 'enjoy' this documentary? After the documentary we had a vivid group discussion on the different aspects of the documentary (ethically, visually, socially...). The educator and learners were all expressing their experience of the documentary, which sometimes were completely opposite. At the core of the discussion was the paradox between 'this is a great, thought provoking documentary' versus 'you don't treat the African people like Renzo Martens does' (when travelling to the Congolese village,

Martens wore classic white, colonial clothes, having black people carrying his equipment; he's clearly the 'important white artist' with a mission). At a certain moment during the discussion one student expressed very clearly: "I could not make community art at the expense of others. It's just not worth it. Now it makes much more sense to me how the artists discussed in the previous meetings were organising their projects." She became very expressive in her body language. You could notice how this documentary touched something that was of great value to her. At the same time, she realised that she would like to participate in a community arts project. Seeing the documentary of Renzo Martens appeared to be the paradoxical, unexpected experience that clarified some of her personal values as a visual artist. It also changed somehow her view on the artists that were discussed previously. So obviously something changed in the way that she looked at community arts. By reflecting on the practice of several visual artists, something has changed inside her, raising her inner readiness to be the visual artist she wanted to be herself.

Story two about a woman on an 8m high balance beam

During a five-day course for adult women with an eating disorder at Outward Bound Belgium, there was one participant who was always ready to help and support others, both during the challenging activities as well as during the conversations which were sometimes emotional. However, each time that she got emotional herself, she stepped back, saying 'it's nothing, it's nothing'. Although she voluntarily subscribed on the course to learn something about herself, she always avoided the exploration of her emotions. During the fourth day of the course, participants were climbing the rope course. She chose to climb an 8-meter-high balance beam (being of course safely secured by a top rope system). But when she arrived at the beginning of the beam, she froze completely. Fear was getting too much for her. And she started wondering 'why do I have to walk on a beam this high? Why am I here participating in this course at all?' However, she didn't get down immediately. The trainer asked her, if possible, to stay there a little bit longer. Together they were enquiring how she always stepped back when emotions were getting too intense, not only during the course, but at home as well. She recognised this pattern, but this still did not change anything for her to start walking the balance beam. She just wanted to get down and go home. The other participants were encouraging her to take at least one step forward, but none of their arguments were persuasive enough. The woman was convinced that it had no sense, and what's more, it was just too high, so she really could not do it: 'it's just too challenging!'. Just before getting off the beam, someone reminded her of something she had said before she started the course: how different quality of life was when she was not in the grip of her eating disorder, how life and emotions could give more fulfilment in contrast to the 'empty days' when eating excessively was just a way not to feel anything anymore. In a split second something changed inside the woman. She immediately looked different to herself standing at the 8-meter-high beam. It was no longer just a meaningless activity, but it offered

the possibility to once again take the step in her life which was needed to deal with emotions and the eating disorder, to move again in the direction of 'better days ahead'. Her posture became more upright, her energy level raised and some short time later she took one step forward.

What's remarkable in both cases is the fact that the change only came after a while. In both cases the educator and learners were first taking care of the essential conditions for the reflective atmosphere to be co-created in the learning group. Meanwhile, continual questioning broadened and deepened the learning process of learners (although in a different context and with a different aim of each course). And then suddenly, the so-called '**pieces of the puzzle' connected somehow for both learners**. In a very personal way they linked things already known and discussed before with the current experience. And it wasn't in a straightforward logical way, quite on the contrary, it was done in a personal reflective way whereby they were completely owning the learning process at those precise moments. Due to this re-connecting, **that-which-was-at-stake was perceived in a way that was unknown and unexpected beforehand**, reminding us of the famous quote by William Blake 'the eye altering alters all'. As a consequence, both learners were able to act in a different way than before (be it immediately for the woman on the balance beam as she took a step forward, be it later for the student as she did not engage in a community arts project immediately). It's important to stress at this point how this change in the ability to act had **nothing to do with gaining new knowledge, skills or attitudes**. It had only to do with the way that both learners personally related to and owned the here-and-now experience. Or to put it from a different perspective, how the documentary and the balance beam were addressing that-which-is-at-stake so strongly that it started to speak in a very personal and deep way to both learners, different than ever before (reminding us of the quote of Jan Masschelein, see letter 4). **This (dis)ability to act (whatever one's knowledge, skills or attitudes are) is exactly what inner readiness is about**. Facilitating the reflective atmosphere is, according to us, a very good tool in raising the possibility to make a change in one's inner readiness.

Sincerely yours,

Your REFLECT correspondent