

Putting educational therapy on the agenda

Part I The importance of educational therapy

Part II An impression of educational therapy

Monika Jongerius-Joras

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About part II

It is with great pleasure and fascination that I have read the general introduction and, indeed, the entire book.

It is both of importance and a delight that you clarify to the reader the context of your book, including the roles of the writer, narrator and the other protagonists.

Your choice of this form has yielded a layered quality that may look simple yet does justice to the diversity and complexity of interactions and of the human consciousness and of people's conversations.

What a labour of love it must have been to achieve this form and how skilful to have hit upon a form that is sufficiently unfinished for the reader to experience that this is an impression of a process, but at the same time so well-conceived that you cannot but feel that all this matters.

I find your book most satisfactory and I am grateful for having been able to contribute to the realisation of this work. In great appreciation, I compliment you on this work.

I hope, with you, that it will give colleagues the courage to continue questioning and seeing themselves and the other in constant, careful dialogue.

Dr Hans Bom (16 August 2017)

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A contribution to a quality discourse within the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy [NVRG]

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Part II An impression of educational therapy

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General introduction to the combined publication of parts I and II

When people asked me to tell them the story of my life, I would usually talk about that part that I felt would matter to them. What I chose to tell was always inspired by my assessment of the other's interest. My preconception that the whole story could not be received without bias was often corrected through the questions I was asked and through the other's palpable, genuine involvement. This correction opened up the space for growth in our mutual contact.

In educational therapy, the attitude of genuine mutual interest combined with an openness to correct old images is ever-present in the interaction between the two people. Every human being has preconceptions and can adjust these by engaging in an open dialogue with the other.

In my personal stories and in the story in part II, sincerity and open-mindedness go hand in hand with the realisation that our memories are in part coloured by images and stories of important others in our context. The story I would like to tell here is the story composed of many stories based on the life experiences of various people.

Interaction in educational therapy implies an emotive approach of language. Any utterance will evoke emotions to which the educational therapist responds by asking questions, not just about literal definitions but also about emotional meaning.

The invitation to reflect extended to the colleague in training is always also an invitation to reflect on the educational therapist's emotions and meaning attributions. These reflections serve him as a person and as a tool to be used in his work.

The process that evolved during an 18-month period is described in part II, not so much on the basis of literal reports but, rather, on the basis of impression of spoken dialogues.

Educational therapy serves and sustains work with family systems. This means that the colleague in training must himself undergo educational therapy in order to experience what it is like to be a patient. This experience is so valuable because the colleague will experience a side of the therapeutic relationship that he had never suspected. Thanks to this experience, he will

conceivably be even better attuned to his clients when interacting and collaborating with all family members.

In addition to this growth in empathy and compassion, the colleague in training is likely to experience a development of his own personality during the educational therapy process. This process allows him to grow as a therapist, coach, facilitator of his own and the trainee colleague's strength. It is through educational therapy that the competency 'therapeutic attitude' receives the attention it deserves.

I have combined part I (the importance of systemic educational therapy) and part II (an impression of educational therapy) because, for one thing, part I was due a reprint but in particular because reading part I is seen as a precondition for achieving a deeper understanding of part II.

And so, the title for the combined parts is now: putting educational therapy on the agenda.

A basic guideline runs through both part I and part II that I want to mention explicitly here since it also entails a message I would like to pass on for the purpose of reflection and dialogue in my colleagues' daily life and work.

The equality of all human beings that I consider obvious is clarified by the model of the system-internal and system-external that I sketch in part I, and where I consider and describe all aspects and layers in and around the human being as being of equal value. For me, the deepest basis of the equality of human beings lies in the fact that every cell in the human body is understood and acknowledged as equal to all other cells. Behaviours and actions of different cells may be viewed and described as different, as being, for example, useful or malignant. For me, the interdependence of the cells and the different types of autonomy of cells and cell groups in our body are a daily reminder of how equal we as human beings are in relation to each other, while we also differ as to roles, functions, behaviour and interaction.

As she often is, nature is an important source of awareness. For me, the human body as a beautiful natural system speaks a language that we can understand. All the cells pairing mutual dependence with equality can help us better understand the mutual equality of people.

My second message is: keep reflecting on learned and internalised preconceptions. Do so in open and respectful dialogue with others and in a safe context.

The third message is connected with the focus adopted in part II: continue looking in a subtle, nuanced way at people who have experienced abuse of power in the context of sexual activity and continue placing the abuse in the entire system, both the system-internal and external; continue listening and questioning, involving both the party who has endured and the perpetrator. Note the **use of language** that reflects what preconceptions play a role.

I sincerely hope that this book (parts I and II) is an invitation to further dialogue about and reflection on our daily preconceptions, in particular those involving all aspects of intimacy and physicality, in such a way that we can continue to evolve as human beings, with all our possibilities and limitations.

My experience as an educational therapist has taught me that educational therapy can make an important contribution to this process of growth. My wish to share this experience with my colleagues was what inspired me to write this book.

Part I The importance of educational therapy

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I. Introduction

A great deal has been written about supervision, and many are the courses organised for aspiring supervisors. However, this is not true for educational therapy, or hardly so. Even if the study programme does invest a great deal of time in educational therapy, as in the training for psychoanalysts, for instance, the Dutch Association of Psychotherapy does not provide any training in educational therapy. It is common practice that one simply becomes an educational therapist on the basis of one's own experiences with educational therapy.

I remember a well-respected colleague of mine in the Dutch Psychiatry Association [NVvP], a psychiatry professor, proposing that educational therapy be removed from the study programme for psychiatrists. When I broached the subject with him, he agreed that the fact that there was no specific training for educational therapists ought to be an important focal point in securing the quality of educational therapy. I mentioned research carried out by Peter Fonagy (1999) whose specific focus was the reflection-improving power of training and therapy, including, therefore, educational therapy.¹

What finally emerged from the conversation with my colleague was the idea that educational therapy is, in fact, an important part of the training programme.

He now acknowledged clearly the need for and the possibility of ensuring the quality of educational therapy by improving the quality of the educational therapist.

This focus on ensuring quality has also long been an important issue in the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy (NVRG, see chapter IV). At the same time, our Association has experienced how several colleagues wishing to become educational therapists consulted senior educational therapists and myself as well to ask: how do you do educational therapy? Sharing the experience of an educational therapist in just one talk often sufficed for the person asking the question to take the plunge and to apply for the screening interview (to this day the only quality test) to gain recognition as an educational therapist. The idea gradually grew in me that we, as an association, would be well-advised to put the importance of educational therapy on the agenda.

Let us see how we do educational therapy and investigate how we could

ensure the quality of both the educational therapy and the educational therapist even further.

It is thus that this book *“Putting educational therapy on the agenda”* was born. It is meant as an invitation to discuss the importance of educational therapy and ways to ensure its quality.

To benefit the thinking about the subject I will briefly set out my views on living, learning and educational therapy. Then, in subsequent chapters, I will take a closer look at: the role of the educational therapist, the importance of educational therapy, and educational therapy practice. Then follows a reflection on the current situation and on the prospects for the future, after which, and by way of conclusion, the importance of a visible vision and manner of working for educational therapists are focused on.

The appendix contains my working model, including a case study.

II. Principles

The following notes will give some insight into the basic attitude I adopt in my work as an educational therapist. My impression is that what an educational therapist has already achieved and still wishes to achieve in his/her further development are important for what s/he may achieve with a colleague in training during the educational therapy. Herein, too lies my motivation for the invitation to discuss the importance of educational therapy.

Of course, in the coaching interviews as in this book, I use my experiences gained during my own training as a physician, psychiatrist, psychotherapist, family and relational therapist and my professional experiences in these fields.

My systems thinking is closely connected with my own personal life experiences and my personal development. This will be perceivable in what I write.

The word ‘learning’ for me is close to the word ‘living’.

What we call the source of life is the most fascinating thing I know and, also, the thing I acknowledge most as the phenomenon that cannot be captured in words and that I will time and again name as ‘only approximately describable because never quite possible to grasp’.

For instance, I use the word “life” with great reverence and caution, as I do the word “inner being”. Of these, too I will say that I do not know precisely what I am talking about, that I use the word reverentially and cautiously, yet anything that I subsequently say about these will be an approximate “description”, never knowing for sure, seeking always, questioning each other, making word choices that may yield an image for something I am trying to describe.

Words are like images to me, as is the model that I have chosen to work with. I present my working model (see appendix) as an image of the many possible images of a human being’s complex life.

We can use it as long as we keep checking that we still understand each other. It is an image that can also be understood in other languages because it can be drawn. It tries to visualise, make visible something invisible that we can look at together and talk about, all the while realising that there is more than we know, more than we experience consciously and that a model will never be perfect.

The French philosopher Frédéric Lenoir puts it thus: “We did not choose to live but we need to learn how to live just as we learn to play the piano, learn to cook, or learn sculpting.”²

Learning to live, personal growth and development are the basis of the learning in our profession and the basis of educational therapy within this profession. And, “personal growth is the foundation of good care services” (Diemen-Steenvoorde, 2013).³

It is my view, too that professional growth is inextricably bound up with one’s personal growth as a human being. This is also part of the reason why educational therapy features in the family and relational therapist’s profession. As soon as a family or an individual enters your room or makes contact with you to register by telephone or in writing, something happens to you, you can be touched in memories of an earlier encounter in your life, for instance in your family of origin or with other important people in your first years.

Perceiving and recognizing an instance of being touched and acknowledging it as a part of you and then being able to question yourself how you will deal with it in the present contact and its context are themes that run like a thread through the learning process of your own development to benefit your professionalism.

When, in educational therapy, the colleague brings up a personal experience with a patient/client system, the conversation will turn out different than in supervision where it is discussed how to work with this system. The focus is on the personal experience and one’s reflection on it. This deeply personal experience on the part of the colleague in his own personal context, who is now touched in the interaction with the patient/client system in the present situation, is part of our dialogue. Reflection is practised as the basis of conscious and competent action.

III. The role of the educational therapist

Every psychotherapist, every supervisor and, in particular, the educational therapist in educational therapy is supposed to acknowledge the importance of his professional role and the importance of reflecting on this.

(German has various ways in which to define the term ‘educational therapy’: Selbsterfahrung, Entwicklung und Reflexion professioneller Rollen und Aufgaben mit Elementen der Familien (Re)Konstruktion.)

Research into the effectiveness of psychotherapy has long, and again recently, drawn attention to therapist characteristics (and thus, to educational therapist characteristics) and other factors that may play a role. According to Lambert et al. (1992)⁴, the effectiveness of psychotherapy depends on and is a complex composition of:

40% factors outside the therapy, such as: characteristics of the environment, the living environment and network of the client system.

30% factors of interactive common human nature (previously termed ‘non-specific factors’), such as:

- empathy, acceptance, transparency,
- visualising a clear model that fits in with the client’s ideas about himself and his problems,
- working in such a way that clients can apply what they have learnt outside the therapy,
- letting the client experience what resources there are and which are available to him,
- inviting the client to attribute the therapy success to himself.

15% factors with a placebo effect, such as: expectation, faith in therapy, faith in the therapist and the method.

15% factors which are effective due to a therapy specific technique according to a therapeutic school.

The 30% factors, the ‘non-specific factors’, are especially important to me with respect to the development of the educational therapist’s professional role.

In our association we have long acknowledged that there is a non-linear interrelation between the factors mentioned above. And we have also experienced that symptom severity, treatment quality and therapist quality, for instance, stand in a complex relation to each other.

Let me add explicitly here, since this is not always common practice, that attunement to the client's strengths and learning style and to the strengths of the socio-cultural context is a pre-condition for a therapeutic relationship to be effective.

Van den Boogaard (2014) adduces the notion 'compatibility' as "a **more important** predictor of treatment effectiveness than the therapeutic alliance." He defines compatibility as "agreement between, on the one hand, the theoretical model of the treatment, and, on the other, the patient's ideas about his symptoms and problems and the appropriate approach."⁵ It is, therefore, important that the educational therapist make visible to his colleague in training what his vision and working model entail. This also implies an invitation to the colleague to reflect on his/her working model and vision, and may help him/her express explicitly what their vision and working model entail. In turn, these can then be communicated to the client.

Another interesting finding was recently presented by La Croix et al. (2013).⁶ On the basis of their research into therapist effectiveness, they conclude that the most effective therapist has faith in his own competences while simultaneously possessing sufficient modesty and self-knowledge to be able to receive feedback on how the treatment progresses. If the therapist was over-confident (less open and responsive to feedback), the therapy proved to be less effective. The therapist's self-appraisal is a composite. Seen systemically, self-appraisal is a historic and interactional process of growth that can go on and on because it remains open to feedback and personal questions and reflections that are important both for every therapist as a human being and for his professional competencies (cf. educational therapy).

Peter Rober (2012) describes something similar. As an instrument in his work, the therapist is "a living human being in the here-and-now" with all his life experience and all his visions of the future.

The following quote from neuro-scientist Lamme fits in beautifully with this "now": "experiencing the bare 'now' is simply impossible because your whole past – genes, education and everything you have been through – determines

what you experience. (...) a person who does what they find important and enjoy doing with care and attention – that person, I think, lives sufficiently much in the present moment."⁷

In each and every contact (psychotherapy, supervision, educational therapy), then, the role of the therapist and his attitude are of great importance (also see the bibliography).

There are differences as well as similarities between psychotherapy, supervision and educational therapy. These have been described both extensively and beautifully by many fellow educational therapists. My colleague Vera Mierop has drawn up a schematic description that I summarise here briefly:

Psychotherapy is a voluntary choice:

focus and request start from the client system, i.e. the wish to change or gain better insight into or more grip on problems and stagnating development. What question and/or wish to change does the client system have and how could this system, together with the therapist, answer this question? What technique is chosen depends on the needs assessment and on the therapist's specific expertise.

Supervision is a mandatory part of the study programme:

focus and request come from the supervisee, in consultation with the supervisor. Aim is to expand one's professional competency both in working with systems and in working with oneself as an instrument in the new therapist-family/individuals system. Awareness of work attitude and work alliance with systems is improved, and conceptual, experiential and technical levels will rise.

Educational therapy is a mandatory part of the study programme:

focus and request come from the colleague in training, who experiences a personal growth process as an enhanced quality in his functioning as a systemic therapist. The educational therapist regularly assesses whether the focus, the definition of the desired change, is in place, and invites the colleague in training to give feedback on the process. This constant feedback improves the ability to self-reflect and introspect. Self-knowledge and self-appreciation may grow due, in part, to parallel processes. The educational therapist is transparent, explains his manner of working in such a way that the colleague in training could use this in his own work. The colleague in training can contribute his own work experience, in

such a way that it is not so much the content of the work with the family taking centre stage as the colleague in training as a human being in the interaction with the family and with his personal experiences that cannot be discussed during supervision.

As I stressed in the introduction, I see the words that I use as images that offer openings for a dialogue about meaning attribution, the underlying stories. The word 'self' has, for instance, been described in many a book (also cf. bibliography) and new definitions keep cropping up, as with the image of the 'rhizome', a subterranean root system found with strawberries, ginger and other plants.

Jasmina Sermijn (2013)⁸: "A rhizome's most important feature is that it has several entrances ...(this) automatically implies a multitude.... You have to completely let go of the illusion that you could grasp someone's real, essential self."

This image comes close to the multidimensional, multimodal systemic model which I use in my work and which I explain further during educational therapy (see appendix).

IV. The importance of educational therapy

A great deal, then, has been written about the value and importance of effective therapy factors and about how the therapist can deploy himself as an instrument, but very little, if anything, can be found on educational therapy itself or on training programmes for aspiring educational therapists.

Trijsburg et al. (1994)⁹ are among the few who have devoted attention to educational therapy. They conducted a survey among psychiatrists and psychotherapists in training about their experiences with educational therapy. Let me quote the last sentences from their conclusion:

"The conclusion is that mandatory educational therapy would not pose a burden or a problem to the Dutch educational system. However, it is wise to have the training institute decide on the moment at which educational therapy is begun, to recruit educational therapists from outside the circle of the institute's own trainers and not allow any reporting on the contents of the educational therapy to those responsible for the training."

These findings have been put into practice in the training institutes of the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy.

To the present day, no new perspectives based on research or reflections on educational therapy have been added to the study quoted above. Yet any studies into the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship may constitute a welcome incentive and an extra focus for the educational therapist's coaching or training.

Similarly, all literature and research that devote attention to the person of the therapist and to factors enhancing the effectiveness of the therapeutic process is nourishing to the 'phenomenon of educational therapy' even if the phenomenon of educational therapy as such is not addressed explicitly.

In his latest book, *De therapeutische relatie* [The therapeutic relationship], Anton Hafkenscheid (2014, see bibliography) clearly mentions as often as twice the position and importance of educational therapy, thereby referring to Bowlby (1988) and Nouwen (2008):

"the therapist must always be aware that his own attachment experiences may play a role in the way in which the therapeutic relationship takes shape. ...Every therapist is to some extent a wounded healer. ... He cannot really exploit the advantage of personal recognition (and thus his credibility for the patient) until he has sufficiently worked through his own inse-

cure attachment history emotionally in a safe context (during a successful educational therapy, for instance).”

If educational therapy is indeed as obviously important for those working with people in our professional field as Hafkenscheid claims, it would seem worth the effort to investigate how we could secure the quality of the educational therapist and educational therapy even more. That is why we'll now have a look at how I work in my own practice as an educational therapist. Much of this can also be found in the new educational therapy contract.

V. The practice of educational therapy

It goes without saying that each and every educational therapist has his own practice and practice experiences. I will briefly describe mine here because this will give us an opportunity, if we wish, to share our experiences as educational therapists with each other and further develop our quality.

1. *Application*

The colleague wishing to train in educational therapy usually applies over the telephone or via e-mail: this is where the first encounter takes place. Thanking them for placing their trust in me, I am interested to know how they came to choose me.

If the applicant lives faraway, we first try to find an educational therapist closer to his home. If that does not yield anyone, we make an appointment to get acquainted, and I explain that in this meeting we can form our own impressions of each other and that we are free to explore and choose whether we can and wish to work together during the educational therapy. The meeting is planned as quickly as possible because the colleague might look further for another educational therapist. If the colleague chooses to have an introductory meeting and we make an appointment, I always ask what the colleague might want to drink: coffee, tea, water. This gives me a chance to prepare and have these already in place. This not only saves time but is a sign of hospitable human contact among equals.

2. *The introductory interview*

I always start the introductory interview by saying: "Whatever question I ask, please feel free to answer it or decline to answer it; this is about you and your wishes." I also stress that I will divulge nothing of what we discuss during the educational therapy, but that the colleague in training is of course free to talk about whatever they wish. Then I invite the colleague to ask me questions about me and I sometimes show them the vision that underpins my work, as I draw my systemics thinking working model.

I further find it important to clarify that any of the colleague's important others is welcome to sit in on the educational therapy. If the colleague believes and, also, if I see that it is useful or necessary to invite these important others to the room, the colleague will give his reasons for his choice, and so will I. If our opinions differ, we will also discuss these. But it is the colleague who ultimately makes his choice, with any attendant consequences, which we also go through insofar we can observe these at

this point. The ability to reflect on the inner barrier that makes itself felt when choosing to invite an important other to a talk is a very useful one. It yields a great deal of self-knowledge as well as respect and appreciation for the client systems coming to see the colleague.

My **preparation** for the introductory interview consists of:

- laying out a notepad with plenty of blank sheets to make notes and drawings on during the interviews,
- an end page to briefly summarize the session, highlighting the process,
- noting the name, address, telephone number, email address, date of birth, use of coffee, tea on the first page,
- then a number of questions I definitely want to ask and points that need to be addressed, like:
 - a. logistics of the interviews:
 1. times, rhythm, invoice,
 2. planning the interim and final assessments and the announcement that I look back after each talk and that I start each new talk with the question if there are any questions or remarks that need to be addressed before we proceed;
 - b. questions about contents:
 1. motivation to train as a professional relationship and family therapist and train in educational therapy
 2. qualities, inner compass in working with families and relationships
 3. known and suspected pitfalls or blind spots in one's work,
 4. *educational* question for the educational therapy (defining the problem), the focus of the desired change, what would you like to know about yourself, what part of yourself do you bring to the therapy sessions with your clients and families that poses a problem, what affects you too strongly, what do you experience as a block, what does your wish to change entail,
 - c. what would you like to have learnt and achieved a year after the start of the educational therapy?
 - d. training, from birth to the present moment, where was the training in systemic therapy followed, looking back and reactions to the various training programmes
 - e. work context, duration, various work contexts,

personal context possibly including a brief overview genogram, religion, spirituality, giving meaning as to life and profession, culture, place of birth, ancestors, hobbies, and other parts of socialisations (graces);

Towards the end of the first meeting, I thank the colleague for his trust and I formulate a working hypothesis for myself that I share with the colleague, sometimes straightaway, sometimes at a later stage. What is important here is what part in me as a human being, now working as an educational therapist, is touched by the interaction with the colleague. I work out for myself any focal points that will keep inviting me to self-reflect. These are also duly shared with the colleague (parallel processes), and may include the point that the colleague attaches overmuch importance to what I think. What do I think about that, how does that affect me? How has the colleague developed this pattern and how did I grow up with it?

Looking back on the first interview, we assess what it was like for the colleague and for me. If we both agree to cooperate, a new appointment is made. It has only happened once in about 30 times that the colleague needed some time to think and phoned me the following day to make a new appointment and it has happened once that the colleague and I decided not to go on together, on the basis of arguments we could both express, and with the colleague quickly managing to find another educational therapist who was better suited to her needs.

Sometimes the focus is defined in too ample terms, and then I will ask for a more concrete definition before the next appointment or I will email the colleague prior to the appointment.

Or, it sometimes happens as early as the first meeting that we can focus on and address our interaction for a moment, and explore how this is identifiable in the colleague's family of origin and in his work. My own position and method of working can also be discussed then, in particular the position that I have brought with me from my family of origin and that is still visible in my way of working and interacting.

3. *The process and structure of educational therapy*

The next meeting usually addresses the genogram and raises the underlying question about the focus of the educational therapy (felt block, problems, the wish to change). This is not, then, a repeat, as people often fear. I explain how we allow the focus to guide us through the questions that we ask the genogram.

It has often happened that the colleague was subsequently eager to apply this form of working with the genogram in his or her own work with clients. For example, discussing the focus and the hypothesis of “whether or not to occupy a space”, we explored this theme in the genogram together, with the colleague quickly hitting on some surprising answers to his questions as he explored the matter.

The process of educational therapy is indicated through the common thread running through it, its focus or the colleague’s wish to change. If these are clearly stated following each interview, the colleague can visualise and experience the process.

Regularly “freezing” our interaction for a while during the interview and looking at it together also enhances the benefit for the colleague in that what is discovered through reflection is also experienced “physically” in a literal sense and can be transferred to the practical work with families and relationships.

If the focus is reached quickly, the colleague will define a new focus, which then becomes the next common thread. Occasionally, this happens as early as before or during the interim evaluation. It is sometimes at this stage that the colleague puts forward the case of a client, family or relationship that he is working with and where personal reflection on the interaction between him and the client system is desirable. Even though a concrete recent situation is discussed here, the focus and the colleague’s desire for change remain the common thread; in other words, this is not about supervision.

Describing actual practices proceeds in a structured manner; the reality of the interviews is that the colleague prepares for the talks and that the educational therapist has no other means of preparing than by listening open-mindedly to the colleague and him/herself:

- what presents itself in the interaction during the sessions,
- how can I remain in the dialogue while being attuned to the colleague from within, and facilitate growth and enhance reflection?

The adventure that this new relationship constitutes is a metaphor: the first relationships on the part of the colleague in training and the educational therapist were an adventure, too.

VI. Reflection on the current situation and future prospects

I once discussed my work experience with educational therapy with an educationalist. With great enthusiasm she asked whether this could not constitute an important coaching trajectory for teaching professionals. After all, these professionals are daily similarly affected in their own personal patterns that they have developed in their system-internal and -external. How do they deal with this once they are aware of it? How do they behave if they are not aware of it? How does the difference matter?

Very recently I heard of a colleague who had been asked to work together with a school for the benefit of its teaching staff! Awareness is on the increase in the larger systems. These systems assume responsibility for the next generation: investing in the current generation’s educational quality is an in-depth investment in the next generation. As much was demonstrated in a German study dating from 2011 on the costs and benefits of early care work in families.¹⁰

When working with the seriously traumatised or when addressing hefty existential issues the therapist always runs a certain risk that this may, for one thing, cause vicarious traumatisation. This, in turn, often leads to a burnout, with the therapist having to stop working. The latter is an important reason why the colleague should learn to recognize and acknowledge his possibilities and limitations as much as possible during educational therapy, and use these as part of his natural resilience.

Another colleague who had completed an individual educational therapy in an earlier period (and had earned the required points) asked for specific systemic educational therapy after he had experienced during supervision how important the therapist’s history and personal development are in working with people.

I found that working with my colleagues in educational therapy using the systemic method proved to be more enlightening and more effective over a shorter period than they themselves had expected. The fact that parents and partners and children and other important others were involved in the educational therapy deepened and quickened the educational therapy process.

In September 2014 I went to Germany with a colleague to attend a conference of a large and well-known training institute in Weinheim.¹¹ In this institute,

educational therapy has been integrated into the whole study programme. In their restricted, private group, the members work and keep together for the length of the entire training. Group educational therapy is given either over one period of 10 days or over two periods of 5 days each, with a three-month break.

Every educator and trainer can be an educational therapist. Our question whether they did not miss the colleagues bringing along important others and being able to work with these received an honest answer: they had not considered that possibility.

But they are going to think about it. We also asked how they felt about the fact that the trainers, who, after all, also carry out the assessments in the entire study programme, can be educational therapists while they have not received any specific coaching in educational therapy. This was another subject they wished to discuss further.

In my colleagues' and my own experience, the examples live on of colleagues in training who shared with us the importance of working with, for example, parents in the educational therapist's room: an adolescent experience that was still annoyingly present in the current functioning and was recognised and acknowledged as such by the colleague melted back into historic proportions when the colleague and the parents discussed this together and the parents were able to grant recognition.

Colleagues who at first were reluctant to bring along their partners or family and were able to explore these personal obstacles were in a better position to appreciate even more those clients who bring along their partners and family members to the therapist's room.

In the Netherlands, we have especially gained experience with the educational therapy that puts the individual and his context centre stage. However, a few fellow educational therapists also have experience working with groups. I mention this because the colleagues who have this experience may well contribute to improving the quality of educational therapy.

In Romania, in the project that Anneke van Steenberghe - Postma together with a great number of Dutch trainers set up and brought to such an excellent end, I offered, together with Anneke, to give educational therapy to our colleagues there.

In Romania, we as educational therapists worked with a group of six English-speaking young colleagues for a full week; in the morning, one

person was the individual "explorer" with her own focus (genogram on flip-chart). In the afternoon, we worked with the focus chosen by the colleagues in "family reconstruction" or, as we also termed it, "role-playing" with the whole group around the explorer's focus. A year later, we did the same with the same group and we experienced how all the factors identified by Lambert (1992) and mentioned above had done their job.

Dutch colleagues who had met our Romanian colleagues both before the first round of educational therapy and a year later after the second week shared with us their surprise and joy at the visible change in the colleagues.

Educational therapy with an individual and his context has its advantages, and so does educational therapy in a group. Discussing this and sharing our experiences are bound to contribute to ensuring the quality of educational therapy in our association.

Ensuring the quality of systemic educational therapy and the educational therapists of the Association for Systemic Work with Families and Relationships is a pertinent issue whose social relevance extends well beyond the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy. And the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy is aware of the importance of ensuring its members' quality through, also, devoting study days to subjects like "becoming more competent at competencies".

One sign that attention is being devoted to quality is that the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy has had the Programme Advisory Committee [Opleidings Advies Commissie, OAC] develop forms for members who are or wish to become educational therapists. These forms are downloadable from the Dutch NVRG website for its members:

- the "educational therapy contract", to be completed and signed by the educational therapist and the colleague in training.
- an evaluation form for the educational therapist to re-register, which has to be filled in by the colleague in training one month after having completed the educational therapy.
- an application form to request recognition as an educational therapist, to be discussed extensively during screening. In it, the future educational therapist describes his motivation, his view of himself as a future educational therapist, his views on his theoretical concept, his attitude and other aspects that are important for an educational therapist.

Use can also be made of a “session rating scale”, developed at the Institute for the Study of Therapeutic Change (www.talkingcure.com) in 2000 by Scott Miller, Barry Duncan and Lynn Johnson, and since translated into Dutch by Frank Asmus, Mark Crouzen and Flip Jan Oenen.

The form can be used to give feedback about both the therapy and the therapist. The last large study with regard to educational therapy was conducted by Trijsburg et al. and stems from 1994. I would argue it is high time that further research were done.

I would also draw attention here to a study into reflective functioning before and after training or therapy that Peter Fonagy et al. (1999) conducted using a scoring procedure. They found an increased ability to reflect following training and therapy.

This book was written for my fellow trainers in the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy who share my view that educational therapy is an important part of the study programme.

If we acknowledge that the quality of educational therapy is inextricably bound up with the quality of the educational therapist, we could investigate and explore together how we might ensure the quality of the educational therapist even better. I myself am thinking of several possibilities that we could examine:

- The introduction to educational therapy could take place as early as the first year of training, and in the training group. An educational therapist from outside could work a number of times with the group. This will allow the colleague in training to experience for himself how useful educational therapy actually is. The mandatory character of educational therapy can thus recede to the background.
- The colleague wishing to become an educational therapist himself could have one or more coaching talks with a senior educational therapist.
- A coaching trajectory could be designed for a group of 3 to 5 colleagues max to come together a number of times, to be rounded off with a screening interview.
- The new educational therapists could together start a peer coaching group where they feel safe.
- Assessment could be designed for the purpose of re-registering the educational therapist.

The Programme Advisory Committee of the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy could use this book as a starting point when organising a study day on ensuring the quality of educational therapy and educational therapists.

VII. Finally

That I have attached my working model here has to do with the fact that I realise and acknowledge that every educational therapist has his own vision and is used to working in accordance with this.

Visualising our vision and our working model may help when checking whether the educational therapist and the colleague in training can and, indeed, wish to work together.

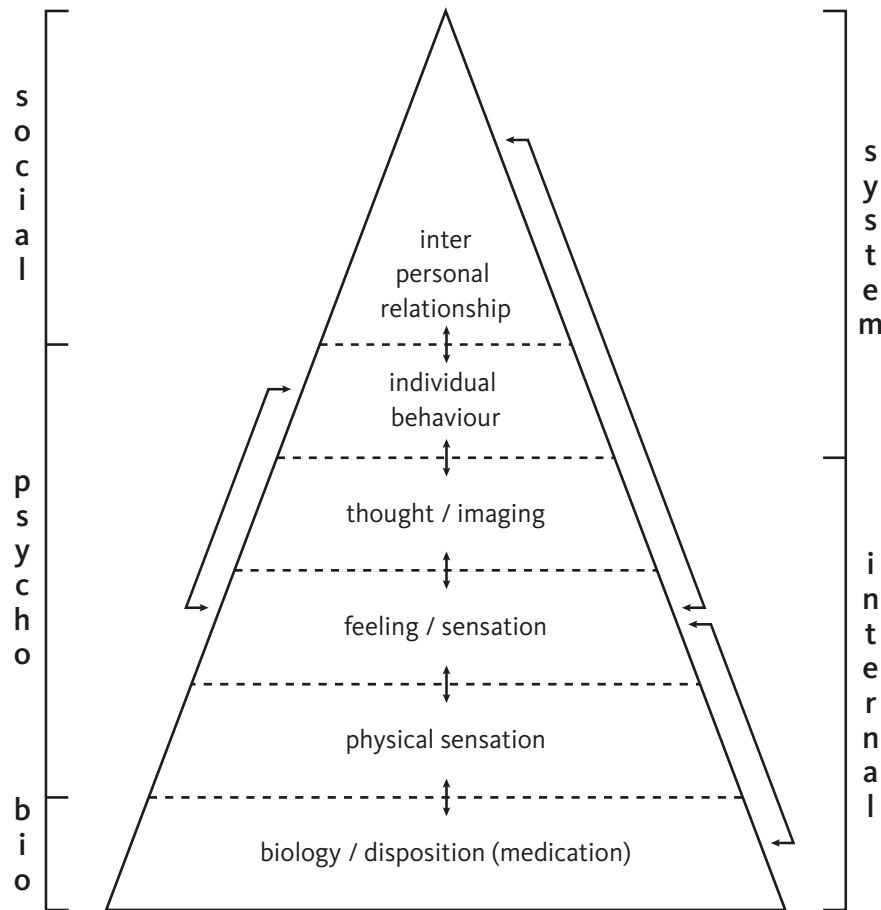
Informing each other of our ways of working may be inviting and inspire reflection and dialogue about our vision and about how we work with systemic educational therapy.

If we, as educational therapists, continue to learn with and from each other and keep developing our qualities in this field further, this will surely benefit the next generation of colleagues.

Appendix

My working model

A.A. Lazarus (1986)
M.G.T. Kwee



Seeing the human being as a bio-psycho-social being is an invitation to use systems theory as it offers a comprehensive framework for (approximate) explanations of psychological changes. Further, systems theory encompasses other theories, in particular educational therapy. A range of learning processes play a role at all levels of the bio-psycho-social system that is the human being. Thus, for me, there is no competition between different theoretical approaches.

All of these have their own focus, they complement each other.

In the remainder of this book I quote Kwee and Roborgh (1987), authors of *Multimodale therapie* [Multimodal Therapy, MMT], with quotes from the book in quotation marks.

The drawing, a triangle, might as well take the form of a square or a circle; there is a certain hierarchy but no value judgements have been placed in the various modalities.

“The basic elements of MMT may be separately distinguishable yet in reality form modalities that cannot be separated ... We are people who act (behaviour), feel (affect), observe (sensation), imagine (imagery), reason (cognition), relate (interpersonal relationship), and, moreover, are beings of flesh and blood, that is to say, have a biological dimension that can be influenced through medication (drugs)” (page 4).

Important here is that the boundaries between the modalities are graphically shown as dotted lines to visualise that they allow interactions to take place between each other. This means that they can never function independently and also that they impact each other in their functioning. **I have named this the ‘system-internal’.**

“The relationship or interaction between the modalities is determined by circular rather than linear causality. Any random event in a modality is both cause and effect. The modalities can be seen as elements of an organisation system that we term the psyche. It is a network of interrelated structures and integrated processes, not so much a rigid structure as a flexible yet stable form within which dynamic processes take place” (page 9).

“The biological modality and the social modality constitute the demarcation of the psyche in a narrower sense. Since biological functioning is the base for

psychosocial functioning, **Biology** has been located at the basis. **Sensation** has been placed above this since sensory experiences have a strongly biological base. Emotional processes are triggered by and/or stem from Sensation, which is why we have given **Affect** a place above it. Because Affect involves intervention and stimulation of **Cognition** and **Imagination** we have situated these above Affect. A modality lying between the interpersonal and other modalities, Behaviour influences the length and intensity of emotions. The **Interpersonal modality** is located at the top, whereby it should be noted that emotional responses mostly take place in a social context..." (page 10).

"Every modality is a sub-system of the entire bio-psycho-social system and is simultaneously in itself a system that in its turn consists of sub-systems; Sensation as a system, for example, consists of the sub-systems: seeing, hearing, touch, smell, taste, and others" (page 11).

"Processes within the bio-psycho-social system consist of communication, a reciprocal information exchange between the modalities. This happens, for instance, when thoughts, images transfer information from observation to the behavioural modality. Transaction is the reciprocal exchange of matter and energy between the modalities. Experience teaches that energy invested in running, for example, is invested at the expense of experiencing the emotion 'fear' Performances feed back the information; with self-regulation (change processes of the first order) this involves small adjustments to the system by the system. Self-transformation (change processes of the second order) is the creative ability to reach beyond physical or mental boundaries via positive feedback. Reorganisation takes place in such a way that a new structure arises. This usually manifests itself as a reaction to strong external and internal influences, with the old ways of functioning ceasing to be adaptive.

Development phases and learning processes often proceed in this way. A last concept we should mention here is **equifinality**. What we mean is that it is the current state of the bio-psycho-social system that is of importance, not what it once was. Complaints are mainly perpetuated through factors in the here-and-now situation" (pages 11-12).

These, then, are the quotes from Kwee and Roborgh (1987).

This is where my own model comes in, by way of addition to the foregoing. It has been my own life experience and my experience in working with the severely traumatised that a human being's history is inextricably bound up with his present. This model has provided me as a member of a multidisciplinary team with an efficacious image: just as the equal and different modalities interrelate and interact as a system with sub-systems, the members of a team with different disciplines and expertise can similarly interrelate to benefit the development of the system, i.e. the human being who has come to us with a wish to change. Drawing on his own specific expertise, each team member made, in cooperation with the client/ patient, a functional analysis of the complaints and strengths of the client/ patient's system-internal and presented it in the team. It was also described which specific therapy was used and what possible interactions with the other therapy interventions could occur.

We, as team members, together made a 'treatment plan' that we then submitted to the client/patient. This plan was evaluated in interim assessments and towards the end of the day treatment and during the follow-up appointments once the patient was discharged. We shared the goal and therapeutic effort aimed at to bring about the desired change in the emotional disorder as described in the manual of the multi-modal therapy (MMT) book. Equally important was a kind of parallel system: we are all very different in how we practise our profession, and as human beings (as are the modalities in the system-internal). At the same time, we are connected to each other in our goal and in our cooperation in the communication amongst ourselves and with the environment. In other words, we clearly worked in a systemic way as a multidisciplinary team, and we were able to explain this to the clients/ patients, thus also proving to be a transparent model for the system-internal of the individual himself.

As we addressed the client/patient's problems in the here-and-now, we simultaneously realised, being systemics workers, that the individual cannot be seen separate from his system-external, his current relationship and family and the family of origin, or the people in his work situation and social context. These were therefore involved actively in the therapy, also because they held a great deal of resources and because they engaged with each other on a daily basis at home or part-time at work.

The therapy process was said to enable one to see the wood for the trees again, as the evaluations during and following the therapy process revealed. Further, defining the problem(s) at all modalities proved to have surprised patients/clients and opened up possibilities for a new perspective on the problem and boosted their motivation to bring about the desired changes. Indeed, this is about the current situation in which a human being's bio-psycho-social system "stands" and which this human being brings to the fellow educational therapist with his problem definition or wishes for change. However, as I use the word "stands" I immediately visualise a tree that can only stand upright thanks to its roots and the soil and the context surrounding it.

Thus has come about my own model, by way of addition to equifinality: the here and now cannot be seen as separate from past and future. Survival mechanisms that seemed useful and necessary in the past can turn out to be actual obstacles to one's functioning in the present. They seem to linger on until the old experiences and survival mechanisms have been identified, recognised and acknowledged, in such a way that they can be replaced with newly learnt and developed adequate coping mechanisms.

Duly considered, the drawing of my model for a human being resembles a tree with roots and branches, with the trunk being the place where transition streams flow up and down between birth and the present moment, intending to flow on to the branches of the future.

Using the model in educational therapy

In the first or a subsequent meeting with the colleague I first of all explain Kwee and Roborg's model, based on A.A. Lazarus's, with the system-internal and its dotted lines. I draw a circle around the triangle. For me, this circle denotes that it is impossible for us to know everything and describe in words what goes on in our system-internal. It is for me important to remain open to new developments, knowledge and surprises ranging from a biochemical to an emotional level. Then, I share my view that we are all born with this system-internal and I draw the same encircled triangle at the bottom of the page. I connect the modalities using time/development lines from birth to the present (see drawing).

On the viewer's left I draw a timeline from birth to the present. This can be described visually through outside influences, context and important others in all life stages, empowering and traumatic experiences at all modalities in

all life stages, on both socialisation and value systems and on such sub-systems as physicality and sexuality. All types of education and training and relational experiences, physical changes, health, sickness and death are addressed.

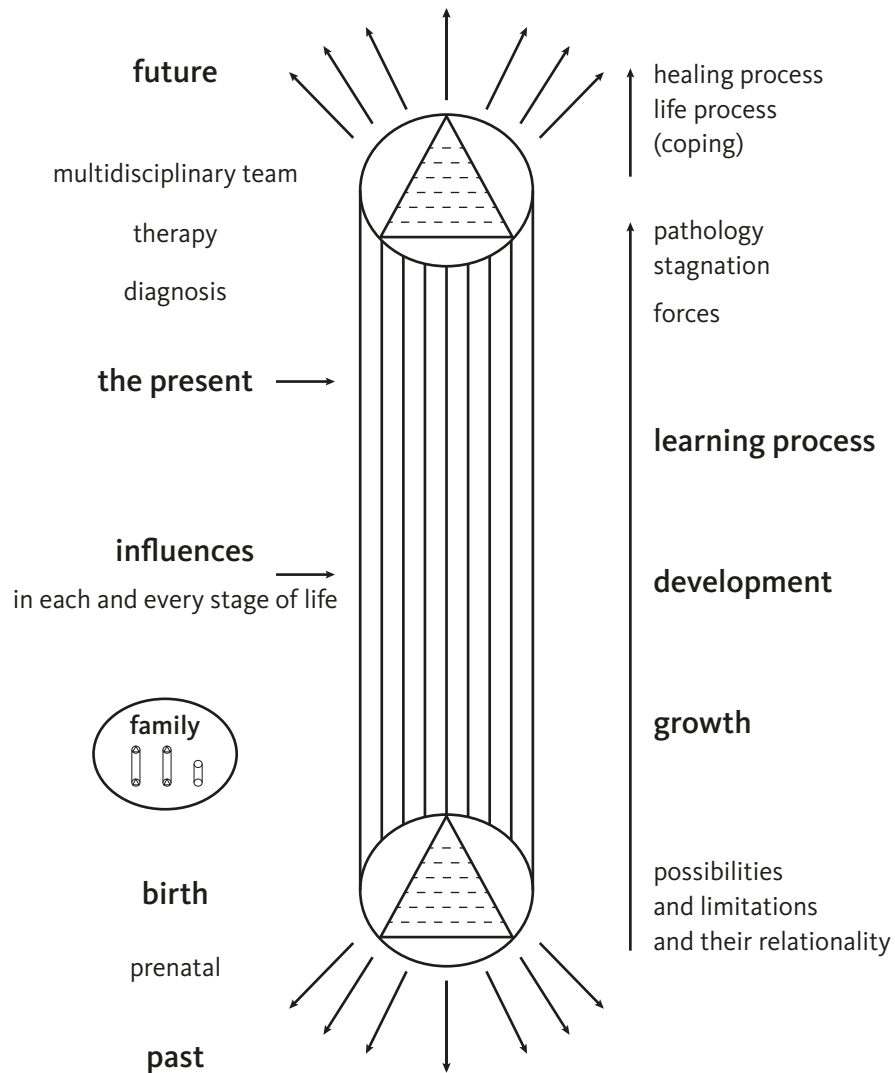
Then, I clarify my view that long before birth, a great many influences have been leaving their impact on the ancestral genetic material, on the DNA, RNA and on all other structures of cell content and cell membrane. What I can then list includes geographical context, religious context, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic context, sexuality and gender roles, education and spirituality. There are more influences, which I do not all know, but I am open-minded and will ask about these, using, for example, the genogram. It is important to realise that these contextual influences have also left their imprint on the genetic material, not just on the colour of the skin and eyes but also on the disposition of all modalities and sub-systems of the system-internal. All these go to determine both the possibilities/strengths and the limitations/boundaries of the disposition of all modalities; but they also determine how these modalities interrelate and how they, together as the system-internal, relate to the system-external.

To the right of the tree I then draw the line symbolising the development and learning process from birth to the present. Learning to identify, recognise and acknowledge, to accept one's dispositionally acquired possibilities and limitations is the basis for learning to deal with these and with the influences from within and without.

Survival mechanisms that we have learnt because we had no coping possibilities or they were hindered can be acknowledged as having been temporarily helpful in an early stage of life. Now, however, they may cause any further development to stagnate and may even lead to tissue damage and pathology. This, too can now be acknowledged and recognised. It is only then that the appropriate/desired coping mechanisms can be explored and practised. These, in turn, may bring about increased further development and recovery or enhanced self-management and skills for dealing with the present situation.

System-internal and system-external

both separate and inextricably bound up with each other



An example:

Martin discovers that his cognition, which is in essence inextricably bound up with all other parts of the system-internal, yet exerts a kind of dominance that could almost be termed a tyranny. This leaves no space for the other aspects, so these are then suppressed or they go underground and dominantly resurface at unexpected and not always welcome moments in undesirable behaviour or interaction. He defines his focus thus: he would like to examine where this tyranny comes from and change it. He wishes to bring about a more equivalent interplay of all his inner layers.

The context of his history discloses how his natural disposition for warm-heartedness and cuddling has obtained a negative label: mother stands for super-emotional behaviour, such as cuddling, which had a strong sexual orientation. She also openly had affairs with other men. This behaviour was condemned by both her environment and Martin. This was not how he wanted to be and how he wanted to treat himself and others. The image Martin had of his mother when he was seven was shattered, with mother knocked off her pedestal, when he accidentally found out that she had slept with another man. The frustration, sorrow, anger, powerlessness hit him so hard that only cognition could help him cope. He had also imbibed this thinking power from his father's interaction and communication with him. Father would constantly emphasise his responsibility to him: Martin was not to feel, he had to think, study and achieve. In his internal system, cognition and emotion were played out against each other within his complex loyalty conflict as an either/or phenomenon, not realising that cognition and emotion are inextricably bound up with each other and that they stand in an and/and position where they mutually influence each other.

Since the emotions were disapproved of and Martin as a child felt dependent on his father's judgement because he needed him, he did not get the chance to learn the coping mechanisms for dealing with emotions. Cognition took over as a survival mechanism. For this, he received his father's approval. At the time, this was a useful mechanism that now, in the present, may receive recognition as a survival mechanism (rather than encounter opposition); now, however, he experiences this mechanism as troublesome, and he has the possibility to feel what he feels. Being able to recognise this as being a part of him as a person and learning how to deal with this was something he experienced as liberating.

His natural biological disposition, his sensitive physicality, his emotions, his perceptions, his cognitions, his individual behaviour and his interactions were given a place, in all equality, around his inner round table to engage in an internal dialogue. The present adult internal system was able to look upon his childhood development and the influences it had received from the system-external with acceptance and love.

His own experiences had already taught Martin that survival mechanisms automatically withdraw when adequate coping mechanisms are being learnt. His body, his faithful companion, had been telling him on a daily basis that it wanted to be heard and seen. It demanded attention for such various feelings as listlessness, overeating and drinking, sadness, fear and powerless anger.

He was now able to listen to these and ask: What suits me? Will I continue with the old images about cognition and emotion as if they are each other's opposites? Will I use my own knowledge and life experience and make the choices that suit me? How much do I still depend on other people's judgments?

This, then, was Martin's example.

To conclude, I would like to say with regard to this working model that it has been such a joy for me to work with it, especially so because clients and colleagues with whom I worked could give feedback on the model. This has supported me and them in our desire to learn and keep developing.

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For me, it is important that anyone reading my book has acquainted themselves, or will do so, with the contents of the books in the bibliography. I have no wish to repeat here what has already been said so outstandingly before. These books can also be used when coaching/training educational therapists.

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I would like to express my thanks to all those who have invited me to join them on the adventurous road of educational therapy.

I thank them for their trust in me and for creating opportunities for learning and growing together in this context.

Monika M. Jongerius-Joras

Part II An impression of educational therapy

Inhoud

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Introduction

'Decision: As of today, the government orders every person wishing to teach others to follow a course in systemics educational therapy.'

Desirous to set a good example, the government will itself enrol its members on such a course.

The aim is for a teacher to get to know himself as much as possible and to be surprised by his growing self-knowledge. Only then can he be open to others who affect and touch him. If he is able to reflect on those aspects and layers where he is touched and can identify and acknowledge a personal life theme, he can first reflect on this recognition instead of responding automatically to the other and more readily choose an action that is attuned to the other's request.

Obviously, this government action requires educational therapists who are very well trained and who can handle their life experiences at all layers and parts of their human-ness so expertly that this will benefit their trainees in their own growth process.'

When I woke up, I was not even startled by this dream. But it did make me realise once again how important I feel educational therapy to be: a message I hope to have passed on in part I, *The importance of educational therapy*.

As I subsequently set out to give a wider view of educational therapy, linking it up with a description of its substantive process, I discovered that there were other important substantive messages I wished to pass on. In order to stay highly focussed on my process, I asked a colleague and friend for feedback while I was writing.

When I related my dream to my friend and colleague Tijno and told him about my motivation to attempt a description of the educational therapy process, he offered to think along with me. Tijno is a trusted psychologist and psychotherapist as well as systemics thinker with whom I can very openly share and discuss substantive views on working together with people. He appreciates how difficult it is to write descriptively rather than literally and he was prepared to look over what I had written down with me. And, he was happy to reflect with me on my views and the messages following on from these.

I told him: 'As early as 2014 I wrote the first book, *Leertherapie op de agenda* [*Putting educational therapy on the agenda*], in my capacity as a trainer for my colleagues in the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Relatie- en Gezinstherapie, NVRG). In it, I describe why I find educational therapy important and what structure educational therapy could have. I also present the thinking and working model that has influenced and inspired me. Now, in 2017, I would like to follow up with a second book, *Een impressie van een leertherapie* [*An Impression of educational therapy*], where I focus more on the content of educational therapy. For more information on the practice of educational therapy and on how to choose a focus, the reader is referred to the first book.'

Both books are intended for fellow educational therapists and colleagues aspiring to become educational therapists. The books are here combined since the first book was due a reprint and it serves as an introduction to the second book. From this point, then, I will speak of parts I and II of this book.

My motivation to write this book stems, first of all, from my wish as surfaced in my dream. Secondly, I find it important that therapists are aware of their own views and concepts, that they can reflect on these, indeed, can put them forward as input for a dialogue with colleagues and with their patients, even. By means of a model I outline my vision of the human being as a system-internal and a system-external. It is this vision, visualised in two drawings, that I would like to share and contribute to the dialogue. I have clarified my vision via drawings in my work with clients and patients. I experienced concretely how important and fruitful this explanation was in our interaction as we worked together.

A human being is seen as a bio-psycho-social (bps) being. This vision entails an invitation to listen to the human being from a systemic theoretical approach. Educational therapy based on this vision also fits in with learning theory. A range of learning processes plays a role at all levels of the human being as a system-internal and system-external.

The basic elements of all aspects of the bps system are all equivalent, in the same way that all the cells in our body may be different yet are of equal value. The sub-aspects of the bps system are in constant circular interaction with each other, whether or not perceived consciously, they are active. They can be described separately as subsystems where each has its own components, but they cannot function independently of each other. They continuously influence each other.

To this image of a system-internal I have added the system-external that involves all aspects of a human being's context, including the continuous circular interaction between the aspects of the system-internal and the system-external, an interaction that continuously influences how we develop in the course of our lives.

It is well before our birth that the dynamic process of human development begins, whereby we cannot overemphasize the influence of genetic material. As human beings, we are also placed within a context and its impact on our development, which is not of our own choosing but has been lent to us for the duration of our lives; a context that, moreover, can vary in the course of our life. Within our context we all encounter stereotypes that shape our thinking and that underpin the cultural norms of the group into which we were born.

The constant interaction between biological disposition, individual context and the wider social context is a combined interplay that is in constant development in every human being's timeline, is sometimes obstructed or severely hindered, can even be disturbed. It is different for every human being, and unique.

Educational therapy aims to be a process where we examine which stereotypes have influenced our thinking and living from before our birth and during the timeline of our development, and, in particular, which stereotypes inhibit our development. Reflecting on this can create space for the recognition and acknowledgement of these stereotypes. And then the question can be asked: how do I handle these? These reflections may help us regain control over these stereotypes that dominate us and restrict us in our personal development and in the interaction with our environment.

The impression

While writing about educational therapy I have learnt a great deal myself as I reflected on my own views and concepts. However, it is in dialogue with colleagues and friends who read my first draft that I have learnt most.

From this parallel process I chose the following form:

In conversation with Tijno, who also works as an educational therapist, I started with an explanation of my own vision. I talked about my considerations and shared my views, reflections and ideas. Together we read and briefly reflected on the dialogues that I had written as impressions of a year-long educational therapy.

We talked about our thoughts and feelings on the subject. Tijno shared with me that it is very difficult to describe a process that takes up a whole year and supports me in my effort to see the power of restraint.

Sharing our reflections as personal impressions and views, I submit them here as an invitation to readers to engage in joint dialogue.

I will call the educational therapist in the educational therapy dialogues described here Paulien while the colleague in training is named Anne. Both are fictitious characters. Paulien, Anne and the person described by Anne as John are not existing colleagues. However, their stories are based on real-life histories.

Tijno: 'My position is straightforward: I read, ask questions and offer feedback from my own background as an educational therapist and colleague. You are the writer, with responsibility for your opinions. My first question: how do you see the position of the colleague in training and the position of the educational therapist?'

Me: 'Paulien and Anne are each other's equals, both will learn from each other and have their own responsibilities and expertise with respect to the educational therapy process. However, the educational therapist is the trainer. Here, too, equality is not sameness. Diversity among adult people need not be labelled hierarchically, though; it simply exists and is recognised and acknowledged as such. A student receives something and is responsible for whatever he does with it, the trainer teaches, offers something and is res-

possible for that. Difference of power, of influence does not have to be labelled vertically: it may very well be experienced horizontally as a difference that helps people enrich each other.

I have roughly used my own words as much as possible to convey both the educational therapist's reflections and the invitations to reflect and the stories and reflections that the colleague in educational therapy puts in.

The educational therapist has to make choices all the time. What recognition of her own life and life stories evoked in her will she present to the colleague in training? A parallel process takes place with what the colleague in training has experienced in her private life and, in particular, in her work situation. The colleague in training's position within the therapy context is by definition constantly addressed during the educational therapy.

The educational therapist's questions take an investigative and facilitating approach: will Paulien's questions enable Anne to dig more deeply into her personal perception and reflections during her development process? Will Anne be able to use these to learn and develop herself in her everyday life and, especially, in her work with families and couples? Can the relationship between Paulien and Anne create space for new development opportunities and a new openness to the future for both of them?

Tijno: 'Knowing you, I would say that you are especially concerned with the roughly imagined rendering of a process. It is impossible to take in all of reality; much will be left out and there are no pretensions to absolute truthfulness.'

I nod: 'Yes, each representation, every image of Anne and Paulien's realities made and conveyed to the reader here will inevitably remain a construction on the part of the narrator. This construction can become a subject for discussion in dialogue with the reader and amongst readers and can, after its deconstruction, be formed into a new reality.'

In this way, a supposedly objective truth and objective reality are constantly brought up for discussion according to the possibilities and limitations of the narrator's and reader's thinking, feeling and physical experiencing.'

Tijno: 'An apt metaphor here is that of the rainbow: the various colours stand for the relative and many-coloured truth of the development of one's talents.'

The light that falls through the prism and divides into the colours of the rainbow could symbolise the continuous quest for even more desirable insights that tie in better with one's own possibilities and limitations as to personal development in the context of daily life.

In this process, being touched in one of these colours and layers in your personal development can be viewed as a challenge and an invitation to set out on an investigation and then choose what you want to keep or rather let go of or change.'

Me: 'Yes, that's how I see it, too. Allowing yourself to be touched may be a sign of receptivity and being in flux. It may create an opening for the enjoyment of things for what they are, and possibly for work on things a person might wish to change. Since this is an educational therapy process, growth as a therapist, as an instrument in the service of others, takes centre stage. Obviously, any change that the colleague in training wishes to bring about is inextricably bound up with the human-ness of the therapist.'

Tijno and I read Paulien's account of her introductory interview with **Anne**: 'During the **introductory interview** Anne puts forward the **question she has chosen**. She has recently experienced a specific motivation to start her educational therapy: the fact that she, a married woman, has met a married man, John. They have been deeply affected by each other.'

How is she to deal with this in such a way that all those involved can grow from the experience and nobody gets needlessly hurt? The answer as such has already been given:

Two years ago, Anne and John broke off their contact after four dates because John had been too deeply affected by their contact, which was jeopardising his present partnership. He did not want this to happen. She respected his decision and on her part also broke off relations, her main argument being that she does not want him or those dear to him to suffer unnecessarily. She is able to allow in and experience her feelings about this loss. She knows that she is better at enduring her own pain than the pain suffered by others. She consciously feels many aspects of her pain, such as her intense feelings of disappointment, powerlessness and the wish to enforce contact, to breathe new courage into the other, to change the other into a man who can have a relationship with both herself and his partner.'

In this pain she also experiences and accepts, as she has done earlier in her life, the pain of her limitations, her transience and the finiteness of her life.'

Tijno: 'This background to the question is not only complex but also still very relevant. During the introductory meeting Paulien will have to ask quite a few questions in the safety of their early contacts to get Anne to formulate a question in as concrete terms as possible.'

Me: 'Yes, I read here that Paulien thinks that Anne's formulations are too abstract, and she probes further. Paulien describes how she finds Anne to be very sensitive. She feels that this is why she dwells in rather abstract and circuitous descriptions. Perhaps Anne thinks she is safe in these. An idea she may have built on the basis of earlier experiences. Paulien has asked her about this, both respectfully and concretely.'

Tijno: 'It is important that she can first experience a new kind of safety before she lets go of what to her are safe, old ideas and concepts and their resulting behaviours.'

Anne finally defines her concrete question and focus that are to be central in the educational therapy as follows:

She wants to explore and comprehend even better her sensitivity to non-verbal contacts and physicality as part of her intimacy with another person. She would like to be better at managing sexuality as a force that can be harmoniously integrated into her human-ness. She wants to grow in her experience of intimacy in more aspects of her life that she can enjoy.

She wants to explore and work on how, relative to her focus, her idealistic longing for a human being who is as much her equal as possible can become more realistic.

She would also like to learn how to deal with the bashfulness that she observes in herself and in others when talking about physicality so as to encourage rather than inhibit personal development.

Being a marriage and family therapist who every day works with couples who ask questions about, among other things, faithfulness and unfaithful-

ness and the impact of experiences with third parties on their relationship, she wants to get to know herself as much as possible in this respect. She would like to relate to this kind of situation in her own life in such a way that she can handle it and will be able to invite the couples that she works with to contribute their discoveries and experiences to the dialogue if they wish to work with these.

She also chose this focus because she believes that developing physical sensitivity and eroticism involves a colourful and constant process from cradle to grave and as such an equal part of one's development as a human being.

While explaining her systemics model, Paulien describes how she sees the place of Anne's focus in it: 'Already anchored in a baby's biological disposition, sexuality is from birth constantly subject to the impact of perception, observation, imaging and meaning attribution, reasoning and acting, in short to all dimensions of the system-internal that every human being has, and is therefore different for every human being.'

The system-external, with relationships and interactions, with judgements and cultural meaning attribution, also interacts with biology, indeed, has a generations-long interaction on the genetic material. The social impact on the biological sex that we term gender is subject to more biological influences than we think or have knowledge of today. That is why so much research has lately been conducted into the impact of hormones and, in particular, the stress hormone on gender.

In this sense, Paulien does not see intimacy as inextricably bound up with sexuality; rather, she views it as an experience at all layers of the model that mutually influence each other. How a person thinks about intimacy affects his individual behaviour and feeling, and his treatment of other people.

Anne talks about her own vision. Preconceptions and stereotypes about the subject have been instilled in her too, both in her own cultural family context and in the wider cultural context where she lived with her family. She has also acquired the attendant standards and norms systems. Her idealistic views on intimacy and sexuality touch on the reality surrounding her.

In her summary, Paulien describes her own first impressions from the first interview. She is particularly struck by the 'idealistic versus realistic' theme, and by the fact that Anne tends to sidestep the issue by calling herself a romantic person. Paulien will share her impression with Anne in the first talks. She will ask if Anne also has a question on this subject, and if so, whether this question can be explored together when they make a genogram.

Tijno: 'When I read this, Anne touches me in my own vision on physicality: I also believe that more attention should go to disposition and development of intimacy from birth but also to the vision that encompasses the physical and sexual aspects and layers of a human being. This sort of attention is lacking in parenting and in education.'

The fact that adults tend to overemphasise sexuality or declare it taboo together with the fact that research has shown that 40 per cent of all children have experienced sexual abuse leads one to suspect that views about sexuality are often one-sided and that sexuality is usually taken to be synonymous with sexual intercourse and orgasm.

Figures from the World Health Organisation (2014) show that every year over 16 million unwanted children are born of girls aged between fifteen and nineteen.

Research also indicates that in places where it is easier to talk about sexuality, the use of contraceptives is improved and abortion figures drop. Awareness raising through traditional and modern media has greatly affected how sexuality is handled in everyday practice. The historically developed connection between sexuality as a taboo and abuse of power will remain an issue that requires attention if we wish to examine and change the inequality between women and men.'

I also find it important, for myself and for the purpose of the reflective dialogue with Tijno, to share here the differentiated definition of sexuality as given by Ms Dr J. Rademakers:

Sexuality: biological sex, gender identity, sexual preference.

Physicality: sexual responsiveness including experiencing pleasure, touching and being touched, the ability to enjoy and find pleasure in your body, attitude to nakedness, sexual behaviours and ways of love-making.

Intimacy: the wish and the ability to engage in interpersonal contacts and relationships, cherishing and cuddling, being in love and courting, feelings of bonding and safety.

By way of general information preceding the descriptive impressions of the dialogue between Paulien and Anne, I also share with Tijno the following aspects of my views on how Paulien works as an educational therapist. The model of the system-internal and -external that she uses and their description can be found in part I of this book.

There, it is also explained that the choice of a focus constitutes something of a common thread. During the interim evaluation and the end evaluation it is discussed whether this focus has received sufficient attention. It is also checked if the first focus can be rounded off. Usually, the choice of a subsequent focus follows on organically from the previous one. This next focus can sometimes place even more emphasis on concrete work experiences with people in their systems.

It is then that subjects like being touched in the therapeutic interaction with clients and questions how to deal with this can be put forward. These questions are of such a personal nature that they cannot be addressed during supervision.

During the entire educational therapy process, the educational therapist will obviously and constantly bear in mind the guideline that this process especially serves to enhance the colleague in training's growth, in particular as a human being and as an instrument when working with family systems.

As described in part I, Paulien explains to Anne during the introductory interview how she works and what model she has adopted.

Anne chooses to work together with Paulien. She already says so at the end of the first interview. She prefers to be with a woman with whom she can feel safe when reflecting on the theme she has chosen.

Paulien, on her part, also wishes to work with Anne. She approves of the focus chosen by Anne because she feels that she can receive Anne's question and story and can allow herself to be touched by her story in the layers where she will again come upon similar experiences that she herself has had. She can use these to benefit the colleague in training as she shares, through questions, whatever relates to her own question.

Paulien's constant interaction with Anne forms a parallel system with the interactions that Anne has with the people that she works with. The educational therapist regularly discloses this parallel system by momentarily 'freezing' the interaction between herself and the colleague in training. This allows a permanent reflection on the interaction between Paulien and Anne, with this interaction remaining visible and in motion.

Frankness about being able to work together in educational therapy is of the utmost importance given the therapeutic relationship that underpins the efficacy of the cooperation. For this reason, too it is important to make clear, during the very first contact, sometimes as early as on the telephone, that both parties leave open during the introductory interview whether or not they wish to work together. After all, it is already on the phone or in their emails and during the introductory interview, when Anne and Paulien express their ability and willingness to work together, that the process starts.

Experience has taught Paulien that she cannot prepare for the contents of the sessions that are to take place within the agreed period. She has learnt that she can allow herself to be touched by what happens during the interviews, and, she is able to observe and reflect on this. From this will come the questions and impressions she is to put to the colleague in training. She will also describe this process to her colleague in training, visualising it as well she can.

The safety in their interaction is important for both. This, too is a parallel system, an example for the colleague in training's work with his client systems.

A brief description of Anne and Paulien's personal context:

Forty-two-year-old Anne was born in South Africa in 1975 from South African parents, descendants of Dutch farmers. Her dizygotic twin sisters were born three years later.

Her father was a small farmer who, although he did not support apartheid, had to fight in the war, while her mother strongly opposed this. He was severely traumatised as well as physically injured during the insane fighting that he wished he could have remained aloof from. Anne says that her mother and the children suffered from her father's untreated post-traumatic disorder. His intense, unacknowledged inner powerlessness expressed itself in a form of power abuse within the family that was not accompanied by physical violence and thus went unnoticed for a long time.

When Anne was fourteen, her parents sent her to the Netherlands. She went to a girls' boarding school where she could attend grammar school. There, she met a teacher who acted as a personal coach to her in a respectful and loving way and introduced her to spiritual values from various cultures. This relationship deepened her process of self-reflection and self-knowledge. It has always been of great value to her, both as a student and a professional.

Sixty-one-year-old Paulien was born in the Netherlands in 1956 from an East-German mother, who had gone into hiding in the Netherlands in 1941. Although of Jewish ancestry, she did not practise her religion. Her East-German father, born in a little village near Dresden, and married to her mother in 1939, fought as a German soldier in Russia. He ended up in a hospital before the end of the war due to a frostbitten foot. This saved his life: he did not have to return to the front. He was allowed to join his wife in the Netherlands in June 1945.

As the narrator, I take the liberty of adding some descriptions of possible inner thoughts and visible non-verbal interactions on the part of Anne and Paulien. I also want to take into account what might be going on in their heads. I show their possible bodily reactions and visible interactions. I describe my and Tijno's associations and reflections on themes that come up for discussion, both on Paulien's and on Anne's part.

I have italicised the dialogue between Anne and Paulien. The dialogues serve to convey the impression but do not give an overall picture of the interaction between Paulien and Anne.

As Paulien asks Anne to state her focus more concretely, it turns out that Anne would first like to examine how her idealism and sense of reality relate and how she has learnt to handle these. She would like to become more realistic in her inner life. As realistic as she can be in her everyday life, so idealistic is she still in her inner longing for unity, especially in a relationship with a man. Keeping in mind her focus, Anne starts to draw her genogram. As she does so, Anne recounts stories from her early childhood where her focus plays a role. At Paulien's request, she also shows some pictures from this time:

Anne: *'We are all right together, mother and child. I am a child that was lovingly conceived and wanted by both parents. What joy to be bound so to mother, over nine months long. We listened to each other two weeks longer than nine months as we delayed the birth.'*

"Together we are safe," my mother keeps telling me, her child in her belly, because outside, people are fighting each other in an insane war, with deadly violence.

It is not until the doctor speaks up – "If the child isn't born spontaneously, we will have to get it" – that we, together, mother Toos and her daughter (oh yes, Toos senses intuitively that I am a girl, she's even got a name for me: Anne) are delivered on 14 July. We don't want an induced birth, we ourselves know when the time is right and we have sensed that the small world around us is prepared to protect us. A clear, small haven surrounds us in our village, which on a smaller scale in our street treats inhabitants with a different skin colour peaceably. As yet unconsciously, or possibly already slightly conscious of the great uncertainty that I call life, I, already grateful, receive the love that is as it may be.'

Paulien: *'What makes you stress that you have your own say and influence at the birth?'*

Anne: *'The image of the then context that rises up in me is that of being totally at the mercy of an environment where war and discrimination, power abuse and degrading behaviour continually determine everyday life. This existential powerlessness is something that my mother experienced. She also knows about these experiences from the stories of her parents and their situation. These old stories have taught her how her ancestors dealt with these things. She will not be ruled by powerlessness but she also allows in all the anger and*

indignation that she feels in her heart at the injustice around her. This allows her to focus on what is within her possibilities, on the influence that she does have.'

Paulien: *'So, your mother focused on the child, on you. She even construed this meaning attribution and the image in herself. She thus found her own ways in which she had a voice and kept a grip on the traumatic wartime that she otherwise had no influence over. Did you think this up later or did she tell you about this?'*

Anne: *'She told me, and the women in her environment that she could trust, a lot about this. As a child I was often there during these conversations.'*

Paulien: *'The idea that forms in your mother's mind is an idealistic image that helps her survive and lets her act according to her heart while the realistic situation would sooner invite to fear and feelings of powerlessness. Can she continue to behave actively and act adequately because of this image?'*

Anne: *'Yes, I think so, but it must have cost her an awful lot of energy, besides experiencing the happiness of having a child.'*

Paulien listens to her own life experience that is being touched: *'Did you never see your mother powerless or frightened?'*

Anne: *'She is not disposed to fear or intimidation on account of any feeling, image or behaviour of powerlessness whatsoever. Her character is her salvation, and I think that in the nine months I spent in her belly she familiarised me with her feelings and coping mechanisms. From a very stage, I learnt a lot from my mother, both through verbal contact via sound waves and through non-verbal intimate contact via the veins. And, I must have inherited something of her character and of her ancestors' character.'*

Paulien realises that Anne digresses a little here before she can continue with the possibly looming experience of powerlessness on account of her father's abuse of power. Anne focuses on the strength, Paulien follows her, just as conscious and keen. Anne first recounts her own influences in this war situation. Paulien moves along with her, at the same time keeping an eye on this overall theme: *'How do you experience "predisposition" in the model that I put before you?'*

Anne: *'Predisposition has been an important basic theme all through my life. Just as in your model I have both feet firmly in my predisposition. I mean 'predisposition' at every layer of the system-internal, predisposition that I received unasked. More poetically, I could even say that I experience my predisposition, my being what I am, my acceptance of this, as a source of strength. Only then come awareness and acknowledgement of my limitations, and recognition and acknowledgement of my possibilities in any situation. It is also because I recognised my own vision in your model that I chose you to be my educational therapist. For I think that both my possibilities and my limitations have been given to me as predisposition. These are what I will have to work with.'*

I realise that my image of myself in the context of my socialisation and my biological predisposition are so specifically mine that they have determined the course of my whole life and that I wish to remain faithful to these. In the early days, I often felt that I was alone in this, while I now feel how much I have in common with other people, with women especially.'

Anne's appreciation for Paulien's model alerts her to the fact that this may become a pitfall in the present educational therapy. Anne may be projecting onto her educational therapist her wish to find somebody who is as much as possible her equal. She puts this to Anne, who acknowledges as much. As the interaction is frozen for a moment, Anne also recognises such wish projection as an interaction that some of her clients in her work use in relation to herself.

Probing, Paulien asks about Anne's strengths, realising that this approach may also be useful in Anne's work if clients expect too much of her as a therapist: *'What touches me is how you talk about you and your mother. Because it seems that the age difference aside, you and your mother have an equal relationship: you are allowed to just be, you are welcome. At the same time, you need each other to cope with life.'*

And the thought occurs to me that you would desperately love your mother and, later on, other people, including me, to closely resemble you. How do you see this?'

Anne: *'Yes, I recognise both. I need equality and equivalence.'*

Anne is quiet for a moment, listening to herself. Her cheeks flush, her breath comes faster: *'Yes, my longing to see my likeness in John was very great, I experi-*

enced myself as a young child. Not in a realistic sense matching my present age, but I saw idealistically in him what I wanted to see. I can now also recognise it as an old desire to be one with my mother, safe and warm.'

Anne keeps listening to herself in silence. Paulien is moved that Anne can openly share her pitfalls with her. It gives her the courage to disagree with Anne and she is less afraid of making mistakes or not meeting Anne's expectations. She can now make these expectations a subject of discussion. In the parallel process she will now be able to share her own pitfalls with Anne. This will help Anne reflect more consciously on any pitfalls or blind spots in her work with families.

Anne also seems relieved that she is allowed to acknowledge her inner child and to initiate dialogue with her inner child: *'Could my need for equality be rooted in my longing for equivalent likeness and could life experience have made me wiser and more realistic?'*

Paulien: *'Being in love often transports us into a different state of consciousness, allows us contact with our inner child. You discover this as you experience it more often. At least, that's how I've experienced it.'*

Anne watches Paulien attentively as the latter shares this with her. She senses that Paulien does so because she has the courage to share even these experiences without fear of satisfying Anne's longing for equality too much.

Anne: *'I know that I invariably distinguish equality and equivalence in therapeutic conversations. To me, the latter is a fundamental given, a principle, an attitude in being human. It always was for my mother as well.'*

Paulien: *'What do you mean "for your mother as well"?''*

Anne: *'She had no problem whatsoever to accost a well-known doctor or a civil servant, for instance, and ask them questions. To her, they were people employed to serve other people.'*

Tijno and I look at each other after reading this dialogue. For myself, I recognise the fierceness and intensity of the propensity for equality, which indicates that the inner longing for it is very much alive. It is also a sign that it can be discussed and that it can be transformed, from an old image with all its consequences into a new image of equivalence. That the notions of equa-

lity and equivalence are used interchangeably may be due to their different use in other languages.

Tijno: 'It is not so much about banishing old longings and images as about recognising, acknowledging and handling them in different situations. In Paulien's model, the images have an impact on how we feel and behave. If we can transform these into desirable images once we have recognised and acknowledged them, and can then internalise these altered images, we will discover that our feeling, our behaviour and the interactions change as well. Part and parcel is also the experience that we learn most by trial and error.'

Me: 'Anne is a fast learner and her language is almost too beautiful to be true. It is more poetry than prose!'

Tijno: 'Yes, I can still read the woman in love in her words and I can also see that she is a mature woman with a lot of life experience who is not afraid to address this specific theme in her educational therapy.'

I am now curious to learn how Anne sees the connection between equality and equivalence with respect to her experiences with this man, John.'

Anne: *'Let me just say a bit about my experiences in my relationship with John. In our first contact I was touched by his expert remark about non-verbal aspects of our work. As a professional woman I experienced a gratifying equality. A bit later I was also touched by his remark that I inspired him. That inspiration was mutual. You could see it as a meeting together as if it were a homecoming, allowing yourself to need each other in your similarities and in your differences. It was such an intensely great pleasure for me, I think, because it touched on my first life experience with my mother.'*

Paulien: *'That is one hypothesis for your need for equality. I would like to ask you to find at least two more hypotheses.'*

Anne looks up: Paulien is asking for at least three hypotheses. One hypothesis may narrow one's vision, finding three hypotheses means 'to leave space open, as Paulien stresses, to not allow any learnt image or preconception to narrow one's vision.'

Anne: *'I'll have to think here for a minute... Another hypothesis could be that as the oldest child, my position meant I had to look after the young ones. But I didn't want to feel superior.'*

If I let this sink in for a moment, I experience old feelings, images and expectations that I used to struggle with. I can vividly picture them, and I can feel my heart pounding.

If I go back in time, to my schooldays, I recall that it soon became clear how talented I was. I was a good student and I attracted attention as the child of simple farmers. And so, I came to be placed on a pedestal. When the teacher was called away, she would ask me to take her place in front of the class and keep an eye on the other pupils! That was not to the liking of every classmate. I may have been given this talent but that surely didn't make me better than my classmates? I can picture that scene too and I realise that that is where my aversion to education with large classes was born.

A second hypothesis could be that I literally, as the oldest child and a talented pupil, was very early on given an amount of responsibility that, really, was too much for me.

I experienced the inequality that others started to foist on me as a painful reality that also confronted me with fiercely jealous behaviour on the part of my sisters and classmates. That pain may possibly have made me more alert to how diverse people's talents can be and how people can nevertheless remain each other's equal.'

Tijno is surprised at the speed and eagerness with which Anne addresses Paulien's questions: 'She is quick to make a connection with early experiences. But she can also quickly return to her present life and knowledge, possibly in order to steer clear of other early experiences that are too painful to relate. She doesn't appear to like painful experiences, tries to hold on to her strengths, just like her mother did. Fine in itself. Provided she acknowledges the pain.'

We sense in Anne's answer a step towards the subjects that she finds more difficult.

Subsequent meetings extensively address the painful experiences from the dangerous war context. Paulien listens a great deal during these sessions. Her own life experience and her memories are stirred up by Anne's words as well.

In her work as an educational therapist Paulien has experienced that the questions that the colleague in training asks during the educational therapy stem from the answers that are already lying dormant in her and that are facilitated by the invitation to reflect. They are then ready to be discovered by the colleague in training herself. In this way, Paulien is gradually making herself redundant by letting Anne experience that she makes the discovery herself.

The pros and cons of being the oldest child are discussed. Anne reflects on her own hypotheses. Being visually inclined, she can see in her mind's eye old situations and hears her mother's old stories. She can experience them anew and recognise and manage attendant feelings.

Anne: *'The first year of my life flies by because my mother and I are mostly alone. My father is away, fighting in an insane war he never wanted. My mother talks to me all day, so that I learn to speak before I can walk. Neighbours sometimes look in to see who my mother is talking to. In those days, every visit was suspicious and my mother was known for her disapproval of the unjust and discriminating fights. Equality, decency, humanity and peace came first with her. Neighbours who appreciated her for her warm-heartedness and spontaneity warned her, in the interest of her child, to keep her opinions to herself. It was only two years before her death, when she was almost ninety years old, that my mother told me a part of her life story, a memory from the war, which helped me recognise and pinpoint a pattern of assuming responsibility that I had instilled as the oldest child.*

When I was eighteen months old, my father – by nature an open and sensitive man, and hence so vulnerable – came home, on leave, but bearing all his terrible traumatic war experiences. He raped his wife, and nine months later, she gave birth to dizygotic twins, two girls, my only sisters.

Even as a child I sensed and saw that my mother struggled with these two children. Looking back, I can still feel the responsibility and the need to bring about a connection between my mother and my sisters.

Fortunately, my mother was allotted a fourteen-year-old girl who came to work

for us to do her compulsory social year. Later, this girl – she is still alive and has a good memory – told me that she came to love us. I can still sense that love whenever I see and talk to her now.'

Paulien: *'Being the oldest child of four, I recognise that position, and its pros and cons. It is not for nothing that both of us have become family therapists. Whereabouts in your body did you feel touched, in the here and now, by John and what, do you think, made it go so deep – all the way to your earliest memories and experiences?'*

Anne: *'Even when I think of him now, picture him, I still fill up. My skin tingles with a warmth and tenderness that is unconditional. I can see so many resemblances with myself, in all layers of my human-ness that it is like looking into a mirror. He calls up in me the old experience of being so near, of being so open to each other as I felt my mother and I were. I still experience it as intensely pleasurable, as a gift, even though I realise that we differ greatly and we will never see each other again. At the same time, I'm also touched by his resemblance to my father. John is very sensitive in body and soul. He can be touched in every cell of his body, by music, for instance.'*

Paulien hears how Anne talks more freely about her longing for equality.

Anne: *'My longing for physical contact with John is rooted in the old tender experiences with my mother as well as in my physical contacts with my father. My mother's tenderness seems to have imprinted a kind of habituation in my cells and fibres so that I can barely do without tenderness. I need to be careful that other people with different experiences and needs in this respect do not misinterpret my behaviour. Once, a man interpreted the friendly look I gave him as my being in love with him. An experience that my mother also had in her life.'*

Paulien: *'Would you like to say something about your partnership and your experiences with physicality in it?'*

Anne nods: *'Yes, I think I can. The fact that my husband expresses his need for tenderness less has, I suspect, created a need in me that is easily tapped into by someone who is more like me in this respect. Incidentally, over the past weeks in between these sessions, I have felt more courage to invite couples to talk about both their experiences with physicality in their childhood, because I can now experience the connection between past and present even more clearly, thanks to the educational therapy.'*

Paulien is glad to observe the effect of the educational therapy on Anne's work. At the same time, she follows the common thread: *'I sense that it is easier for you to talk about your mother than about your father. You'd like to let the story about your father rest for a while, is that correct? You'd like to approach it via other stories, I think?'*

Blushing vehemently, Anne nods, glad to be given some space and to notice that Paulien is not afraid to identify what still needs to be addressed.

Paulien: *'You were born in times of war! How did you experience this as a child with respect to intimacy?'*

Anne: *'As a child I experienced very early on in my war-stricken context that everyone else was different from my mother and that what people say about physicality and intimacy and many other areas does not necessarily agree with what they do. The frustrations and the shocking confrontations with the reality around us were hefty. People in my environment, including my father, often tried to survive their traumatic experiences as perpetrators and victims with the help of alcohol. However, because of this alcohol abuse they more often happened to transgress their own as well as other people's boundaries.'*

From an early age on, I learnt from my mother not to be afraid but to approximately understand people, not to wish to help them; that it was more important that they helped themselves. I learnt that you can still respect people as human beings while you don't necessarily accept their behaviour. It was also true for me that, as I learnt early on, you have to start with yourself if you want to improve undesirable behaviour. I can give you an example.'

Paulien: *'So, your mother taught you a lot in word and deed? She was a living example?'*

Anne: *'Early on, she taught me wonderment at everything mankind is capable of and she taught me that it was fine for me to feel whatever I felt without condemning mankind while denouncing his behaviour. As she kept talking to me about all kind of things, showing me how she dealt with feelings honestly and bravely, and fearlessly, I very early on learnt from her stories and her attitude how to distinguish survival mechanisms from coping mechanisms. My survival strategy for when we had visitors I disliked was to hide in a book. By how she lived, she*

showed me that she might share this feeling with me, but that I could also listen to these people and learn something from them. And learning happened to be my hobby!'

Paulien: *'Your mother was very important to you, then?'*

Anne: *'Yes, very important! What she also taught me was that I had a choice as to what I had to or didn't have to tell about what I felt or experienced inwardly. I saw how she did all this and I learnt to recognise and respect how she respected her own and others' privacy, that she, if at all possible, made choices in her communication by, when she was asked something, simply not telling because she didn't trust the people asking her. Yet when she did feel safe with others, she would talk. She had to be like this because her children's safety was at stake. When I was ten, I had an experience that I still remember as if it happened yesterday: I had eaten something that was actually meant to be for the whole family. I suppressed the shame and guilt that welled up in me and tried to lie my way out of my mother's question if I had been the culprit. However, my body immediately sent a red glow to my face, which taught me that lying was not an option. So, my body itself taught me that shame and guilt cannot be suppressed and I came to the conclusion that, therefore, it was all right for them to be and to be shared with others, if possible.'*

Anne is silent for a while: *'I had to apologise and my mother urged me to come straight out with what was bothering me. The relief I then experienced I can still feel. I could simply be me, even when my behaviour was not appreciated and I was feeling ashamed. I'm suddenly also thinking about John.'*

Paulien: *'That's a sudden transition. What is going on inside you now?'*

Anne: *'I taste again that old joy in a recent pleasure! It is wonderful to be able to be yourself and to experience that the other, even if he is truly different, remains faithful to himself. That rest is pure enjoyment: not having to unite, not having to adapt or put yourself in someone else's shoes in order to prevent little wars or quarrels. I feel a strong need to experience the blessing of being safely and naturally united with each other. Being allowed to be open to each other and feel deep inside me how I stay true to myself and how this reinforces my own strength to cope with the realities of the everyday context. That is something I greatly enjoy.'*

My contact with myself is strengthened in my contact with the other but is now, in the present, not so totally dependent on this anymore as it was in my mother's belly. At the same time, this is also where my we-attitude, my basic openness to the other and his being different, stems from. That is not the same as my longing for someone like me.'

She seems to be defining – and drawing Paulien's attention to – a certain inner force here that is appreciated by herself and by others. Paulien could ask if she is looking for recognition, she could mention Anne's doubts concerning her own strength. But she does neither, possibly because she feels that it is fine if Anne's own strength is accompanied by doubts as long as they are not intimidating but are experienced as being part and parcel of being human.

Paulien is thinking about her own last experience with an intense we-encounter. Her boyfriend is very different from herself yet is also a soulmate who inspires her and who is in turn inspired by her. Sharing this with Anne, she asks: *'Can you also see and describe the difference between you and John? Because I think that a real 'we' actually allows space for differences and diversity.'*

Anne: *'Then, let me describe what is so clearly different yet also made us feel very safe with each other and brought us so close together.'*

We happen to be born as a man and a woman. This difference in our sexuality was clearly noticeable in the socialisation: he had more patriarchal traits than I cared for and I was inclined to accommodate myself too much to him as I let him take the initiative because I noticed that he liked this.'

Paulien: *'Is this a big leap towards your focus?'*

Anne: *'Yes, because my focus is based on the fact that our sex falls to us, while gender is to a greater extent dependent on our social context.'*

Anne: *'My mother had a miscarriage before I was born: a little boy, still-born. She was at home, on her own. Her doctors had told her, on account of her enormously painful menstruations, that her uterus was in a wrong position. Because of the miscarriage, her uterus assumed its proper position. I thought later that there was even some testosterone left for myself.'*

Paulien smiles: *'Don't let other doctors hear this.'*

Anne: *'Much, much later, when I was a doctor in my own right, I learnt that both my cerebral hemispheres are in a balanced position to each other: the right hemisphere is just as strongly and clearly developed as the left. They function as a harmoniously balanced system.'*

I also realise that from very early on I was not so much focused on male / female gender aspects but far more on a person's human-ness. Later on I saw and experienced personality as a fluid, ephemeral phenomenon. I disliked any parochial, rigid kind of thinking.'

Paulien: *'How did harsh reality hit you?'*

Anne: *'Not until much later, when I was confronted, not just in stories but in reality too with behaviour, interaction and images that made me see and experience that men and women were treated unequally and unjustly. Only then did I have the strength to help bring about change. Or perhaps I was already influenced as a child by my mother as she told me, angry and indignant, how she as a woman had been discriminated and assaulted when she had a temporary job in a hotel. She, who acknowledged the difference in skin colour in her South-African village but matter-of-factly connected this with the equality of all people of any colour, had to acknowledge that she was the exception in her environment.'*

Paulien is curious to hear how Anne would describe John at this moment, a man she had only seen four times: *'And what was it in John that touched you so?'*

Anne: *'He showed me his sensitivity in the tears he shed for his brother, in his cheek-to-cheek touch that is not possessive but full of respect. He dared talk about himself, about his sexual experiences, his experiences with women, his image of himself as possibly serially polygamous, his self-knowledge and his worry that he might get addicted to physical contact.'*

We seemed to be on the same wavelength in our views on physicality and intimacy. I had been looking forward to discussing this theme extensively with him and learning even more about how a man inwardly experiences physicality and intimacy differently from a woman.'

He agreed with me that feminine and masculine traits, which we called soft and hard qualities, were able to develop harmoniously in both of us.'

Paulien: *'Yes, so another instance where you two resemble each other.'*

Anne: *'As a man and a woman, we are biologically very different. Now, with more distance, the differences that I had already spotted have become clearer; I can see and experience them more keenly now, after we said good-bye; what I describe here is certainly also coloured by my pain and disappointment.'*

Paulien: *'You speak of pain and disappointment. Weren't you also furious, angry at the harsh reality that makes your longing for your ideal impossible?'*

Anne thinks long and hard about this question of Paulien's: *'In me lives my propensity to describe something as pain while I can also feel how angry I can be. But rage and anger immediately call up the image of my father, who once smashed my toy wheelbarrow against a wall out of sheer anger, even though he had made it himself for me.*

I was four years old. I was scared but also sensed his powerlessness in his outburst of anger. It is this kind of powerlessness that I hear first in myself when I spontaneously get angry. The expression of my anger has already been translated inwardly into an adequate expression of that powerlessness. Because of this experience I am not easily scared of feeling anger or even of other people behaving violently.'

Tijno: *'I'm completely speechless. I now understand much better at what young age she was grown-up and how early she, with her intelligence and intuition, was able to see the other. Very young, she learnt through experience how the system-internal and -external are connected with each other.'*

Me: *'Yes, but still, I hope that Paulien will stay with her focus now and won't allow herself to be distracted by her amazement and awe at Anne's early maturity.'*

Paulien looks at Anne. Anger and powerlessness are clearly visible on Anne's face. Anne's body language and word choice are very expressive.

Paulien: *'Do I also hear and sense your anger about John's being different and about the fact that he can't give himself the place in your life you want him to have?'*

Anne springs up. Her whole bodily anger rushes to her fists and feet. Needed, she jumps up and paces up and down. It is as if she would like to open the cage that John has built around himself and around her as well. She feels

confronted with a reality she experiences as painful. She must learn to deal with this.

Anne sits down again, her breathing calm again. She now looks sadly at Paulien, but her clenched fists still speak for themselves. They not only reveal her anger and powerlessness but also her tendency to force the other to open himself to his happiness, to have the courage to embrace love, as Anne terms it.

Anne sighs deeply, tries to pull herself together. Paulien gives her time to shed many tears for her loss.

Anne: *'Where was I again? Ah, yes, facing reality, facing my limitations and boundaries.'*

This is not the first time that facing reality has hurt me but has also given me a chance to practise dealing with it. As a child I very much wanted to have ballet lessons. As a nine-year-old girl I had to baby-sit a girl of four who I was allowed to take to ballet lessons. I nagged the ballet teacher till she gave in and said: "All right, have a go, then." I started to dance, body and soul, to the music she was playing. While I was dancing, I sensed all over my body that it was built for music but not for ballet. I can still feel the pain of that limitation, that disappointment and next the pleasure of having had the courage to gain my own experience. Even the teacher was surprised and happy that I could accept my reality. The pain, the disappointment I felt: those I didn't show.'

Paulien: *'What made you not show this pain?'*

Anne: *'I was ashamed that I had needed a confrontation with my body's real possibilities and limitations to accept what someone else had already told me. I myself was familiar with my pain, but showing someone else that pain touches on showing your vulnerability and the abuse to which it may be turned.'*

Paulien watches the restrained yet clearly visible anger in Anne's eyes. She notices how she listens with even more attention now that Anne seems to get closer to her focus: the possible abuse of vulnerability. She gives her the space to pay extra attention to her strengths and her talent 'to feel what she is feeling', an important coping mechanism for Anne.

Anne: *'My experience with John is perhaps also comparable with this early event: I kept an open attitude when we met and in my contacts with him. I thoroughly enjoyed the four dates but simultaneously felt what consequences they might have for my present relationship, to the extent where I was dismayed as well as surprised to find I was even considering leaving my partner. I kept hoping, kept undergoing, body and soul, the blissful experience of the relationship and when it was broken, I allowed in all my anger and pain because I know that makes it easier to deal with reality and accept it. Even when the pain lingers for months, like now, and years ago when I was also in love, I can still look at myself during the whole process with humour and deal with it. By the way, I also believe that my strength stems from the near-death experience I had as a three-year-old during and following a serious childhood disease. It has influenced everything I have undergone and experienced since and how I have dealt with it all.'*

Paulien looks surprised but understands even better now the attitude she knows Anne to have: 'it is what it is'.

Tijno: 'The dialogue in this educational therapy should, really, sound more ordinary, like everyday language. This is not a verbatim report yet I would like Paulien to probe what Anne means when she talks about "being united". I would have Anne narrate less, let her teach or muse less and have her fumble a bit more when explaining what being united means for her life, for instance. Paulien could accept what Anne says and then probe: "How do you see this? What does it do with you?"'

Me: 'Do you feel that the process should show up more in the dialogue?'

Tijno: 'Yes, that's right. You are a bit too contemplative in your descriptions; you're possibly already too occupied with what Anne will say next. Perhaps you experience safety as something that expresses itself through beautiful language'

Me: 'I recognise that. To me, language is a kind of protective overcoat against everyday confrontations with disappointment and powerlessness. Safety and "do no harm" are so obvious and important to me that they can also come to control my written language while when I speak, I fumble and look for words like everybody else.'

Paulien: *'Could, would you like to say a bit more about how you dealt with your reality in your early childhood? It seems important to me that we also investigate*

in a differentiated way how you learnt to deal with reality, because from the day you were born your context was a harsh war environment and because the near future of getting older is not going to be easy, either. You may even find other resources that you could use now or in the future.'

Anne looks surprised. Her innate strength is to her so important and well-nigh matter-of-course that she almost forgot that she has also contributed to its development herself: *'Then I will have to expand a bit more on my family roots and my experiences in this respect. This, in turn, can help me give my innate strengths explicit recognition. My life and mental development together with my own input are built on that biological nature.'*

Paulien sits back to listen to Anne's expressively told story. At the same time, she has now been given the space and inner permission to talk about her own family history in due course. War, abuse of vulnerability and trust feature in her background as well, besides bilingualism, matters that have been of key importance in her own development.

Anne sees Paulien getting paper and pen ready to make the notes that will help her formulate the questions that will facilitate Anne's own strength more deeply.

Paulien would also like to go more deeply into the physically experienced feelings. After all, the body expresses the feelings that are evoked by old images about the ideal and real world. In their turn, these feelings and images affect one's behaviour and dealings with other people. Paulien knows that the force of old stories can be utilised to help powerful new stories grow.

Anne: *'My mother's parents come from large families. My grandfather was the eldest of twelve. He would have liked to study but had to learn the manual work of shoemaking to help provide for the family. He read a lot and taught himself the violin. He developed into a skilled craftsman but lacked the business acumen to ask poor families to pay him for his work. My mother and her sister were sent to collect the money, a humiliating experience that my mother would often quote, and that had me resolve never to work freelance.*

I never knew my grandmother. She died five months after the birth of my mother. I was later told that she died of throat cancer but my mother was often told as a child that she had died in childbirth. On the one hand, this made her feel guilty but on the other hand, she came to realise that even if other people considered

her guilty, this didn't necessarily make her guilty. Her elder sister by two years was not kind to my mother, her father had no interest in the children but found a second mother for them in his housekeeper. She was very sweet to the children, especially my mother, as she was the one, more than anyone else, who looked after my mother for four years after her birth.

Unfortunately, this woman too died prematurely. My grandad married again, this time a hard woman who bore him a son, who came first with both of them. This woman would beat the girls hard if they were disobedient. When the girls are fourteen, the father finds them families where they can learn housekeeping. My mother was very fortunate to end up in the family of an internist, who had had three sons with his wife, also a qualified doctor. My mother could learn the job of a housekeeper with them.

They had a nanny and a cook. Being kind-hearted, my mother was lovingly taken into the family and was treated with respect. She learnt a great deal. She gradually became one of the family and everybody loved her. All her life, she kept in touch with the two doctors, until their death. After I was born she would often take me along if she on occasion was allowed to cover for someone. To this family I also owe my name: Anne. The family was expecting a fourth child, and the mother hoped for a girl, who she would call Anne. However, the baby was another boy, and I got the name. I also took to the family like a duck to water, because everyone was very fond of me – also because I was a girl. This family's love for my mother was subsequently given to the family that my mother started of her own.

The strength my mother radiated and her love of people was very special. These must have been inborn in her, too. Her environment was such that she had to mobilise her own strengths in order to cope with harsh reality.'

Anne falls silent for a moment. Paulien looks at her and listens to her silence. First, tears run soundlessly over her cheeks. Then she begins to sob. Paulien lets her be for a long time.

Unprompted, Anne starts again: 'It makes me so terribly sad that she had to learn how to deal with her harsh reality, the war and its impact, in this way. It is as if these received so much emphasis that she didn't dare listen to her own heart anymore. I'm thinking of a moment I remember clearly: I was eight, had just come home from school and saw a white, fair-haired man sitting at the kitchen table with my mother. This happened in a week when my mother was very sad about the conditions in which she had to live and work. She had just been harass-

sed and assaulted at her job as a chambermaid in the hotel and she was fairly shocked.

The man at the kitchen table turned out to be her first great passionate love, when she was seventeen. Their love had been mutual but my mother broke off their relationship because she was afraid of her own, and his, intense sexual desire. She could not handle these feelings because she was also afraid he would 'eat her up', as she said later. She was afraid she wouldn't have a life or her own, that he wouldn't respect her in other aspects of her womanhood and human-ness. Now, he was sitting here, as yet wanting to take her and her children with him to his life, away from South Africa. She refused. Even now I can almost feel the pain in her heart.

Even now I can feel how her story has made me very alert to how a friend once kissed me: I was very much in love for the first time, at fifteen, and it happened during the school holidays, and the kisses from this boy were so very passionate and possessive, as if he wanted to 'eat me up' that I, on the one hand, enjoyed them, and could return them but at the same time I was also on my guard, heart and my head always together.'

A tender smile plays about Anne's lips. Understanding, Paulien smiles and asks: 'And what happened with him and you in the end?'

Anne: 'Indeed: in the end. I had to leave him during the holidays after my final exam because it wasn't on my path to continue living with him in our village. Very painful for him, I still feel guilty! At the time, my head was stronger than my heart. I knew clearly that it wasn't until heart and head were in harmony that I would meet a potential partner on my path.'

Paulien: 'And, looking back, does this ideal tally with reality as you encountered it?'

Anne: 'Yes, completely, amazingly. I was very much in love with my present husband, and he with me. We were intimate in our talks and in our physicality. Our first orgasm together was a feast. Our physical development had many similarities, our intellectual developments paralleled each other. At the same time, I knew that our characters were very different and that we would be able to learn and receive a great deal from each other. And, that there was much we could give each other, based on companionship and shared life experiences.

I believe that innate strength, if it is recognised and acknowledged as such, opens up space to receive whatever falls to you and to learn how you might deal with the dichotomy between ideals and reality.'

Paulien: *'I was just thinking if there is also a cultural and spiritual, religious strength that is relevant to your history.'*

Anne looks attentively at Paulien. She experiences her empathy as a sign of personal involvement and professional distance. With her, she can show her vulnerability and discover to whom of her friends she can also disclose herself.

In addition, Anne practises in her work in between the interviews what she can divulge about herself so that it benefits the people she works with. She has already experienced that simply being together as human beings and showing human vulnerability encourages working together on a basis of equality and that it is healing in the therapeutic relationship.

'Yes,' Paulien says, 'I could feel that question coming up because I have some experience with this in my own life. My parents were Jewish though not practising while they did look Jewish. I have never done anything about it myself but I am aware of the influence it has in my life.'

Moved, Anne looks at Paulien. **Anne:** *'Thanks for sharing this with me. This aspect is important in my life as well. It so happens that I was born into a Catholic family but according to my maternal grandad and grandma, their distant ancestors were Jewish emigrants who fled persecution. Personally, I have the impression that the impact of the social context on the genetic material has given my mother, and me, great creative strength.'*

Both are quiet for a long time.

Tijno: *'When I think about the impact of circumstances on a human being's genetic material, I see the human being as a fluid ephemeral personality, a beautiful system of energy particles that can be everywhere at the same time. Indeed, the old socio-historic influences are perceptible as well as visible in our genes.'*

The interconnectedness of people could, therefore, go deeper than present-day observable models. By thinking out of the box, we might also be able to discover new dimensions that science is already working on.

Me: *'Looking back, I myself must also have assumed, quite young, that man, even when still in his mother's belly, is aware of the Universe and that this connectedness stays with us as an ideal. From this originate my attitude and my idea that I can only develop in the encounter with the other and in dialogue with the other. It is only in a real relationship with another person where you can mutually show each other your longing for another that I can grow using the talents I was given.'*

Paulien feels a question crop up that preoccupies her: *'When you think of connectedness, is it only the historical and biological influences from your mother that you're thinking of?'*

Anne: *'I was thinking just now that in my mother's belly I must have sensed non-verbally that there might be some universal connectedness that every human being experiences. Reading the philosopher Martin Buber (even as a grammar school pupil) must have helped me identify with his words: "In the beginning was the relation."'*

Both are silent again.

Paulien comes back to Anne's mother's physical, passionate longing that made her afraid to lose her grip on herself and ending up in someone else's grasp. Before asking Anne straight out how she has handled this herself, she focuses on Anne's father: *'How did your mother meet your father?'*

Anne: *"Her older sister who was dating a boy in my father's birthplace introduced him to her. He was a skilled carpenter. They hit it off straightaway: he was very sensitive as well as tender. He had a bit of a clubfoot, which he was bullied for. She liked to take care of him, spoilt him even. She seemed to find caring and motherhood more important than their partnership. Thus, she was known to say famously: "I want children but no husbands." Nowadays, she might have chosen to be a single mother.*

Oddly enough, my father's family name is one that was quite common in his town, with one branch being very openly and avowed Jewish while the branch my father belonged to didn't want anything to do with it, were clearly practising Christians even.

My parents were married before the fiercest insane fighting broke out and before my father had to take part. He was taken in lovingly by her parents and the doctors' family as my mother's husband. That was also very important for her.

Very attentively, Paulien looks at both Anne and herself. During some sessions they have addressed physicality as it features in her work with families. It has become clear that she can now talk more freely about vulnerability and strength and can embed physicality and intimacy in these. She'd love to hear the rest of Anne's story and feels impatient; at the same time she knows that Anne is the one to indicate when the time is ripe to talk about this.

Paulien builds in a moment of rest and it is she who identifies what they could discuss next: *'You're going pretty fast now. Does any of this relate to the focus on sexuality that you'd like to sidestep? Or would you like to talk about it now, after all? It would seem that the point in your life story that we have now reached entails an invitation to address it now, since physicality is such an obvious theme in relation to your mother and her caring, motherly relationship with your father.'*

A hot, red colour passes over Anne's cheeks. Her breathing is more superficial. Her heart beats faster.

Me: *'The story now gets close to Anne. Experiencing safety is now very important for her.'*

Tijno: *'Yes, in her mind she'll be hearing all the prejudices from people who simplistically label someone telling a personal story, especially if this story is about personal experiences with sexuality. That is what her body language tells us. In the model of your system-internal and-external you can see how notions stemming from the social context and internalised by us can also make our body react, can throw out stress hormones and affect our heart and brains.'*

Paulien watches alertly, saying: *'Only you can say whether you'd like to talk about it now. Feel free to say yes or no, or not yet.'*

Anne: *'Let me lead up to the story because I need to keep seeing it in its context of my inner and outer situation.*

During the war, my mother was always alert to a possible flight to the air-raid shelter during fights near their town. My parents and their three children had rented a two-room top floor flat in the house. My mother told me how once she was late in reacting to the alarm and lay down, her body covering the three children and trusting that a god would protect them. Though raised a Catholic, she didn't pin their god down in a certain image. In the doctor's family where she had

worked she had been introduced to an atmosphere of a liberal Protestantism and an enlightened humanity that typified her own character as well.

My father didn't die during the fighting. He ended up in hospital with a shot wound to his left leg, the same hospital where the doctor worked in whose household my mother had worked. This doctor signed a report stating that my father was no longer fit to fight. The doctor thus hoped to save my father any further traumatisation in this insane war and returned him to his family.

A highly skilled and highly valued carpenter, my father could guarantee his family's livelihood, but my mother continued to work on the domestic staff of a hotel. We were then living in a two-room flat that we had rented, with a bedroom and a live-in kitchen. The bedroom contained my parents' bed and a bed that was slightly wider than a single bed, where my two sisters and me slept till I was six.'

Anne is silent for a while as she conjures up the scene. She perceives a memory of shame at the poverty in which she lived, even though she knows that Paulien will not be swayed by this prejudice. Then, she looks at Paulien and her eyes light up as in a physical memory.

Anne: *'The doctor who saved my father also saved me when I contracted a children's disease at the age of two that poisoned all my blood. I nearly died, and was taken to the hospital where this doctor worked. He gave me a blood transfusion with his own blood, and so resuscitated me. This 'near-death experience' has had an existential impact on my whole life; I lived as if I was grateful for each day and I radiated a calmness as if I would no longer have to be scared of anything. That is how my mother describes me, that is how I look in photos from that time and that is how I'd describe myself now: as someone who is not easily frightened.'*

Paulien looks at her, recognising again in Anne the strength of the contemplative.

There is acceptance of reality and a compassionate connectedness with life radiating from Anne which touches Paulien.

As she listens, Paulien experiences in herself a barrier to asking further questions about Anne's so very personal experience with physicality. She wonders whether she is afraid, while acknowledging the courage and acceptance Anne radiates. Paulien is conscious of the personal experiences and memories that she has with regard to Anne's focus, and she opens herself to the courage Anne that radiates.

Paulien: *'I can picture the two-bedroom flat and the bedroom as you describe them: three little girls with their parents. The parents will have their own version of how they handle physicality. What has become of the three little girls, and, in particular, of you, the eldest girl?'*

Anne: *'I was in bed with the twins and actually, I didn't like it. I experienced it as too cramped, there was hardly any room to move about in while I was already four. I feel how I'm lifted from the bed and put in the bed next to my father, because my mother was outside, together with other women, looking for fuel and food.*

My father's hand is tender and warm and strokes my whole children's body, in all places. At four years old, I experience and undergo for the first time an orgasm as something that is very beautiful and pleasurable. My cognition and my imaging identify this as a natural experience. The tender and simultaneously transgressive caresses also introduce me to each place on my body that is being stroked. I get to know and feel every place that is stroked, and I experience every spot and the attendant feeling as being mine. Later, I turn out to have a self-awareness of my body that amazes physiotherapists.'

Paulien breathes in deeply: *'You describe this situation from a win-win perspective. How do you see this? How should I understand this while my heart hurts for the child and the trust that is being abused?'*

Anne: *'At the time I couldn't see or grasp what was happening to my father's body which was connected to that tender, warm hand. Even now I have this sort of adult understanding: "This is not my responsibility; this is the responsibility of that other person; and I don't want to be held accountable for this." I still feel that way very strongly!'*

Paulien: *'How do you mean? How would you describe this in the present moment?'*

Anne: *'Because I can feel and experience so deeply what I feel and experience physically, both pleasure and my own boundaries in relation to the other, I can also put it into words quite well and describe it, sometimes poetically or in romantic prose. But I can't stand it if the other says something on my behalf or about me that I can put better myself. With John, I experienced a marvellous meeting of equals. He described his own feelings, experience and perception, and*

I mine. How these two then come together is a feast to me: we are both independent yet deeply connected. I enjoy it immensely if the other takes his responsibility, and lives.'

Paulien: *'Could this also be the point where your need to merge with the other evolved into your need for differentiation and independence?'*

Anne looks up, amazed: *'Paulien, how did you manage to get so close to this important fact?'*

Paulien explains: *'I know you to be a very independent and responsible person and at the same time you tell me about your inner longing to be one with the other which may well be connected with your experiences with your mother. I also know this longing, from phases of intense love. I would place it in my model there where being touched at the layer of intimacy in the present also touches straightaway on old experiences in this area. Yes, the oldest experience is that in your mother's belly.'*

Anne thinks, visualises the model and now recognises the connection between her need for basic safety and intimacy as the safety she experienced in the past. In addition, she now sees the fact that she was able to differentiate between herself and the other at an early age as a gift: *'It is true that I already assumed responsibility for my behaviour and for my desires when I was still a child. Even then, from age five, or six, I came to gradually understand that my father was crossing my boundaries, abused my trust. I still remember that I still chose to keep feeling the pleasure of orgasm as something natural and belonging to me, and that I would sometimes wake up my father to get an orgasm through his caresses until I learnt to give it to myself. When he wanted to seduce me into playing with his penis and thus being actively involved with him, I refused. I remember that I didn't recognise any aesthetic pleasure in this. He had to keep on doing it himself, I thought, while he also stroked me. It was his body, I wasn't going to touch it. He accepted that. I can picture this situation as if it was yesterday. I was eight.'*

Paulien now created some space for silence. She realised that this was the first time that Anne had dug so deep into her history in the presence of another. She saw how vulnerable and brave Anne was, how the colours on her face could change and how tears rolled down her cheeks. Paulien also sensed

the anger and rage when Anne jumped up and paced up and down the room, wordlessly but stamping her feet and clenching her fists. She heard how Anne was searching for words to approximately describe what she had experienced.

Me: 'The force of these words and images and the feelings they recalled help Anne to process what happened anew. The safety of the interaction and the dialogue have an impact on the layer of her emotions and physical sensations. Her breathing was sometimes deep, sometimes fast and high, but she was always in contact with the feelings that she aired. She had learnt throughout her life to feel what she felt, but usually on her own. She could share it now.'

Tijno: 'Paulien allows herself to be touched by her own experiences. She remembers how she experienced transgressive behaviour at the cognitive layer in the form of repression and condemnation of herself as a girl by people in her environment she trusted. She felt owned, and began to see herself as an inferior human being. Loving contacts with peers had made her feel how the female strengths and talents in her could be stirred. In her career choice she had followed the path of seeking and discovering in every human being how constructive strengths could exist side by side with destructive possibilities and how the first could be made to unfold.'

Paulien notices how Anne looks up, uncertain. Will she be able to continue and share more of what moves her?

Paulien: *'What do you remember that you were proud of or where you experienced your strength?'*

Anne looks surprised, amazed: *'What makes you ask this question?'*

Paulien: *'To me, you're not sitting here as a survivor but as someone who has learnt to use coping mechanisms. I'd like you to recognise and acknowledge your strengths.'*

Anne: *'I'm trying to hear your question. Please let me have some time to find some answers.'*

Both are silent for a moment. Still looking for words, Anne answers: *'I learnt that I could manage my own desire, that I could say yes or no and that I wasn't*

afraid of him. Indeed, when I was just about to leave for another country to go to grammar school there, my father attempted to lie down on me and penetrate me. I fended him off, he let his seed run over my body and I heard him mutter: "But it should be possible now!"

However, he respected me, he never used any violence. I know this so well because it only happened once that he slapped my cheek in reaction to an insolent, disrespectful answer from me as a fourteen-year-old. That slap frightened him as much as me. Despite the fact that I was rightly punished for being disrespectful, no-one in own family found hitting a permissible punishment. However, my fury, indignation and powerlessness in the face of his show of strength after all these years of abuse then erupted as from a volcano. I walked in the direction of the river that runs through our village, wanting to walk into it. I didn't want to live like that anymore. Just before I crossed the street, I sat down on a low wall. I was thinking. My head is also part of my body. It will stay with it. I remember how I started to think (reflect!) how it couldn't be the point of my life to allow myself to be intimidated by my father and walk into the river. The powerlessness and anger I felt, these are my feelings and I have a choice how to handle these. No-one else but me controls this. To no-one else will I voluntarily give the power to suppress this unique freedom of my life.

I got up to return home and saw that my mother had followed me to plead reconciliation and get me back.'

Me: 'Paulien waits quietly. She can see that Anne wants to say more about the memories of her feelings that are called up in her. She knows that Anne knows that intimacy and sexuality are sub-aspects of physical sensation in the system-internal and-external.

Paulien chooses to invite Anne to reflect more on these interactions in her system-internal. All aspects are equivalent while they simultaneously impact on each other. By giving more attention to ideas about vulnerability and strength, it may be possible to acknowledge and perhaps change them. The equality of all the layers in a human being is also a metaphor for the equality amongst all people. The power of thinking and reflecting on sententious images and words is also discussed here.'

Tijno: 'Paulien realises how important it now is for Anne to experience for the first time that she is being heard without being judged.'

Paulien: *'What did you learn about yourself then? What do you experience yourself as a strength?'*

Anne still looks surprised: *'Besides physical pleasure I experienced in my thoughts and imaginings then, as I do now, how I learnt that I could exercise power by taking the initiative. That I was able to seduce somebody who couldn't say no, that I could be proud of myself because I was able to say no when he wanted to penetrate me. The powerless feeling that I hadn't been able to stop him completely was also strong. I was astonished and amazed how a man could deceive his partner and abuse the child she loved so much. I felt shame and guilt because I had also begun to pity my father and I looked down, 'adult-like', on the fact that he needed a child to satisfy his needs. Shame and guilt, anger and outrage, yes, contempt almost also affected my relationship with my beloved mother until I learnt more about her situation. Even then, I was able to not let my interaction with my parents be determined by these images and feelings, except on those occasions where my anger made me make a disrespectful remark.'*

Me: 'Paulien experiences a tendency to probe more quickly. She knows at the same time that no next step may be enforced; rather, it should be offered as an invitation. If she proceeds thus, she can show that Anne is making her own choices in her interaction with her, Paulien, both as to the next step and about what she would or would not like to share with Paulien.'

She "freezes" their interaction for a moment and shows Anne that she is offering her a corrective experience: trusting a human being with natural authority in the therapeutic relationship who respects her boundaries but is not afraid of any story she might hear. She invites Anne to identify, acknowledge and respect her own boundaries in this safe space. Only then will she be able to exercise choice about how she wants to work with these and develop herself further.

Paulien shares her thoughts with Anne, shows them as a parallel system. Anne enjoys this attitude, and the people coming to Anne's therapy sessions enjoy her respectful yet inviting attitude.

Tijno: 'Let's have a rest now. So much is going on here that you can hardly put it into words, let alone comprehend. They must have taken their time as well, to let the process sink in.'

Me: 'Yes, and: the role of the mother is going to be discussed in one of the following sessions.'

Since every family member has their own part to play within the family, Paulien will, in a following session, consider the role of the mother with Anne.

Paulien: 'How would you describe your mother's role?'

Anne: *'In those days, my mother was absent much of the time because my father was able to look after the children while he was recovering from his leg operation. This enabled her to constantly work hard for her family. She worked day and nights shifts in a jam factory. She wanted her children to learn a profession so that they could be independent later and, in particular, not be financially dependent on a man like she was. Later, in my student years, my mother told me, woman to woman, how she still had difficulty receiving her husband's tenderness and sexual desires because she was unable to forgive him and had always remained angry at his raping of her that had resulted in the birth of the twins. My father had also made it clear to me that I must not tell her anything. I still remember an absurd situation where, in the second class of primary school, I was taught about sexual reproduction, and my mother got out a book with pictures to explain to me what was what. I can still picture me standing between my parents and I can still feel my mother's warm commitment to provide knowledge and I still experience my father's hypocrisy, and even the feelings of anger and contempt at his hypocrisy that rose up in me. How was I to deal with these experiences? I felt what I felt and I made choices as to what I wanted or didn't want to reveal, while respecting the other-ness of the others. Even then, I was able to discern that my father was a caring father to his family though at the same time too weak to control his physical desires. In these times, when I could already read before I went to school, books became my dearest friends, because I couldn't talk with anybody about myself and my experiences.'*

Me: 'Paulien lets sink in what Anne has shown her so graphically. She is quiet so as to listen to how she has been touched herself and to choose her next question. She is aware herself of how powerlessness and indignation exist at the layer of her feelings, and how these, in turn, have been affected by experiences with physicality in her history. Her education had instilled images and cognitions in her that could lead one to condemn another human being. Anne's story makes her realise once again that behaviour can be condemned and that a human being remains a human being with more characteristics and activities than those that we condemn, a human being who remains our equal and who can be questioned further. She also realises how Anne was

alone with her experiences, as a child, and possibly later, too. This makes her ask the following question, also because she herself has been deeply touched in the places where she experiences loneliness.

Paulien: *'Did you then get to know your loneliness?'*

Anne: *'Yes, even as a primary school child. What I particularly felt in that loneliness was a need for personal conversations. I experienced how only the teacher from my first two years at primary school actually understood me if I asked questions or wanted to know more.'*

As far as the children were concerned, I was one of the two best pupils in our class, and they respected us. I took an active part in playing together, turned a fairy tale into a play and performed it with my classmates before our teacher. Even now, my classmates remember the occasion and how we rehearsed together for the performance.'

All through my primary school years I played a lot with boys and girls in the countryside around the village. The warfighting had stopped and I greatly enjoyed being and playing outside, away from the house.'

It wasn't until I was at secondary school, when I was thirteen, fourteen, and I met soulmates, that deep friendship came into my life.'

Paulien: *'How did you relate to your sisters at that time? Could they play with you?'*

Anne: *'Now you touch on a very sore point! They are over two years younger than me and there was very little space for them in my world with my experiences and adventures. They played with each other a lot more than with me. I remember that once they had quarrelled and I wanted to mediate. They let me for a while but then quickly re-united against me. Even then I learnt to let go and trust my own strengths. Just as well, because I had a lot to work through on my own, with myself. Later I was also mean to them if I wanted to read in the bedroom while they were wanting to go to sleep. I would try to get my way at the expense of their sleep till I read with a torch under the blankets.'*

Paulien: *'Didn't they notice anything of your father's transgressive behaviour? Did it stay secret?'*

Anne: *'During the first Christmas break at grammar school I deliberately sat down one day, with everybody present, to discuss it. I told them what my father*

had been doing with me and how I wished it would stop and that we needed to talk about it. That's what I had planned and what I did, after a meal at our table. I briefly felt relieved at having told them but soon indignation at the several reactions kicked in: my father denied everything, my sisters looked blank, they were eleven, and my mother started to cry.'

After dinner, when I was alone with my mother, she said to me that she'd had her suspicions, but that she wouldn't manage financially if she divorced my father. At this point I tasted and allowed in a deep, vicarious shame, besides disappointment and anger as well as sympathy for this woman in this context, my mother.'

Me: *'Paulien is listening to how she is touched in her own personal memory: when she came to live in the Netherlands and more or less understood what Germans had done to the country, she too experienced immense vicarious shame. It still makes her shudder. More knowledge and images created from stories evoked these feelings even more strongly, together with a need to let others, as she interacts with them, experience how equal she feels everyone to be. Her constructive social commitment as a therapist dealing with behaviour and interaction has helped her feelings settle down.'*

Paulien is silent for quite a while. Her own life experiences and expertise are touched. Silence is now needed to let what she has just heard sink in. She asks Anne if she may touch her hands, and Anne gets up to receive and give a warm hug. She sees that Paulien is touched; this non-verbal contact of a hug make her feel recognition and acknowledgement.

Following this story of Anne's, Paulien asks Anne how she would like to invite the two sisters, who have meanwhile also come to live in the Netherlands, for a conversation. Difficult for Anne, but to me an important question in educational therapy.

Anne feels that this question ties in with her need to look back on this period with her sisters and to renew their contacts. The two sisters are duly invited and are happy to come. It becomes clear how the sisters accept wholeheartedly Anne's apologies for not having been able to protect them. At the same time, they could assign to both their father and their mother the blame that the latter had heaped onto themselves in a context they could now understand. There was much space for grief and anger, forgiveness and mutual trust.

After the two sessions with her sisters **Anne says:** *'What I didn't know but heard only later, when I had finished grammar school, was that my father had already seduced the elder of the twins after I left home. Using cunning, misleading and transgressive tenderness he managed to copulate with her until she had her first boyfriend. When he next approached my younger sister, she was already old enough to refuse him, shocked and indignant.*

When I heard about this later and talked with my sisters about it, I asked their forgiveness for not having been able to protect them. Worse still, when I left home as a fourteen-year-old seeking my own development and space, I left them to fend for themselves. I did realise that their protection was largely the parents' task, but I also took my own feelings of guilt and shame seriously.

The elder of the twins has meanwhile successfully completed therapy and was able to forgive my father when he asked her forgiveness on his deathbed. When I, at that moment, also said I forgave him, he looked at me, surprised. He didn't ask my forgiveness because he hadn't had coitus with me. This in a way made sense to me because he too must have realised that I myself gradually had a part in actively seeking my own pleasure during the physical interaction with him.

Going through our past experiences as adults has brought us sisters even more clarity and space. In our contacts, we are happy to have each other and we feel a strong sense of connectedness.'

Me: 'In the following weeks Anne increasingly invites siblings to the therapy sessions with her clients.'

Paulien and Anne are glad to have this experience; later on in the educational therapy process, Anne's partner is also invited: he will actively take part in three sessions.

They discuss both their childhood experiences with physicality, and how these have affected their relationships. They can talk about their vision on and approach to sexual contact, even though they feel slightly ill at ease during the first conversation.

For Paulien, too, this is an introduction to a new person taking part in the conversation. She shares her uncertainty and the similarities with her own relationship with Anne and her partner in such a way that they feel safe with her. Paulien can explain and illustrate how important this interview experience is for Anne in her work with couples. Appreciating this, her partner is glad to have been involved. It is a joy to him too to hear that this will enhance Anne's quality as an educational therapist.'

In the time in between the sessions, Anne also contributes life and work experiences. Sometimes at Paulien's request, who is aware that environmental factors play a major part in the learning process. What they also talk about is the delight Anne now feels as an interlocutor in her work with families and couples.

By clearly demonstrating how intensely she herself is a human being and can share something of this, she experiences equality as a given that they reflect on together.

What she especially likes to practise herself and with the clients in her therapy room is reflecting on learned and almost self-evident preconceptions.

Anne also increasingly brings up examples from a family or partner relationship that have touched her and that she'd like to reflect on in the session with Paulien.

Tijno: 'There is a lot going on here for Paulien as well. She experiences how during the process sexuality and physicality gain a realistic dimension and stop being such a dominant theme in Anne's life. What Anne also brings to the sessions is her insight that intimacy is an aspect in each layer of the system-internal and external; she demonstrated this awareness as she relates how, in her couples therapy, partners learn to be intimate in the sphere of emotion, cognition, perception and imagination. She practises with them and asks them to practise at home with the beneficial effects that attention to these can bring. She focuses attention on tenderness at every dimension of the system-internal and external.'

Me: 'The interim evaluation takes place after the first half of the educational therapy. It is assessed how they have dealt with the focus and whether the focus can stay as it is or needs to be adjusted. All through the process, Paulien has already adopted a constantly evaluative attitude. From the very start, Paulien has asked Anne, by way of rounding off each session, to look back on the session and briefly put forward any pressing questions or remarks. At the start of each new session Paulien would ask if there were any leftovers from the previous session that needed to be discussed first. And she would always ask if Anne had in the meantime encountered or witnessed anything that should be addressed first before they took up the common theme of their focus again.'

Tijno: 'Good of you to mention this, because this would show up better in a verbatim report.'

Me: 'Anne especially stresses in the interim evaluation that she is better now at handling her recurring uncertainties about her self-esteem and her possibilities. It is fine to feel uncertainty. The images of herself that she has been given make sense. Further, the insight that one is born to die gives her so much space in which to unfold her own talents and to work with and for others to develop their talents in the time given her. She no longer feels a dichotomy between a life lived idealistically or realistically. For her, the one is connected with the other. Harsh reality to her is an invitation to build in moments of meditative silence when she reflects and gets to know herself better. Physicality is no longer dominant but she can now think of intimacy as being part and parcel of her whole system-internal. In her friendship with a man who inspires her as a writer she feels less her penchant for being one and equal. She derives pleasure from their adult interaction based on like-mindedness, love and safety. Intimacy in exchanging thoughts, images and feelings through poems fills her with joy and energy.'

Anne feels there is no need for a new focus for the remainder of the educational therapy, but she would like to talk more about the relation between past experiences and her present life and work. She is also interested in the future developments in the area of physicality in her own professional field. She'd like to exchange views on this with Paulien.

Tijno: 'It is important that, before Paulien asks a question and invites Anne to reflect, this is preceded by Paulien's own process: she sometimes can't wait to ask a question that is burning on her lips while she is still listening to Anne's story. She sees this happening in herself, keeps on listening to herself and only then does she choose the question she feels is best-suited to Anne.'

Also, she regularly asks Anne what she thinks about a certain question. And when she perceives in herself that she is over-solicitous and careful, she will put this inner process to Anne. This also enables them to talk about how Anne might encounter and handle a similar situation in her own work.

Paulien shares with Anne how she handles her own uncertainty in the interaction: never knowing precisely what to ask, constantly listening to the strings that are touched in her, including those of the existential uncertainty that invites to modesty, and continually asking questions and listening.'

Me: 'Vision on and dealing with sexuality and physicality are just as important aspects of Paulien's life as her views on studying, eating and working. She muses on these. Numerous preconceptions and research findings about sexuality and sexual abuse emerge in her head, where they are ready to be used.'

But in her head there is also her own model, waiting to be used, the layer where all physical perceptions lie: all aspects of sexuality, physicality and intimacy. As the model illustrates, these are connected with all the other aspects in the model, such as biological predisposition, feelings, ideas, individual behaviour and interactive behaviour. They reciprocally and circularly influence each other, they constitute a multimodal system.

Paulien does not know exactly how a human being is put together. Despite all approximate definitions, whether given in books and formed from her own experience, of biological predisposition, feelings, ideas, individual and interactive behaviour with respect to physical sensation, she remains curious and open to Anne's individual story. Paulien has also shared with Anne that she prefers to speak of abuse in an area of the system-internal, such as in the cognitive area, through judgemental and repressing norms and values and in the area of sex. She would rather not use the conveniently short, summary term "sexual abuse". For her, this word choice obscures the complexity, it simplifies and denies a complicated circular interaction in the system-internal and external. Abuse with respect to perception, or cognitive indoctrination, for instance, is also inextricably bound up with abuse in how we treat people and in the area of sex.

Throughout the process, Paulien constantly connects the story of the early experiences with the here and now.

Tijno: 'The educational therapy continues after the interim evaluation.'

Me: 'The old themes can sink in now. Anne can bring them up again in connection with families that Anne is working with, for instance, or with experiences in her circle of friends.'

Paulien: '*How would you now connect the experiences from your early youth with your recent experience with John and with the focus of these talks?*'

Anne breathes in. She too felt a need for further reflection on her interaction with John in the present. But she knows that she can also bring this up herself.

Anne: *'What strikes me is that the ascetic parting from John particularly touched me in the stream of old experiences and observations. The self-imposed yet painful distance confronted me fiercely with my old tendency to seek pleasure and, having once been introduced to it, to continue seeking it greedily. My ideas about myself are images that I cannot see separate from my bodily sensations; I think I am capable of disinterested and unconditional love. Although I know this, I still sense how my body craves the tenderness it received since childhood, unasked for and later at its own request, which my father usually granted. This, I think, is one of the roots of my fear of "licentiousness"; the danger of slipping into prostitution. It took me over two years of active meditation and reflection on my propensities to control them in such a way that I could enjoy it on my own.*

Because of my father's transgressive actions, as a child I also experienced the ability to feel pleasure as an inner strength. Later, others would define that strength in terms of a zest for life or powerful self-assurance or, occasionally, as an overwhelming dominant presence.

The feelings of shame I then felt are easier to place, now.

I also realise that in my very first life experience, my mother's tenderness for me from my conception had been just for me, all of three years, and then I shared this tenderness with my sisters. Her unconditional love was at the base of how I have dealt with all the experiences I had later.'

Paulien lets Anne finish but wants to return to the present.

Paulien: *'What experiences do you ascribe to your mother? How do these still affect you?'*

Anne: *'I was constantly cuddled, my mother was so overjoyed to have me, a child conceived in love despite the war and violence around us. In the two-bedroom flat with just her, I also had enough space to move around.*

My strongly developed physical self-observation may also have to do with the fact that in those times babies were swaddled: on the one hand, the child is brought into contact with the boundaries of its entire body, on the other, it experiences a restful inward concentration, attention to what is happening within the confines of its body, including thinking and feeling and both painful and pleasant bodily sensations.

From the moment she was aware of my existence, my mother talked to me. She told me as much as soon as I was able to understand her. This may well have stimulated my cognitive functions and my ability to consciously experience the world around me.

She was so happy to have me; not just as my mother, but especially as a human being, now being able to receive back love and tenderness. I may have sensed this need on my mother's part very early and responded to it. Cuddling together will have made my whole little body sensitive to the tender physical contact that I also enjoyed when my father gave it to me. His stroking my clitoris and the subsequent orgasm are extensions of the physical sensation of the normal caresses by my mother, and I experienced these as pleasurable.

It was only when I was two or three years old and had a near-death experience that I possibly became more aware of the boundaries of my body and of the difference between what I experience as pleasurable and what another person finds enjoyable.

Experiencing motherly tenderness gave me an experience of female physicality that was deepened as my father stroked my whole body without explicitly focusing on sexual pleasure.

This was possibly the basis for a oneness in experiencing physicality and sexuality within the safety of intimacy. In my own system-internal the experience grew that all aspects of being human were equal, with aspects later defined as feminine and masculine in harmony with each other. However wry it may be, I still had a chance to enrich my childlike physicality as I became acquainted with my sexuality and experienced myself as a human being with a clitoris. Later, I didn't have to prove myself as a woman who wanted to be seen by men. I didn't look at myself through the eyes of men who saw and judged me as a woman. I saw myself as a human being.'

Paulien listens, holding her breath, and deeply touched: *'How did you experience this on your own?'*

Anne: *'I lived as a human being with an inner freedom and harmony and felt how I was getting more and more lonely. There was nobody in the village that I could talk to, early on, I sought refuge and recognition in books.*

I sensed the dichotomy, the different valuations of physicality and sexuality, and I encountered it in books as a socially created and normative distinction promoting an imbalance of power in the system-external.

Later the realisation grew that my father gave me, unasked, pleasure when I sometimes did not feel like it. He made sure of his own pleasure. His hypocrisy made me very alert to how adults treated children, also generally speaking. The

difference between their words and their actions became painfully clear to me at an early stage.

When I indicated to my father that I didn't want his caresses, he would accept this, looking displeased, but he would do so immediately. I was never afraid he might use violence. All my life, I have never been afraid of a man, and I have been lucky; never have I met with an act of violence. But I once did see my father explode in anger. The fact that a man was the head of this family, with all the attendant power is a vivid memory.

Abuse of power among men, between men and women, and between women is a vivid memory from the postwar social context, when most people were driven by self-preservation and survival mechanisms.'

Paulien: *'Do you still have memories of your adolescence that affect your present relationship with John and your work as a couples and relationship therapist?'*

Anne: *'Let me start with a very painful encounter with myself that I can now describe. I may say that I am unselfish in my loving but in my body as in my soul I vehemently crave and long for the other whenever I'm in love. The physicality and, also, the spiritual connection have been sensibilised so intensely that I constantly want to be with him. I feel a tendency to claim him just like I demanded caresses from my father when I felt like it. I was able to renounce that; masturbation helped me let go of him and find the ephemeral pleasure in myself. I have likewise become familiar and friends with my inner loneliness. I feel deep connectedness and freedom with the other who is important in my life.*

When I was fifteen and an adolescent, and for the first time vehemently, deeply in love, I experienced how he, the most handsome boy in the village, wanted to 'eat me up', he kissed me that greedily. I learnt from him that it was quite possible to control your desires because we never went beyond kissing.

What I also learnt about myself was that I didn't want to waste away in his house and village, that I had to save myself by literally leaving the village. However, I kept feeling the physical desire and the need for a soulmate in my every fibre.'

Paulien: *'How did you learn to control these desires? Because during your marriage, you have fallen in love as many as five times and been deeply affected by another man.'*

Anne looks at Paulien thoughtfully: *'Yes, I told you that before. I know it has got to do with the fact that my partner and me are a super team who love together and are the sort of friends, to each other and to the friends around us, who radiate strength and warmth. Intimacy in most areas of our system-internal is what unites us. And yet I strongly miss the physical and sexual contact, which he doesn't need as much as I do. My husband also acknowledges that he has very little feeling for my creative expressions and philosophical conversations. And so it happened that I, in my marriage, was touched by an intensely good conversation with a colleague, by a painter and his work, a musician and his love of music, a poet and his passion for language, but also by a man with a strong physical appearance who wasn't afraid of warm hugs or tender kisses.*

In fact, I already learnt to control my physical desires when I was a child. My father too didn't always feel like indulging my desires. At a very early age I learnt that masturbation was a pleasurable substitute without my needing the other or having to trouble them. When, as a thirteen-year-old adolescent, I asked forgiveness from a Catholic priest for the first time for the "sin of masturbation", he explained to me that this really wasn't necessary and that I could just enjoy it. I'm still grateful that I met this wise man then. He also explained to me that I wasn't guilty of my father's transgressive actions, but he recognised and understood my feelings of shame. My diary entries for that time still fill me with happiness.'

Paulien: *'So, in all your intense dates and in the present situation with John, it was easy for you to control your desires?'*

Anne: *'Yes, because to me, sexual longing is just as primary a human need as food and drink. As a child can learn to listen to hunger and thirst and his body's need for sleep, so he can also learn to listen to his needs for physical and spiritual contact.'*

Tijno: *'Anne has strong views on sexuality and physicality that I share: just as aspects like thinking, feeling, imaging of the system-internal are learnt and develop further as a human being grows up, so physicality and intimacy can likewise unfold during a learning process. Just as the boundaries and possibilities of one's creative and religious development are learnt and internalised through socialisation, one can also learn how to deal with physicality. Accepting that sexuality, physicality and intimacy are in the first instance just as neutral (neither good or bad) as our entire biological predisposition creates space for the possibility and the limitation of the development of all components during our life that has been given to us as it is.*

Yet the fierce sexual drive that was regulated through socialisation still needs to be controlled at a personal level, just like other types of urges and feelings.'

Me: 'That is true and yet it will remain important for Paulien and Anne to explore intimacy during the learning process in such a way that for every aspect of the system-internal its boundaries and autonomy are acknowledged. Being close at all layers of your personality while retaining your individuality seems to me a mature form of intimacy.'

Tijno: 'When Anne is silent and realises that she shares a view with Paulien, she also realises that Paulien is a woman who understands and empathises with her. Anne's choice of a female educational therapist is understandable but a consequence might be that the male view on sexuality and intimacy goes largely unaddressed. It is clear, however, that men play a major role in these two women's lives. It is similarly clear that they have no wish to speak on behalf of a man but try to put themselves in his position, and they put forward their observations as hypotheses that you can discuss. Anne realises at the same time that she daily lives with her need to meet people, men and women, who also share this view.'

I think that sexuality is a different aspect for very many men than it is for women. Men are more easily led by lust, which functions almost isolated from the other aspects in their system-internal. I was immediately touched by this theme, and I would now more readily take a step back to look and listen more carefully to the entire human being in his context.'

Me: 'The difference isn't just that men are built differently biologically. In particular, ideas about men that are imposed through socialisation in most cultures are just as intimidating as ideas about women. Those men who dare to reflect on this bring about just as big a shift in the interaction between people as the women who reflect on it. But since there is still an imbalance of power, a man's influence is the greater, and therefore, all the more welcome. I have high hopes if both, man and woman, were to work together to bring about a change in the ideas about themselves.'

Anne: 'When I met John, I was so glad that he could very simply say to me: "When I woke up this morning, thinking of you gave me an erection." And I could tell him too that just thinking of him and picturing him could give me an orgasm. We could enjoy this openness because it had a normal place within our relation.'

At the time I thought that the physical aspect was as natural as it was for me and that being able to talk about it was just as natural as talking about food and drink. That is how it seemed, also because I wanted to see it like this. Alas, alas, things were very different. He was incapable of giving shape to our relation. But I not only distanced myself from him because we didn't want to hurt his wife, but also because he was, after all, more different from me than I had hoped.

The greatest pain I felt was on account of his fear that his being touched by me might alienate him from his wife, that he had to distance himself from me so as not to lose her. While I understood him, I had also expected him to be able to deal with this. The expectations I had of myself I also imposed on him.'

Paulien: 'Have you ever felt what it is like to lose your partner?'

Anne: 'Yes, I have been through some quite difficult situations in that respect. My own infatuations have taught me a lot, especially that my marital partnership has never been jeopardised because of them.'

Paulien: 'How did you do that? What did you and your partner do to achieve that?'

Anne: 'I've always kept treating my partner with respect and love. Because the foundation of our relationship that we had laid together was strong. I could nearly always share my experiences with him. I sometimes chose to get through it on my own because I could already visualise how things would work out. Owing to our intimacy in most areas of the system-internal we continued to feel connectedness while we at the same time trusted each other. And, each of us has their own space and circle of friends. In fact, our relationship and our partnership have actually deepened over these years.'

Paulien: 'Were you able to talk about the fact that each of you experienced these happenings differently?'

Anne: 'The past year's reflections during this educational therapy have taught me a lot. It has, for instance, provided me with enormous support when looking back and reflecting on something that happened a few years ago, and that I haven't told you yet.'

When my partner started to court my friend, because they both saw no reason why they shouldn't, I was shocked. My old feelings and ideas about our relationship were shaken by feelings of disappointment, powerlessness, anger, sorrow

and jealousy, especially for the loss of physical tenderness that was now given to someone else. My behaviour, my relation with these two precious people threatened to be disturbed. Gradually, after a fierce outburst of feelings before my partner and before another friend, I realised that if I allowed myself to feel what I felt, I would be able to reflect on these feelings. That is how my behaviour and interaction stayed respectful. It wasn't so much how they treated each other or what they did, that is not my business, but how they treated me. That is my business and something that I am responsible for. I was able to tell them both in that respect that my trust as a friend and marital partner were being abused and my boundaries were crossed by their behaviour in my presence. I could air my feelings of disappointment, pain and anger before my partner but I could also make it clear that I wouldn't be intimidated and that I would continue in my life and work, if necessary in another house. So I know from experience how tough it is to be touched by another person and yet let the familiar partnership continue in a respectful and loving way.'

Paulien: 'How did you manage to let John go?'

Anne: 'By realising that John differed more from me, after all, than I originally thought. What was particularly painful was that he kept stressing that he believed that he had to take the initiative in showing tenderness. That greatly helped me to let him go. However, the fact that I loved him so much that I didn't want to burden but enrich his life was what moved me most of all to say farewell.'

Paulien: 'What did you, during these four dates with him, learn about the similarities and differences between you and how he deals with these?'

Anne: 'He, too was a firstborn, and his mother's favourite. He told me, with tears in his voice. He enjoyed receiving all this special attention and love but it also pained him to see that the others weren't given their due. That he bore no responsibility for this situation yet felt powerless to change it could still have him sob with the pain of it. His mother became the source of John's feelings and his lustful experiences. He responded to his mother's tenderness with his own lust. For him, too, masturbation started early, by way of continuation of her tender caresses. He saw his mother as a trailblazer in his eroticism. She got his mirror neurons going. That is how he looked back on it now, with his professional knowledge.

Since his father was literally but also inwardly frequently absent from his mother, she bonded extra strongly with her favourite son, who turned out to resemble her more than his father.'

Paulien: 'You are now giving his own interpretation of his situation, just as you did with your situation, aren't you?'

Anne: 'Yes, these are John's hypotheses, which he shared with me in response to my story and my hypotheses.'

Me: 'Hadn't I better leave this hypothesis unsaid?'

Tijno: 'No, these are hypotheses that can be discussed. I do recognise something in this hypothesis: in order to leave his mother's realm and the reach of her arm, a man sometimes gets bogged down in language, finding it difficult to express himself and ultimately allowing his language to seem unfeeling. For him, this turns out to be a survival mechanism; language, not talking, as a dam against his mother and her emotions.

He will start to ignore anything to do with his body, since this stands for everything connected with the emotional life which his mother enveloped him in and suffocated with. The longer she treated him as her property, the longer and more fiercely he will resist his mother's (supposed and real) fantasies. He stays small and young for a longer period where his emotional development is concerned while his biological, physical development continues. His unconscious fear of having to replace the absent father as a partner inhibits him from finding a deeper connection with the emotions in his body and developing himself further in this respect.'

Anne: 'What he told me about his very first infatuation at our first date was deeply moving and intensely illuminating, both for him and for me.'

Paulien: 'He told you as early as your first date?'

Anne: 'Yes, he later said that to his own surprise, it just burst out of him, unstoppable. After being, first, passionately in love with her, he kept this first woman at a distance because at that time he didn't know how to handle this being touched. Later, he sought her out again but then it was she who ultimately kept him at a distance. She is married now but he still feels how deep his love went. Then he shortened his words and gestures, restrained himself cognitively, emotionally and physically because everything reminded him of the symbiotic tenderness with his mother. He blocked off his desire for himself and her, so that a great force built up behind that dam and he encountered sudden floodings where he was unfaithful, and domineering, tended to direct things and keeping a grip on the

exchange of tenderness in the interaction. He sometimes even labelled his desires a sex addiction.'

Paulien: *'Was he addicted?'*

Anne: *'Not the way I see it. In his relation with me, it was as if he, on the one hand, longs for tenderness and on the other, wants to ignore and fight it, as if he was still processing his memories of the tenderness and all the sensitive interaction that he received as a child.'*

Tijno: *'The tenderness that a man can receive in his marriage gives him a chance to let his vulnerable and affectable aspects just be and to experience that it is all right for them to be there in the safe contact. His warm ('feminine') aspects can develop just like the strong ('masculine') aspects can develop in a woman.*

You don't actually need to be married for this but you do need a certain safety before you can discover your vulnerable sides and show them as strengths.'

Anne: *'He still misses his late father. Had he had more of a relationship with him, been able to talk more with him, hug him, then he might not have needed to demonstrate to his mother through a serial monogamous relationship style that he is a real man.*

John and I believe that a child's relationship with his mother and his father ought to be more balanced. This, in turn, may lead to less sexist language and behaviour and less aggressive interaction between women and men in adulthood.

What has struck me is that in my work with families I pay more attention to my and their language as soon as old preconceptions and ideas are expressed. A sort of humour ensues even, as we discover that changes in language may also lead to shifts in the meaning of ideas. This, in turn, leads to a change in interactions. The entire family experiences this as better.'

Anne briefly shares a memory of John: *'He can press me against him so strongly and calmly as if he wants to enjoy this non-verbal physical tender contact where he feels completely safe for a long time. It is clear that he wants to take the first step. I let him, but can't help being aware of it. My hypothesis is that he seeks a wholly equal rapport, complete in all the aspects of the internal system,*

where he feels completely safe to go his own way. I can be there and give him all the space he thinks he needs, because my own space stays as it is.

It was my dream that our mothers and fathers would no longer stand between us and that we could pass through our old experiences and hurts, keep whatever we wanted to take along and leave behind anything we experience as a hampering burden.

I would so very much have liked for us to be allowed the time and space to look for a form of a new union where everyone directly and indirectly involved could grow.'

Tijno: *'Silence is important in this conversation. Paulien is thinking of her own recent experience with a friend who has told her that since he has started to talk intensely and deeply with her about their shared hobby, painting, his relationship with his wife has improved. His wife, much like Paulien's husband, has no interest in art.*

She loves this friend, and he loves her. Their love is limited to a hug, any further desires are kept in check. Yet she is very curious what it would be like if they both did give in to them, and she'd like Anne to tell her her views as she tells her this story. By consulting Anne Paulien shows how she might learn from her. Anne has also experienced in her work how much she learns from her clients.

Paulien: *'I've got this difficult question that I'd like to share with you. I'd like to explore with you if we could find an answer to my question and if so, how we could integrate physical intimacy into our friendships with women and men.'*

Anne looks at Paulien in an observant, open manner. She senses that Paulien is very keen to discuss this aspect of Anne's focus together.

Tijno: *'Now you run the risk of having Anne say what you as a writer think. Wouldn't it be clearer if you simply gave your own opinion and then continued with their process?'*

Me: *'With them joining in later and reasoning in this line?'*

Tijno: *'Yes.'*

Me: 'That is better, yes.'

The vision I'd like to contribute to the dialogue is this: we are born with sexual characteristics that, as we develop, become gradually more and more visible in a differentiated way. Biologically based differences are a given. If these are accepted and defined with recognition and respect, they will enrich our togetherness. It is ever about equality, not about uniformity.

Incidentally, we, or our environment, are never asked any questions about the fact that we are born one way or the other. Almost as soon as our sexuality manifests itself, a divide comes about (a more accepted, qualified divide, these days) in the shape of a definition of the child's physicality and intimacy in terms of preconceptions or pigeonholes that have developed historically as socialisation. As long as it is mainly through its mother that the child gains experience with feelings and lust, these will, sadly, continue to be labelled feminine. Anything to do with intellectual development and the outside social world is defined as masculine. Unfortunately, men and women are still very often, and to a greater or lesser degree in different cultures, programmed, so as not to co-exist together but, rather, to stand opposed to each other, ready to fight. If they decide to fight together for the sake of their children, this may be constructive, but we very often find abuse of power and humanly unequal interactions in the relations between women and men, as among people in general.

My view is that as soon as men no longer maintain social inequality in education and socialisation, but turn it into a social role play where women and men have equal standing, women will cease to be an 'object' to men, and instead become a 'subject'.

It can, nay, must be acknowledged that there are, indeed, differences between men and women but it can also be acknowledged that these differences enrich the way we live and work together. Being mutually dependent on each other, needing each other because we all have different talents would then be feasible not just between men, and between women, but between men and women without any concomitant abuse of power.'

Tijno: 'Personally, my view is this: we've seen how it was only a short while ago in human history that a man's identity was shaped in part through a 'counter identification' in relation to the woman, the woman reduced to a mother stereotype. We recognise even now: women struggle to free them-

selves from men's abuse of power. And yet, many women are still pushed by men to compete with each other to become an object of beauty to a man, who wants to enjoy their beauty until the day of his death.

At the same time, men are constantly disadvantaged, even in our western societies, as they are not given the space to experience their warm characteristics, in relation, for instance, to raising their children; worse, as these characteristics are denounced even or labelled negatively.'

Anne: *'In my experience, physical intimacy can only be experienced in a relationship between equals. Only when we experience this can we explore whether, and if so, how, it can be integrated into friendships.'*

Paulien: *'What, in your opinion, does it take to break the idea of inequality and promote equal interaction?'*

Anne: *'When I bring to bear my and John's life experience on my reflections on how to break the vicious circle, we must start somewhere. I would start at the point where fathers and mothers learn to become parents who raise and educate children, and all minders and carers of babies and young children.'*

Paulien thinks aloud: *'Are you thinking of the 'infant mental health' (imh) principles and theories here? These could certainly help us, if we look at the earliest relationship. We listen to the very early stories and the earliest interactions between parent/carer and child. We can acknowledge the situation for what it is and from there, ask questions and via new stories invite in any change that this is judged desirable. I have always shared this imh knowledge in my work with parents and children, using their own language.'*

Anne: *'Yes, I agree, imh experts are important partners to systemics thinkers and all those working with the system in its context. But if I bring up my focus again, what would we say are desirable changes in how we treat children that might have an impact on the development of equal interactions among adults in general and, more specifically, in the area of physicality?'*

Anne is silent for a while, her eyes close and she seems to be listening inwardly and meditating. Paulien also takes time to open her mind to what she is about to hear, in such a way that any reactions and preconceptions that might well up in her spontaneously may be acknowledged and recognised by her as being hers (and many others'). If she can do this, she can also ask

herself whether these images are useful or justified, which she would like to keep and which she would want and be able to change while accepting any concomitant consequences.

Me: 'Many, though not all, of the younger generation talk about 'social constructs', rigid rules that we all internalise as if it were natural behaviour that we term 'masculine' or 'feminine'.

Through rigid norms we keep conspiring to glamorise the characteristics defined as 'male' and to look down on what termed 'feminine' traits. In social terms, this is reflected in the reward systems and the unequal regard for certain professions. Men as well as women who want to live from their heart and their own personal development potential and who do not conform to the prevalent rigid norms are reviled, bullied and stigmatised, sometimes even murdered.

The often unconscious bias makes women and men want to maintain the present status quo, research has shown. A young group of women (Vileine) would also claim that 'it is not so much masculinity that is in crisis as the patriarchal definition of masculinity'. They recognise that men may suffer just as much as women from patriarchal stereotyping and collective socialisation. Both men and women yearn for the freedom to develop themselves according to all their individual possibilities. Subject to discussion are not just the externally imposed boundaries but also the freely internalised boundaries of one's own making.

Young and older couples, with or without children, are engaged in a real struggle. Refusing to give in to stereotypes, having the courage to experiment and to fight bravely for equal-status interaction and treatment may still take a lot of energy but it fortunately does create space.

I'd like to take a closer look at the descriptive language we use when we talk about these phenomena and about Anne's focus. As I said earlier, the language adopted by the couples and families that I work with is for me one of the points of departure when working towards the changes they desire.'

Tijno: 'I would add that what with her model of the system-internal and -external Paulien has a vision that can in a very real sense support work towards equality between people, and that, while she is attentively listening to Anne, she is touched there, and can't wait bring this up in their dialogue.'

Paulien: *'In my model of the system-internal, all aspects of a human being's personality are equal, with the development of these aspects in the system-external inviting us to see this equality as a constant, well-nigh as important as the breath of life, which we ought to cherish during all the outside influences before and from our birth onwards.'*

Anne picks up the thread that Paulien offers her. For her, too equality is as essential as breath: *'Then, physicality is wholly equivalent to cognition, emotion, behaviour and all other aspects of a human being, of any sexuality or corporeality whatsoever.'*

Thus, every cell in the body is equivalent to every other cell.

It doesn't matter where this cell is in the body or in the skin; it can be treated with tenderness and respect.

Thus, also, can sex education teach both boys and girls how to explore their body in all its places and to enjoy it through masturbation. Sex education should similarly devote more attention to intimacy in all the layers of the system-internal.'

Me: 'This vision is based on Anne's life experience.'

It is important for adults to realise that the tender physical contact between child and minder is a continuous source of physical and sexual development. And, it can be safe basis for learning how to handle excitement and gratification.

If they can accept this as a natural aspect of a human being's development, they help the child grow into an adult with an energetic sexual life that is neither overemphasised nor a taboo. If a parent or carer cannot handle this, the child will sense this immediately and deviant images and preconceptions are sown.

Parents who can talk about the subject or ask others if they are shocked by their own sexual reaction give the child the opportunity to develop freely, even if they themselves have been raised very differently.'

Tijno: 'I remember a father who was shocked to tell me that he got an erection when his little daughter sat in his lap. This father was relieved when he heard there was nothing wrong with that and that he could learn to make his erection go down. But he can also tell the little girl that she is developing into a beautiful woman and that he can teach her to stand up for herself and her boundaries in her relations with other children and adults.'

Talking normally about physicality and sexual reactions may create space for a more normal and healthier approach to intimacy. The overemphasis of or taboo on physicality might then gradually lessen.

When masturbation is explained to the child, when it is able to grasp this in its own language, the child can hear that sexuality, physicality and intimacy are as normal as eating and drinking and that they can be controlled like other basic needs and bodily functions. In other words, intimacy can continue to develop during the biological and psychosocial growth towards adulthood just like cognitions, perceptions, feelings, behaviour, interactions and other physical sensations do.

Our creativity and religious feelings are similarly expected to develop rather than stagnate at a child's level.'

Me: 'Paulien remembers how as an adult woman, she was literally called "little woman" or "little Paulien"; a little woman who wasn't allowed to be aware of and accept her own girlish sexuality. Her mother had no experience of her own in this respect, and therefore couldn't give this any attention when she was raising Paulien.

She understands that her mother's focus was on the vagina, on the future women's sexuality, as had been passed on to her by her mother and ancestors. She once told her that she had never had an orgasm. Language-wise, the little "clitoral" girl was taboo but she was cheered when she used her mother's lipstick and walked about in her mother's shoes. The child was quick to unconsciously catch on to this taboo and to the fact that she, like her mother, would have to play-act to be desirable as a future woman and amount to anything. Attention and care were consequently focused on the unknown but so important other instead of on the child itself.

Later on, when she was an adolescent, she was again deceived: this time by the boy who wanted her to be beautiful, to have a lustful body and to become his object.

Her head, her brain, apparently did not count, were ostensibly not her body.

She could be furious when touched carelessly near her breasts. A friend who lay down on her to masturbate without even asking about her feelings intensely disappointed her expectations.

It took her a lot of effort to develop into a woman who could experience her whole body and mind as lustful, as a woman.

Her present boyfriend shared with her that he recognised in his language and its development how it had developed in relation to his mother. He had struggled free from her by setting himself apart from her ways of expressing desire and lust. For a long time he ignored everything to do with his body because that was where his mother's emotional life was expressed. He experienced his so-called masculine language as a 'language breach' and a form of separation from his mother's emotional life and her way of expressing emotions. The direct link between spontaneous erection and sexuality for which his mother would punish him confused him and gave him the feeling of being imprisoned in a dungeon, in 'un-freedom'! He had to break free, by hook or by crook. At the time he could not yet accept that he would always stay united with his mother while he would still be able to unfold his talents and personality, which differed greatly from his mother's.

Both Paulien and her friend have a long quest for their physical identity behind them. His often was at the expense of women he had fallen in love with and who he could never really let in to his sensitive inner self, for fear of losing himself and his individuality.

Paulien's quest ran the stony path of wanting to please others, wanting to be liked and adapting to prevalent standards, even making use of her charm as a little woman.'

Anne looks at Paulien to see if she has rounded off her musings.

Paulien: *'Are we now going to explore how you in the present moment live with your own insights in relation to the people you love? And of course, in your work?'*

Anne: *'When I look back on the four dates with John now and place my experiences with him in your working model, there's something I'd like to add to what I have already described: since every cell in my body has been touched, it doesn't seem at all necessary to have vagina to penis contact (coitus) with John. Every cell that touches the other has been sensibilised. If this contact comes about, it can be seen in its entirety as being an extension of total tenderness and intimacy. This intimacy occurs at all aspects of the system-internal. Conversations and every interaction and behaviour that are experienced together are a being touched*

that is comparable to a physical touch anywhere on the body. That is also how I understand that a man may think his wife is unfaithful when she has more intimate conversations with another man than with himself, even if he finds it hard or even impossible to have such conversations with her. They would need to talk about this. Accepting diversity and our need for each other in a range of areas without slipping into terms of power or possession is a constant challenge to the inwardly free and open human being, and it is an art of living to practise this from within yourself together with your environment.'

Paulien: 'You're absolutely right there: "an art of living". In my practice and in my life, that is a constant, trial-and-error quest, where others get hurt unintentionally, boundaries are pushed, crossed and found again, partnerships are lost and children are uprooted. Have you experienced this as well, in your work?'

Anne: 'Now that I'm buoyed up by this educational therapy, I was able to talk about this with a couple the other day – earlier than I would otherwise have done, and in a more relaxed way. At first, they were nonplussed but they gradually sensed that I was basing myself on my life experience. I steered them in such a way that my privacy was protected and that they through recognition still felt safe and invited. Then, they talked openly about all the aspects in their relationship, in particular about how ideas and imaginary fears affect the physicality and intimacy in their relationship and in their relations with others. They recently told me that their rapport has never been so good. They experience their partnership and companionship as a safe and respectful base from where they can engage freely with other friends. Their talents clearly unfold in their loving rapport, also with other friends.'

Me: 'The feasibility of engaging another in an open conversation about intimacy, physicality and sexuality can, in my opinion, only be guessed. I never know in advance how the other will react, or how I will react. Having the courage to enter into such a conversation in a safe context may imply gaining experience with such conversations, with a subsequent experience working out better or differently. Life appears to be more in motion, is more like an experiment. But there has to be a basis that lets in the type of courage required for undergoing new experiences. I have experienced in a safe circle of cherished women friends that any aspect of intimacy in the area of physicality, feeling and ideas can be discussed and that we could appreciate this in each other and learnt from it.'

Paulien: 'So, you are glad that introducing your focus into the educational therapy has brought you something?'

Anne: 'Oh yes! Being able to talk about it with you has strengthened my inner space and courage.'

Adventurousness, feeling safe in yourself and the joy of experimenting may work in a beneficial and supportive way, but there can also be some pain. These, however, are growing pains rather than the sort of pain suffered when the other is deliberately hurt. I can be hurt by another person unnecessarily and unconsciously but provided it was done unintentionally I can handle it. That is what I have experienced in my life; an experience I could use the other day during a relationship therapy interview.

I worked it out, together with John. His wife and my husband are so safe, so familiar and so important to us that we were able to choose to stay with our partners. I find my own growing pains, a longing that is not satisfied, easier to bear than someone else's pain. Moreover, I was deeply moved by the space that my partner gave me so trustingly, while the intimacy with him and everything we share together confirmed me in my choice of him as my life partner.'

Tijno: 'The deepest longing that John touched in Anne was her need to communicate from mind to mind, from heart to heart with people who are agile and young – with every cell in her body, without fear of the social pigeonholes that we are placed in when our hair turns grey and our looks become age-appropriate. She thought to have found someone in him who could communicate with her at that deep level because he had a youthful appearance and they had an almost perfect intuitive understanding of each other.'

What they shared together was also that they both set great store by the commensurate combination of mental and physical contact and of the equivalent exchange of tenderness.

The fact that she was able to let him go makes her feel grateful because it has helped her rediscover old characteristics in her partner that she used to appreciate so much. And, there was space once more for meeting new, precious people.'

Me: 'There are no two people who can share everything with each other. The richness, the ability to stretch beyond and build bridges between new experiences with new forms of partnership appears to me an achievement of our times in our period of the evolution. We might add that we continue the transformation of our human-ness with the deepest respect for both each other's otherness and equal-ness, also in the area of love and partnership.'

Paulien: *'Do you really think that there are people who allow, even wish themselves and each other this freedom, and who can experience and celebrate this freedom together?'*

Anne: *'I believe there are such people: I have even met one or two, both in my private life and at work. It very much depends on how their personality has been able to develop in all areas of the system-internal.'*

Me: *'We may not live to see it, but given the possibilities of the transformations that mankind has already undergone, we can individually continue on this path, knowing that more people will follow suit because we are unafraid to talk about it with each other and therefore dare to live and engage with each other more openly and vulnerably. Education as we discussed earlier remains an important element in achieving a transformation towards freedom in unity, with respect for each other's differences.'*

I remember a discussion evening where young people, experts by experience, were not afraid to talk about their experiences with loving and entering into relationships with more than one person, men and women. They struggled openly and honestly with their new experiences, "muddling along" as they sometimes called it. A breath of fresh air, to hear them talk so openly, that things weren't hushed up so. Women were the spokespersons here, championing the cause. They struggled openly to express in words a line of thinking where diversity and change are central. As did earlier philosophers (Hannah Arendt and Gillis Deleuze), they described the existing system in critical terms but they also went much further in their thinking. As they create and experiment with new possibilities, they discover new concepts. Paulien had already come across the concept of the "rhizome" in her work. It is used to describe the interconnectedness and fluid contacts between people and systems. This image is viewed as a metaphor for the longing to enter into relationships without a hierarchical structure. Mutual differences are not expressed in hierarchical terms but in terms of radiating a natural influence and authority without abuse of power.

This requires both partners to be materially independent and self-supporting, just as they are free adults inwardly.'

Paulien: *'However, we have been placed within a system-external, in various cultural contexts and rules, which in their entirety is sometimes necessary to safeguard the safety of children. This larger system needs much, much more time*

to allow in an individual's transformation and then follow up with greater groups of people.'

Anne: *'Yes, my view entirely, and I notice how the younger generation has the courage to experiment. I would like to do so myself but I realise that this requires a context with several people where everybody feels safe. It is also important to continue to exchange thoughts and ideas because the search for new forms is inextricably bound with finding new words and stories and dropping the old words and images that we have and would like to change. We'd like to see man as fluid, active and agile. Man is not static.'*

Paulien: *'What is your definition of man?'*

Anne: *'Man is not an individual by nature but a we-being that constantly and rhizomatically links with other beings.'*

Here we dig deep under the binary way of thinking that man has developed, which is more of a barrier to further evolutionary transformation. The multifariousness, the quality of being different yet united as a loving and respectful 'we' is more conducive to the growth of people as a humanity with its human rights and duties than is a divide with just two possibilities.'

Tijno and I share how we agree with Anne and how moving it is to see how Paulien and Anne can exchange their views with one another.

I thank Tijno for reading and thinking along with me. I have been able to integrate his input into the final impression of this educational therapy. He also encouraged me to state my views as clearly as possible. I can now also let go of my worries about the fact that this is not a verbatim account and therefore remains an impression. His view is that an entire chapter could have been devoted to each dialogue. Let this observation, then, be an invitation to a discussion among colleagues and with me.

Now, I'd like to adopt the perspective of the narrator and look back:

During the final evaluation Paulien and Anne share how they have experienced the whole process.

They also discuss Paulien and Anne's experience with their readiness or reluctance to invite members of Anne's family system. To begin with, the educational therapy represented Anne's own place for herself, where she could unwind, felt safe, where she could be herself and where she, for the first time in her life, received safe and undivided attention for her detailed story. Inviting others to the meetings yielded a few surprises. She experienced things that she had already told Paulien about her sisters and her partner differently than when these people told their story themselves. She experienced clarification; other places and perceptions manifested themselves to her. For her, recognition from the others brought with it a deeper healing power. Anne was grateful to Paulien for continually inviting her to allow in conversations with important others into the educational therapy. Paulien respected her threshold, reflected on it with Anne and calmly maintained that if Anne herself was motivated to invite others, she would gain experiences that she would otherwise never have had. This taught Anne a great deal about the courage and motivation on the part of the families who received therapy from her. Her respect for these families and partners had grown.

Anne and Paulien have gained a great deal from their cooperative relationship.

They were frequently able to bring up the subject of how Anne wished to see her ideal parent in Paulien. Paulien was able to identify, acknowledge this with Anne, and practise with her how to handle this in this safe context. This also taught Anne to be more alert to the reciprocal interactions in the work situation.

Paulien's sense of humour, an important part of her overall attitude, helped place their identification and acknowledgement of Anne's old need to be one, even with her educational therapist. Being different and autonomous while simultaneously allowing a sense of connectedness was experienced as grown-up and soothing.

The equality and mutual interdependence of every body cell, of every layer in the system-internal and of all aspects of the system-external created an opening where anything could be discussed. Because old preconceptions received recognition and acknowledgement and could frequently be placed in old patterns, grown in old context, they could be corrected and re-internalised in a newer form.

Awareness of the equality of all aspects in the basic biological predisposition, in the individual and social context created space for the realisation that reflection and dialogue are lifelong necessities.

In their work with people, families and couples Paulien and Anne are going to be even more alert to preconceptions as regards the focus put forward by Anne.

They will encourage discussion of the themes they went over together even sooner.

They will do so respectful of differences in the family culture or social culture of many of their fellow humans, and at the same time, they will invite them to reflect on use of language and old notions.

It is useful to remark here that language can in part perpetuate how women are talked of as weak or even inferior instead of saying how it is men who continue this definition. Using such terms as sexual or physical violence against women and children as a catch-all term is a construct that foregrounds passivity. As a result, it is not so much the perpetrators using violence that receive attention as the persons undergoing it. Changing language and ideas may help to change behaviour and treatment of others, and this, in turn, may give a whole different feel to things.

As soon as they discover or facilitate even the slightest of motivation in others, Paulien and Anne will explore, together with them, how people using their own strengths could work towards the changes they desire. For it is only when they desire this themselves, and use their own strengths that people can join forces and alter and evolve their old ideas and images in such a way that the effects in every-day reality can be bearable, in fact even desirable.

Because Paulien and Anne have been able to reflect on this special focus together, they are more open to working with people who are already aware of their longing for desirable change in the area of intimacy. Working together towards an equal and equivalent human-ness makes this an easier goal to attain: there is strength in numbers.

Concluding words

At the start of this impression I dreamt about the possibility that every human being be given the opportunity to learn to reflect. I also explained why I feel this way. Reflection, however, is experienced and described by different people in different ways.

In a recent interview actress Isabelle Huppert (B.J. Bockting, 2016) says something very interesting about her role in Paul Verhoeven's film *Elle*: 'Actually, I didn't quite understand my character. And I love that. I understand her in the way you understand decisions in real life: understanding doesn't come until after a while, you're not handed the point of it all just like that. We mainly go through life using our instinct and intuition. Analysis and reflection are ideas from fiction. In everyday life, you just have to soldier on. The film makes a very intelligent statement about that.'

What she says here is that reflection is not so much or just about conscious views and decisions in life, but also, and especially so, about unconscious thought processes that take up space in our instincts and intuition.

Stereotypes used unconsciously in our thinking may lead to rigid behaviour that inhibits personal development and growth. Moreover, they may lead to interactions that suppress equality. This particularly makes them focal areas for reflection if we are to develop together in agile fluidity and equality.

Since every human being unconsciously uses stereotypes, every human being should also be invited to reflect. My dream could thus demonstrate that desirable ideals and reality are inextricably interwoven. In the same way I consider what we call the unconscious and the conscious to be similarly inextricably interwoven even though we are not quite clear what we are talking about. This natural uncertainty, not (yet) knowing and only being able to give an approximate definition of something, may constitute an invitation to us to keep asking questions and keep listening to any answers openly and critically.

Maintaining a continuous dialogue with each other, about a focus like Anne's, for instance, while it is perfectly all right for us to hold different views: that is my dream.

Practically speaking, this may entail that we should make it possible to talk about sexuality, physicality and intimacy in all forms of education – at home, in courses and during training, in schools and in professional groups – just as we talk about other important and everyday things in a loving and respectful way. That I would call my dearest wish: being able to be a free human being, each other's equal yet also different, mutually dependent and continuously learning from each other.

I realise that this impression is far from perfect and I would like to extend a warm invitation to my colleagues to reflect on this and proceed in dialogue, working towards a next version so as to ensure that educational therapy stays on the agenda.

Thanks

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Monika M. Jongerius-Joras

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Monika Joras

Was born on 14 July 1941 in Oberwesel, Germany, has been married to Ton Jongerius since 1970, studied medicine in Nijmegen, where she graduated in 1975. She specialised as a psychiatrist and a systemic psychotherapist in Leiden and Amsterdam.

She worked for almost thirty years at the Dercksenentrum, a day centre for multidisciplinary psychotherapy in Amsterdam. In addition, she worked for almost twenty years at an orthopedagogical centre in Santpoort, where she provided consultation. She was a trainer and coach for the elective internship in psychotherapy as part of the study programme for psychiatrists. After her retirement in 2001, she continued her work as a supervisor and an educational therapist with the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy [NVRG]. She was also active in the Women in Psychiatry committee (Vrouwen in de Psychiatrie, VIP) of the Dutch Association for Psychiatry (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Psychiatrie, NVvP).

Now a retired psychiatrist, she has completed her activities as a trainer with the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy [NVRG] with her book *Leertherapie op de agenda* [*Putting educational therapy on the agenda*]. She also ended her career as a coach with the Dutch Association of Female Physicians [VNVA], and now enjoys her retirement. Having handed over her function of confidential counsellor with the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy, she has accepted the function of confidential counsellor with the training institute CTT Amsterdam. Recently, she joined the board of the newly founded intercultural section of the Dutch Association for Marital and Family Therapy.

She continues to lead an active life, and enjoys meeting people. Writing about educational therapy and about her thoughts and feelings in the form of poems are among her daily activities. Since she loves dialogue, she enjoys sharing her writings with others.

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