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Dealing with Teaching that Evokes Emotions, in particular Audiovisual Material and Guest Speakers

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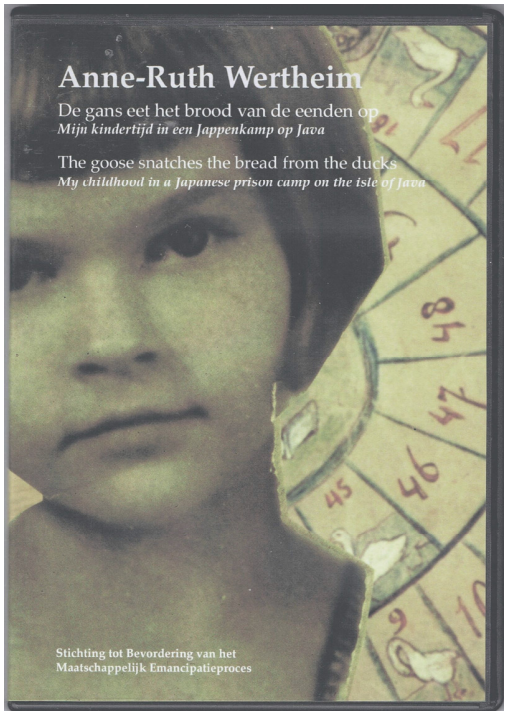
Dealing Creatively with Teaching that Evokes Emotions, in particular Audiovisual Materials and Guest Speakers

Method developed by

Anne-Ruth Wertheim *and* **Lieneke Akkerman**

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Introduction

For years I used to show all the groups I taught my DVD *The Goose Snatches the Bread from the Ducks, My Childhood in a Japanese Prison Camp on the Isle of Java* [i]*).*
Again and again, I would see how touched the members of the group were by the contents. This was clear from the emotional questions they posed after watching it, questions I answered as well as I could. But I gradually came to see how one-sided it really was that they had learned so much about me but had not been able to give me back anything of themselves.

On the DVD, I show the enlarged little drawings I made as a child in the Japanese prison camp. It was during World War Two when what is now Indonesia was still a Dutch colony. The Japanese had occupied the country and put us in prison camps along with all the white people there. The drawings show how we children experienced the most horrible things one moment and were off playing in between the barracks another. In the meantime, you hear me talking about all the things that were happening, what I was feeling and thinking and how I looked back on it all in retrospect.

The more presentations I gave, often with totally different contents than this story about the Japanese prison camp [ii]), the more convinced I was that I was not giving the people in my groups what they deserved. I started to think about ways to have them deal with their own emotions. At the same time, the stories I heard from my colleagues including Lieneke Akkerman [iii]) made it clear to me that they were facing this same problem and were looking for solutions. Now that presenting audiovisual material and inviting guest speakers had become so common in the world of teaching, Lieneke and I felt it was time to develop methods for dealing with the feelings that were being evoked. This held true for the adults we were working with and it also held true for the children. In this booklet we call them *participants.*

By giving the people in our groups an opportunity to deal with their feelings, we also wanted to achieve something else. We had noticed they were often deeply impressed by the injustice in the world that they were aware of every day. They didn't like being powerless to do anything about it, but what could they do? And then came all those prejudices about the people who were so unfortunate and again the lamentations that there was nothing they could do.

With our method, we hoped to take a step towards enhancing their self-respect and respect for others. We felt it was our job to enable them to discover what it was about their feelings and ideas that defined them and what it was that defined others. And it was just as important to give them a chance to experience what they had in common, what they recognized in the things others expressed. *The unique* as well as *the universal* could give them a sense of not being alone, of sharing their lives. And at some point in the future, perhaps they would act to help combat injustice.

Keep your mind on the lesson at hand … and silence your heart!

The method we developed [iv]) is meant to fill up a gap in education ever since showing audiovisual material has become the usual course of affairs. Events are shown close up or from a distance that occurred in the past, are still going on, or are expected to happen in the future. They can be gruesome and frightening, but they can also abound with beauty and love. Especially material taken from television increasingly goes straight to the heart of a situation. There is little today's technology can't do to get information across. But in ordinary teaching situations, all these impressions can only be included in so far as they fit into the programme. Presentations are designed to hold the attention of the participants and keep their mind on the lesson at hand, and there is at most some space for talking afterwards with the entire group.

Something similar is true for invited guest speakers. Being confronted face to face with persons who have often suffered a lot may evoke deep emotions. And even then these emotions are merely dealt with in a group talk afterwards.

At these talks most of the people don't get a chance to have a say and have to make do with listening to what others have to say. Everyone has experienced different and often contradictory feelings, and it is a pretty happenchance matter who gets to say something at a talk. It is usually the spokesmen of the group who determine what it is going to be about, often in a dialogue with whoever has supervised the presentation. Before most of the people attending the presentation have even been able to wonder what they really think and feel, they have already set the tone. In this way, what most of the people at these group discussions can learn there is that their feelings matter less than those of the spokespeople.

Making a group discussion more democratic

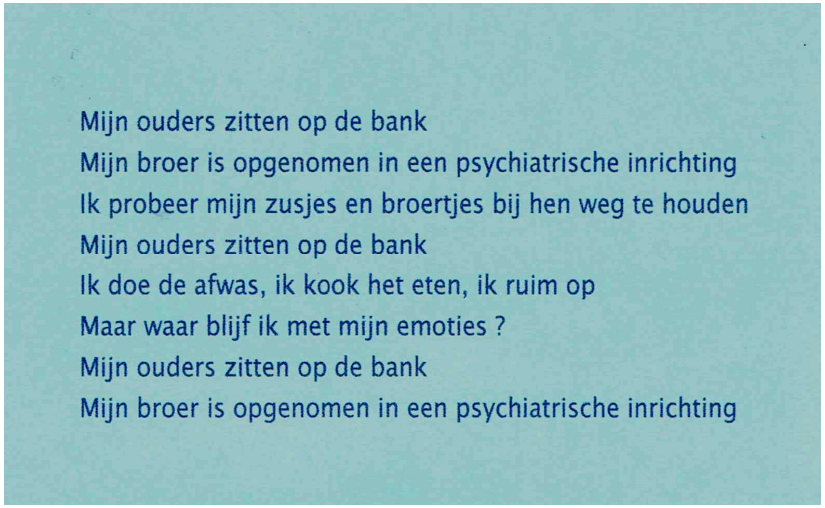
It isn't only the people listening who don't get what they should. A group discussion about an impressive presentation is essentially undemocratic. Everyone should be invited to quietly explore how the presentation moved them before someone starts talking. Rushing from investigating individual feelings and thoughts to a group event is not good for anyone. This way the lesson they all learn might unintentionally be that it is best to hide your feelings and shut yourself off from other people's emotions.

We include a number of preparatory steps in our method to democratize participation in a group discussion to a certain extent. But it is not nearly enough. Methods are needed that give everyone an opportunity to allow what has moved them to really penetrate and to link it to their own memories. Then they can experience how they themselves make decisions about what they do or do not want to have come out and what they do or do not want to share.

My parents sit on the couch
My brother was sent to a mental hospital
I try to keep my little brothers and sisters away from them
My parents sit on the couch
I wash the dishes, make the food, clean up
But where are my emotions?
My parents sit on the couch
My brother was sent to a mental hospital

Experiences presented, evoked and recalled
In our method, we distinguish three types of evocative experiences.
Evocative experiences can be

1. perceived by the group
2. conceived by the individual
3. received by the heart.



Perceived experiences are organized meetings with people who have something to say. Or they are audiovisual material that illustrates what people like this have been through. Triggered by the presentation individual participants *conceive* a mixture of experiences, with or without mediation by teachers, inside or outside the teaching situation. Lastly, it is part of our method that we encourage people to *receive* in their minds their own memories and mould them in a creative way so they can share them with others.

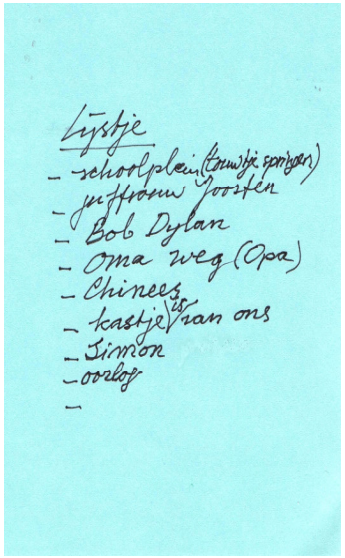
Gaining control of your feelings
Keeping participants from learning to ignore or suppress their feelings and experiences does not necessarily mean everything should be blurted out with no restrictions. The important thing is that people learn to cope with their feelings generated by impressive experiences in the teaching situation and gain control over them.

Participants learn
- that one specific experience, the confrontation with a visitor or the perception of the presented material can evoke numerous different emotions, each of which is important
- that they themselves are the only ones who determine which emotions they admit and address and wish to reveal
- that they need to take time for this selection process
- that in addition to *the specific*, each individual's feelings can include elements they share with others, *the similar*, the recognizable, that can comfort them or make them happy or give them a sense of connection
- that it can be a good thing to allow perceptions to manifest themselves in a creative way
- that getting in touch with and learning about other people's experiences and emotions can enable you to look at your own experiences and emotions in a different way and more realistically assess the negative as well as the positive things in your life
- that you don't have to suppress the emotions evoked in you when you are confronted with shocking experiences of other people because they overwhelm you, but that it helps to approach them and transform them into forms of action that you select yourself.

The Method

1. The guest speaker's story or the presentation of audiovisual material
The people in the group sit in a circle and are not given any instructions or questions beforehand. They don't have to take notes and can simply see what happens. The important thing is that they are open to what they see and hear and absorb whatever is valuable to them.
They are barely given any information about the contents. They are told though that they are going to be able to ask the guest speaker or whoever is presenting the audiovisual material whatever questions might come to mind.

2. Making a list
After the presentation, each participant is given a strip of paper that is purposely narrow to keep it brief. In silence, they each write down what they found most striking in a few words or short sentences. Whatever they write down only has to mean something to the participants themselves, they are the only ones who are going to read it.



Making a list might seem like an intermediary step that is not really necessary, but it is crucial. It contributes towards a careful preparation of the stories, poems or illustrations soon to be put down on paper. It gives everyone an opportunity to examine how the presentation has affected them without anyone else interfering. They can experience that the effects don't have to be unambiguous and might well consist of various and perhaps even contradictory thoughts and feelings. By listing what they think and feel, they see how every impression is all right and has a right to be there.

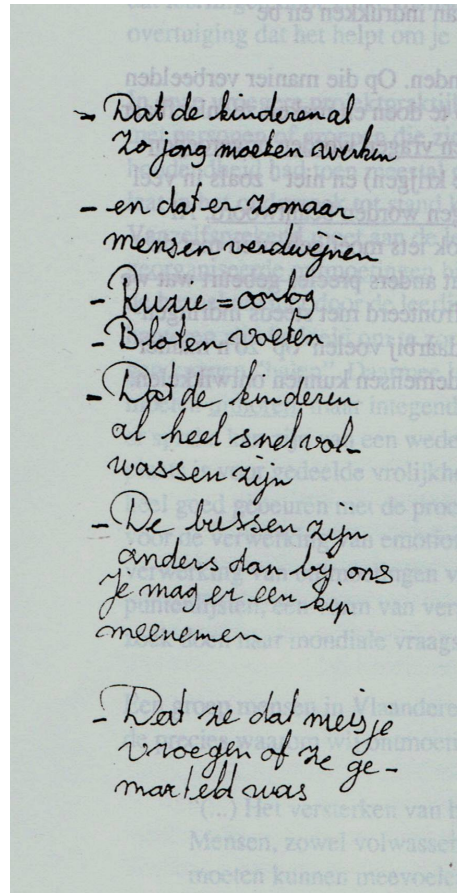
- Schoolyard (jumping rope)
- Miss Joosten
- Bob Dylan
- Grandma gone (Grandpa)
- The Chinese
- Old cabinet is ours
- Simon
- War

The items on the list largely depend on how you formulate the instructions and the atmosphere you create. You can decide to only ask the people in the group to write down what touched them. Then you would probably mainly get judgements about what they observed and descriptions of parts of the contents. That is what you can expect from people accustomed to the information given to them in educational situations that is designed to be remembered and judged.

If you want the lists to contain as many evoked memories as possible, you have to explicitly say so. You can clarify this with an example of something that touched you because it reminded you of an earlier experience. You need to carefully select the example you are going to use to prevent participants from imitating you and focusing on the same kind of experiences of their own. By making a personal list yourself, you emphasize that everyone wants to be left alone for some time after witnessing an impressive presentation.
Once all the participants have written down a number of items, each of them chooses one or more to *work with*. This choice is a very tentative one, soon there is going to be a chance to change their minds, pick something else and/or add new items.

3. Conducting a dialogue

The people in the group each engage in a dialogue with the person sitting next to them about one or more of the items they have noted. One person talks, the other asks questions. After a while, the roles are reversed. The point is that the person who is talking can empathize with what has touched him and can discover what it means to him.
This way, naming feelings loses its bombastic quality. By talking in small groups about what is on their mind, people can examine what is important to them and what isn't and discover links with their own memories. This intermediate step is particularly important to participants who have trouble speaking in a large group.



- That such young children have to work
- That people simply disappear
- Quarrel = war
- Bare feet
- That children grow up so fast
- Busses are so different from here.
  (You can take along a chicken).
- That they asked that girl if she had been tortured

4. Addressing questions to the guest speaker or the person who has presented the audiovisual material

After the participants have drawn up their individual lists and discussed their item(s) with the person sitting next to them, there will be all kinds of things they would like to know. These things can pertain to the feelings and thoughts of the guest speaker or simply to missing information.

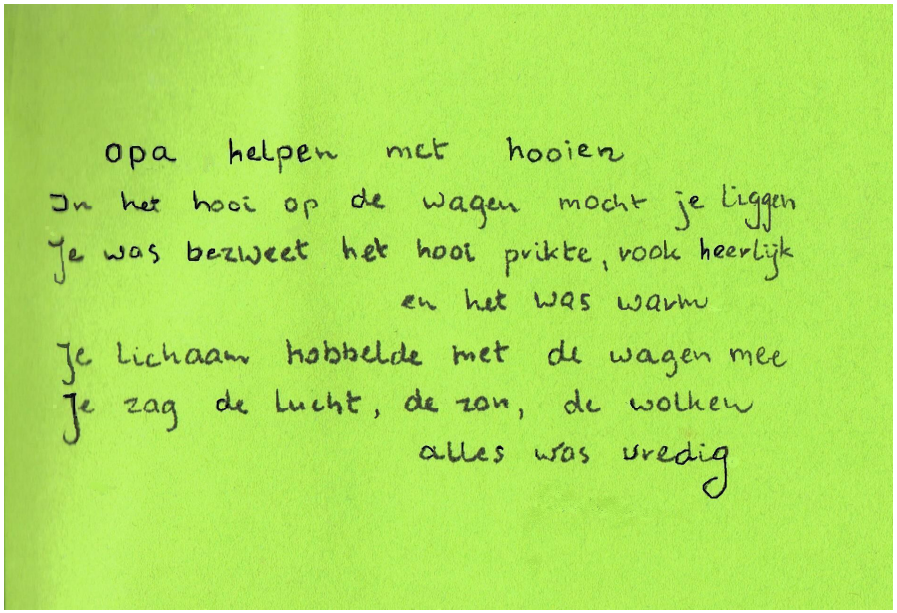
Asking questions in an empathetic way

The preparatory steps described above are crucial to how questions are asked. The participants are no longer as apt to behave like uninvolved spectators and listeners who touch upon the most personal and deepest feelings of the guest speaker without revealing anything about themselves. They discover links between what they have seen and heard and their own lives, which is the underlying reason why they pose questions in an empathetic fashion and formulate carefully [v]).

5. Recalling a memory and moulding it into something creative

Now the participants write a story or poem or make a picture of some experience they recalled when they were watching and listening to the presentation, or later when they were talking to the person next to them or during the discussion with the guest speaker or presenter of the audiovisual material. Thus the selected experiences are *perceived* by the group, *conceived* by the individual and *received* by the heart.
Then they select some item from their list that has to do with a memory of some occurrence in their own lives. They recall the experience on their own, but they do have some help doing so.
It is necessary to make it clear right away that whatever they produce is going to be shared with the entire group. The stories or poems are read out loud and the pictures are shown to the others. It is important to note that what the participants create does not necessarily have to be beautiful. The point is that they show what they have made and say what the presentation meant to them personally, so any way they do that is fine.

Knowing that what they create is going to be shared can make the participants express themselves in a less personal fashion, but that is simply the way it is. They might also decide to select a different item to go on with or eliminate certain items or add new ones to their list. All of this is fine. It is even fine to suggest this as a possibility, emphasizing that it is the participant and not anyone else who is responsible for the selection process. This teaches them to protect their own privacy.



Helping Grandpa fetch the hay
You could lie down in the hay on the wagon
You were sweaty, the hay itched, smelled great
And it was warm
Your body bumped along with the wagon
You saw the sky, the sun, the clouds
Everything was peaceful

Your senses as guiding lights

The people in the group are now given a strip of paper to write down a few prompts to serve as reminders.

The point is that they project themselves into an occurrence or situation from the past and try to picture what it was like.

It is important to take your time with this, and to communicate that it is an adventure to go back to the past and recapture what happened at the time [vi]).

This assignment has more of a communal element than the last ones.

Everyone knows how it feels when you see or hear something and you associate it with all kinds of things from your past.

We couldn't get up the mountain
The trailer had to be uncoupled



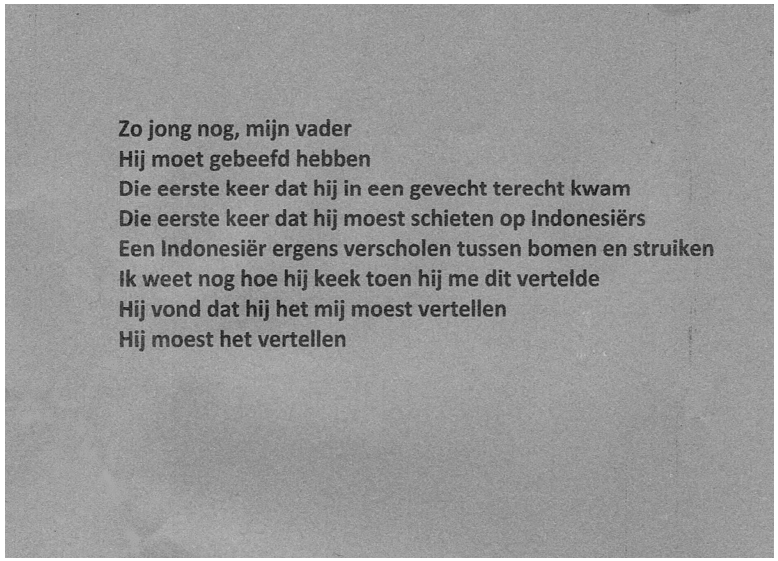


The prompts you suggest all have to do with what is observed via the senses. They are presented in the form of questions. Make it clear that the idea is not for the participants to answer the questions, that is what they are going to do later when they create something.

- What did you see? Was it light or dark, in the shade or in the sun, were there clouds? Did you see walls, the horizon, colours, shapes?
- Were there any people around? Any animals, plants?
- What did you hear? Sounds, music? What language was spoken?
- Was it warm or cold, humid or dry? Was it raining?
- What did it smell like?
- What did it taste like?
- What did it feel like?

6. Expressing what touched you in words or pictures

The people in the group are given a piece of coloured paper and pens and pencils to write with. The paper is small (A5) to keep it brief. Participants who might dread having to write a whole essay are relieved to discover this is all they have to do. And those who have trouble getting to the core of what they have to say see the limited space as something that helps them. By typing them out and printing copies, the written texts can be distributed and read by any number of people.


Zo jong nog, mijn vader
Hij moet gebeefd hebben
Die eerste keer dat hij in een gevecht terecht kwam
Die eerste keer dat hij moest schieten op Indonesiërs
Een Indonesiër ergens verscholen tussen bomen en struiken
Ik weet nog hoe hij keek toen hij me dit vertelde
Hij vond dat hij het mij moest vertellen
Hij moest het vertellen

If pictures are going to be made, the participants are given whatever supplies they need. It does matter whether the illustrations are only shown to the group or reproduced for a wider audience, in which case different material might be required, such as printing equipment for stamping or linoleum cutting.

Snail
Slow snail
On the grass
Together with his home
Cosy!

Still so young
He must have been trembling the first time he was in a battle
The first time he had to shoot at Indonesians
An Indonesian hidden somewhere among the trees and bushes
I remember how he looked when he told me about it
He felt he had to tell me
He had to tell

You can have the amount of time you give the participants for their work depend on what you see appearing on the paper. But we have observed that it is good to limit the time frame (not too long), otherwise many of the spontaneous expressions are crossed out or changed and that does not always lead to improvements. It is also important that you work on the items you have chosen yourself at the same time as the participants work on theirs. This shows them that just like them, you have your own feelings and thoughts to deal with after seeing and hearing the presentation.

Contours to write within

When the stories are being written, no further instructions are required, the contours are completely free. You can suggest picking a title though.
If it is a poem that is being created, you can either give the participants total freedom or suggest a type of poem. Here are two examples of types of poems.



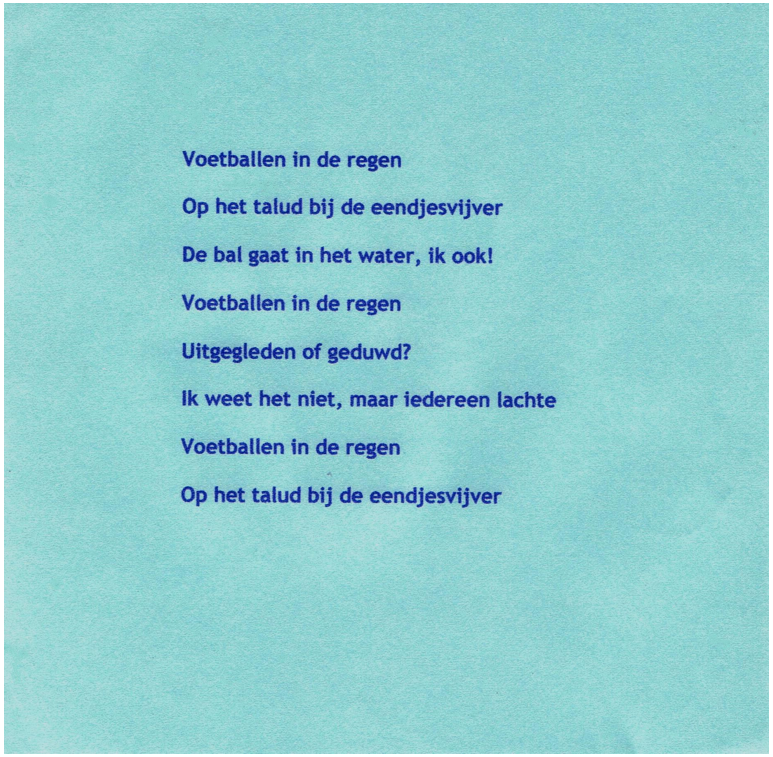
Fire
Baker woman
Heats your skin
What fills your bread
Emptiness

An eleven is a short poem of only eleven words in a fixed arrangement. The first line consists of one word, the second of two words, the third of three words and the fourth of four words. The final and fifth line consists of one word.
You can have the participants write an eleven line by line or two lines at a time. You do need to choose beforehand from a number of options that you can illustrate with an example of your own.

- The first line (one word) can be the name of a person, an adjective describing a person or a group, the name of an object, a noun, a verb, an adverb, an adjective, etcetera.
- The second line (two words) is a further description of who or what it is about.
- The third line (three words) and fourth line (four words) express thoughts or feelings about the above. There can be a question.
- If the previous lines include something of a question, the answer can be given in the fifth line (one word). Otherwise the final word can be a kind of conclusion, an exclamation, or perhaps once again an interrogative.

A rondeau is a poem of eight lines with certain lines repeated at fixed spots. The first line is repeated as the fourth and seventh lines. The second line is repeated as the eighth. Repetition can be a way to reinforce your words, to indicate a fateful circular course of events, or to make it clear that something is really starting to annoy you. Based on their work, this might best be discussed with the participants afterwards.

- The first line of the poem consists of a short description of an image the person has in mind.
- The second and third lines give more information around that image. Since the second line is going to be repeated, the second and third line each have to be a separate sentence.
- The fourth line is a repetition of the first.
- The fifth and sixth lines have to contain something of a contrast, for example between the evoked image and something the person knows, or between what he or she thinks of the image and what others think of it. The lines can either be one continuing sentence or two separate ones.
- The seventh line is a repetition of the first.
- The eighth line is a repetition of the second.



7. Reading stories or poems aloud and showing pictures

When everyone is done, the participants read their stories or poems aloud and show each other their pictures. It is good to go first yourself. Our experience has been that with these careful preparations, you get wonderful stories, poems and pictures and the people in the group enjoy having been able to create them.

It is hard to not make any comments

The point is to let each other see and hear how the presentation or the audiovisual material has affected you and not how nicely or poorly made the products are. So ask the participants not to make any comments about what the others have produced and tell them you are not going to do that either. By emphasizing this, you create a climate where it is easier to validate each other. After all, most of the participants are accustomed to teaching situations where comparing themselves, focusing on each other's mistakes and pointing out to each other what was done wrong have become so commonplace they have trouble refraining from doing it.

Soccer in the rain
On the slope near the duck pond
The ball goes in the water, me too!
Soccer in the rain
Slipped or pushed?
I don't know but everyone laughed
Soccer in the rain
On the slope near the duck pond

The motorcycle

It was a 98 cc Durkopff, so it was a very old one.
It just drove in second gear, and then only if you held your hand in front of the carburettor now and then.
From the street through the woods, along the house over the cobblestones to the warehouse and then back.
You felt the wind in your hair.
You lifted the gas pedal in the curves, otherwise you would fall.
And if it stalled, you'd have to keep stepping on the pedal to start and once again feel the sensation of driving.

De motorfiets

Het was een 98 cc Dürkopff, een hele oude dus.
Hij reed alleen in de 2de versnelling en dan nog alleen als je af en toe je hand voor de carburateur hield.
Vanaf de straat door het bos, langs het huis over de keien tot de loods en dan weer terug.
Je voelde de wind door je haren. Wel even wat minder gas in de bochten, anders viel je. En als hij afsloeg, eindeloos intrappen om te starten om de sensatie van het rijden opnieuw te ondergaan.

You will notice that not making any comments is more difficult than it seems. If a story or poem seems to be asking for criticism, it is hard not to give it. And if the participants read texts aloud that are moving or amusing, it is not easy to restrain yourself or at any rate exhibit a restrained response. You need to realize it would make it more difficult for whoever comes after something moving or amusing to read their own texts.

But perhaps you shouldn't make too much of a point of this. It is indeed very hard to keep a straight face if the whole group obviously wants to burst out laughing. Or to forbid people from sighing or softly saying how beautiful something was.

Showing each other what they have created without making any judgements is a way of seeing themselves in each other. By sharing what they have made, the participants can discover what is specifically theirs, what they and the others have that is special and what everyone has that is universal. The universal and the unique.

NEVER AGAIN WAR

hard

onze meester

pakt altijd Simon

waarom laten wij hem?

zwak

Harsh
Our teacher
Always grabs Simon
Why do we let him ?
Weak

Mindere

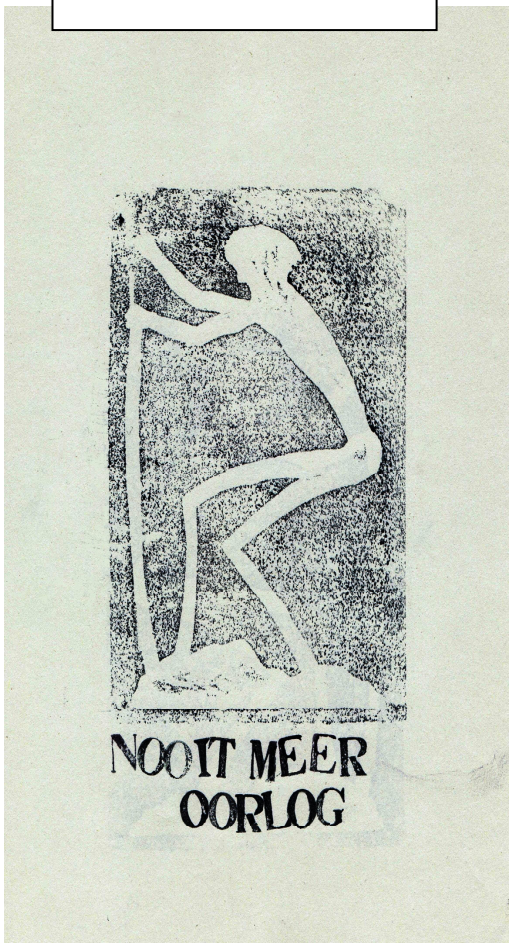
Een arbeiderskind

Kinderen sjieke buurt

Praten niet met mij

Gemeen !

Inferior
Working-class child
Rich neighbourhood kids
Don't talk to me
Nasty!



oorlog

een muziekje

in het kamp

heeft de oorlog overleefd

heus

War
Little music
Survived the war
In the prison camp
True

The power of creative expressions

Of course the feeling that you are sharing what you have created with others is reinforced if it is published, especially if you yourself have been responsible for that. Seeing that the words you have given to your feelings and thoughts are important enough to be reproduced and distributed helps you take yourself seriously and gain self-respect. Self-respect enables people to have respect for others, even if they are *different* or live far away. Seeing that your words can have a certain power opens up possibilities for doing something with your thoughts and feelings instead of hiding them and pretending they aren't there.

[i] The DVD *The Goose Snatches the Bread from the Ducks, My Childhood in a Japanese Prison Camp on the Isle of Java* can be ordered or downloaded via www.cmo.nl/gans.
Anne-Ruth Wertheim began her working life as a biology teacher at a secondary school. She moved on to adult education and is now a publicist. In her newspaper articles she deals with the concepts of exploitation/colonial racism (contempt, condescension) and competition/cultural racism (jealousy, distrust, fear). By distinguishing these two types of racism all kinds of mechanisms in modern society can be analysed.
She has written books about educational reform and life with a handicap. The story about her childhood in Japanese prison camps 'The Goose Snatches the Bread from the Ducks' appeared in an Indonesian translation in 2008 and can soon be seen on Internet in Japanese.

[ii] The audiovisual material I worked with mostly showed the lives of people in the Third World, their troubles and also their inventiveness. For instance the DVD 'I have been there myself' by Jessika van Kammen and Kathinka van Dorp shows the adventures of an eighteen- year-old Dutch girl in Nicaragua during the Sandinistic period. See www.mep.schilpdel.nl.

[iii] Lieneke Akkerman was a youth welfare worker for years. Then she took up training young people and adults in educational and labour organisations. She specialised in organizational diversity, both ethnic and otherwise, and topics concerning careers and life phases. She coaches people who are beginning a career as well as those who retire and are prepared to participate in society and create a future for themselves. More specifically, she uses methods that appeal to people's creative faculties. She is also a body-oriented psychotherapist.

[iv] In the method we developed, we gratefully included procedures from the world of 'Taaldrukken' (Word Printing), see www.taalvormingentaaldrukken.nl.
In 1987 Anne-Ruth Wertheim was trained to become a 'Taaldrukker' together with Herrie van Borssum, the designer of the book 'The Goose Snatches the Bread from the Ducks'.

[v] The Basic Concept Method is an instrument for learning how to formulate more and better questions. This way pupils and students can devise a greater range of questions that go more profoundly into the subjects. Participants become personally committed to what they want to know, are more personally concerned with the person addressed and become more circumspect in wording their questions. If the method is used by a group, it ensures the participation of a greater number of members. The Basic Concept Method can be considered a crossing between Open Project Education and Word Printing. See www.mep.schilpdel.nl and www.taalvormingentaaldrukken.nl.

[vi] In general participants keep the association to themselves that put them on the trail to their memory. But sometimes they do reveal it. In the story 'The Motorcycle' the association was a line in the DVD 'The goose snatches the bread from the ducks'. There the little girl tells how she was standing on a truck to the Jewish prison camp and felt her hair touched by the wind. The rondeau 'Soccer in the rain' also refers to this DVD, but the association is the drawing of the duck pond on the goose board the girl's mother made for her children in the Japanese prison camp. In the eleven 'Inferior' a woman recalls her experiences as a working-class child while watching an event of racial discrimination in this same DVD. The eleven 'Baker woman' refers to a woman's own experiences in Nicaragua triggered by the DVD 'I have been there myself', see note 2.