



Respecting diversity towards an organizational change where there is space for existential questions within higher education

23-August 2023, Daan Buijs



Existential questions

- Questions that grab you
- Tend to be more biographical
- Describe one's relationship with the world





Living the question

Unified act of the happening of *questioning/answering* (Bortoft, 2012)

Self-reflexive inquiry-based process

Conscious and unconscious (Jung, 1969)



Change of perspective





Creating space for existential questions, means:
Creating space for subjectification (Biesta, 2020)





Where student as subject matter





This means teachers are invited to:

- Work from their own purpose (Palmer, 2017)
- Strive for more equal relationships with students
- Be vulnerable, and practise teacher disclosure
- Use more indirect pedagogies (Saeverot, 2013)
- Take risk and put themselves at stake (Biesta, 2020)





Main question

What do teachers need to create space for students to live their existential questions?





Methodology and methods

- Research took place at the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Social Science, at the University of Amsterdam
- Reflective interactive design framework, based on system transformation (Bos & Grin, 2012)
 - With three pillars that iterated:
 - system and actor analysis
 - Structured design
 - Anticipating niche and structural change
 - Every research activity was at the same time a small contribution to system change





Methodology and methods

- 2019-2020
 - Pilot group with students
- 2020-2021
 - Implemented advise from students
 - Start with a voluntary group of teachers to work on design principles for tutor meetings
- 2021-2022
 - Implemented obligatory Intervision for teachers to commonly develop tutormeetings
- 2022-2023
 - Finalized the design of the tutor meetings together with teachers



Main findings in the process of creating the space:

- Firstly, we stumbled upon resistance among teachers
- When involving the teachers in the change, the support grew
- Create a common ground together in coming together, and sharing experiences
- Giving teachers the freedom in the change process to find their own relationship to this space for existential questions, and also the freedom to implement it in their own way in the classroom



Specific findings for existential questions:

- The word “existential”, was experienced by most teachers (and students) as being too heavy, and replaced by “life questions”, “drivers”, or Underlying questions.
- Space for teachers questions about there teaching during intervision was an important condition in creating the space for existential questions
- Before teachers could carefully facilitate activities, they first had to experience these activities themselves
- Teachers always had the freedom to adapt the commonly created design for there own practice





Questions:

Do you recognise the value of centering education more around enabling students to live their existential questions?

How do you deal with differences among teachers?

Do you know of any attempts to work within this vein? Perhaps in your own practice? If so, what do you encounter?

What opportunities/constraints do you see?

