

Songs of Hope

Currently, Johan Vlasblom and I are writing a book on restorative school climate. Our key words: Hope, Humour and Restoration (in Dutch: Hoop, Humor en Herstel.) Spring 2020 is undeniably the most absurd time possible to do: due to the Corona virus, schools, companies, theatres and sports facilities have been closed down, both in and outside Europe. On the radio we are urged not to go to the beach, as even there it is hard to keep 1.5 m distance; horrible images of hospitals unable to deal with the number of patients enter people's living rooms. Saying goodbye to dying loved-ones in an appropriate way is virtually impossible. On Sunday 22 March, an earthquake in Zagreb gets little press, as other news is considered more important. Pupils are at home, working on digital assignments. It's hard to imagine what the world will look like in six months' time.

In my head I keep hearing Leonard Cohen's song [Everybody knows](#):

*Everybody knows that the Plague is coming
Everybody knows that it's moving fast.*

That's in stark contrast to the songs we use to sing at the top of our lungs, in years gone by, during long hikes and on school outings:

*Hela hola houd er de moed maar in
(Hey, ho, let's keep the spirit high!)*

Keeping up the spirit and being courageous seems more difficult than ever. In schools, this goes for teachers and pupils alike.

Hope and courage are inextricably linked. Where hope disappears, all that's left is despair: why get up in the morning and go to work or school, do your homework or dream about the future, if you don't even believe there is one?

I believe that offering hope and keeping the spirit high is in any circumstances an important task of anyone who works with children and youngsters, and even more so for teachers who give online classes in the current circumstances.

Keeping the spirit high is not a technique; it's a way of life. When wondering how to accomplish this, a sentence comes to mind that I used recently when talking about

school safety: pupils feel safer in unsafe environments where they have influence, than in safe environments where they have no influence. People who can influence their environment are better able to keep up good courage. So give pupils influence and let them share their thoughts, let them contribute ideas and solutions to practical problems, for they know best what's good for them. Show them how we use their contributions in how we deal with the current crisis. People who have influence can make choices, and being heard makes you feel part of a greater unity, and this is just as important as well-thought-out digital classes.

Extra attention is needed to strike the right balance between influence and restrictions. Whether we like it or not, new rules apply - without any room for dialog or discussion: 1.5 m social distance = fewer deaths.

Learning to adapt to and survive in a rapidly changing world is becoming more important than the transfer of knowledge. Without having asked for it, we now get unique chances to support our pupils in this respect.

As regards 'humour', our second key word, we fully agree with psychiatrist Witte Hoogendijk, Head of Psychiatry at Erasmus Medical Centre in Rotterdam, Netherlands. When asked by a leading Dutch newspaper, de Volkskrant, how we deal with the crisis, he answers: 'Really well, with lots of humour, I receive one funny app message after the other. Besides being funny, it helps to release the tension. It is impossible to stay deadly serious for too long, and it's unhealthy, too.'

So, educational workhorses: keep the spirit high by listening to your pupils, engaging them and asking for their ideas on how to deal with the current situation.

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