

Keeping you informed

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THE EDUCATION OF THE EXCLUDED

Space Station leading the way

Educational deprivation is widespread in the so-called “ third world “ countries. Almost every self-respecting “ developed” country as well as the major UN and international ngo’s are aware of the challenge this proposes to our sense of justice and well-being. Billion-dollar programmes – as well as shoestring local initiatives that simply brick-build the classrooms - are being developed in order to end the atrocity of educational deprivation in poverty stricken countries.

In the western world, there is little advocacy for the education of the excluded. Education is free, accessible and even compulsory. It is state-run or, if not, state financed. Wardens or inspectors insure that every single child attends school until they are about 18. A growing group continues full-time learning until they reach the age of about 24. In fact for many people, education never ends. They continue learning or studying in the workplace. Senior citizens can choose from a myriad of possibilities ranging from cyber-based offerings to the computer or cooking course in the local community school. So what am I on about?

THE MYTH OF EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION

One might say – one has said – that there is no poverty, no child abuse, no wife beating, no lack of equal opportunities, in Europe. These myths however have been laid to rest over the past ten years. Strangely enough, hardly anyone questions the myth of equal access to education.

In this paper, I suggest that there is a significant group of people who are systematically excluded from every form of education available. If this is true, it constitutes a major human rights violation, which I would like to highlight and – together with you - eradicate. Will you help?

So who are these people, those hardly visible, hardly people whom you never meet and whose very existence is questionable? I would consider every adult who lives with a profound disability to belong to this category. Those with a profound disability measure roughly 0.35 percent of the population.

EXCLUSIONARY POLICIES

As children they went to school, didn’t they? Well, not really. Those with a profound disability whiled



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away their time in institutions that excelled in exclusionary policies. The injustice and absurdity of the situation was somewhat mitigated by all those “ little unremembered acts of kindness and of love “ exercised by poorly paid and overworked “ day centre” staff or care workers. Being kept pretty busy with changing nappies, replacing dribblers, and assisting with eating and drinking and sometimes breathing, there was little time for any kind of teaching. With the widespread assumption that people with a profound disability, with such a low IQ, can’t learn, , any of their attempts at anything vaguely resembling education met with incomprehension. The doctors, the psychologists, the government inspectors and even you, my donors , were all of one mind: you can care for these people, you can pity them, you can love them, but you can’t educate them! And what would you educate them for? They can’t *be* anything, they can’t *become* anything . *What* would you teach them was as baffling a question as *why* would you teach them.

A WILD AND EXCITING JOURNEY

Educating adults with a profound disability is the aim of Space Station, a new foundation set up at a grass-roots level in The Netherlands. Most of the finance comes from good companies in the locality. Space Station aims at providing a curriculum that meets the needs of those would-be students.



Space Station students provide a challenging and rewarding environment for corporate amateur musicians from the software company Syntess Software . Space Station relies heavily on corporate cooperation.

Photo :a gift from photographer Marijke Folkertsma

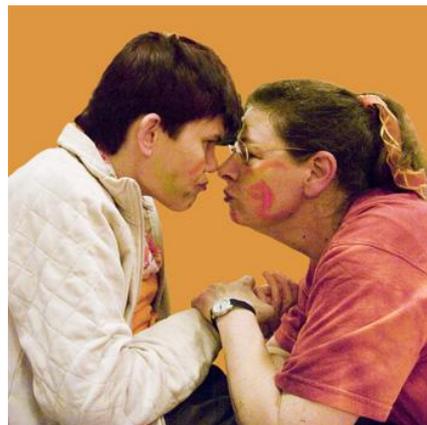
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The voluntary organization is currently developing and implementing a three-year course consisting of 60 theatre workshops. The workshops take place in a real educational facility, a local regional technical college. By experimenting and developing novel ways of communicating with their students, Space Station challenges the assumption that these students, most with an IQ under 20, can't learn.

Simultaneously the programme shows *how* you can teach adults with a profound disability, how you can click in to the old Latin idea of educating: education as "educare" - leading forth, taking you where you're at and moving one tiny step forward. Education is not about where you start from or how far behind you are. It's as much about the length and the quality of the journey. For students with intensive support needs, it can be a wild and exciting journey, enriching their lives, offering them undreamt of opportunities to make their unique contribution to their community. Without the support of local businesses, the Space Station experiment would never have taken off.



Photography: a corporate contribution from Silvia Wennekes of Atelier Chaos

THE RULES OF GOOD RESULTS

Without the support of local businesses, Space Station could never have taken off. More and more the social sector is discovering the business community as the essential link in successful social entrepreneurship. Business people understand better than anyone else that severely under-resourced initiatives are doomed to failure. They invented words like investment and infrastructure, dysfunctional boards and dynamic leadership. And social entrepreneurs are beginning to learn that they do not have an exclusive monopoly on passion for social justice or, for that matter on passion. In fact some of the most effective social reformers are business people. They are asking, indeed demanding, that the social sector reinvent itself according to the rules of good results.



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COUNTING THE MILLIONS

It is the purpose of a business to make money. Yet great businesses enrich not only themselves. I would like to share a beautiful story of lucrative giving by a local company that is also, happily, a sponsor of Space Station. It appears that one morning in Zierikzee one of the employees of Zeelandia woke up with a desire to help animals. In keeping with the high ambition of successful people, he got in contact with a national environmental organization and drew up a plan that would cost his company very little and generate a large income for the ngo. He, or maybe one of his friends, invented the motto

Help de natuur een pootje , koop een Panda broodje.

Now only the Dutch speakers will understand the impact of such a brilliant one- liner. Well, that was more than ten years ago and the ngo, World Wildlife Funds, is still counting the millions and reeling from the effect of successful entrepreneurship intertwined with the spirit of imagination. Zeelandia , as well as getting other people to care for the animals and the environment , commands an undisputed first place in the world of local philanthropy. Always useful for a company that spends most of its philanthropic euros on donating bags of flour to local organizations who bake and sell pancakes and cookies and get on with the business of changing the world. Not that the effects of the bags of flour are less important: the women who knead the dough have been kneading change since the world began. Selling pancakes is however light years away from composing one-liners and marketing “panda broodjes”.

LEADING FORTH

Whatever else the new learners teach us, they intimate that life is not about being clever or being competent. With their faint voices and faltering steps, they point the way towards a deeper intelligence, a profounder understanding, a greater questioning of what it means to be human. At the end of the day, maybe it is they who are leading us forth. Let’s just educate them and see what happens.

And, you my (prospective) donors, don’t forget that you’d be dumb too if you never went to school.



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Philomene op't Hof-Coleman , treasurer Space Station

Photos: director of the housing corporation Zeeuwend, Van Oeveren Reizen, local contractor Jumelet, camping owner Marijke Tangemans with camping activist Maura all support Space Station in their own peculiar way. Photography: volunteer Ans Overdeest.

Space Station is s voluntary enterprise that promotes educational opportunities for the excluded.

Chairwoman of the board: businesswoman Marian van der Meij (left). Coordinator Ariene van Westen (right).

